



## Public Library Closures

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In the run up to the start of the 2011-12 financial year, a significant number of local authorities were reported to be proposing the closure of public libraries; figures of around 400 libraries are currently being quoted. This Note summarises the background to these proposals, including the statutory duties of local authorities and the Secretary of State in respect of public library services. It also looks at relevant recent initiatives in the public libraries sector, specifically the Future Libraries Programme, and the issue of voluntarism and libraries. Finally, data relating to public library services and finance are included.

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# 1 Proposed closures of public libraries: an overview

## 1.1 Background

The possible impact of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on public library services has been the subject of extensive debate during the past six months. Libraries have continued to come under pressure as local authorities seek to balance their budgets in the context of a 26% real terms reduction in funding over the spending review period. Official data on the precise number of public library closures are not available and various figures for proposed closures have been quoted in the media. The most widely reported number is currently around 400 libraries, with half of councils yet to make announcements. Some sources are now beginning to quote figures of 450 or more, however, with the *Public Libraries News* blog recently reporting a figure of 485 libraries (426 buildings and 59 mobiles) as “currently under threat or recently closed.”<sup>1</sup>

A recent *Guardian* article reported that “nearly 400 [libraries] are threatened with closure, and with half of councils yet to announce their plans, the final number could be as many as 800 across the UK – a fifth of all libraries.”<sup>2</sup> The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, CILIP, currently estimates that over 600 libraries in England could close, especially if communities do not come forward to manage local libraries, with a reduction of 4,000 – 6,000 full-time equivalent staff.<sup>3</sup> Last summer, the *Independent* cited “predictions that up to 1,000 libraries are likely to close over the next year.”<sup>4</sup> The library campaigner Desmond Clarke was also quoted in the *Guardian* as saying that “Sadly, what we’ve seen in recent months is some councils cutting opening hours, cutting book funds, indicating that they want to close smaller libraries. If this were to continue, up to 1,000 libraries could go in the next three years.”<sup>5</sup>

In November 2010, the *Bookseller* stated that “at least 25 local authorities have announced new proposals for cutting library services since the October review, with fresh details emerging almost every day. Because many of the proposals are provisional and involve different options, it is unclear what the exact number of individual libraries and librarian posts already [sic] at risk.”<sup>6</sup> The article notes that “some councils were proposing a worst-case scenario loss of up to half their libraries.” On 14 December 2010, *The Bookseller* quoted Desmond Clarke as saying that “it is very clear that the cuts taken by the public library service are totally and absolutely disproportionate. In a number of councils including Leeds and Oxfordshire up to 40% or 50% of libraries are being closed.”<sup>7</sup>

An article in CILIP’s *Library & Information Gazette* stated that “it is still too early to be sure exactly how the Comprehensive Spending Review announced by George Osborne will affect different sectors of the library and information profession.” Kate Millin, Chair of CILIP’s Public Libraries Group was quoted as saying that “the response at the moment is ‘very varied,’ with some authorities holding back and others already announcing changes.”<sup>8</sup> CILIP,

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<sup>1</sup> [Public Libraries News](#) [on 18 Feb 2011]

<sup>2</sup> “Libraries seen as easy touch when it comes to balancing the books”, *Guardian*, 8 January 2011

<sup>3</sup> CILIP Press Release [Public libraries being failed by lack of leadership from Westminster](#), 7 February 2011

<sup>4</sup> “Hands off our public libraries”, *Independent*, 20 August 2010

<sup>5</sup> “Urgent warning over cut threats to libraries”, *Guardian*, 19 October 2010

<sup>6</sup> “Massive cut backs to library services begin”, *Bookseller*, 29 November 2010

<sup>7</sup> “Axed libraries ‘disproportionate’ as council cuts capped”, *Bookseller*, 14 December 2010.

<sup>8</sup> “How bad is it going to be?”, *Library & Information Gazette*, 11 November -1 December 2010

which on 15 December 2010 contacted all English MPs about public library closures and cuts,<sup>9</sup> was currently “tracking the impact of the recession on public library services.”<sup>10</sup>

CILIP’s website links to UK Library Watch, a wiki that has been set up “with the purpose of collecting news about libraries under threat of closure across the United Kingdom.”<sup>11</sup> Information is presented here by geographic location based on councils, local and unitary authorities.

In January 2011, a *Guardian* article reported that groups such as Voices for the Library and Public Libraries had also begun mapping the proposed cuts online.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2 Local authority proposals: examples and comment

The following proposed library closures have been widely reported in the media:

- Dorset – 20 out of 34 libraries
- Isle of Wight – 9 of 11 libraries (see also update below)
- North Yorkshire – around half of libraries threatened with closure
- Oxfordshire – 20 out of 43 libraries
- Somerset – 20 out of 34 libraries (see also revised plans below)
- Suffolk – two-thirds of libraries to close unless volunteers step forward to run them

Other examples include:

- Conwy, north Wales – 7 out of 12 libraries
- Croydon – 5 libraries
- Doncaster – Closure of 14 out of 26 libraries recently confirmed by the Council, “despite a huge campaign by people opposing the cuts.”<sup>13</sup>
- London – A third of public libraries because of spending cuts, with councils including Lewisham, Wandsworth, and Hammersmith and Fulham having already said that some will have to close. “Others are reviewing the service as they decide how to make the 27% savings imposed by Chancellor George Osborne. Only one borough, Hillingdon, has said that its libraries are definitely safe.”<sup>14</sup> Kensal Rise (Brent) due to a £37m cut from the council budget this year.<sup>15</sup>
- Warwickshire - 16 out of 34 libraries, “under £2m savings plan after government funding cuts.” A public consultation in March will examine alternatives, including takeovers by community groups, merging libraries with other services, more targeted use of mobile services and developing internet library services.<sup>16</sup>

Some local authorities have reported that they have no plans to close their libraries, however, while others have reversed or deferred previous proposals or decisions. Examples include:

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<sup>9</sup> CILIP press release, [Sweeping cuts to public libraries threaten a fair society, MPs warned](#), 15 December 2010

<sup>10</sup> [CILIP website](#)

<sup>11</sup> [UK Library Watch](#)

<sup>12</sup> “Mapping the UK library cuts”, *Guardian*, 10 January 2011

<sup>13</sup> *Go-ahead to close 14 of 26 libraries in Doncaster*, BBC website [on 17 Feb 2011]

<sup>14</sup> “130 libraries in the capital face axe in spending cuts”, *Evening Standard*, 10 November 2010, p11

<sup>15</sup> “Libraries seen as easy touch when it comes to balancing the books”, *Guardian*, 8 January 2011

<sup>16</sup> “Sixteen libraries to close in Warwickshire”, *Bookseller*, 3 February 2011

- Gloucestershire – The County Council is reported to have reinvested £500,000 into its library budget, with new proposals that would see Cinderford library saved from closure. This would “still leave 10 libraries at risk of closure if volunteers do not step forward to run them.”<sup>17</sup>
- Isle of Wight - A recent *Guardian* article stated that 9 out of 11 of the Isle of Wight’s libraries were at risk of closure, with the paper reporting that Steve Beynon, chief executive of the local council, as saying that £500,000 of savings was “going to have to come out of the library service in the first year, £750,000 thereafter.”<sup>18</sup> On 9 February the council announced new plans, which would see 3 of the libraries that were at risk of closure stay open, with reduced hours and the introduction of volunteer staff. 4 libraries earmarked for closure in April would have their deadlines extended until the end of June 2011. A formal decision on the new proposals is expected on 1 March.<sup>19</sup>
- Somerset – The *Bookseller* has recently reported that nearly half of the 20 libraries threatened with closure could now be saved, and that a year’s grace has also been proposed for a further 5 threatened libraries, putting just 6 at risk of closure in the current year, instead of 20, as first proposed.<sup>20</sup> Council leader Ken Maddock is reported as saying “We have listened to what people said and put our residents’ views at the heart of our decision-making.”

Also, the *Guardian* has recently focussed on the opening in summer 2013 of the Birmingham “super library”, at a cost of £188.8m, although it noted that “every one of the 40 branches [in Birmingham] is under review, and major cuts are expected in staffing and the book budgets.”<sup>21</sup>

The *Public Libraries News* blog recently listed 24 local authorities as having announced that there will be no closures in the 2011-12 financial year. This includes Anglesey, where it is reported that 4 libraries earmarked for closure “have apparently been (temporarily) saved.”<sup>22</sup> In Hull, the number of libraries is reported as actually increasing, although in other areas, including Coventry, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, reductions in opening hours are being proposed. Cuts in book funds are also reported in Leicestershire and Norfolk, for example, while in Devon, there may be reduced opening hours, fewer mobile stops and no new Exeter library. In Norfolk, while there are no closures, there will be staffing reductions, cuts in the book fund and opening hours, and less mobile visits. Merton is reported as having a £118k cut; 2 libraries will have reduced hours but have been reprieved from threatened closure. In Trafford, mobile library staff will be replaced by volunteers.

*The Bookseller* has reported that the library campaigner Alan Gibbons has issued a letter calling for a moratorium on library closures.

He argued “There are no closures in Anglesey, Anglesey, Brighton, Barking and Dagenham, Cornwall, Coventry, Devon, Essex, Highland, Hull, Lincolnshire, Merton, Newcastle, Norfolk, Poole, Portsmouth, Staffordshire, Swindon, Trafford, Windsor and

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<sup>17</sup> “Cinderford saved, but Gloucestershire campaign goes on”, *Bookseller*, 31 January 2011.

<sup>18</sup> “Hands off our Libraries” *Guardian*, 3 February 2011

<sup>19</sup> [Isle of Wight Council press release](#), 9 February 2011

<sup>20</sup> “Somerset backtracks on library closures”, *Bookseller*, 28 January 2011, p9.

<sup>21</sup> “Opening soon – one super-library. Closing sooner – 481 others”, *Guardian*, 7 February 2011, p12

<sup>22</sup> [Public Libraries News](#)

Maidenhead and Wirral. Why are some councils closing half their libraries while others are closing none?"

He continued: "Culture Minister Ed Vaizey should call a halt to all closures under the 1964 Libraries Act and demand that the councils that are unable to manage their services properly should be made to listen to those that appear to be protecting them better.

"You can revive the fortunes of a library when times are better on one condition—it must remain open."<sup>23</sup>

There have been recent reports that the company that helps run the Library of Congress in the US, Library Systems & Services (LSSI), has approached 50 library authorities (one third of the total) offering to help save libraries from cuts. The *Sunday Times* quotes the company as saying that councils have "massive fat" in their budgets and "can afford to buy more books, extend opening times and add literacy programmes." LSSI propose taking over the running of libraries, while leaving ownership of the books and buildings with councils. They are reported to be in serious talks with 12 library authorities.<sup>24</sup>

## 2 The public and professions' response to library closures

Public library closures have prompted campaigns at local community, regional and national level, with concerns being expressed about the potential loss of community and cultural assets, and the possible impact of closures particularly on children, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and also on rural areas.

Opposition has taken a variety of forms, including the following examples:

- On 19 October 2010, a joint statement on the *Value, Impact and Potential of public library services*<sup>25</sup> was sent to local authorities "by a coalition of authors, publishers, librarians, library campaigners and booksellers."<sup>26</sup> This was described in the *Guardian* as an "unprecedented joint initiative – bringing together groups that are frequently found on opposing sides of the debate on libraries."<sup>27</sup>
- In their open letter of 5 December 2010 to the Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey, a coalition of library campaigners "expressed concern that over 250 library closures had been announced since the Government's spending review and called on the ministers to act in the spirit of the 1964 act and prevent the closures."<sup>28</sup>
- On 15 December 2010, CILIP wrote to all MPs to:
  - explain the implications of library service cuts, to remind MPs that public libraries are a statutory service and to ask them to assess the effectiveness and impact of any proposed changes in their constituency.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Sixteen libraries to close in Warwickshire", *Bookseller*, 3 February 2011

<sup>24</sup> "US offer to save libraries from closure", *Sunday Times*, 6 February 2011

<sup>25</sup> [Museums, Libraries and Archives Council \(MLA\) website](#)

<sup>26</sup> "Urgent warning over cuts threat to libraries", *Guardian*, 19 October 2010,

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> "'Efficient' library service means change, says Vaizey", *Bookseller*, 16 December 2010.

<sup>29</sup> CILIP Press Release, [Sweeping cuts to public libraries threaten a fair society, MPs warned](#), 15 December 2010

They have been given key questions to ask local authorities about the public library service in their constituency, which include:

if the authority has a library strategy, if the public had been consulted, if the proposed savings are proportionate, if the library service will provide what local people need, and if the local authority has taken professional advice. CILIP is asking MPs to show leadership in local affairs and work with local authorities to achieve the best possible outcome for families and communities.

- In January 2011, CILIP's *Update* reported that, as it went to press, "at least three groups were planning to bring a legal challenge, sharing tactics and a *pro bono* lawyer."<sup>30</sup> The *Independent on Sunday* claimed the same month that:

Library users in Oxfordshire, Lewisham, Doncaster, Somerset and Gloucestershire are among those who have sought legal advice about challenging local closures of about 50 percent, which they say will make it impossible for councils to provide "comprehensive", "efficient" and "improving" library services required under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. The Local Government Association said councils were being impeded by the "badly outdated" legislation which was drawn up before the arrival of the internet.<sup>31</sup>

The *Guardian* later reported that "campaign groups are drawing up plans to take the Culture Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, and his minister, Ed Vaizey, to court over the closures of more than 400 public libraries."<sup>32</sup>

- Also in January, local campaigners in Stony Stratford, near Milton Keynes, staged a mass borrow, emptying the library shelves of its 16,000 volumes.<sup>33</sup>
- 5 February 2011 was designated as Save our Libraries Day by library campaigners, and saw between 80 and 100 protests staged nationwide. Philip Pullman and Mark Haddon were among a number of authors taking part. Read-in protests were held at Leeds Central Library, Blackheath Village Library in Lewisham, for example, and in New Cross, south-east London, a group of around 40 people were reported as "choosing to stay in the library overnight before leaving on the Sunday."<sup>34</sup> Around 400 people in Beeston Library in Nottinghamshire took part in a further mass borrow protest organised by Unison. *The Bookseller* also reported that:

active social networking on Facebook and Twitter from librarian group Voices for the Library, the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals and The Bookseller's own Fight for Libraries campaign, which now has 3,000 followers, is spreading awareness ... Some library supporter numbers can be gauged by the quantities of people signing paper petitions: 18,550 in Somerset, 13,000 in Dorset, 1,200 in Brighton, 20,00 in Lewisham, 15,000 in Gloucestershire and 2,500 for Stony Stratford library alone. Many more are participating online. Leading campaigner Desmond Clark estimated "hundreds of thousands" were now behind the cause.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> "1964 and all that, in 2011", *Update*, January 2011, p4

<sup>31</sup> "Overdue! The fight to save our libraries begins", *Independent on Sunday*, 16 January 2011

<sup>32</sup> "Library campaigners plan court action over closures", *Guardian*, 28 January 2011

<sup>33</sup> "Stripping our library shelves has rewritten the book on protest", *Sunday Times*, 23 January 2011, p21

<sup>34</sup> "Hundreds of thousands' join library protests", *Bookseller*, 4 February 2011, p6

<sup>35</sup> "Thousands turn out for Save our Libraries day", *Bookseller*, 7 February 2011

- On 7 February, CILIP published what it described as a “clear set of actions for Jeremy Hunt ... to fulfil his statutory duty to superintend and promote the public library service in England.”<sup>36</sup> CILIP called on the Culture Secretary to:

collect and publish information so the impact of proposed library cuts is properly understood. He has a duty to intervene where proposed cuts are disproportionate or where a local authority will fail to comply with the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act. He should provide guidance on best practice for community managed libraries. It must be made clear to local authorities that community managed libraries must not charge for book borrowing if they are to be regarded as part of an authority’s provision to meet its statutory obligation to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” service. He must ensure the Arts Council (England) is able to scrutinise local authorities’ library plans and advise the Minister when there are problems.

The organisation had “grave concerns” about the level and extent of proposed cuts to public library services across England. “The front-loading of savings to local government grants mean that radical proposals have been implemented quickly and often without proper preparation and consultation.”

- Also this month, an open letter to the *Guardian* by a coalition of campaigners claimed that “libraries are a vital part of local communities, as are trained librarians to staff them,” and called on the coalition Government to “heed the view of the people,” and on the DCMS to “call a moratorium on the closures now and convene a seminar involving all the major representatives of library users and librarians.”<sup>37</sup>

### 3 The *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*

The primary legislation governing public libraries in England and Wales, the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*, requires that “it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.”<sup>38</sup> “Comprehensive and efficient” are not defined; it is the responsibility of the library authorities to determine how they deliver public library services, “set in the context of local need: that is, specifically of those who live, work and study in the local area.”<sup>39</sup>

The general duties of library authorities are outlined in section 7 of the Act as follows:

*(1) It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, . . .*

*Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.*

*(2) In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—*

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<sup>36</sup> CILIP Press Release *Public libraries being failed by lack of leadership from Westminster*, 7 February 2011

<sup>37</sup> “Our libraries – our right to say” [letter], *Guardian*, 15 February 2011, p33

<sup>38</sup> *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964* s7(1)

<sup>39</sup> [DCMS website](#)

*(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and*

*(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and*

*(c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.*

The 1964 Act also imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to:

*superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act.<sup>40</sup>*

In addition, the Act allows the Secretary of State, in extreme cases, to take direct control of public libraries if he considers that local authorities are not running an adequate service, although in practice these powers have never been invoked.

More detail on the powers of the Secretary of State to take action where a local authority is in breach of its own duty is given in section 10:

*(1) If—*

*(a) a complaint is made to the Secretary of State that any library authority has failed to carry out duties relating to the public library service imposed on it by or under this Act; or*

*(b) the secretary of State is of the opinion that an investigation should be made as to whether any such failure by a library authority has occurred,*

*and, after causing a local enquiry to be held into the matter, the Secretary of State is satisfied that there has been such a failure by the library authority, he may make an order declaring it to be in default and directing it for the purpose of removing the default to carry out such of its duties, in such manner and within such time, as may be specified in the order.*

*(2) If a library authority with respect to which an order has been made under the preceding subsection fails to comply with any requirement of the order, the Secretary of State, instead of enforcing the order by mandamus or otherwise,—*

*(b) if the authority is a joint board, may make an order providing that on a date specified therein the board shall be dissolved and—*

*(i) that on its dissolution the authorities constituting the board, shall again become library authorities;*

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<sup>40</sup> *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964* c75 section 1

*(iii) that the functions relating to the public library service of such of those library authorities as may be specified in that behalf in the order shall be transferred to the Secretary of State, or*

*(c) in any other case, may make an order providing that the functions of the authority relating to the public library service shall be transferred to the Secretary of State.*

*(3) A power conferred by subsection (2) above to make an order shall be exercisable by statutory instrument, which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.*

*(4) Where functions of a library authority have been transferred to the Secretary of State under subsection (2) above he may at any time by order transfer those functions back to the authority, and the order may contain such supplemental provisions as may appear to him to be expedient for that purpose.*

*(5) Section 324 of the Public Health Act 1936 (which relates to expenses incurred in exercising the functions of a body in default under that Act) shall apply in relation to expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in exercising the functions of a library authority as if the Secretary of State were the Minister therein referred to and the reference to a local authority included any library authority.*

In relation to library closures, the DCMS website states that:

The closure of one or even a small number of library branches is not necessarily a breach of the 1964 Act. Sometimes a local authority will close a library to ensure a better, more efficient service across its whole area. We judge such cases on the basis of the authority's overall provision.

We would be concerned if libraries were closed, or their services disproportionately reduced, just to save money.<sup>41</sup>

## **4 The Government response to library closures**

### **4.1 The Wirral Inquiry**

On 3 April 2009, the then Culture Secretary, Andy Burnham, exercised his power under section 10(1) of the 1964 Act to commence a local inquiry into Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council's (Wirral MBC's) compliance with the duties imposed upon them by section 7 of the Act. The Council's plans to close 11 of Wirral's 24 public libraries had been the subject of a large volume of correspondence, mainly from the public, but also from professional bodies.

The Secretary of State had not used his powers under the 1964 Act to intervene in relation to proposed library closures since 1991, when closures in Derbyshire were investigated. The Inquiry is also significant in that it examined the factors that may determine whether a local authority is in breach of its statutory duties. The Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey, has described the report as "an immensely important influence on library provision in that authority, but also on how we speak about the statutory duty at national level."<sup>42</sup>

The Inquiry was ordered followed a request to Wirral MBC in February 2009 to work with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) on the proposed restructuring of library services. The MLA subsequently wrote to the Secretary of State, expressing concern about

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<sup>41</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>42</sup> "Custodian of public libraries?", *Update*, January 2011, pp12-14

the situation in Wirral.<sup>43</sup> The resulting report, published in September 2009, is accessible via the DCMS website.<sup>44</sup>

The terms of reference of the Inquiry were to:

Gather information and provide advice in order for the Secretary of State to assess whether, in taking the decision to implement the proposed changes to their Library Service, The Wirral is in default of their statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, including the provision of a comprehensive and efficient Library Service.<sup>45</sup>

In formulating its advice and recommendations, the Inquiry, led by Sue Charteris, was asked to consider the following questions:

- Did Wirral make a reasonable assessment of local needs in respect of library services and, in any event, what were those needs?
- On assessment of local needs, did Wirral act reasonably in meeting such needs through their proposals in the context of available resources and their statutory obligations?<sup>46</sup>

The Inquiry was asked to comment independently on factors around the local authority context; service operation; service delivery; and strategic vision. It was also asked to assess how effectively the Wirral's Library Service addressed and met the guidance factors contained in the 1964 Act relating to the desirable elements of all library services. Finally, the Inquiry was asked to recommend, in the event that Wirral MBC was found to be in breach of its statutory duties, the practical steps they could be ordered to take by the Secretary of State to address this failure.<sup>47</sup>

The Inquiry found the Council's decision to restructure its Library Service to be in breach of its statutory duties to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" service.<sup>48</sup>

The primary reason for this breach was "that the Council failed to make an assessment of local needs (or alternatively to evidence knowledge of verifiable local needs) in respect of its Library Services."<sup>49</sup> The Inquiry further considered that the Council had taken the decision to close 11 of its libraries "in the absence of a strategic plan or review of the Library Service" and "without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services [then] being provided in the libraries". It believed that there had been "a further breach in relation to the needs of deprived communities" and a key concern was that there had been "an absence of an adequate plan for and commitment to a comprehensive outreach service." Without an assessment of needs and a strategic Library Service review, the Council had "displayed a lack of logic around why some facilities were recommended for closure and not others."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> DCMS press release, "[Culture secretary Andy Burnham orders local inquiry into public library service](#)", 3 April 2009

<sup>44</sup> DCMS, *A local Inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: led by Sue Charteris*, 2009, p3

<sup>45</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> DCMS, *A local Inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: led by Sue Charteris*, 2009, p3.

<sup>48</sup> Op.cit., p i

<sup>49</sup> Op cit., p iii

<sup>50</sup> Op.cit., p iii-iv

The Inquiry then concluded that there was a strong case for reviewing the decision and/or retaining at least some physical service at some sites earmarked for closure. The reasons cited may be summarised as follows:

Where libraries:

- Were located in an area of significant deprivation.
- Had inter-dependent links with schools and/or children's centres .

Where the Council had:

- Changed its decision on which libraries to close.
- Identified an area of need but "subsequently chose to ignore this information."
- Failed to meet its own standards in terms of a reasonable distance to travel.<sup>51</sup>

The report also considered that:

It would be reasonable for [the Secretary of State] to expect that within the meaning of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, any reasonable library authority, before embarking on major change proposals, should undertake a needs assessment of the changing needs of its population for Library Services, taking into account relevant local factors. Indeed s.7(2) of the Act places a mandatory requirement upon library authorities to have regard to the desirability of securing that the needs of local adults and children are met (in respect of the provision of library resources) when discharging its duties to provide a comprehensive and efficient service under the Act, and I have outlined in section 6 of this report what I think this explicitly required analysis and the more general implicitly required analysis of needs should include.<sup>52</sup>

On 30 November 2009, the Culture Minister issued a statement explaining that the Secretary of State had concluded that, since the local authority subsequently revoked their earlier decision to close 11 library branches on the Wirral, it was no longer appropriate to rule on whether this earlier decision was in breach of the 1964 Act.<sup>53</sup>

CILIP welcomed the Inquiry's conclusions as "arguably, a clear updating of the 1964 Act – focused on 2010-style consultation with users and 2010-style professional practice (at all levels)."<sup>54</sup>

## 4.2 Recent developments

There is renewed interest in the Wirral Inquiry, in the light of the possible implications for public library services of the CSR, and reports of planned and confirmed closures. *Update* returned to the issue in January 2011, reporting that the Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey, had "told local councils to base their decisions on the guidance set out for Wirral by Sue Charteris in 2009."<sup>55</sup>

In his letter to all local authorities of 3 December 2010, Ed Vaizey cited "the importance I place on compliance with the statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964."<sup>56</sup> He went on to state that:

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<sup>51</sup> Op. cit., pp iv-v

<sup>52</sup> Op. cit., p74

<sup>53</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>54</sup> "Wirral report says user needs and staff input are central to legal duty", *Update*, January-February 2010, p6

<sup>55</sup> "1964 and all that, in 2011", *Update*, January 2011, p4

<sup>56</sup> DCMS letter, "Spending decisions and library services", ref CMS 160888/DC, 3 December 2010

The [Wirral] inquiry determined that the ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service that local authorities are required to provide is a balance between meeting local needs within available resources in a way which is appropriate to the needs of the local community. No two authorities are the same and there is no single way of making an assessment of the needs of a community.

He then set out the key considerations for local authorities, as follows:

- a statement of what the service is trying to achieve;
- a description of local needs, including the general and specific needs of adults and children who live, work and study in the area;
- a detailed description of how the service will be delivered and how the plans will fully take into account the demography of the area and different needs of adults and children in different areas (both in general and specific terms);
- the resources available for the service, including the annual budget.

He expressed the hope that “local authorities will develop a creative and bold approach to decision making around the public library service” and stated that the Future Libraries Programme was launched in the summer “to provide local authorities with support in delivering the service more efficiently.”<sup>57</sup>

In an interview with *Update*,<sup>58</sup> Mr Vaizey stated that the key findings of the Wirral report:

outlined that when re-organising library services it is important that authorities have a strategy, that they have considered the needs of their communities and that they have consulted local people.

Just as authorities take local decisions about their library services, when considering whether a local authority’s plans are in breach of the 1964 Act, we take decisions on a case-by-case basis too.

He went on to state that:

Local authorities would be well advised to consider the findings of the Wirral report when developing their library policy, and particularly when considering significant changes to library provision.

In a statement released to *The Bookseller*, Mr Vaizey is reported as having “stopped short of supporting” calls for a national public inquiry into library services.<sup>59</sup> He is quoted as saying that:

People have every right to campaign for their local libraries, and to let councils know how much they care about them.

The best councils know who uses their services, how they use them, what books they borrow and what benefits these services bring to them. Consultation should take place at local level first; that’s how local councils can make the best choices on behalf of local residents ... I am monitoring very closely what’s happening across England. I will consider the use of statutory powers on a case-by-case basis. Local authorities have clear legal obligations, but library services must be looked at as a whole, including provision beyond the walls of library buildings.

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<sup>57</sup> Future Libraries Programme (see section 5 below), and [DCMS website](#)

<sup>58</sup> “Custodian of public libraries?”, *Update*, January 2011, pp12-14

<sup>59</sup> “Vaizey rebuffs library inquiry call”, *Bookseller*, 21 January 2011, p5

A recent article in the *Independent on Sunday* reported that Mr Vaizey had:

rejected calls for an inquiry into the [proposed library] closures, but said that every council decision would be checked to ensure statutory obligations were still met. His Future Libraries Programme will report on alternative ways of providing library services later this year, but this will come too late for many libraries.<sup>60</sup>

In response to a question put to him for *Ask Ed Vaizey February 2011*, “Why have you not used your powers to call for a national review of all the proposed library closures?” Mr Vaizey confirmed that he does not have the power to order a national review, but that the Secretary of State has powers under the 1964 Act to “review a local authority’s provision of libraries and to look at whether it meets a test about whether it is ‘comprehensive and efficient’”. He noted that the situation is changing “all the time” due to the response of local authorities to demonstrations by local people in support of their local libraries, and so:

we want to wait to see what particular local authorities finally decide to do in terms of library service and then we will look at what decisions they take and we’ll take advice from the Museums Libraries and Archives Council about whether there is a *prima facie* case that they have broken the requirement to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, and if they have, then we will order an inquiry.<sup>61</sup>

The *Sunday Times* has reported Whitehall sources as warning that the Government “may take direct control of libraries if ‘reckless’ councils fail to act with restraint over closures”<sup>62</sup> and is worried that “some communities, particularly in rural areas, may have no access to libraries and are concerned about the effect of closures on children and the elderly.” The article comments that the Government is now:

offering guidance on how to rescue some threatened libraries by modernising their services. Among suggestions to generate revenue are the opening of coffee shops and internet cafes and sharing buildings with Sure Start and job centres.

“At this stage we want to offer advice. We are reminding councils what their statutory responsibilities are,” said one source. “We can’t do anything during the consultation, which is still happening. We then have statutory powers to intervene if it is thought necessary.”

The following recent Written Answers also refer to the statutory responsibilities of both local authorities and the Secretary of State in relation to public library services:

### Libraries

**Mr Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what consideration he has given to the merits of using his statutory powers in the event of a local authority not fulfilling its legal duty to maintain an acceptable level of library provision. [30952]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The Department takes compliance with the statutory duty to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service under the Public Libraries and Museum Act very seriously. The Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries (Mr Vaizey) wrote to all local authorities recently to remind them of their statutory duties.

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<sup>60</sup> “Overdue! The fight to save our libraries begins”, *Independent on Sunday*, 16 January 2011

<sup>61</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>62</sup> “Minister may grab control of libraries”, *Sunday Times*, 13 February 2011, p2. See also: “We’ll move to protect libraries, says minister”, *Daily Telegraph*, 14 February 2011, p4

The use of the Secretary of State's statutory powers must be considered on a case-by-case basis.<sup>63</sup>

### **Libraries: Opening Hours**

**Gloria De Piero:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the effects on the provision of library services of proposed changes to opening hours or the closure of libraries by local authorities. [33951]

**Mr Vaizey:** The Secretary of State has a statutory duty to superintend the delivery of library services by local authorities, including any reduction in programmes. He takes this duty very seriously and we continue to monitor proposals being made about changes to library services across England. However, any specific assessment of the impact of any changes to services has to be made within the context of the exercise of statutory powers by the Secretary of State, consideration of which has to be made on a case by case basis and in accordance with the statutory provisions.

Responsibility and accountability for day to day management of individual library services, including opening hours and closures, is vested in local authorities. Local authorities must be capable of demonstrating that they have discharged their statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service and that they will continue to do so if changes are made to the service.<sup>64</sup>

### **Public Libraries**

**Mr Bone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what his policy is on the future of public libraries; and if he will make a statement. [34844]

**Mr Vaizey:** The Government are committed champions of public libraries and their value, not just in encouraging reading, but as the hub of local communities. They are places which can be used by anyone in order to learn, read, access information or get online.

The Government continue to drive the improvement and development of public library services through the Future Libraries Programme. The programme was announced in July and is led by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Local Government Association. They will support over 30 authorities participating in the programme to explore options that will help them to deliver the front line services communities want and need more efficiently. Learning from the 10 pilot projects will be shared widely to support non-participating authorities to deliver their services more efficiently too.

We continue to monitor proposals about changes to library services being made by local authorities across England and we take our duty to superintend the delivery of services, including any reduction in programmes, very seriously.<sup>65</sup>

The most recent debate on public library services took place in Westminster Hall on 25 January,<sup>66</sup> when statutory requirements and responsibilities, amongst other topics, were also discussed.

## **5 The Future Libraries Programme**

On 1 July 2010, Ed Vaizey announced a support programme, the Future Libraries Programme, led by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council<sup>67</sup> and the Local

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<sup>63</sup> [HC Deb 15 December 2010 c780W](#)

<sup>64</sup> [HC Deb 17 January 2011 c467-8W](#)

<sup>65</sup> [HC Deb 20 January 2011 c898W](#)

<sup>66</sup> [HC Deb 28 January 2011 cc1-26WH](#).

Government Association Group<sup>68</sup> “to help library authorities to look at how best they provide their services and look beyond organisational boundaries” and “helping them deliver key services while reducing costs.”<sup>69</sup> Mr Vaizey said that many options should be considered, including: shared services, merging functions, staffing across authorities, support from volunteers and the use of other community buildings.<sup>70</sup>

Fifty-one submissions, representing over 100 local authorities, were made. They were assessed on “their individual strengths, but also to ensure a balance of the type of project, geographical spread, and rural and urban mix to help ensure the programme shares learning nationally.”<sup>71</sup> Details of the projects chosen for the first phase of work were announced on 16 August 2010.<sup>72</sup> In the second phase, the lessons learned will be shared with the public library network.

The 10 phase one areas and their associated projects are summarised below:

- **Northumberland with Durham:** a project to make use of shared arrangements relating to IT and professional support to enable their libraries to offer access to a range of councils and other services.
- **Bolton, with Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan:** a feasibility study and options appraisal to identify efficiency savings and customer service improvement opportunities and consider alternative governance models.
- **Bradford:** a project to remodel library service to provide major libraries in key centres across the district supported by a network of sustainable local service points. Potentially many of these library link points will be located in shared outlets with extended opening times in partnership with a retail partner.
- **Lincolnshire, with Rutland, Cambridgeshire, North East Lincolnshire, Peterborough:** a project focussing on how Lincolnshire can work with neighbouring authorities and local communities to develop library services beyond their perceived traditional role and across a large geographical area. Two core elements are: how to involve communities in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of library services; and how to engage local councillors, the private and voluntary sectors in the development of high performing, value for money library services which meet the needs of local communities.
- **Suffolk:** a project to enable communities to take control of running their library.
- **Oxfordshire with Kent:** a project to develop a new long term model for library services provided in rural counties.
- **Herefordshire with Shropshire:** a project to consider the use of new models of service delivery building on both authorities’ experience in working with communities in highly rural areas to deliver and improve services. The programme will look at the options of charitable trust status and neighbourhood run libraries.
- **Cornwall with Devon, Plymouth, Torbay:** a project to identify the scale of the potential efficiencies created by joint working, explore areas for innovative service

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<sup>67</sup> [MLA website](#)

<sup>68</sup> [LGA Group website](#)

<sup>69</sup> [DCMS website](#) and DCMS press release *New support programme for libraries*, 1 July 2010

<sup>70</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>71</sup> MLA press notice, *Future Libraries Programme*, 16 August 2010. See also [MLA website](#)

<sup>72</sup> DCMS press release, *First ten areas to join future library programme announced*, 16 August 2010

improvement across the partnership and identify appropriate governance models, which can incorporate the shared services across the four authorities.

- **Lewisham with Bexley, Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lambeth and Southwark:** to look at options and opportunities for improving quality and reducing costs by working more closely together.
- **Kensington & Chelsea with Hammersmith & Fulham:** to explore the feasibility of sharing library services to be delivered or commissioned jointly across borough borders.<sup>73</sup>

Updates on the programme and the participating projects are available on the MLA's website.<sup>74</sup> In November 2010's issue of the Future Libraries Programme newsletter (the first), Cllr Chris White, Chair of the LG Group's Culture, Tourism and Sport Programme Board, stated:

In the present financial climate councils are working hard to protect their library services whilst making them more efficient. We share an ambition that long-term transformation to join up public services and model them around local people's contemporary needs, is far more preferable than short term cuts and closures.<sup>75</sup>

The Future Libraries Programme was referred to in September 2010's Westminster Hall debate on public libraries,<sup>76</sup> during which Ed Vaizey stated that it was "important to stress that libraries are a local service and that it is not for the Government to tell local authorities how to run their local library service—we exist to encourage and support." He went on to express the hope that the library support programme will, in particular, "bring together different views about innovation and modernisation and enable best practice to be shared."

A recent Written Answer also makes reference to the role of the FLP:

#### **Public Libraries**

**Dr Huppert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to comply with section 1(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to promote the improvement of the public library service. [39944]

**Mr Vaizey** [*holding answer 11 February 2011*]: We continue to drive the improvement and development of public library services through the Future Libraries Programme (FLP). The programme was announced in July and is led by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and the Local Government Association. They are supporting over 30 authorities participating in the programme to explore options that will help them to deliver the front line services communities want and need more efficiently. Learning from the 10 pilot projects will be shared widely to support non-participating authorities to deliver their services more efficiently too. In addition to the FLP the MLA promotes best practice and supports local authorities to develop their library services. Arts Council England will assume responsibility for the library service improvement and development agenda, following the abolition of the MLA.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> [DCMS website](#)

<sup>74</sup> [MLA website](#)

<sup>75</sup> [MLA website](#)

<sup>76</sup> [HC Deb 7 September 2010 cc64-72WH](#)

<sup>77</sup> [HC Deb 14 February 2011, c529W](#)

## 6 Public libraries and volunteers

### 6.1 Background

Since 2006-07, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, CIPFA, has published data on the number of volunteers working in libraries. In 2009-10 there were 16,300 volunteers recorded as working at libraries in England and Wales. Together they worked for just over half a million hours, around 33 hours per volunteer across the year.<sup>78</sup> The *Guardian* reports that recent statistics from CIPFA showed “a drop of nearly 1,000 in the number of paid library staff in the 12 months to March 2010, a 3.4% fall to a total of just under 25,000. Over the same period the total number of volunteers in UK public libraries rose 7.7% to 17,111.”<sup>79</sup>

The staffing and running of public libraries by volunteers and community groups has been viewed as a key expression of Prime Minister David Cameron’s call for a culture of voluntarism and the establishment of residents-led co-operatives to take over local public services under threat as a result of spending cuts. The plan has, however, “also been attacked as simply government withdrawal from the provision of vital services.”<sup>80</sup>

Speaking at the Re-modelling Library Services Conference on 1 July 2010,<sup>81</sup> Ed Vaizey stated that:

Libraries also have a home at the heart of the Big Society where communities have more of a role in determining the shape of the public service and what it delivers. When David Cameron announced the Big Society Plans in March he said:

“[The Big Society] is a guiding philosophy. A society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control. It includes a whole set of unifying approaches – breaking state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises and companies to provide public services, devolving power down to neighbourhoods, making government more accountable. And it’s the thread that runs consistently through our whole policy programme.”

This is particularly relevant to libraries because at the centre of your role are the needs of your communities and of library users. You can – and I know many do already – use that relationship to bring about community-led changes in your service.

There are all sorts of ways of configuring the Big Society – The George and Dragon pub in North Yorkshire is now delivering a library service and a pint to the community in Hudswell. That sounds like a good partnership to me.

The library service’s ability to reach out and engage with groups who might otherwise be on the outskirts of the community – makes that role in the Big Society all the more vital.

The potential contribution of libraries in this area is also the subject of the following recent Written Answer:

#### Public Libraries

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<sup>78</sup> *Public library statistics 2009-10*, and earlier, CIPFA

<sup>79</sup> “Leading authors attack coalition’s library cuts”, *Guardian*, 22 November 2010, p5

<sup>80</sup> “[Lewisham asks community groups to run libraries](#)”, *Local Government UK*, 6 December 2010

<sup>81</sup> [DCMS website](#)

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the potential contribution of local libraries to the Government's big society initiative. [40198]

**Mr Vaizey:** The big society is particularly relevant to library services as the needs of the community are at the heart of their provision. We have seen the number of people volunteering in libraries increasing to deliver homework clubs, digitisation projects and 'buddy support' for people new to computers in libraries, among other things.

Libraries provide books and other services which help people learn, empower them, and make contact with other community members. Library services have a vital role in reaching out and engaging with communities, delivering the big society in which citizens have amore active role in shaping public services and what they deliver.

I hosted a roundtable on the theme of 'libraries and the big society' last month. A number of local and national government officials and civil sector partners attended the event which explored how libraries can help to achieve the big society vision.<sup>82</sup>

## 6.2 Volunteers and libraries: examples and comment

There have been many examples of local authorities seeking voluntary help to maintain current levels of library service.

In Lewisham, it has been reported that the borough council has called for community groups to come forward to run local libraries threatened with closure, thereby being "one of the first major councils to experiment with Big Society-style cultural services provision."<sup>83</sup> In Bridport, Dorset, "After the county council threatened to cut 13 of its libraries more than four years ago, volunteers looked to see how they could save their facilities."<sup>84</sup> It was claimed that "Volunteers at Beaminster Library who help keep the town service open don't see how it can continue without county council support." The article also noted that "volunteer support means the Burton Bradstock library is now open six days a week and manned by amateurs every other day."

It has also been reported that in Croydon "radical proposals which could see libraries being run by volunteers or moved into schools are being floated by the council as alternatives to cost cutting closures."<sup>85</sup> A *Financial Times* article of October 2010 claimed that "11 of Gloucestershire's discarded libraries, one of which attracts 177,000 visits a year, are to be offered to volunteers at peppercorn rents, the suggestion being that if people really care about a library, even in a disadvantaged area, they will run and fund it themselves."<sup>86</sup>

In Southampton, it was reported that plans to replace staff with volunteers had led to industrial action.<sup>87</sup> More recently, there have been references to the possible loss of 9 of the eleven public libraries on the Isle of Wight, where the council was consulting on a plan that includes four "Libraries Local" (of which Ventnor is one), staying open part-time until March 2012 when local volunteer groups will, in theory, take them over.<sup>88</sup> It was reported that eventually the council hopes to supplement the service with "Libraries Direct" (mobile

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<sup>82</sup> [HC Deb 15 February 2011, c649W](#)

<sup>83</sup> ["Lewisham asks community groups to run libraries"](#), *Local Government UK*, 6 December 2010

<sup>84</sup> ["West Dorset: volunteers fear libraries will close under council cuts"](#), *Bridport News*, 15 December 2010

<sup>85</sup> ["Council looks at volunteers to run libraries in bid to avoid shutting them down"](#), *Croydon Today*, 16 December 2010

<sup>86</sup> "Ignorance is bliss for Middle England", *Financial Times*, 16 October 2010, p4

<sup>87</sup> "Libraries under siege 'as never before'", *Bookseller*, 16 July 2010

<sup>88</sup> "Borrowed time", *Guardian*, 4 February 2011, pp4-7

libraries), “Libraries home” (home delivery, volunteer-run), and “Libraries Online” (described as self-explanatory and seemingly not yet beyond the idea stage).<sup>89</sup>

References to the proposals by local authorities in Gloucestershire, Dorset and Oxfordshire, that many of their branches become community-run, were made in the recent Westminster Hall debate on the future of library services.<sup>90</sup> Justin Tomlinson also cited the example of Walcot library in the South Swindon constituency, where the local council, having decided that the facility was no longer viable, handed it over to volunteers. He referred to volunteers as having an important part to play:

It is right to say that volunteers cannot simply replace all traditional library staff. However, the best model is one where existing core library staff are transferred, so that those people who rely on an excellent library service in core hours can still go at those times. Nevertheless, we should not lock the library doors for the rest of the week. We should empower communities to take over the running of local libraries at those times.<sup>91</sup>

Commenting on what he considered to be one of the key themes of the debate, the respective roles of volunteers and professional staff, Guy Daines, CILIP’s Director of Advocacy, stated:

Most of the labour [sic] representatives stressed that libraries could not be run by volunteers on thin air. There are currently 17,000 volunteers contributing 1.5 million hours per year but without the support of a library service this would be impossible to sustain. All MPs, irrespective of party used words such as “extending”, “supplementing” and “additional” when speaking of the contribution of volunteers, although one person suggested a volunteer run library was better than no library at all.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy, a rare Welsh presence in an English debate) expressed surprise that labour representatives had so little confidence in communities to save (manage) libraries and reminded members that libraries originally sprang from the efforts of local communities. However, even he concluded that the public library service needed to be professionally led but must address the inefficiencies within the system.<sup>92</sup>

He noted that Ed Vaizey was asked to work with Gloucestershire “as even volunteer run services needed support.” He further commented that another leading Councillor, in Gloucestershire, is recommending that community-run libraries be allowed to levy subscriptions for the loan of books. This, he considered:

is clearly counter to the provisions in the 1964 Act,<sup>93</sup> but all will depend on whether they are regarded as public libraries within the terms of the Act. This is an area that will need further investigation and close monitoring.

### **6.3 Future Libraries Programme and volunteers**

As part of the first phase of the Future Libraries Programme<sup>94</sup> [see above], a project has been launched in Suffolk to enable communities to take control of running their library. Further information is included in the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council (MLA) and

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid. New plans were announced on 9 February 2011. Current information accessible on the [Ventnor Blog](#).

<sup>90</sup> [HC Deb 25 January 2011 cc1-26WH](#)

<sup>91</sup> [c8WH](#)

<sup>92</sup> [CILIP Information & Advice Blog](#)

<sup>93</sup> [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#)

<sup>94</sup> [DCMS website](#)

Local Government Association's December 2010 newsletter on the FLP.<sup>95</sup> Communities will be given:

more say and choice over services by delegating budgets and transferring assets so that library services could be delivered outside the council through, for example, town or parish councils or community organisations. The benefits of a network and shared support services would be maintained and developed.

Four work streams (governance, specification, communication and support services) have been set up by the Council's project board, to deal with the different aspects of the project. Suffolk libraries is described as one of the "early adopter" services that are helping to develop the implementation of the New Strategic Direction that is being applied across County Council services. The FLP project has "allowed the service to shape and test its proposals, prior to a formal consultation process to start shortly."

A recent Written Answer on voluntary work in libraries includes a reference to current Future Libraries Programme pilot projects:

#### **Public Libraries: Voluntary Work**

**Gloria De Piero:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent discussions he has had with local authorities on the use of volunteers to replace librarians. [36771]

**Mr Vaizey:** This week I was given an update on the Future Libraries Programme (FLP) which included presentations from three of the authorities that are participating. A number of FLP pilot projects are exploring new models for library delivery-including greater involvement of volunteers. I also hosted a roundtable on the theme of 'libraries and the big society'. A number of local and national government officials and civil sector partners attended the event which explored how libraries can help to achieve the big society vision.<sup>96</sup>

#### **6.4 Other recent developments**

On 15 November 2010, the policy group/think tank ResPublica published a report *To Buy, To Bid, To Build: Community Rights for an Asset Owning Democracy*, in which it "argued that the government's Big Society initiative would fail unless community groups were supported to take over assets such as libraries and leisure centres."<sup>97</sup>

Amongst the provisions of the *Localism Bill* 2010-11, introduced on 13 December 2010, are new powers which could help save local facilities and services threatened with closure, and to give voluntary and community groups the right to challenge local authorities over their services.<sup>98</sup>

On 4 February 2011, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a consultation paper, *Proposals to Introduce a Community Right to Buy*, which seeks views on:

- Provisions being made by the government in the Localism Bill to assist community organisations that wish to purchase assets of community value.

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<sup>95</sup> [MLA website](#)

<sup>96</sup> [HC Deb 31 January 2011 c507W](#)

<sup>97</sup> [To buy, to bid, to build: Community rights for an asset owning democracy](#)

<sup>98</sup> [Localism Bill 2010-11](#), Library Research Paper

- The detail of how the scheme should be delivered, which will be set out in regulations.
- What type of support and guidance should be provided.<sup>99</sup>

The paper states that:

As part of our determination to shift power to local neighbourhoods, the Community Right to Buy will ensure that community organisations have a fair chance to bid to take over assets and facilities that are important to them. These facilities could include their village shop or the last remaining pub in the village, their community centre, children's centre or library building.

It should be noted that the assets that are the subject of the consultation, which ends on 3 May 2011, comprise land and buildings, not the services provided on or within them. In relation to assets and services, the paper notes that:

The proposed Community Right to Buy scheme in England and Wales applies to assets only (that is, land and buildings), not services. Community groups may therefore be able to nominate a building to be listed as an asset of community value, but not the service that operates from within that building. For example, a post office is a contractual service and whilst community groups may be able to nominate the building from which the postal service operates, this would not guarantee the continuation of the post office service but that this could be something for the community to take on separately if it so wished. This could also be the case with library services.

Communities seeking to buy a building or other land under the Community Right to Buy scheme will need to consider how they are going to access resources to maintain the asset. In the case of local authority services, such as children's centres or libraries, the prospect of a continuing income stream in the shape of a contract to deliver the service may therefore be very important. The Community Right to Challenge, also included in the Localism Bill, will complement the Community Right to Buy by giving community groups the opportunity to express an interest in running services currently provided by local authorities. A consultation on the Community Right to Challenge is being run in parallel with this consultation and further information can be found on the DCLG website.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> DCLG, *Proposals to Introduce a Community Right to Buy*, 2011

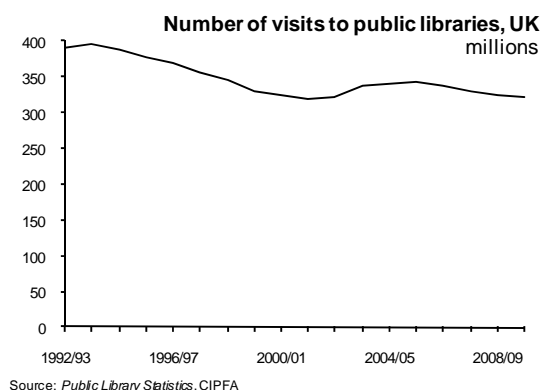
<sup>100</sup> Op. cit., p22

## 7 Public library trends: statistics<sup>101</sup>

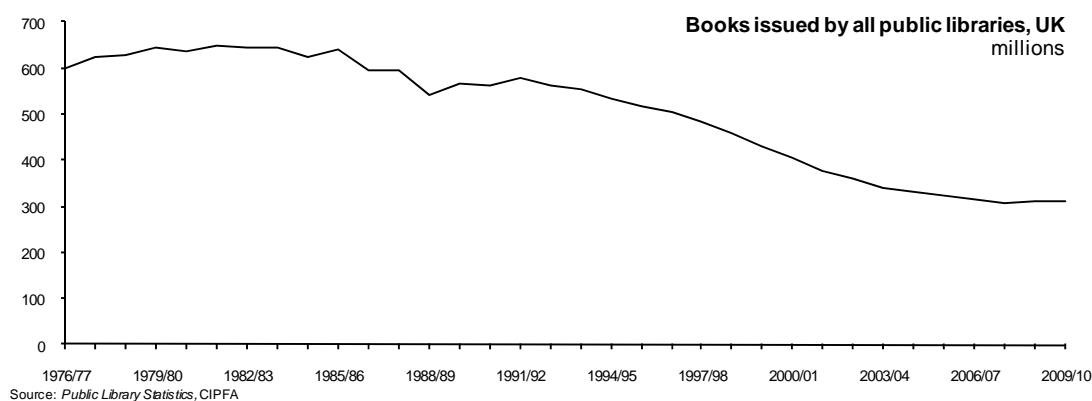
### 7.1 Visitor numbers and book loans

In 2009-10 there were 322 million visits to libraries, but slightly fewer book loans at 309 million. Visits have exceeded book issues in each of the last six years.

The chart opposite shows that visitor numbers fell in each year between 1993-94 to 2001-02; from 391 million to 318 million. There was an increase between 2003 and 2005, but numbers have declined again in each of the last four years.



Figures on the number of books loaned by libraries are available for a longer time period and trends are illustrated below.



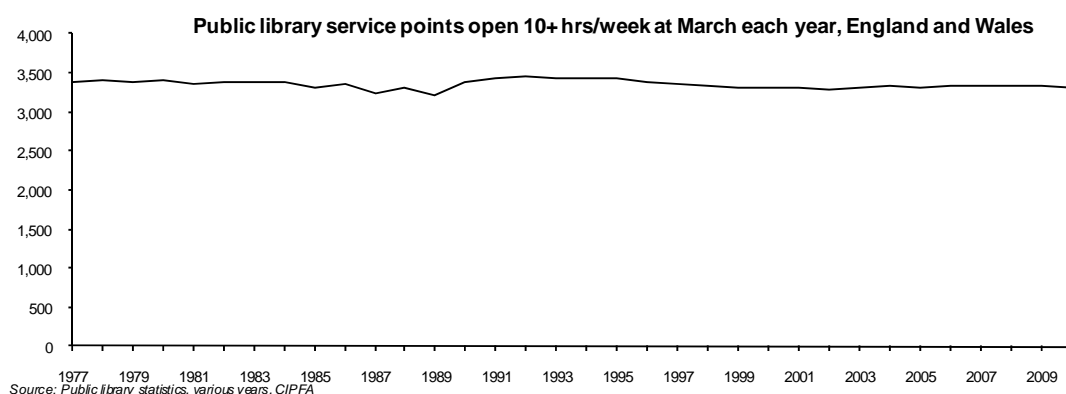
The total number issued has decreased steadily from around 650 million a year in the early 1980s to fewer than half this number in the past four years. In each of the past 18 years there has been a fall in the number of books loaned; an average annual decline of 3.4%. Loans of audio, visual, electronic and other stock increased during the 1990s and the early part of this decade to a peak of 42 million in 2002-03. However, loans of these items have also fallen since then to 26 million in 2009-10.<sup>102</sup>

### 7.2 Library 'service points'

The number of public libraries is measured in 'service points' to include mobile as well as static libraries. The following chart looks at the total number open for 10 or more hours per week, excluding mobile libraries, since the late 1970s.

<sup>101</sup> This section was contributed by Paul Bolton, Social and General Statistics Section

<sup>102</sup> Public library statistics 2009-10, and earlier, CIPFA



The 3,318 open at the end of March 2010 was slightly lower than in the previous few years, but the number has changed very little over the past three decades, remaining in the 3,300 to 3,400 for the large majority of the time. The only period where the number changed noticeably was in the late 1980s/early 1990s when, after falling to just over 3,200, their number increased by more than 200 in two years. Over the last decade the number of these libraries open for less than 45 hours per week has fallen by just around 470, while the number open for 45 or more hours per week has increased by around 440.<sup>103</sup>

The Appendix shows the total number of service points open for 10 or more hours per week, broken down by local authority (as above, figures including service points open for less than 10 hours per week are not available). The table gives total numbers in 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2010. Both the chart and table show 'net change' only; they do not show the number of individual libraries that have closed and opened in a given area.

Data from CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) on the total number of libraries open at the end of March 2011 is expected to be published around October 2011, alongside other data on services and spending in 2010-11.

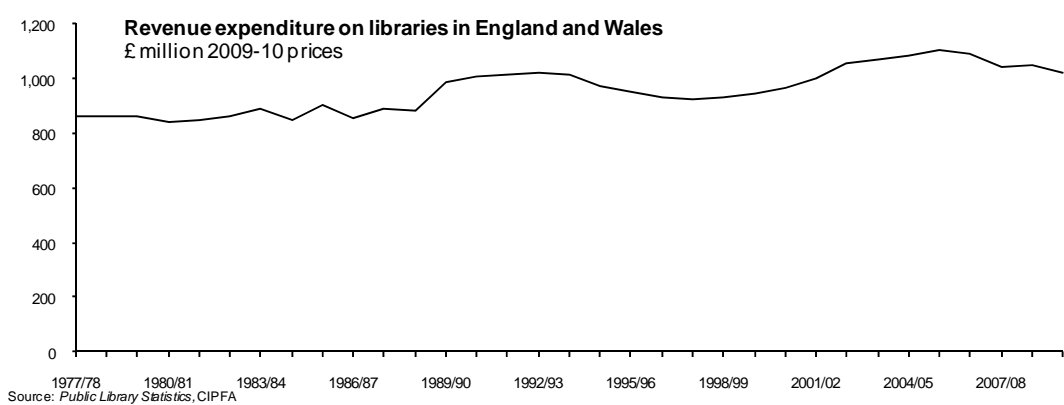
### **7.3 Local authority expenditure on libraries**

Central government funding for local authorities comes from the local government finance settlement and is administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It is not ring-fenced. Local authorities are responsible for deciding how to allocate core funding to public libraries in the light of their statutory duties under the 1964 *Public Libraries and Museums Act* and local priorities.

Real levels of spending on libraries in England and Wales are illustrated below. Spending has varied little year-on-year over this period. After around a decade of stable expenditure there were real increases in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but these were reversed in the mid 1990s. Increases in spending from 1997/98 have only been partially reversed in recent years.

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<sup>103</sup> Public library statistics 2009-10, and earlier, CIPFA



The proportion of expenditure devoted to books fell from 18% at the start of this period to less than 8% in 2008-09. Spending on staff has increased as a proportion of the total from just below 50% to 55% in 2009-10.<sup>104</sup>

#### 7.4 Staff numbers

The long term trend in the number of staff employed in libraries is downward. Their total full-time equivalent number in England and Wales fell from just over 25,000 in the late 1970s and early 1980s to 21,300. Short term trends have varied over this period, but the total has fallen in each of the last six years and the 2009/10 figure was the lowest of any during this period. Within this total the full-time equivalent number of professional posts fell from 6,700 in March 1999 to just under 5,000 in March 2010. Most of this fall occurred between 2004 and 2009.<sup>105</sup>

For data on the number of volunteers, see 6.1 above.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*

## Appendix:

### Library service points open for 10+ hours per week, excluding mobiles

	1999	2004	2009	2010
More than in 1999				
Fewer than in 1999				
<b>End March each year</b>				
	1999	2004	2009	2010
Aberdeen City Council	18	18	18	17
Aberdeenshire	32	..	30	30
Angus	7	7	..	..
Argyll and Bute	12	12	11	11
Barking and Dagenham	11	11	11	11
Barnet	17	17	15	16
Barnsley	20	18	17	17
Bath and North East Somerset	8	8	8	8
Bedfordshire	17	17	18	..
Belfast E and L B (NI)	21	21	..	..
Bexley	14	13	12	12
Birmingham	40	40	42	42
Blackburn with Darwen	5	6	9	5
Blackpool	12	12	8	8
Blaenau Gwent	7	7	6	6
Bolton	15	15	17	16
Bournemouth	12	12	12	12
Bracknell Forest	9	9	9	9
Bradford	26	26	26	26
Brent	12	12	12	12
Bridgend	12	14	14	15
Brighton and Hove	16	16	16	15
Bristol	26	27	27	27
Bromley	15	15	15	15
Buckinghamshire	33	34	27	28
Bury	7	12	13	13
Caerphilly	19	19	18	18
Calderdale	20	20	20	20
Cambridgeshire	40	41	37	37
Camden	13	13	13	13
Cardiff	19	19	20	20

Carmarthenshire	15	15	16	16
Central Bedfordshire	..	..	..	13
Ceredigion	6	6	7	7
Cheshire	37	39	39	..
Cheshire East	..	..	..	17
Cheshire West and Chester	..	..	..	22
City of London	6	6	5	5
Clackmannanshire	8	8	8	8
Conwy	11	11	9	9
Cornwall	29	30	30	30
Coventry	13	17	17	17
Croydon	14	13	13	13
Cumbria	45	47	43	47
Darlington	2	2	..	2
Denbighshire	8	8	..	..
Derby City	10	10	12	14
Derbyshire	45	45	45	45
Devon	49	53	43	43
Doncaster	25	25	27	27
Dorset	34	34	31	31
Dudley	18	18	16	17
Dumfries and Galloway	22	21	..	22
Dundee	14	14	14	14
Durham	39	39	40	42
Ealing	12	12	15	15
East Ayrshire	24	23	21	21
East Dunbartonshire	8	8	8	8
East Lothian	12	..	12	12
East Renfrewshire	9	9	9	9
East Riding of Yorkshire	19	22	..	..
East Sussex	24	24	24	24
Edinburgh	26	26	26	26
Eileanan Siar	5	5	5	5
Enfield	15	15	16	16
Essex	74	73	73	73
Falkirk	7	8	8	8
Fife	52	48	48	48
Flintshire	16	16	14	14
Gateshead	17	17	..	17
Glasgow	33	35	34	34
Gloucestershire	39	39	39	39
Greenwich	14	15	14	14

Gwynedd	16	16	16	16
Hackney	8	7	7	8
Halton	4	4	4	4
Hammersmith and Fulham	6	6	6	7
Hampshire	51	52	53	53
Haringey	9	9	10	10
Harrow	11	11	11	11
Hartlepool	7	8	7	7
Havering	10	10	12	10
Herefordshire	8	8	8	8
Hertfordshire	52	52	49	49
Highland	34	38	38	38
Hillingdon	17	17	17	17
Hounslow	11	10	11	11
Inverclyde	9	9	7	7
Isle of Anglesey	9	9	9	9
Isle of Wight	11	11	11	11
Islington	10	11	10	10
Kensington and Chelsea	6	6	6	6
Kent	101	101	..	100
Kingston upon Hull	17	17	16	15
Kingston upon Thames	7	7	..	7
Kirklees	27	23	27	27
Knowsley	7	7	7	..
Lambeth	11	9	10	10
Lancashire	78	85	75	75
Leeds	53	56	52	52
Leicester City	21	21	19	17
Leicestershire	51	53	55	54
Lewisham	12	11	12	12
Lincolnshire	50	46	48	48
Liverpool	24	24	22	22
Luton	8	8	8	8
Manchester	23	24	23	23
Medway	15	17	17	17
Merthyr Tydfil	3	..	..	3
Merton	9	7	9	9
Middlesbrough	11	13	13	13
Midlothian	10	10	10	10
Milton Keynes	8	8	11	10
Monmouthshire	6	6	6	6
Moray	15	16	15	15

Neath Port Talbot	15	16	15	15
Newcastle upon Tyne	22	18	17	17
Newham	10	10	10	10
Newport	10	10	..	13
Norfolk	49	47	48	48
North Ayrshire	15	16	16	16
North East Lincolnshire	..	11	10	10
North Eastern E and L B (NI)	38	..	29	..
North Lanarkshire	24	24	29	24
North Lincolnshire	13	15	15	15
North Somerset	12	12	14	14
North Tyneside	15	15	..	15
North Yorkshire	41	42	40	41
Northamptonshire	35	35	36	36
Northumberland	34	34	33	33
Nottingham	20	20	21	20
Nottinghamshire	58	59	60	60
Oldham	14	14	15	13
Orkney	2	2	..	2
Oxfordshire	43	43	43	43
Pembrokeshire	13	13	..	11
Perth and Kinross	12	13	13	13
Peterborough	7	9	10	10
Plymouth	19	16	16	16
Poole	10	10	10	10
Portsmouth	..	9	9	9
Powys	..	17	17	17
Reading	7	7	7	7
Redbridge	9	9	11	11
Redcar and Cleveland	14	13	13	13
Renfrewshire	19	17	12	12
Rhondda Cynon Taff	30	29	..	29
Richmond upon Thames	13	13	13	13
Rochdale	18	18	18	18
Rotherham	15	15	16	16
Rutland	4	4	4	4
Salford	16	16	16	16
Sandwell	19	19	19	19
Scottish Borders	12	14	12	12
Sefton	13	13	13	13
Sheffield	28	27	30	29
Shetland	10	1	10	10

Shropshire	22	22	24	24
Slough	4	4	4	4
Solihull	12	13	13	13
Somerset	34	34	34	34
South Ayrshire	14	14	14	14
South Eastern E and L B	26	26	24	..
South Gloucestershire	12	13	13	13
South Lanarkshire	25	25	25	25
South Tyneside	8	8	9	9
Southampton	11	11	11	11
Southend-on-Sea	7	5	7	7
Southern E and L B	25	25	..	..
Southwark	13	13	12	12
St Helens	13	13	13	13
Staffordshire	43	43	43	43
Stirling	15	15	16	16
Stockport	15	15	16	16
Stockton-on-Tees	10	11	12	12
Stoke-on-Trent	9	10	11	11
Suffolk	42	45	44	44
Sunderland	21	21	..	20
Surrey	53	53	54	54
Sutton	9	9	10	9
Swansea	19	17	17	17
Swindon	16	17	16	15
Tameside	16	15	14	14
Telford and Wrekin	9	9	11	11
Thurrock	9	10	10	10
Torbay	4	4	4	4
Torfaen	4	4	4	4
Tower Hamlets	12	11	9	8
Trafford	14	14	14	14
Vale of Glamorgan	8	8	9	9
Wakefield	28	27	27	27
Walsall	20	20	16	16
Waltham Forest	11	12	11	11
Wandsworth	12	13	12	11
Warrington	13	13	13	13
Warwickshire	33	31	34	34
West Berkshire	9	9	9	9
West Dunbartonshire	10	11	10	10
West Lothian	14	14	14	14

West Sussex	35	35	36	36
Western E and L B (NI)	16	16	15	..
Westminster	12	12	12	12
Wigan	16	16	18	18
Wiltshire	31	31	32	11
Windsor and Maidenhead	10	11	11	11
Wirral	24	24	24	24
Wokingham	7	8	..	..
Wolverhampton	22	21	20	20
Worcestershire	22	23	24	24
Wrexham	11	11	12	..
York	14	13	14	14

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Source: CIPFA Public Libraries Statistics 2010 and earlier