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House of Commons

Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Library Closures

Third Report of Session 2012-13

Volume I

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House of Commons
Culture, Media and Sport
Committee

Library Closures

Third Report of Session 2012-13

Volume I

Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

Additional written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at www.parliament.uk/lcmscom

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 30 October 2012*

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Mr John Whittingdale MP (*Conservative, Maldon*) (Chair)
Mr Ben Bradshaw MP (*Labour, Exeter*)
Angie Bray MP (*Conservative, Ealing Central and Acton*)
Conor Burns MP (*Conservative, Bournemouth West*)
Tracey Crouch MP (*Conservative, Chatham and Aylesford*)
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Mr Adrian Sanders MP (*Liberal Democrat, Torbay*)
Jim Sheridan MP (*Labour, Paisley and Renfrewshire North*)
Mr Gerry Sutcliffe MP (*Labour, Bradford South*)

The following were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

David Cairns MP (*Labour, Inverclyde*)
Dr Thérèse Coffey MP (*Conservative, Suffolk Coastal*)
Damian Collins MP (*Conservative, Folkestone and Hythe*)
Alan Keen MP (*Labour Co-operative, Feltham and Heston*)
Louise Mensch MP (*Conservative, Corby*)
Mr Tom Watson MP (*Labour, West Bromwich East*)

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at www.parliament.uk/cmscom. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some of the written evidence are available in a printed volume.

Additional written evidence is published on the internet only.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Elizabeth Flood (Clerk), Grahame Danby (Second Clerk), Victoria Butt (Senior Committee Assistant), Keely Bishop/Alison Pratt (Committee Assistants) and Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, House of Commons, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6188; the Committee's email address is cmscom@parliament.uk

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Summary

Public libraries providing free access to books and other sources of information are a vital and much-loved service. Recent campaigns against the closure of local libraries have highlighted the strong attachment that many people feel to this service. However, much of the focus of the campaigns has been on library branches rather than the broader question of the preservation—and, if possible, enhancement—of the library service. Reductions in opening hours and the loss of professional staff may damage the service more than the closure of particular buildings, even though premises are clearly key to comprehensive provision.

Local authorities are under considerable financial pressure at present and have to make budgetary decisions swiftly. The provision of a library service is a statutory duty, but a number of councils have drawn up plans that fail to comply with the requirement to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. A good starting point is the consultation being carried out under the aegis of the Arts Council into exactly how people use the service at present. Making a full assessment of the needs of the local population for the services provided by libraries is key to developing plans for changes to the service. While guidance on how to assess local needs is available, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Arts Council (the body which now has responsibility for promoting good practice in the service) need to do more to disseminate it. The support of the Local Government Association and the professional librarians will be needed in this task.

Although the current crisis may appear to bode ill for the future of public libraries, it also presents an opportunity for a thorough reassessment of their role and of the way they are organised. We were given many examples of innovative thinking about what libraries can offer to the local population, and a number of models of how those services might be provided. Under the pressure of budget cuts, co-operation between library authorities, partnerships with other public and private bodies, development of new services and the greater sharing of good practice open the possibility of providing more flexible, imaginative and efficient library services in future.

Councils which have transferred the running of libraries to community volunteers must, however, continue to give them the necessary support, otherwise they may well wither on the vine and therefore be viewed as closures by stealth.

During our inquiry, the Minister gave us a commitment to produce a report by the end of 2014 on the cumulative effect on library services of the cuts in local authority provision and the promotion of alternatives such as transfers to community volunteers. We welcome that commitment and look forward to that report. Enthusiasm over the scope for volunteers, and for new models of provision, is fine, but—given the importance of library services—a systematic look at the impact of funding cuts and re-organisation is needed to assess the durability of such changes over time.

1 Background

Introduction

1. Public Libraries have been an important element of local life since 1850, when the first Public Libraries Act gave power to town councils to levy a small rate for the establishment of public libraries and museums in all municipal towns. (The rate was intended only for buildings: no provision was made for the purchase of books.) This—to modern eyes—modest measure raised considerable concerns, and the debate on Second Reading of the Bill threw up a number of arguments familiar to those interested in the public library service today: the utility of libraries in spreading literacy and the love of learning; the benefits of voluntarism over public provision; even disagreements about the use of library facilities for other purposes, such as lectures.¹ Certainly, the provision of public libraries has been a subject of controversy from the beginning.

2. The most recent legislation governing the provision of public libraries is the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the 1964 Act). This was introduced mainly because of the proliferation of library authorities under the then statutory regime: the Government of the day wished to reduce the total number of authorities (there were more than 600 by 1942), and in particular to merge or dissolve the smallest and least efficient authorities. In addition to sweeping away several hundred authorities, the Act imposed duties on both local library authorities and the relevant Minister in respect of delivering a free and effective library service to the public.²

3. Currently, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has overall responsibility for national library policy and individual local authorities are responsible for the library service in their areas. There are 151 library authorities in England, running nearly 3,500 libraries and spending more than £900 million each year on library services.³ Central Government funding for local libraries 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 Act and local priorities.

4. Since the Comprehensive Spending Review instituted by the new Government in 2010, the grants given by central government to local authorities have reduced significantly while restrictions on the ability of local authorities to increase council tax for their residents and local businesses remain in place. Local authorities face a decrease of, on average, 28% in their income over the Spending Review period⁴ and, in reviewing which services they should cut, some local authorities have decided to close one or more libraries in their area. This has sparked a series of campaigns and protests in areas where library closures have been planned.

1 HC Deb, 13 March 1850, col 838–849

2 The relevant provisions of the Act are discussed in paragraphs 7 and 8 below

3 Ev 68

4 Ev 78, para 1

This Inquiry

5. After receiving numerous letters and emails from campaigners, we decided to launch an inquiry into library closures and, on 23 November 2011, asked for written evidence on the following terms of reference:

- what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service for the 21st century
- the extent to which planned library closures are compatible with the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Charteris Report⁵
- the impact library closures have on local communities
- the effectiveness of the Secretary of State’s powers of intervention under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

6. We took oral evidence from three organisations representing those campaigning for maintenance of the library service (The Reading Agency, Voices for the Library and The Library Campaign); the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals; three representatives of local authorities, one of whom also represented the Local Government Association; the Arts Council; Sue Charteris, who in 2009 carried out the most recent inquiry into a local authority’s library service; and Ed Vaizey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. As well as being familiar with library provision in our own constituencies, we visited two libraries in London, in Pimlico and at Canary Wharf, to see two different approaches to providing new and imaginative library services in a time of financial stringency. We also received 136 written submissions to this inquiry. We would like to record our thanks to all who submitted evidence to us and who welcomed us during our visits.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

7. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and Wales and sets out the statutory duty for all local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons to make use thereof”.⁶ “Comprehensive and efficient” are not defined in the 1964 Act: it is the responsibility of the library authorities to determine how they deliver public services in the context of local need—specifically, the needs of those who live, work and study in the local area.

8. The main duties of library authorities outlined in the 1964 Act may be summarised as:

- providing a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for local people;
- keeping adequate stocks of “books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials”; and

5 For a summary of the Act and the Charteris Report see paragraphs 7–14 below

6 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 s7(1)

- encouraging adults and children to make full use of the library service.⁷

The Act contains provisions allowing the Secretary of State to hold an inquiry into any local authority's library service if there is a complaint to the effect that the authority is running an inadequate service and is therefore in breach of the Act. It also states that if, following an inquiry, a local authority is found to be in breach of the Act, the Secretary of State can take direct control of the public libraries in that area.⁸

9. The view of the DCMS is:

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.⁹

10. Successive Secretaries of State have used their powers under the Act sparingly. In the last 21 years, they have been used only twice: in the form of a threat to investigate library closures in Derbyshire in 1991 and, more recently, an actual inquiry in 2009 in the Wirral.¹⁰

The Wirral Inquiry and the Charteris Report

11. In February 2009, Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council (Wirral MBC) was asked to work with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council—the non-departmental public body then holding responsibility for the development and improvement of libraries—on the MBC's proposals to restructure its library services. The Council's plans to close 11 of Wirral's 24 public libraries had been the subject of a large volume of correspondence to the DCMS, mainly from the public, but also from professional bodies.

12. On 3 April 2009, the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Andy Burnham MP, exercised his power under section 10(1) of the 1964 Act to commence a local inquiry into Wirral MBC's compliance with the duties imposed upon it by section 7 of the Act.¹¹ Sue Charteris, a public policy consultant specialising in local government and public service reform, was asked to conduct the inquiry. In formulating her advice and recommendations, Sue Charteris was asked by the Secretary of State to consider the following questions:

- Did Wirral MBC make a reasonable assessment of local needs in respect of library services and, in any event, what were those needs?

7 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 s7(2)

8 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 s10

9 http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/3416.aspx

10 "Custodian of public libraries?", *Update* (the trade journal for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), January 2011, pp12-14

11 DCMS, *A local inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: led by Sue Charteris*, 2009, p3 ('Charteris Report')

- On assessment of local needs, did Wirral MBC act reasonably in meeting such needs through their proposals in the context of available resources and their statutory obligations?¹²

13. In its final Report in September 2009, 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.¹³ Wirral MBC revoked its decision to close the 11 library branches. On 30 November 2009, DCMS issued a press release explaining that the Secretary of State had concluded that, since the closures had been revoked, it was no longer appropriate to rule on whether the decision to close them had been in breach of the 1964 Act.¹⁴

14. There is renewed interest in the Wirral Inquiry and the Charteris Report in light of possible implications for public library services following the Comprehensive Spending Review. In January 2011, in an interview for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals' (CILIP's) *Update* magazine, the current Minister with responsibility for libraries, Ed Vaizey MP, said that he had "told councils to base their decisions on the guidance set out for Wirral by Sue Charteris in 2009."¹⁵ In another article in the same publication, he 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".¹⁶

Library usage and the impact of funding cuts

15. It has been suggested that fewer and fewer of the public are making use of the library service, and—by inference—that the service is less valued and valuable than it was 40 or 50 years ago. Our witnesses considered this was not a complete or accurate picture. The DCMS told us that its 'Taking Part' survey showed adult visits to libraries had declined steeply between 2005/06 and 2010/11 from 48.2% to 39.7% of the adult population,¹⁷ but there had been no statistically significant decrease over the last few years, and children's visits remained at a very high level (75.6%).¹⁸ We were also informed that lending of children's books had risen for seven years in a row.¹⁹ Alan Davey of the Arts Council England told us that 90% of the adult population thought libraries were important or essential to their community.²⁰ Annie Mauger, of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), said it was simplistic to paint a picture of steady decline: "There is changed usage. We can't deny that there is a decline but it is not of a scale at the moment that would suggest that this is a service that is utterly in decline, and there is

12 Charteris Report, pii

13 Charteris Report, pi More detailed findings are discussed on page x below

14 'Statement on Wirral library service', DCMS press release, 30 November 2009

15 '1964 and all that, in 2011', CILIP's *Update* magazine, January 2011, p4

16 'Guardian of public libraries?', *Update*, January 2011, pp12-14

17 Defined as those aged 16 and over.

18 Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport Adult and Child Report 2010/11: http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Y7_Taking_Part_2011-12-Annual_Report_REVISIED0812.pdf

19 Q 1 (Miranda McKearney of The Reading agency)

20 Q 62 See also Qq 1 and 2 (Abigail Barker of Voices for the Library and Miranda McKearney of The Reading Agency)

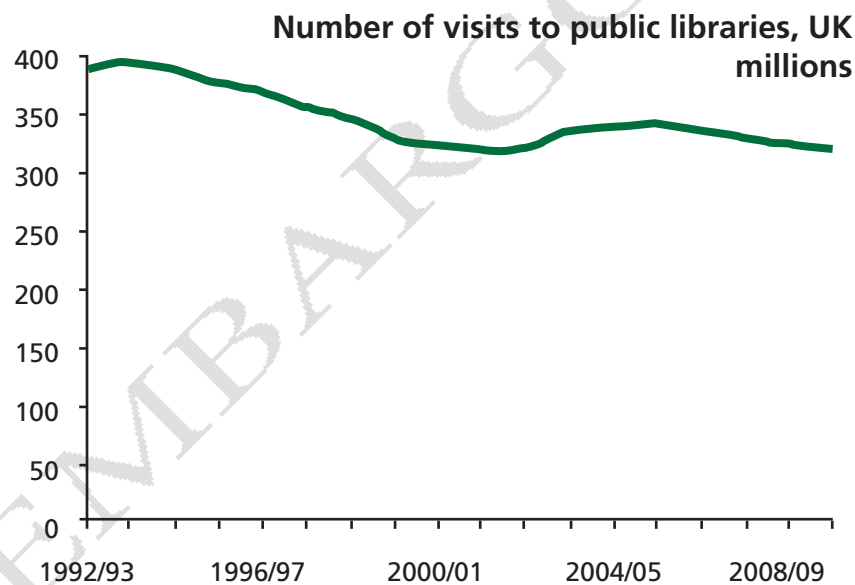
a correlation with reduction in budget.” In support of this argument, she told us that in 2011 there were 314 million visits to libraries and 300 million loans of books, a decline of, respectively, 2.3% and 2.9% over the previous year. She contrasted this with the fact that loans of children’s books had slightly increased, and that there had been a cut of 6.3% in library budgets and 14% in stock acquisitions.²¹

16. In order to provide a longer perspective of use of library services, we commissioned the House of Commons Library to produce some statistics about recent library use. The following tables are based on those statistics, which the Library compiled using data from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

Visitor numbers and book loans

17. In 2009–10 there were 322 million visits to libraries, but slightly fewer book loans at 309 million. The number of visits exceeded book issues in each of the last seven years. Figure 1 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 declined again subsequently.

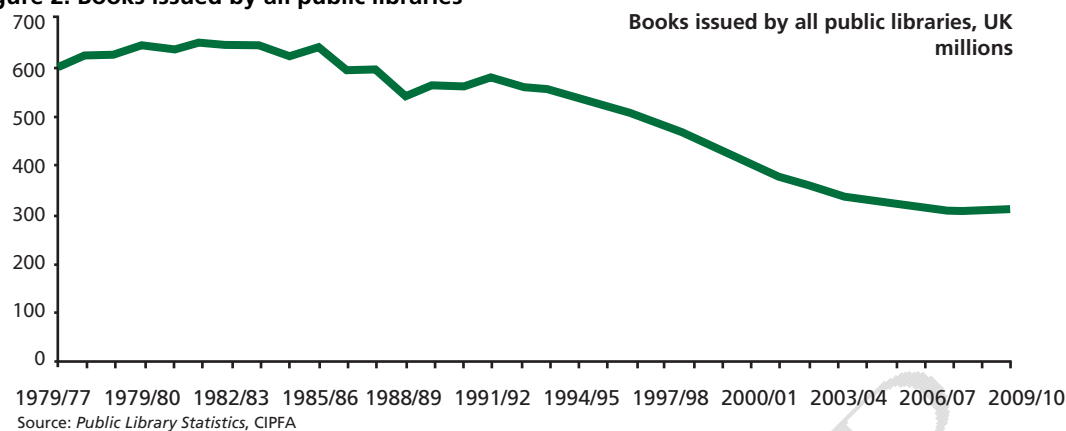
Figure 1: Number of visits to the public libraries



Source: *Public Library Statistics*, CIPFA

18. Figures on the number of books loaned by libraries are available for a longer time period and trends are illustrated in **Figure 2**:

Figure 2: Books issued by all public libraries



19. The total number of books issued has decreased steadily from around 650 million a year in the early 1980s to fewer than half this number. In each of the years since 1992 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 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.

20. Most of our witnesses argued that data on footfall and loans were too crude a measure of the use the public makes of libraries.²² Annie Mauger of CILIP suggested that some libraries that had been closed because of low numbers of book issues had actually made a more significant impact in terms of working with the local community in other ways: in other words, that they may have been the wrong branches to close.²³ Nigel Thomas, from Leicestershire Library Services, encapsulated the question as being ‘what is performance for the library sector?’. He contrasted the ‘hard’ data on footfall with the more focused, and very resource-intensive, work accomplished with vulnerable adults, which was much more difficult to quantify.²⁴ He also advocated a wider view of the core book-lending role of libraries as being not only an important educational tool, but also as having major benefits in terms of mental health.²⁵ Others cited the work done in encouraging children to read, notably those of primary school age but also among teenagers as well.²⁶ The Campaign for the Book not only argued that libraries were vital for improving literacy, but that this support for literacy from the grassroots up was fundamental to social cohesion:

The UK, which has performed relatively poorly in international comparisons, can ill afford to allow the erosion of the mainstay of its reading culture, the public library service. We need a greater focus on literacy and reading, not a weaker one. Any cost-savings will prove illusory as the impact of poor literacy levels in reduced

22 See, for example, Q 1 (Abigail Barker of Voices for the Library)

23 Q 87

24 Q 129

25 Q 109

26 See, for example, Qq 2-3 (Miranda McKearney of The Reading Agency)

international competitiveness and social deprivation is seen. We need only look at the fact that 80% of August rioters arrested had poor literacy levels.²⁷

Similarly, many of our witnesses emphasised the importance of the free access to the internet and information technology provided by libraries, particularly for the unemployed and socially excluded. The Minister said that library staff and volunteers based in libraries had helped 2.5 million people to “get online” as part of the Government’s Race Online 2012 initiative to help tackle the ‘digital divide’.²⁸

21. We were given a wealth of other examples of the uses made of library facilities (homework groups, social groups for older people, craft groups and many more),²⁹ and we return to this issue later in this report. Those representing local authorities emphasised the importance of surveys and the local knowledge of councillors in providing the sort of ‘soft’ data on how people actually used libraries that could not be captured by mere visitor numbers.³⁰ Annie Mauger of CILIP suggested that there was still too little information about the broader impact of libraries on communities; she therefore welcomed the research being commissioned by the Arts Council to fill this gap.³¹

Local authority expenditure on libraries

22. As already stated, the income of local authorities is set to decrease by about 28% over the course of the current Comprehensive Spending Review period. Although the provision of libraries is a statutory duty for local authorities, the funding for libraries is not ring-fenced, and libraries have to compete with other services provided by authorities, both statutory and non-statutory, for shrinking resources. The House of Commons Library provided us with information about trends in real levels of spending on libraries in England and Wales. Spending has varied little year-on-year over the last 35 years. After around a decade of stable expenditure, there were real increases in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but expenditure fell back in the mid 1990s. Increases in spending from 1997–98 have been only partially reversed in recent years.

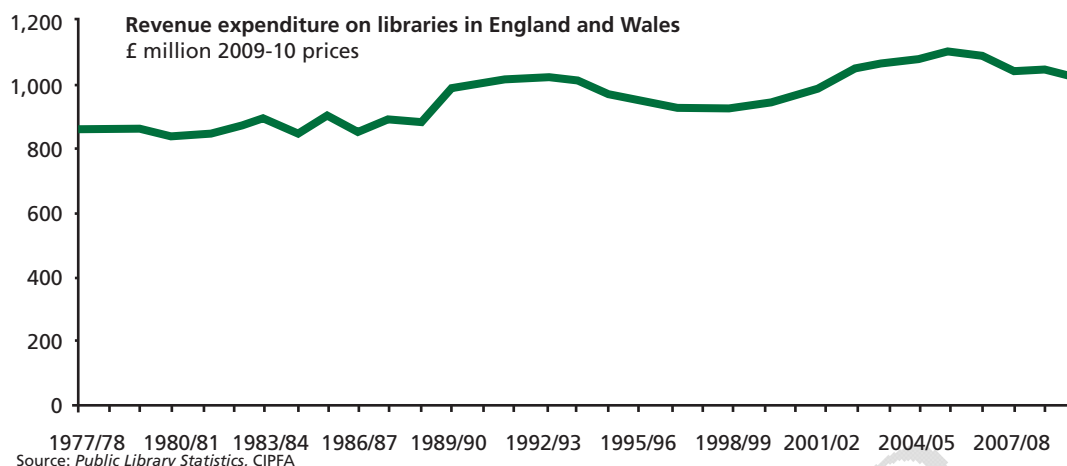
27 Ev w6 See also Ev 47 (The Reading Agency)

28 Speech to The Future of Library services conference, 28 June 2012:
http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/ministers_speeches/9167

29 See, for example, Q 1 (Abigail Barker of Voices for the Library)

30 Q 129

31 Q 78 The Arts Council has started a programme of research into the use made of libraries and the value placed on them by the public and professionals. For further details, see paragraph 34 below.

Figure 3: Revenue expenditure on libraries in England and Wales

23. The proportion of expenditure devoted to books fell from 18% at the start of the period to less than 8% in 2008–09. Spending on staff increased as a proportion of the total from just below 50% to 55% in 2009–10.

24. In its written submission to this inquiry, CILIP provided some results of its recent survey of local authority library services, although at the time of its submission only 83 out of the 151 library authorities had responded. Of those that had responded:

- 80% had reduced library staff;
- 30% had reduced opening hours;
- 65% were looking at alternative methods of service delivery;
- 14% had already, or planned to close libraries; and
- 13% had set up community managed (that is, volunteer-run) libraries.³²

The CILIP survey suggested that in 2011–12 the library authorities that responded planned to make 909 staff reductions and reduce weekly opening hours by 2,438.³³ We asked the House of Commons Library to provide us with further historical context in relation to the number of library buildings, library staff and trends in opening hours.

Number of Libraries

25. One of the most obvious impacts of the recent decrease in funding has been the closure of library buildings. There are no official statistics for the precise number of proposed library closures at present, although various figures have been quoted in the media, with some reports suggesting that up to 600 public libraries across England may close.³⁴ In June 2012, the Minister, Ed Vaizey MP, said this estimate of 600 closures was “very wide of the

³² Ev 50

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ “Library usage falls as branches close”, the *Guardian* website, 3 November 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/nov/03/library-usage-falls-branches-close>

mark”, and that a truer picture would be about a tenth of that.³⁵ In fact, leaving aside mobile libraries, the total number of public libraries has remained fairly constant from the late 1970s to the present day, at between 3,300 and 3,400. The only exception was a short dip in the late 1980s/early 1990s when numbers fell to just over 3,200, but the total increased by more than 200 in the following two years.

26. The most widely reported proposed library closures recently are as follows:

- **Brent Council** made a decision in April 2011 to close six libraries, half of the libraries in the borough. This sparked a series of campaigns under the umbrella group Brent SOS Libraries, which sought a judicial review of the council’s decision. The High Court ruled on 13 October 2011 that Brent Council’s decision had been lawful. On the same afternoon as the court ruling, all six libraries were closed and boarded up. The campaigners appealed the decision, but the appeal was rejected in December 2011.
- **Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils** initially planned to close (in Gloucestershire) 10 out of 38 and (in Somerset) 11 out of 34 libraries in 2010. Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries campaign group took joint legal action with Somerset campaigners against their respective councils’ decisions in November 2011. The High Court found that neither council had carried out a sufficiently comprehensive and detailed analysis of local needs—especially those of disadvantaged groups—for library services and it overturned both councils’ decisions to close the libraries. Both councils are now exploring alternative approaches.³⁶
- Initial media reports in 2010 suggested that **Isle of Wight Council** proposed to close nine out of its 11 libraries. However, the council conducted a public consultation and evidence-gathering exercise and eventually proposed the closure of five libraries. Campaigners sought a judicial review, but the request was rejected. The council has now closed the five libraries and is establishing community libraries in place of the five closed sites.
- In January 2011 **Dorset County Council** proposed the closure of 20 of its 34 libraries. In June 2011, after protests and petitions from campaigners, it revised its proposal in favour of a compromise of nine closures.

Opening hours

27. While there was no major change in the number of public libraries over 30 years, there has been a significant change in the availability of library services, in that more libraries extended their opening hours: according to CIPFA, over the decade to 2010 the number of libraries open for fewer than 45 hours per week fell by around 470, while the number open for 45 or more hours per week increased by around 440. On the other hand, CILIP’s research indicates that the trend to longer opening hours is now being reversed. As the Chief Executive of the Arts Council said, if cuts in opening hours resulted in people being

35 Speech to The Future of Library Services Conference on 28 June 2012: http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/ministers_speeches/9167

36 For a full account of these cases, see Ev w288 (Public Interest Lawyers)

unsure whether or not their local library would be open, then that would have an effect on library usage.³⁷

Staff numbers

28. A less immediately obvious change to the library service has been the decrease in the number of library staff. We were interested to see whether this was a new phenomenon. The House of Commons Library provided statistics which show that 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 in 2009–10. Short term trends have varied over this period, but the total has fallen in each year since 2004–05, 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.

2 A comprehensive and efficient service

Defining a 'comprehensive and efficient service'

29. The 1964 Act requires local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for local people.³⁸ Neither of these terms is defined in the Act, and both are open to widely varying interpretation.³⁹ In 2005 our predecessor Committee conducted an inquiry into public libraries and in its Report said that there was “need for more clarity as to what constitutes ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service and what action will be taken when this criterion is not met”.⁴⁰ The 2005 Report went on to recommend that the DCMS should review the case for new library legislation.⁴¹ However, in its response to the Report, the DCMS said that it did not see a compelling need for new legislation.⁴² Currently, as a number of judicial challenges are being brought against local authorities’ decisions to close libraries and/or make other cuts to library services, the definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ is becoming a legal minefield.⁴³

30. Opinions among our witnesses differed, however, as to whether it was desirable to have a clearer definition of the core criteria for a comprehensive and efficient service and, if so, whether it should be provided through statute, through guidance from the Secretary of State, or left to local authorities themselves (with the backstop of judicial review). Andrew Coburn, of The Library Campaign, argued that, while the final decision had to rest with the local authority, “Nationally there needs to be assistance, guidance and possibly something stronger than that”. He lamented the demise in England of the public library standards drawn up by the DCMS (they have been retained in Wales).⁴⁴ Our predecessor Committee summarised the library standards in its 2005 Report, and suggested some additions. An outline of the then standards is set out in the textbox below.

Library service standards in 2005

The top ten Public Library Service Standards with which library authorities had to aim to comply in 2005 related to:

- i. the proportion of households living within a specified distance of a static library;
- ii. aggregate scheduled opening hours;
- iii. the percentage of static libraries providing access to electronic information

38 Section 7

39 The Minister explained the original purpose of this phrase as follows: ‘comprehensive’ reflected the desire for libraries to have a wide stock of books, and ‘efficient’ the need to reduce the number of library authorities, which in 1964 totalled about 450. Neither adjective, he argued, referred to the distribution of library buildings. Q 180

40 Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Third Report of Session 2004-2005, *Public libraries*, HC 81-I, para 79 (*Public Libraries*)

41 *Public libraries*, para 80

42 Government Response to the Third Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Session 2004-2005: *Public Libraries*, Cm 6648, para 33

43 Q 34

44 Q 23 See also the replies given to Q 23 by Voices for the Library and The Reading Agency

- resources connected to the internet;
- iv. the number of electronic workstations with access to the internet and the libraries catalogue;
- v. dealing with requests;
- vi. number of library visits;
- vii. adults' satisfaction rates;
- viii. children's satisfaction rates;
- ix. number of books and other items acquired annually; and
- x. time taken to replenish the lending stock.

Standards which were omitted in 2005, but had been incorporated in those published in 2001, referred to: book issue periods; the number of books permitted to be borrowed at any one time; the number of visits to library websites; levels of success in finding a specific book or gaining information; and other types of satisfaction rates.

Our predecessor Committee said it had sympathy with those who wished to see the standards strengthened and the list extended. It recommended that the list of standards should be extended and/or revised to include measures of: the number of adult and children's book loans; the provision of material for users with disabilities; extended opening times; value for money and the three Es (efficiency, effectiveness and economy—including the balance of management and frontline staff); free access to the internet; and the quality of user consultation (and subsequent action).⁴⁵

31. The Public Library Service Standards shared the flaws of those imposed elsewhere in the public sector, in that they concentrated on the measurable rather than giving a rounded indication of the quality of service—let alone its responsiveness to changing customer needs and demands. It is noteworthy that most of our witnesses wanted a broader and more permissive approach on the interpretation of ‘comprehensive and efficient’.

32. CILIP argued in its submission that the Government should set out a “fresh vision for the 21st century public library service defining what comprehensive, efficient and accessible mean and forming a basis for local planning and delivery”.⁴⁶ We noted the addition of the word ‘accessible’. Annie Mauger of CILIP suggested that the Secretary of State should set out a framework for what a public library service should provide and how the needs of the local community should be assessed, but that it should then be for the local authority to decide how to deliver that.⁴⁷ Alan Davey of the Arts Council was of the view that it was necessary to have a debate about what a comprehensive service would comprise, but he also considered that guidance should be in the form of a framework rather than a detailed prescription.⁴⁸ The Minister thought that enough guidance had been made available

45 *Public Libraries*, paragraphs 60-63

46 Ev 50

47 Qq 76 and 77

48 Q 77

already, given the cumulative effect of the Charteris Report, the guidelines published by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and CILIP's advice.⁴⁹ Despite this, a number of library authorities have had to curtail their plans for changes to their local services in the light of judicial reviews and discussions with DCMS officials.

33. Sue Charteris and the representatives of the local authorities argued for greater confidence in the ability of local authorities to judge local needs.⁵⁰ The Local Government Association emphasised that not only did local needs differ widely, but also any attempt to give a detailed statutory definition of service standards would soon fail to reflect changes in technology and broader social changes: the example often cited was that the 1964 Act required libraries to supply gramophone records, while, unsurprisingly, there is no requirement in the Act in respect of digital material or services.⁵¹ Local authorities therefore regarded the prospect of central government defining 'comprehensive and efficient' as imposing a "straitjacket" and "immediately building in obsolescence". They argued that councils must ultimately take the decisions; accountability for those decisions would be through the ballot box. They accepted that this model required individual councils to make it very clear what they considered a 'comprehensive and efficient service' to comprise, so that they could be held fully to account.⁵²

34. In February 2012, the Arts Council launched a consultation called *Envisioning the Library of the Future*, which was intended to discover the value which the public placed on library services, to provide an overview of trends in society, and to provide information about best practice—and, indeed, innovative developments that, for some reason, it had been difficult or impossible to implement. The consultation included desk research, interviews with a carefully selected cross-section of professionals and users, seminars and workshops, and an online public consultation. Interim conclusions were published in March and May, and the final report will be published this autumn.⁵³ The Chief Executive of the Arts Council admitted that it would have been very useful to have completed this work before local authorities had had to start making decisions about the future of their library services, but "we are where we are".⁵⁴

35. The professional librarians have also given serious consideration to what constitutes a good library service: CILIP distributed a leaflet on the subject to all local authorities and councillors in 2010.⁵⁵ CILIP stated it was willing to work with the Arts Council and the Secretary of State to help formulate guidance to local authorities about the way in which they should approach the construction of a comprehensive and efficient library service.

36. Local authorities are having to take decisions now about the funding and shape of the library service but a number appear insufficiently aware of the available guidance

49 Q 180

50 Ev 81 and Ev 54

51 Qq 111 and 114The relevant section of the 1964 Act is section 7(2)(a)

52 Q 111

53 Qq 78 and 88-92 See also the Arts Council's webpage: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-libraries/libraries-consultation>

54 Q 94

55 Q 83

on the definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’. They also appear to lack information about the requirements emerging from multiple judicial reviews. It is not cost-effective for policy to be made by judicial review and it undermines democratic accountability. While we are firmly of the view that decisions ultimately are for local authorities in the light of local needs, the provision of public libraries is mandatory and local authorities should be assisted to understand what is expected of them under the Act and subsequent guidance. We recommend that the Secretary of State provide all local library authorities with the guidance arising from the Arts Council’s consultation exercise as swiftly as possible, and to take that opportunity again to remind local authorities of the recommendations of the Charteris Report.

Assessing local needs

37. When asked what they want of libraries, the public tend to answer more access (which is a question partly of the location of services and in part of opening times) and more books.⁵⁶ However, all our witnesses were of the view that libraries provided a number of benefits to the community in addition to access to books and reference materials, and those championing library services were especially anxious that these wider considerations should be taken into account in assessing local needs.

38. It was failure to make adequate needs assessments that led the High Court to rule against Gloucestershire and Somerset County Councils’ library closures in November 2011. In his ruling, Judge McKenna said that, in order for the councils to have known whether they would still be compliant with Section 7 of the 1964 Act after closing libraries, they would have had to properly analyse:

the library related needs of people living in particular areas, the needs of particular groups of people and the particular ways in which people use libraries in different contexts. Further, in order to design a comprehensive and efficient service it was necessary to assess such factors as who used libraries in particular areas, what they use them for, when they use them and how they travel to them.⁵⁷

Judge McKenna went on to say that this assessment must also take into account “persons with specific needs such as the elderly, the disabled, the poor, the unemployed and parents of children”, and that both councils’ assessments had fallen short of what was required.⁵⁸

39. A number of witnesses suggested that the best guide to how local authorities should approach an assessment of local needs was the Charteris Report. Sue Charteris’s inquiry into the library service in the Wirral concluded that the local authority was in breach of its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient service. 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”.⁵⁹ She

56 Q 78 (Annie Mauger, citing research undertaken by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council in the year before its abolition)

57 *Green v Gloucestershire County Council; Rowe v Somerset County Council*; [2011] EWHC 2687; para 108; 16 November 2011

58 [2011] EWHC 2687; para 108; 16 November 2011

59 Charteris Report, piii

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”. She found there had been a further breach in relation to the needs of deprived communities, and a key concern was that there had been no 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”.⁶⁰

40. She concluded that there was a strong case for reviewing the decision to close 11 libraries and for retaining at least some physical presence at some sites earmarked for closure. The criteria for selecting sites where some physical presence should be maintained were that the library was located in an area of significant deprivation; and/or had inter-dependent links with schools or children’s centres; and where the Council had:

- changed its decision on which libraries to close; and/or
- identified an area of need but “subsequently chose to ignore this information”; and/or
- failed to meet its own standards in terms of a reasonable distance to travel.⁶¹

41. The Charteris report set out proposals for the sort of analysis local authorities should be doing to assess local need. We reproduce the relevant passages in the textbox below. In her written evidence to us, she highlighted several key principles, drawn from her practical experience of working with local authorities:

- Comprehensiveness did not mean “a library on every corner” or “blanket coverage”—it depended on a needs assessment matched against the resources available for the service;
- The needs assessment would enable the council to show it had acted reasonably in drawing up new plans for its services. This did not mean that it would not still have to make difficult and/or unpopular decisions;
- The analysis should be made in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, particularly the requirement for a thorough equalities impact analysis of any proposed changes to that model of delivery and evidence that the authority had sought to mitigate any adverse impact identified on protected groups;
- The assessment of local need should cover the existing service configuration and any proposed changes. It was highly unlikely that the existing pattern of delivery fully met local needs and the analysis was therefore helpful in drawing up potentially different models of delivery.⁶²

60 *Ibid.*, pp iii-iv

61 *Ibid.*, pp iv-v

62 Ev 81

Charteris Report paras 6.26 – 6.28

While the analysis of local needs may involve a shifting set of circumstances and a developing methodology over time, I would currently reasonably expect **an analysis of needs** to be based on:

- consideration of the wide range of those needs caught by the definition of all those who live, work and study in the area, and the specific needs of adults and children and young people of all ages;
- an assessment of accessibility—drawing on travel data including car usage data, public transport routes and the cost of services;
- consideration of the views of existing users, and an attempt to analyse the reasons and motivations of non users and how their use could be encouraged;
- an assessment as to whether there is any differential impact (via an equalities impact assessment) on whether any specific communities or groups would suffer any adverse impacts as a result of the changes to the service; and
- consideration of information from partner organisations and other departments, including reference to learning strategies for children and adults, links with social and adult care, and employment initiatives.

I would also expect there to be a consideration of new and or amended ways of operating the service that might be **more efficient**. Currently, this might reasonably include an assessment of:

- whether the library buildings are fit for purpose, and/or in the right place to serve the needs of the community;
- whether there is scope for more effective use of resources, through for example flexible staffing arrangements, self-issuing, or the Community Asset Transfer model or partial model;
- whether there is scope to provide the service more efficiently via delivery partnerships within and outside of the authority, for example through Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with other council functions;
- whether there is demand for the services in the way that they are currently offered;
- whether the buildings are beyond their useful life and what the scope of shared facilities might be;
- whether a physical presence is necessary, taking into account the particular needs

of that community, and if it could be replaced by other means such as a mobile service; and

- whether steps are needed to encourage use of library provision.

While this is not an exhaustive or definitive set of criteria, I would expect a **'reasonable' authority** to use such evidence, **together with an assessment of resources available**, to devise a comprehensive vision and development plan for the service, which addresses these considerations within the development plan. It may, having done this, still draw different conclusions than those others might draw, and it might make decisions that are unpopular, but importantly, these decisions would be based on evidence which could be used to demonstrate the comprehensiveness and efficiency of the service provided by reference to demonstrable need and resources.

42. We were told that further guidance on how to undertake a needs analysis had been produced recently by the Arts Council which had updated the recommendations from the Future Libraries Programme initiated by its predecessor.⁶³ These recommendations include the preparation of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure the rights of protected groups, as required under the Equalities Act 2010.

43. When she gave evidence to us, Sue Charteris's concern was that the current situation made it more difficult for councils to take rational decisions based on a thorough assessment of local needs and a wide consideration of options. Given the pressure on local authorities to make budgetary decisions swiftly, and without more guidance to them from the Secretary of State and possibly the Arts Council (particularly on the conclusions to be drawn from the various judicial reviews), she feared that some councils would decide it was too difficult to close library buildings and would look to reduce funding to other elements of the library service, without regard to whether this was more damaging to the principles of comprehensiveness and efficiency.⁶⁴ Her prescription for ensuring a comprehensive and efficient service continued to be a proper assessment by councils of local needs, taking into account the requirements of different groups of the population and such issues as access and deprivation, and ideally bringing local communities into the decision-making process.⁶⁵ Such an assessment had to start with a good understanding of what libraries were doing at present, and then to consider the provision of those services in the round by taking into account what other facilities there were locally that might provide an alternative location for those services and which facilities were best placed to meet local needs.⁶⁶

44. The supporters of library services did not disagree with this view — they even suggested that in some places library services had improved thanks to a more creative use of

63 Q 77

64 Q 34

65 Qq 34 and 33

66 Q 35

resources by local authorities⁶⁷— but they were far more sceptical about the willingness and the ability of all local authorities to carry out such an assessment of local needs.⁶⁸ Abigail Barker of Voices for the Library said:

Lots of cuts have been made with no thought of the needs of local residents. There have been consultations that were basically, “If you do not step forward and run your libraries, they will close.” People were not asked, “How and when do you use your library? How could we improve it? If we closed earlier in the week and it meant we could open at the weekend, how would you use it?” In Suffolk, there are libraries that open in schools on a Saturday and Sunday that nobody uses. Of course cuts need to be made, and we are not saying that the library service should be immune from cuts, but why not close those libraries that are not used at the weekend and save or put the money elsewhere?⁶⁹

She also implied that some councils did not sufficiently consider that they would have to provide some services whether or not libraries were kept open, noting, for example, the need to provide access to online reference databases, which would still have to be paid for whether or not they were part of the library budget.⁷⁰ Andrew Coburn of The Library Campaign emphasised that local users and campaign groups had to be given access to information about the existing service in order to make a rational decision about options and to suggest alternatives. Anything less, he said, was not true consultation.⁷¹

45. The representatives of local authorities agreed that a needs assessment and proper consultation with the public and library professionals were crucial.⁷² Nigel Thomas gave us a good example of how a library authority should go about assessing local needs. He said that, when Leicestershire wished to relocate a library branch or operate it in a different way: “In order to make that final decision, I think we have to have a very clear idea of what the nature of that locality is, what its transport links are, what the levels of literacy and employment are and so on, and then we are better informed to make a strategic and informed decision.”⁷³ While the Leader of the Isle of Wight Council—whose decision to close five public libraries unless volunteers were willing to run them led to vociferous protests—placed emphasis on sustaining the *service*,⁷⁴ campaigners have often focused on the retention of individual library *buildings*.

Library buildings

46. Proposals to close a local library often cause considerable protest. Apart from questions of the ease of access to library and other services in alternative locations, the buildings themselves may have a symbolic value: older ones have been community hubs for a century

67 Q 62 (CILIP)

68 See, for example, Q 2 (Andrew Coburn of The Library Campaign)

69 Q 2; also Qq 23 and 24

70 Q 2

71 Q 24

72 Qq 109, 112 and 113

73 Q 127

74 Qq 109 and 113

or more and may be handsome buildings in themselves.⁷⁵ Moreover, as one of our witnesses said, “Sometimes the library is the only public building left in the locality.”⁷⁶ In all these ways, the current proposals to close some library branches are reminiscent of recent programmes of post office closures, and have provoked similar reactions.

47. Our witnesses recognised that library buildings often acted as hubs in the community. One described them as “sort of indoor parks”, a safe environment for both the young and the isolated old.⁷⁷ Another pointed out that a relationship of trust developed between the staff in local libraries and the population, encouraging and enabling the population to use the library as a general source of information and support not just somewhere to borrow a book.⁷⁸ Local libraries were places to hold homework clubs, reading groups, baby rhyme times: all ways to use the library’s resources and to make reading and study a more ‘social’ activity, while also providing a quiet and secure environment.⁷⁹ The Association of Senior Children’s and Education Librarians (ASCEL) argued that, while electronic services were changing some of the focus of library services, the building itself was “still a compelling and significant part of a community”, adding “In times of economic hardship, it could be argued that more people will need libraries to learn new skills, seek employment, apply for jobs, write CVs etc.”⁸⁰

48. A number of those who submitted written evidence believed that libraries earmarked for closure were often smaller, branch libraries. This was summed up by Sue Charteris:

As part of the mapping of local need against current usage data it will inevitably become clear that some library facilities are so optimally located that they act as centres of gravity or because of the quality of its offer or both (for example, Newcastle and Norwich Central libraries and the forthcoming new/refurbished libraries in Birmingham and Liverpool would qualify on both counts). Others may serve the community in a medium sized town and others still serve a specific community, for example, a village, suburb or inner city housing estate. It is this last group of libraries ... that are most under threat; yet they often meet highly localised need.⁸¹

Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries said that the libraries earmarked for closure were in the more deprived areas of their county, and therefore that the impact of their closure would have affected the least well off and most in need.⁸² The Royal National Institute of Blind People argued that the presence of libraries in residential areas was of importance particularly for more vulnerable users, such as elderly and disabled people, who were often less able to travel, and more likely not to be able to afford books and IT.⁸³

75 Q 7 (Abigail Barker)

76 Q 35 (Sue Charteris) see also Q2 (Andrew Coburn), Ev 81 (Sue Charteris)

77 Q 111 (Elizabeth Campbell of the Local Government Association)

78 Q 12 (Andrew Coburn)

79 Q 8 (Miranda McKearney); Ev w50 (ASCEL) see also, for example, Ev w3, ev w19, Ev w71, Ev w77

80 Ev w50 see also Ev w71, paras 9 and 10

81 Ev 81

82 Ev w46

83 Ev w107

49. While accepting that the benefits of a distributed library network did not require the retention of every existing library building, Annie Mauger issued the warning that, when a library in a local community closed, 44% of the children in that community who had used that branch did not transfer to another library.⁸⁴ This was not only a loss for the local population but could also have an impact on national policy objectives, for example by reducing the ability to deliver the Summer Reading Challenge for young people.⁸⁵ The study that she was citing found also that 18% of those affected by library closures did not transfer their custom to another library facility; 35% of respondents said their children were using library facilities less; and 36% of respondents felt their children were reading less.⁸⁶ This was not a recent study—it was conducted by Sheffield University in the late 1990s—but CILIP said that the lack of more recent data was because “it is some time since there has been anything like the scale of library closures currently happening”.⁸⁷

50. On the other hand, many library buildings are not being used to the full, are difficult to maintain or situated in the wrong place, or do not have enough space to develop services beyond book lending.⁸⁸ Brent Council said that the six libraries that it closed were “poorly located and poorly used”, and that this was true in many areas of London where libraries had been built in response to 19th or early 20th century population profiles and habits of life. It added: “Brent Council finds that 21st century public libraries flourish if they are located in town centres close to public transport and this view has long been proven correct. Brent is a London borough that is exceptionally well served by public transport.”⁸⁹

51. Whether or not Brent Council’s analysis proves correct in the longer term, our visit to Tower Hamlets demonstrated the value in reviewing library facilities: the Borough Council had closed a number of old, crumbling, under-used buildings in less accessible locations in order to focus resources on a number of purpose-built libraries with meeting rooms and facilities for many types of events, with the result that library use had significantly increased across the borough.

52. One of our witnesses cited Swindon, where a campaign to retain the old town library had failed, but a new building had opened nearby: although it was not exactly what the campaigners had hoped for, they had had some influence on retaining part of the service locally.⁹⁰ This is a reminder that focussing on library closures does not give a complete picture: 39 new or extensively refurbished libraries were due to open in 2012.⁹¹ We also received evidence from a number of local authorities—Cornwall County Council, Leicestershire County Council, the London Borough of Hillingdon, Staffordshire County

84 Q 87 See also, for example, Ev w67, paras 14-24 and 28

85 *Ibid.*

86 Ev 50

87 *Ibid.*

88 Qq 44 (Sue Charteris) and 86 (Annie Mauger)

89 Ev w290

90 Q 24 (Andrew Coburn)

91 Ev 74 (Arts Council)

Council and Derbyshire County Council—which explained how they had avoided closing libraries.⁹²

53. We noted that, while many local campaigns focus on buildings, one of the areas of expenditure under particular pressure was the provision of mobile libraries: about one in ten of all ‘library service points’ in England and Wales (350 out of about 3600) were mobile libraries, but we were told that many of these services were being removed on the grounds that the cost per person served by a mobile library was considered too high.⁹³ Despite this, the Arts Council assured us that it thought mobile libraries were still an important element in the provision of a good service, though it was also looking at alternative ways of getting books to people who did not have easy access to ‘static’ libraries.⁹⁴ As far as simple access to books was concerned, witnesses cited village halls, churches and pubs as being possible alternatives to under-used library buildings or infrequent visits by mobile libraries.⁹⁵

54. It may not be possible or even desirable to retain every existing library building, but wholesale closures are unlikely to facilitate an appropriate level of service. The key to ensuring that an adequate—and preferably a good— library service is available to the whole local population appears to be the retention of a distributed service, in accessible locations, but with flexibility over whether the service is provided in dedicated library buildings, in other locations, via mobile libraries, or in any other way that best fits local needs.⁹⁶

55. While concerned about the geographical spread of library services, CILIP was of the view that “where buildings are not closed, cuts to services, resource funds, opening hours, building maintenance and staffing are equally significant”.⁹⁷ CILIP told us that significant cuts had been made in staff numbers and opening hours in the 2011–12 financial year.⁹⁸ In the case of opening hours, this would reverse the recent trend to have libraries opening for longer periods, especially in the evenings and at weekends, which has been intended to encourage access by previously excluded groups.⁹⁹ It also tends to confirm Sue Charteris’s fears that local authorities may be tempted to opt for a programme of cuts in areas less obvious than library closures, even if these cuts damage the overall service more than a closure would have done.

Library staff

56. A number of our witnesses argued that professional librarians were critical to delivering a comprehensive and efficient library service. Not only do they assist the public with finding the books and information they want, help them to use technology with which they

92 Ev w31, Ev 72, Ev w39, Ev w57 and Ev w99 respectively

93 Q 95

94 *Ibid.*

95 Q 42

96 Qq 2 and 8 (Miranda McKearney), 7 (Andrew Coburn), 9 and 10 (Abigail Barker), 45 (Sue Charteris), 87 and 95 (Annie Mauger) and 95 (Arts Council)

97 Ev 50

98 Q 86 see also Ev w42

99 See paragraph 27 above

are unfamiliar, ensure that the stock of books and other materials are kept up to date and meet the varied needs of different sorts of customers, and manage the environment (dealing with health and safety, child protection issues, copyright law and so on), but they also carry out a lot of ‘outreach’ work with the community, especially reading and literacy schemes.¹⁰⁰

57. CILIP has estimated that in the 2011–12 financial year, there has been a reduction of possibly as many as 700 posts out of the 3,500 staff working in public libraries. UNISON, the public sector trade union that represents many library staff in the UK, told us that the latest figures from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy showed a drop in paid staff numbers of over 4%, whilst the number of volunteers within libraries had increased by 22% since 2010.¹⁰¹ Those campaigning for library services said the reduction in paid staff had resulted in the loss in particular of expertise in child literacy (we were told that many reader support posts were being merged so that there were no longer separate posts for adult and child support); and in developments such as the closure of information services or the abandonment of the Summer Reading Challenge, for lack of professional support. More generally, pressure of work on the remaining staff hindered training and staff development, and discouraged co-operation with other services or across authority boundaries.¹⁰²

58. When we asked whether she thought that policymakers understood the role of the librarian, Annie Mauger said “no, I really don’t think many of them do”. She went on to say: “I don’t believe that a service that isn’t professionally delivered is best for anybody’s local area.”¹⁰³

59. The local authority representatives who gave evidence to us were keen to emphasise that job losses were directed away from professional librarians and/or front-line staff. Councillor David Pugh denied that any of those who had lost their jobs when the Isle of Wight divested itself of five libraries were ‘professional staff’: he drew the distinction between professionally qualified librarians and other staff who could, he felt, however experienced they were, be adequately replaced by volunteers.¹⁰⁴ Local campaigners, however—who had forced the Isle of Wight to backtrack on an even more radical programme of closures—strongly disagreed, given that professional, front-line staff were indeed being lost.¹⁰⁵ During our visit to the Pimlico Library, we were told that under the tri-borough programme job losses had been among the managerial ranks (as three sets of managers were merged into one) and in back-room functions such as stock control, not among the library staff who dealt directly with the public. We were also told of projects such as the Enquire project carried out by the Arts Council in conjunction with the Society of Chief Librarians, to use IT in such a way that libraries without a professional librarian on their staff would still have access to professional advice 24 hours a day.¹⁰⁶ The Minister was

100 See, for example, Qq 2, 15, 47,67, 69 and 70; Ev 50, Ev w243 and Ev w268

101 Ev w135

102 Q 67 and 71 (CILIP), 17 (Andrew Coburn and Miranda McKearney),

103 Qq 68 and 72

104 Qq 123, 141 and 143-147

105 Q 147

106 Q 82

of the view it was unnecessary to have highly qualified, highly trained and therefore highly paid librarians in every library branch. He argued that there was scope for employing the professional expertise of librarians more “creatively”, to train and support volunteers. He suggested that this approach might lead to the opening of more libraries.¹⁰⁷

60. Staff costs are a significant and have been an increasing proportion of library costs and, if the service is losing up to 35% of its budget,¹⁰⁸ some staff cuts are inevitable. As with other cuts, however, local authorities need to give careful consideration to how to do least damage to the service provided to the public now and for the future. They must ensure that they retain enough experienced and/or professionally qualified staff to develop the services on offer to the public to reflect changing needs, and to support the growing number of volunteers both within their core library service and in any community libraries that may be established locally.

107 Qq 171–172

108 Q 84

3 A library service for the 21st century

61. While the core offering of a library service is access to books and other sources of information, especially for those who have little or no access at home to printed or electronically-provided information,¹⁰⁹ our witnesses were unanimous that much greater value came from linking the resources and facilities available in libraries into wider programmes reaching out into the local community. Many libraries already do this in a variety of ways, but the need for local authorities to prune budgets has increased the urgency of reviewing the library service in the light not only of its own value but also of the value it can add to other services.¹¹⁰

62. One area of symbiosis is with education, not least because many school libraries also face considerable funding reductions at present. The local public library provides not only access to information, but also a safe space for study, with the additional advantage of access to the knowledge of trained library staff.¹¹¹ In some cases, local authorities have found that locating a public library within a school or college benefits both the educational establishment and the local community; but we were told that this did not work everywhere.¹¹² The Government has recently taken up an idea put forward by the children's author, Michael Rosen, of automatic library membership for all primary school pupils, to encourage them to use their local library.¹¹³

63. Other examples of shared facilities are less obvious. Our witnesses referred to combining a library with the registry of births, marriages and deaths (in Sevenoaks) or with a tourist information office (in north-east England).¹¹⁴ Those who hosted our visit to the library in Pimlico emphasised the potential for libraries to support the health service, both in the provision of written information and as a place where medical staff could meet the local community in a relaxed environment in order to promote understanding of public health issues.¹¹⁵ One of the witnesses to our predecessor Committee drew attention to other government departments whose work was supported by the library service: in providing information and practical support to those seeking work (the Department of Work and Pensions); in helping small businesses (the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills); and in addressing those disaffected from schooling and thus helping to tackle anti-social behaviour and truancy (the Home Office).¹¹⁶ Annie Mauger of CILIP and the Minister also wished to persuade departments other than the DCMS of the contribution libraries could make to the outcomes which they wanted to achieve.¹¹⁷

109 Qq 12 and 39

110 Qq 124-127

111 Qq4, 8 and 12

112 Qq 96 (Annie Mauger and Alan Davey) and 136 [Elizabeth Campbell]

113 Minister's speech to The Future of Library Services conference, 28 June 2012

114 Qq 62 and 38

115 Q 2 (Miranda McKearney), Ev w3, para 7, Ev w34, paras 2.1-2.8

116 *Public Libraries*, paragraph 58

117 Qq 103 and 188

64. Leicestershire has taken the approach of viewing libraries as part of its heritage and arts services, enabling the council to concentrate on medium-term aims for this sector rather than just immediate cuts (for example, it has decided not to close any libraries or museums but to look at redesigning, joining up or, in some cases, reducing services). This approach has enabled significant savings, mainly through staff reorganisation, while retaining the expertise of librarians and curators; and it has also had some collateral benefits in terms of applying the commercial expertise developed in the museums and arts service to exploiting the potential of library facilities.¹¹⁸

65. There has also been a renewed emphasis on the role of the library building as a meeting place for the community.¹¹⁹ In some places, this has been achieved partly by — for example—locating a privately-run cafe in the library, which has contributed to a rise in the number of visitors to the library.¹²⁰ Such partnerships may provide some additional income, though experience is that this has not been substantial: it is the increase in usage that is more significant for the library service. Bradford Metropolitan District Council has adopted a different approach. Under its ‘Library Links’ initiative, it has located ‘library service points’ in shops.¹²¹

66. Such relationships with the private sector are not universally welcome, however. We ♥ Libraries, a Hertfordshire-based library campaign group, expressed concern that co-location with private retailers would turn libraries from neutral venues open and welcoming to all into something more commercial and less inclusive.¹²²

Co-operation and mergers

67. One area on which our witnesses agreed was that there were considerable potential benefits to be gained from procurement partnerships for purchasing books, and possibly in other areas where a ‘national’ approach might reap substantial savings and efficiencies.¹²³ Miranda McKearney of The Reading Agency mentioned as examples a national digital portal for libraries, and a suite of planned services to be available 24 hours a day.¹²⁴ Other witnesses argued that it would be impossible for libraries to engage with e-books except on a national basis: publishers were not very interested in the concept of lending e-books as licensing difficulties could not be adequately addressed at a local level and significant demand for a lending service from readers was yet to emerge.¹²⁵ Miranda McKearney also suggested there was scope for engagement with potential partners, such as the BBC in relation to its digital resources, but said that this was being hindered by “a major gap in the ability of libraries to act and plan nationally”.¹²⁶

118 Qq 124, 126 and 137

119 Qq 2, 43 and 132; see also the Southend example of shared buildings cited in Q 96 (Alan Davey)

120 Q 53, relating to Hillingdon. We also saw an example during our visit to the library in Pimlico in London

121 Ev 78 (LGA)

122 Ev w42

123 Qq 38 (Sue Charteris) and 84 (Annie Mauger)

124 Q 5

125 Qq 40 and 41 (Sue Charteris) and 4 (Andrew Coburn)

126 Q 5

68. A number of our witnesses were cautious about the idea of forming regional hubs: there was resistance to the idea of ‘mega-libraries’ or ‘destination libraries’ given the difficulty of travelling long distances to them, though some regional hubs (such as in Newcastle) were acknowledged to work well.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that there was scope for far more partnership between local authorities, and—in the view of Sue Charteris—such co-operation was vital because the scale of the cuts meant that otherwise there would not be enough professional expertise available to run the library service.¹²⁸

69. Unfortunately, our witnesses reported that, with certain exceptions (one of which we discuss in more detail below), co-operation between authorities had recently become more, not less, difficult: one witness said that the ‘good old days’ where one authority would specialise in books on fine arts and another on 20th century history had gone as many of “those co-operative systems” had broken down.¹²⁹ Another witness explained that the emphasis on local finances in the last 18 months, and the resulting focus on local library services, had, perversely, made such co-operation ‘politically’ difficult.¹³⁰ While the Library Campaign acknowledged that collaborations could be an effective way for libraries to improve efficiency, it suggested:

Shared services may be one way of making more efficiencies but only if the authority—and its users—has/ have the same amount of guarantee that services will be delivered on time, to budget and where required. There is no point in a shared service which simply means shipping books from one huge central depot to the branch if there is no other saving.¹³¹

70. South Gloucestershire Council told us about the Libraries West Consortium (consisting of itself, North Somerset, Bath and NE Somerset, Bristol and Somerset library authorities) which had managed to make significant savings from shared procurement of ICT and stock, from shared services (IT support, bibliographic services, information provision via an Enquiry Centre, marketing and the development of new services), and shared training and development.¹³² While we were told of other examples of successful cross-boundary co-operation in Warwickshire, Cornwall and Devon, the north-west and potentially Leicestershire,¹³³ the most commonly cited example was that of the ‘tri-borough’ project, encompassing the London boroughs of Westminster, Hammersmith & Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea.

71. This initiative covers a considerably wider set of services than those relating to public libraries or even the arts in general: it is a project to save money by, wherever possible, combining services in order to rationalise and reduce management structures and simultaneously improve front-line services. The Local Government Association described it as “an integrated libraries and archives service managed as a single service across the

127 Qq 19-21

128 Q 37

129 Q 20 (Andrew Coburn)

130 Qq 20 and 21 (Miranda McKearney)

131 Ev 64

132 Ev w94

133 Qq 20 and 133 and Ev w31

three boroughs, with local branding and delivery in line with local community needs". Launched in April 2012, the tri-borough initiative for libraries was intended to produce savings of more than £1 million a year as a result of the single back office/management structure and from introducing best practice in the deployment of operational staff.¹³⁴ Elizabeth Campbell of the Local Government Association and also a councillor in Kensington and Chelsea, described the thinking behind the approach as follows:

[We] saw cuts were coming, and thought, "How do we not only safeguard what we have, how do we keep our 21 libraries across three boroughs open, maintain the number of hours, but at the end of the day produce a better library service for our customers?" I suppose that is what has galvanised all our thinking; how are we going to be more resourceful, more ready to modernise at the end of it, at the same time as taking £1 million out of the service? We feel that we will have done that. We will have taken £1 million out over the next couple of years, but we will have one library card serving all our customers. We will have a million books that they can take out. We hope our footfall of 5 million over the three boroughs, coming forward, will mean that we are probably more open to sponsorship or other deals. We may say that this is the first step. We will merge first, make our library service efficient and then think, "What now? What other things can we do?"¹³⁵

She added that the library service had always been part of the plan to merge services as the management and back office structures in the three boroughs more or less mirrored one another, so it was easy to rationalise them.¹³⁶ When we asked whether it would be simple to replicate this across England and Wales, she replied that it would be difficult to achieve where the participating authorities were not of the same political persuasion as a lot had to be taken on trust, particularly as each authority would make gains in some areas and losses in others.¹³⁷

72. There have been suggestions that the tri-borough experiment with libraries should be repeated on a larger scale, for example by combining the library services of all 33 London boroughs into a single unit. It was estimated that, by removing administrative duplication, this might save up to £80 million a year.¹³⁸ While making administrative savings on this scale is attractive, such centralisation runs the risk of losing the detailed knowledge of local needs which has, for example, allowed both Westminster and Tower Hamlets to develop their library services in ways which clearly reflect the needs of their local resident and working population.

73. While several of our witnesses expressed considerable enthusiasm for the tri-borough project,¹³⁹ Sue Charteris noted that many council leaders believed that this approach would work only in urban areas. She accepted that it would be much easier where there were clear

134 Ev 78

135 Q 128

136 Q 130

137 Q 132

138 'Give Mayor control of all London libraries', *Evening Standard*; 23 February 2012 The article was quoting the former head of the Waterstone's book chain, Tim Coates.

139 See, for example, Qq 2 Miranda McKearney) and 36 (Sue Charteris)

economies of scale, but she was still of the view that there were significant possible benefits to be had from partnerships even among counties. The vital ingredients, she thought, were real professional expertise and political leadership.¹⁴⁰

74. Some very good models of co-operation between library authorities already exist. Local authorities must ensure that they maintain and improve co-operation, both across boundaries and nationally, as this will free money for front-line library services. It is short-sighted to reduce co-operation at this time of financial constraint.

Community libraries and the role of volunteers

75. A far more controversial response to funding cuts has been to hand over library facilities to volunteers, with the intention that they should be run as ‘community libraries’. We were told that this phrase covered a wide variety of models and very different levels of consultation, engagement and support from the relevant local authorities. At one end of the spectrum, there is the example where a library has been handed over completely to the community, without any professional support and even (in some cases) with the removal of vital IT equipment such as computers, so that it is impossible to join the library or request a book at that place.¹⁴¹ At the other end of the spectrum, the facilities remain intact, there is continued access to the advice and support of professional librarians, but the professional staff are “not necessarily the people who open and close the building every day”.¹⁴² While acknowledging that libraries had often made good use of voluntary staff in the past to enhance the service, our witnesses were generally of the view that, unless there was access to the advice and support of trained staff, facilities could not be considered to be part of the public library network.¹⁴³

76. Sue Charteris told us about the development of the community libraries programme under the auspices of the Big Lottery Fund. She said that the key determinants of the success of that project were, first, it involved an injection of capital; and secondly, it required slow and painstaking work with the local community to design, deliver and develop the service. She cited as a particularly successful example a healthy living centre on a housing estate in Weston-super-Mare, where the library—run by a social enterprise—shared its facilities with a church, a social services area office and a community cafe.¹⁴⁴ She told us:

Councils need to decide, when they are considering cuts, what they mean. Do they mean that they have done a needs analysis and do not think that that library is needed at all? Or do they mean that, actually, they do still think they need that network of provision? It might be in those places that need it most and use it least that a different community partnering model might be more effective, but it will not

140 Q 37 See also Q 36

141 Qq 24 and 30 (Miranda McKearney), 74 (Annie Mauger)

142 Q 48 (Sue Charteris)

143 See, for example, on the proper use of volunteers: Qq 31 (Abigail Barker), 50 (Sue Charteris), 75 (Annie Mauger and Alan Davey); on the need for professional support, Qq 48 (Sue Charteris), 74 (Annie Mauger and Alan Davey), Ev w42 (We ♥ Libraries)

144 Qq 49 and 52 See also Ev 54

work if it is a case of “Here are the keys of the building, get on with it, it is up to you whether you use it or not.” The council needs to be part of it.¹⁴⁵

77. The Isle of Wight Council has been the subject of particular criticism for its decision to reduce the number of public libraries on the island from eleven to six. The other five have been handed over to local volunteers and Councillor David Pugh, Leader of the Isle of Wight Council, made it clear that those five libraries were no longer part of the statutory service.¹⁴⁶ We examined exactly what this meant in practice for the volunteers. We were told that none of the community libraries was accountable to the local authority; each library had responsibility for recruiting its own voluntary staff and, though the council asked volunteers to agree to comply with certain basic legal requirements, such as data protection, it was for each community to develop its library service as it saw fit. There were no common service standards.¹⁴⁷ The buildings had been made available on a peppercorn rent, but other costs—in particular utility costs—were the responsibility of the relevant library, albeit that some transitional funding from the Isle of Wight Council was still in place and the local rural community council had some involvement with two of the libraries. This had resulted in some parish councils increasing their precepts, at least in part to support their local community library. Some communities wanted to move their library to a different building to co-locate with other services: Councillor Pugh said that the local authority would support them “to whatever extent they need within reason.”¹⁴⁸ The community libraries did not have any employees of the local authority working there, with the exception of one part-time person, paid for by a town council, who was the library volunteer co-ordinator. (Councillor Pugh argued that volunteers had not replaced professional librarians as the previous staff, though competent, were not professional librarians.)¹⁴⁹ The five libraries continued to have access to the council’s library IT service, including the full database of books, and Councillor Pugh expected that stock would be rotated and new books would be able to be ordered via the Isle of Wight’s central stock controls, as previously.¹⁵⁰

78. The Minister made it clear that an authority that had handed over a large proportion of its library facilities to volunteers would not escape his Department’s scrutiny: “we would still want to see a comprehensive and efficient local-authority-run service in the local [area]”.¹⁵¹

79. Volunteers have long been a valuable and valued part of the library service, and there are places where their work may help the local community to retain at least some ability to borrow books and access reference material. It will require considerable dedication by the volunteers and, as the Isle of Wight example shows, the financial costs may be high, even if buildings are made available at a nominal rent. It is not clear how sustainable some of these community libraries may be, nor what impact the change will

145 Q 48

146 Q 123

147 Qq 138-139 and 150

148 Qq 142 and 156-157

149 Qq 123, 141 and 145-146

150 Qq 149 and 151-153

151 Q 175

have on some of the outreach work conducted by libraries, particularly in relation to children and reading. It is clear, however, that community libraries will fail unless given at least some support by the local authority in terms of access to stock (including new stock), retaining computer equipment and IT support, and access to the advice and assistance of professional library staff. It would be very helpful to councils to receive some guidance from the DCMS on best practice in the provision of support. Councils which have transferred the running of libraries to community volunteers must above all, however, continue to give them the necessary support, otherwise they may wither on the vine and therefore be viewed as closures by stealth.

80. A different model of devolved library provision is that presented by the Industrial and Provident Society (IPS), currently being piloted in Suffolk. In December 2011, Suffolk County Council decided to adopt an IPS model for its libraries which involved setting up an independent not-for-profit organisation with a Chair. In its written submission, Suffolk IPS Ltd stated that the IPS was still in a transitional phase, becoming fully operational in June 2012. It went on to explain:

The County Council retains its statutory responsibilities for providing comprehensive and efficient library services. It will fund the IPS through a contract and service agreement; monitor progress and ensure compliance.

All libraries will remain open, and public opening hours will not be reduced. Community management groups are planning to develop the scope and public offer of the new service locally.¹⁵²

81. The Minister told us that the Government had no preference about who ran the statutory library service—whether it was run in-house or under contract with a not-for-profit, mutual or private company—provided it could meet the ‘comprehensive and efficient’ criteria.¹⁵³

82. We will be very interested to follow the development of the Industrial and Provident Society model for library provision in Suffolk. Again, it relies heavily on the goodwill of volunteers, but it has the advantage to the local population that the county council retains overall responsibility for the service. **There may be many other potential models for providing library services than those discussed in this report. We urge the DCMS, Arts Council and Local Government Association to evaluate the effectiveness of the different models being developed round the country and to produce an analysis for councils by the end of 2013.**

83. **We very much welcome the commitment given to us by the Minister to produce a report by the end of 2014 on the cumulative effect on library services of the reduction in local-authority provision and the growth of alternatives such as community libraries.**¹⁵⁴ We look forward to receiving that report. Enthusiasm over the scope for volunteer involvement, and for new models of provision, is fine, but—given the importance of

152 Ev w297

153 Q 178

154 Q 189

library services—a systematic look at the impact of funding cuts and organisation changes is needed to assess the durability of new approaches over time.

Responsibility for ensuring a comprehensive and efficient service

84. Much of the frustration of those campaigning for the retention of library services has arisen from a perception that the Secretary of State has been refusing to exercise his statutory responsibility for ensuring the provision of a comprehensive and efficient library service.¹⁵⁵ Appeals to the Secretary of State to initiate Wirral-style inquiries into the decisions of individual authorities have failed: judicial reviews of council decisions have resulted in courts limiting themselves to considerations of process, while referring back the definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’ to the Minister.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, with the abolition of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, and the transfer (as recently as 1 October 2011) of some of its responsibilities to the Arts Council, there is no longer a body with specific responsibility for maintaining standards within the library service at national level.

Role of the Secretary of State

85. Section 1(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 states:

From the commencement of this Act it shall be the duty of 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.

There is therefore a clear duty on the Secretary of State to “superintend, and promote the improvement” of the library service provided by individual local authorities. It seems reasonable to conclude it is his responsibility to provide at least a framework for judging whether a service is ‘comprehensive and efficient’.

86. Under section 10 of the same Act, as subsequently amended, the “default powers” of the Secretary of State are outlined as follows:

(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 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

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, *Ev v 186 (Friends of Lambeth Libraries)*, *Ev 50 (CILIP)*

¹⁵⁶ *Qq 79 (CILIP and Arts Council)*, *97–99 (CILIP)*

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,—

(a) [repealed]

(b) [relates to joint boards, which may be dissolved back into their constituent parts and those parts reconstituted as separate library authorities], 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.

It is these powers that the Secretary of State has recently declined to use in respect of the half dozen or so cases referred for judicial review, on the grounds that they were not serious enough for him to intervene.¹⁵⁷

87. We suggested to some of our witnesses that there were good pragmatic reasons for the Secretary of State to refrain from intervening at present: the sheer scale of the budget cuts meant that so many closures and other changes were being proposed that he would simply be overwhelmed if he intervened. The response was that, nevertheless, he had a statutory duty to fulfil.¹⁵⁸ Andrew Coburn summed up the reason why campaigners thought it appropriate for there to be responsibility at a national level for a service which, they agreed, had to reflect local needs and be delivered locally:

it is a de facto national service. I can go into my local library and discover that the nearest copy of the book I want to borrow is in Keswick; I live in Essex, but I can get that book, perhaps not the next day, but very quickly. There are all sorts of other aspects that make it a national service, and, therefore, there is a place for some national governance, for want of a better word.¹⁵⁹

88. The local authorities, on the other hand, favoured the current light-touch approach to supervision and, if anything, would have preferred the Secretary of State to have no powers to intervene.¹⁶⁰ They placed heavy emphasis on learning from one another, and particularly

157 Qq 26–29

158 Q 100 (CILIP)

159 Q 28

160 Qq 159–160 Ev 78 (Local Government Association) and Ev w225 (Gloucestershire County Council)

on the role of the Local Government Association in disseminating information, conducting peer reviews, and generally promoting different models of good practice.¹⁶¹

89. Alan Davey of the Arts Council explained why, in his opinion, it was wrong to rely solely on the process of judicial review to decide whether local authorities were fulfilling their statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service: “the judicial cases all focus on process and no one is talking about policy, about innovation, about where libraries could be going, about why libraries do matter to people, how they could matter to people more.”¹⁶² Sue Charteris, who had similar concerns, considered that this pointed to a need to amend the 1964 Act, not so much to remove responsibility from the Secretary of State, but to make him more ‘proactive’: to give him a clear role in relation to areas that needed to be addressed at national level (for example, negotiating digital access and using scale to achieve savings in the purchase of goods and services) and to make his supervisory role more akin to that of the relevant Secretaries of State in respect of the health and education services.¹⁶³ To some extent, Ministers are already assuming a more active role in relation to national objectives: the DCMS is now working with other government departments to explore the possibility of providing Wi-Fi in every library in England by 2015.¹⁶⁴

90. The Minister said that he intended to hold discussions with the Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) about the re-structuring of the statistics they collected from local authorities to ‘flag up’ possible areas of concern relating to expenditure on libraries. He added that he wanted to develop a ‘proper partnership’ between CIPFA and the Arts Council.¹⁶⁵ Subsequently, he announced that CIPFA had developed ‘comparative profile reports’ to enable fair comparisons to be made between comparable local authorities in the way in which they delivered library services. The Minister denied this was a reimposition of inflexible library standards; it was intended to enable the DCMS to ask questions if, for example, there were wide divergences in the apparent efficiency of expenditure on books. To this end, the DCMS was commissioning reports on all library authorities in England, to be completed in December 2012 and to be made available to the public as well as councillors, MPs and other interested parties.¹⁶⁶

91. The Minister considered that the role given to the Secretary of State by the 1964 Act was still of value. He said:

There is an interesting debate going on, if you like, a perspective certainly from local authorities that would like the Act repealed. They do not want a superintending duty. They do not want it to be a statutory duty. They want complete freedom, so they regard it as frustrating that they have to account to us. I would say it is good that they are frustrated that they have to account to us because it shows that we are taking an active interest in what they are doing. I do not think that superintendent function is

161 Qq 134 (Elizabeth Campbell), 55 and 61 (Sue Charteris),

162 Q 79

163 Q 57

164 Speech to The Future of Library Services conference, 28 June 2012

165 Q 164

166 Speech to the Future of Library services Conference, 28 June 2012

redundant. I am not sure the exact question was asked in the transcript, but I think it is in the mind of every local authority when it looks at its library service: will we breach our duty? What will happen if we go too far? Will we be called in by the Department?¹⁶⁷

92. It would be possible to remove the Secretary of State altogether from any role in respect of libraries by repealing sections 1 and 10 of the 1964 Act, and making any consequential amendments; but, though it has the benefits of simplicity and clarity, this is not entirely satisfactory. The more libraries develop their role in order to deliver national goals, whether in education or in promising new areas such as public health, the more they match the model of a ‘national service delivered locally’ rather than just a ‘local service’. Consequently, **there is an argument for retaining an element of national oversight. The current situation, however, where the Secretary of State has considerable reserve powers but is unwilling at present to use them, satisfies no one.** One of the key problems for those trying to conduct judicial reviews of local decisions is that, since the revocation of the library standards, there is no national definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’. We have already recommended that the Secretary of State issue guidance on what, in broad terms, constitutes a good library service. **We note that the Arts Council’s libraries team is based in all the regions and is intended to advise on best practice. This team could also be used to feed information on potential problem areas back to the DCMS. This system of advice backed up by intelligence should both help councils to adapt their approach to reductions in the library service—which may serve to reduce the recourse to judicial review—and enable the Secretary of State to give a swifter and clearer response to any complaints or judicial referrals. Section 10 of the 1964 Act then really would be a final resort.**

93. **We are attracted by Sue Charteris’s outline of a modern approach to the Secretary of State’s supervisory duty, with its emphasis on developing the service, promoting best practice and supporting the service through intervention at a national level in areas where there are potential efficiencies of scale. This leaves responsibility for both determining and meeting local needs to the local authorities, where it should rest. It also—as we discuss below—fits the stance taken by the Arts Council in respect of its advisory role for libraries. We do not think that adopting this approach would require any amendment to legislation, as the Secretary of State already has the duty of ‘promoting the improvement’ of library services.**

94. We note one suggestion of a small but significant change to the current procedures and practices relating to the Secretary of State’s powers to call a local inquiry into the actions of a library authority. **Sue Charteris argued forcefully that the Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992 were virtually unworkable and so adversarial that they hindered, rather than helped, to solve the underlying problem. She believed that they should be changed.**¹⁶⁸ We concur.

95. We briefly explored whether it made sense for the DCMS to continue with responsibility for libraries, given the DCMS gives no direct funding for libraries but instead

¹⁶⁷ Q 183 See also Qq 166, 168–169

¹⁶⁸ Q 56

national funding comes from the Department for Communities and Local Government. Our witnesses were divided on this question, but were generally of the view that the identity of the parent department mattered less than the political commitment to the service.¹⁶⁹

Role of the Arts Council

96. When we heard from its Chief Executive in February, the Arts Council had only recently taken over some of the role and responsibilities of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). The Arts Council saw its role in relation to libraries as two-fold: it had to provide the Secretary of State with information (such as on the extent of closures), and it had to assist with the Secretary of State's duty to promote the improvement of library services, which it saw mainly in terms of spreading good practice. Formally, it took over from its predecessor responsibility for the Future Libraries programme. The Arts Council did not, however, have the 'semi-supervisory' role of the body it replaced, a sort of devolution of the Secretary of State's statutory duty to superintend the service. This duty was anyway—in the view of the Chief Executive—"not terribly well-defined" and he argued it properly and firmly rested with the DCMS itself.¹⁷⁰

97. Moreover, as the Chief Executive admitted, the amount of money allocated to libraries within the Arts Council's budget, was "tiny": £230,000 or about £76 per library.¹⁷¹ This fund, which is part of the Libraries Development Initiative launched in November 2011, is intended to fund 13 projects to "test new approaches to library service delivery."¹⁷² The Chief Executive denied that libraries were a low priority for his organisation, arguing that, rather than regarding them as a simple add-on to museums, the Arts Council viewed the role of libraries as popular and trusted local institutions with a strong role to play in encouraging people throughout the country to engage more with culture.¹⁷³ He also said that an area he wished to develop was increasing access by libraries to lottery funds: many library services had been unaware that they were eligible to apply for these, and he thought the Arts Council could help improve both application and success rates for libraries.¹⁷⁴ After we had finished taking oral evidence, on 28 June, the Minister announced that the Arts Council was allocating £6 million from its Grants for the Arts programme for library authorities to work with arts and cultural organisations on projects to promote art and cultural activities.¹⁷⁵ Applications for this funding opened on 27 September 2012 and the programme is due to finish in March 2015.

98. The Minister acknowledged that the abolition of the Museums, Archives and Libraries Council had caused disquiet, especially as the Arts Council was in receipt of a smaller grant-in-aid than its predecessor. He noted that the MLA had already reduced its staff by

169 Pro-transfer to the DCLG: Q 11 (Miranda McKearney); suggesting this is a minor detail: Qq 60 (Sue Charteris) and 188 (Minister)

170 Qq 65–66 and 101

171 Qq 64 and 102

172 <http://www.arts.council.org.uk/funding/apply-for-funding/libraries-development-initiative>

173 Qq 64, 102 and 106 and Ev 74 (Arts Council)

174 Q 64; see also Q 190 (Minister)

175 Speech to The Future of Library Services conference: http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/ministers_speeches/9167

half and had closed its regional offices by 2010; he argued, moreover, that it did not have a separate cadre of library staff. He stated that the Arts Council was spending more on library development projects and its consultation programme than the MLA had.¹⁷⁶ He hoped that the Arts Council would fulfil the function of a “libraries development agency”, a resource for collecting and disseminating best practice and for providing support where needed, rather than an Ofsted-style inspectorate.¹⁷⁷

99. Our other witnesses seemed largely satisfied with the part played by the Arts Council so far, with both librarians and local authorities expressing approval of its commitment to the spread of best practice, and with CILIP and Sue Charteris encouraging it to work closely with the Local Government Association and professional bodies to develop advice and support.¹⁷⁸

100. We have no doubt that the Arts Council will fulfil its duties in respect of libraries efficiently and with enthusiasm. Its decision immediately to start a major consultation on how libraries should look in the future bodes well. However, rightly or wrongly, the demise of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council—and the transfer of libraries to a much larger body with a more circumscribed responsibility for the service and a very low direct budget allocation for it—contributes to an impression that the library service in general is being afforded a lower priority than in the past. In the current climate, it is inevitable that library services will be asked to bear their share of local authority cuts and in some areas be rationalised, even though others have committed to keeping all libraries open. We believe, however, that all those involved in providing this service to the public—local authorities, Arts Council and the Secretary of State—need to work harder to demonstrate that it is still much-valued and has a promising future.

176 Q 190 On concerns about the dowry from the MLA, see, for example, Q 84

177 Qq 181 and 190–192

178 Qq 58–59, 94, 135

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The Public Library Service Standards shared the flaws of those imposed elsewhere in the public sector, in that they concentrated on the measurable rather than giving a rounded indication of the quality of service—let alone its responsiveness to changing customer needs and demands. It is noteworthy that most of our witnesses wanted a broader and more permissive approach on the interpretation of ‘comprehensive and efficient’. (Paragraph 31)
2. Local authorities are having to take decisions now about the funding and shape of the library service but a number appear insufficiently aware of the available guidance on the definition of ‘comprehensive and efficient’. They also appear to lack information about the requirements emerging from multiple judicial reviews. It is not cost-effective for policy to be made by judicial review and it undermines democratic accountability. While we are firmly of the view that decisions ultimately are for local authorities in the light of local needs, the provision of public libraries is mandatory and local authorities should be assisted to understand what is expected of them under the Act and subsequent guidance. We recommend that the Secretary of State provide all local library authorities with the guidance arising from the Arts Council’s consultation exercise as swiftly as possible, and to take that opportunity again to remind local authorities of the recommendations of the Charteris Report. (Paragraph 36)
3. It may not be possible or even desirable to retain every existing library building, but wholesale closures are unlikely to facilitate an appropriate level of service. The key to ensuring that an adequate—and preferably a good—library service is available to the whole local population appears to be the retention of a distributed service, in accessible locations, but with flexibility over whether the service is provided in dedicated library buildings, in other locations, via mobile libraries, or in any other way that best fits local needs. (Paragraph 54)
4. Staff costs are a significant and have been an increasing proportion of library costs and, if the service is losing up to 35% of its budget, some staff cuts are inevitable. As with other cuts, however, local authorities need to give careful consideration to how to do least damage to the service provided to the public now and for the future. They must ensure that they retain enough experienced and/or professionally qualified staff to develop the services on offer to the public to reflect changing needs, and to support the growing number of volunteers both within their core library service and in any community libraries that may be established locally. (Paragraph 60)
5. Some very good models of co-operation between library authorities already exist. Local authorities must ensure that they maintain and improve co-operation, both across boundaries and nationally, as this will free money for front-line library services. It is short-sighted to reduce co-operation at this time of financial constraint. (Paragraph 74)
6. Volunteers have long been a valuable and valued part of the library service, and there are places where their work may help the local community to retain at least some

ability to borrow books and access reference material. It will require considerable dedication by the volunteers and, as the Isle of Wight example shows, the financial costs may be high, even if buildings are made available at a nominal rent. It is not clear how sustainable some of these community libraries may be, nor what impact the change will have on some of the outreach work conducted by libraries, particularly in relation to children and reading. It is clear, however, that community libraries will fail unless given at least some support by the local authority in terms of access to stock (including new stock), retaining computer equipment and IT support, and access to the advice and assistance of professional library staff. It would be very helpful to councils to receive some guidance from the DCMS on best practice in the provision of support. Councils which have transferred the running of libraries to community volunteers must above all, however, continue to give them the necessary support, otherwise they may wither on the vine and therefore be viewed as closures by stealth. (Paragraph 79)

7. There may be many other potential models for providing library services than those discussed in this report. We urge the DCMS, Arts Council and Local Government Association to evaluate the effectiveness of the different models being developed round the country and to produce an analysis for councils by the end of 2013. (Paragraph 82)
8. We very much welcome the commitment given to us by the Minister to produce a report by the end of 2014 on the cumulative effect on library services of the reduction in local-authority provision and the growth of alternatives such as community libraries. We look forward to receiving that report. Enthusiasm over the scope for volunteer involvement, and for new models of provision, is fine, but—given the importance of library services—a systematic look at the impact of funding cuts and organisation changes is needed to assess the durability of new approaches over time. (Paragraph 83)
9. there is an argument for retaining an element of national oversight. The current situation, however, where the Secretary of State has considerable reserve powers but is unwilling at present to use them, satisfies no one. We note that the Arts Council's libraries team is based in all the regions and is intended to advise on best practice. This team could also be used to feed information on potential problem areas back to the DCMS. This system of advice backed up by intelligence should both help councils to adapt their approach to reductions in the library service—which may serve to reduce the recourse to judicial review—and enable the Secretary of State to give a swifter and clearer response to any complaints or judicial referrals. Section 10 of the 1964 Act then really would be a final resort. (Paragraph 92)
10. We are attracted by Sue Charteris's outline of a modern approach to the Secretary of State's supervisory duty, with its emphasis on developing the service, promoting best practice and supporting the service through intervention at a national level in areas where there are potential efficiencies of scale. This leaves responsibility for both determining and meeting local needs to the local authorities, where it should rest. It also—as we discuss below—fits the stance taken by the Arts Council in respect of its advisory role for libraries. We do not think that adopting this approach would

require any amendment to legislation, as the Secretary of State already has the duty of ‘promoting the **improvement**’ of library services. (Paragraph 93)

11. We note one suggestion of a small but significant change to the current procedures and practices relating to the Secretary of State’s powers to call a local inquiry into the actions of a library authority. Sue Charteris argued **forcefully that the Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992 were virtually unworkable and so adversarial that they hindered, rather than helped, to solve the underlying problem. She believed that they should be changed.** We concur. (Paragraph 94)
12. We have no doubt that the Arts Council will fulfil its duties in respect of libraries efficiently and with enthusiasm. Its decision immediately to start a major consultation on how libraries should look in the future bodes well. However, rightly or wrongly, the demise of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council—and the transfer of libraries to a much larger body with a more circumscribed responsibility for the service and a very low direct budget allocation for it—contributes to an impression that the library service in general is being afforded a lower priority than in the past. In the current climate, it is inevitable that library services will be asked to bear their share of local authority cuts and in some areas be rationalised, even though others have committed to keeping all libraries open. We believe, however, that all those involved in providing this service to the public—local authorities, Arts Council and the Secretary of State—need to work harder to demonstrate that it is still much-valued and has a promising future. (Paragraph 100)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 30 October 2012

Members present:

Mr John Whittingdale, in the Chair

Mr Ben Bradshaw
Angie Bray
Tracey Crouch
Philip Davies
Paul Farrelly

Steve Rotheram
Mr Adrian Sanders
Jim Sheridan
Mr Gerry Sutcliffe

Draft Report (*Library Closures*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 100 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Third Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 6 November at 10.15 am]

EMBARGOED

Witnesses

Tuesday 7 February 2012

Page

Miranda McKearney OBE, Director, The Reading Agency, **Abigail Barker**, Voices for the Library, and **Andrew Coburn**, Secretary, The Library Campaign

Ev 1

Sue Charteris, Independent adviser on public policy and author of the Report on Wirral Library Service

Ev 10

Tuesday 21 February 2012

Alan Davey, Chief Executive, Arts Council England, **Annie Mauger**, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

Ev 16

David Pugh, Leader, Isle of Wight Council, **Nigel Thomas**, Service Delivery Manager, Leicestershire Library Services, and **Elizabeth Campbell**, Local Government Association (LGA)

Ev 26

Tuesday 13 March 2012

Ed Vaizey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries), Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Ev 37

List of printed written evidence

1	The Reading Agency	Ev 47
2	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)	Ev 50
3	Councillor David Pugh, Leader of the Isle of Wight Council	Ev 54
4	Voices for the Library	Ev 58: Ev 64
5	The Library Campaign	Ev 64
6	Department for Culture, Media and Sport	Ev 68
7	Leicestershire County Council	Ev 72
8	Arts Council England	Ev 74
9	Local Government Association (LGA)	Ev 78
10	Sue Charteris	Ev 81

List of additional written evidence

(published in Volume II on the Committee's website www.parliament.uk/cmscom)

1	S R Sibley, Chief Executive Officer, W F Howes Ltd	Ev w1
2	Mr D J Williams	Ev w2
3	Simon Barron	Ev w2
4	Lechlade & District Civic Society	Ev w3
5	Campaign for the Book	Ev w4
6	Desmond Clarke	Ev w6
7	Alice Lock	Ev w10
8	June Winifred Quigley	Ev w11
9	David James Quigley	Ev w12
10	Shirley Burnham	Ev w14
11	Mike Cavanagh	Ev w18
12	Colin F Gibb	Ev w19
13	Camden Public Libraries Users Group	Ev w20
14	Black Country Shared Library Project	Ev w22
15	Save Bolton Libraries Campaign (SBLC)	Ev w24
16	Association of Friends of Dorset Libraries	Ev w27
17	Cornwall Council	Ev w31
18	West Midlands Society of Chief Librarians	Ev w34
19	Christopher Pipe	Ev w36
20	London Borough of Hillingdon	Ev w39
21	Hereford Library Users' Group	Ev w40
22	The We ♥ Libraries Team	Ev w42
23	Friends of Gloucestershire Libraries (FoGL)	Ev w46
24	Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL)	Ev w50
25	Nether Stowey Community Library Steering Committee	Ev w53
26	Staffordshire County Council	Ev w57
27	Bill Welland	Ev w59
28	London Borough of Croydon	Ev w60
29	The Booksellers Association	Ev w65
30	Save Preston Library Campaign	Ev w67
31	The Network	Ev w71
32	John Holland on behalf of former librarians of Gloucestershire Library	Ev w73
33	Professor Robert Usherwood	Ev w77
34	Graham Meadows	Ev w80
35	Sarah McClennan	Ev w81
36	Libraries and Information East Midlands	Ev w81
37	Gillian Johnson	Ev w85
38	Jules Channer	Ev w88
39	Wyre Forest Agenda	Ev w89
40	Libraries for Life for Londoners (LLL)	Ev w93
41	South Gloucestershire Council	Ev w94

42	Share the Vision (STV)	Ev w96
43	Derbyshire County Council	Ev w99
44	School Library Association	Ev w102
45	Lechlade Town Council Library Working Group	Ev w104
46	RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)	Ev w107
47	Watchet Library Friends Group	Ev w110
48	Users and Friends of Manor House Library	Ev w114
49	Mrs J E Orman	Ev w117
50	Professor John Irven, Treasurer of Watchet Library Friends and Friends of Somerset Libraries	Ev w118
51	Mrs R G Lawler	Ev w122
52	Friends of Waterloo Library	Ev w123
53	The Combined Regions Ltd	Ev w124
54	Mr Tony Hoare and Mr Mike Bedford	Ev w127
55	Councillor Paul Lorber, Liberal Democrat Group Leader, Brent Council	Ev w130
56	UNISON	Ev w135
57	Friends of Carnegie Library	Ev w138
58	Friends of Goring Library	Ev w140
59	Society of Chief Librarians (SCL)	Ev w141
60	Pam Jakeman	Ev w144
61	Upper Norwood Library Campaign	Ev w145
62	Friends of York Gardens Library and Community Centre	Ev w149
63	Dorset County Council	Ev w151
64	National Federation of Women's Institutes	Ev w152
65	Sarah Tanburn	Ev w156
66	Lewisham People before Profit	Ev w159
67	Alan Goodearl	Ev w161
68	Kirsty Braithwaite	Ev w163
69	Anne Bennet	Ev w164
70	Newnham Library Support Group	Ev w166
71	John Laing Integrated Services	Ev w168
72	The Publishers Association	Ev w172
73	Lynne Coppendale	Ev w174
74	Simon Gurevitz	Ev w175
75	Alan Dove	Ev w180
76	Kent County Council	Ev w183
77	Friends of Lambeth Libraries (FOLL)	Ev w186
78	Reynolds Family	Ev w189
79	The Friends of Wiveliscombe Library	Ev w192
80	Save Friern Barnet Library Group	Ev w194
81	We Care Foundation	Ev w198
82	Simon Randall CBE, Consultant, and Joanna Bussell, Partner of Solicitors, Winckworth Sherwood LLP	Ev w200
83	The Bookseller	Ev w203
84	Kirkburton Parish Council	Ev w205
85	Alison Hopkins	Ev w206

86	Elizabeth Chapman	Ev w207
87	Old Coulsdon Library Supporters Group	Ev w210
88	Birmingham Library and Archive Services	Ev w211
89	Laura Collignon	Ev w213
90	Save Croydon Libraries Campaign	Ev w216
91	Saleem Yousaf	Ev w218
92	Gareth Osler	Ev w219
93	Josephine Grahl	Ev w221
94	Sara Wingate Gray, Alice Corble, The Itinerant Poetry Librarian	Ev w223
95	National Union of Journalists	Ev w225
96	Gloucestershire County Council	Ev w225
97	Friends of the Durning Library	Ev w227
98	John Dougherty	Ev w229
99	Tim White	Ev w230
100	Save Cricklewood Library Campaign	Ev w231
101	Anne Howie	Ev w232
102	Newcastle City Council	Ev w233
103	Roger Backhouse	Ev w236
104	Hugh Paton	Ev w237
105	Rosehill Readers on behalf of Save Suffolk Libraries	Ev w238
106	Save Oxfordshire Libraries	Ev w243
107	Peter Griffiths	Ev w245
108	Friends of Kensal Rise Library	Ev w249
109	Library Systems and Services UK Ltd (LSSI)	Ev w256
110	Executive Committee of the Association of London Chief Librarians	Ev w258
111	Brent SOS Libraries Campaign	Ev w259
112	Lauren Smith	Ev w264
113	The Society of Authors	Ev w268
114	Yinnon Ezra MBE	Ev w273
115	Christina Burnett	Ev w275
116	Barry Gardiner MP	Ev w277
117	Richard Shirres	Ev w278
118	Doncaster Council	Ev w286
119	Public Interest Lawyers	Ev w288
120	London Borough of Brent	Ev w290
121	Trustees of the North Taunton Partnership	Ev w292
122	Martyn Everett	Ev w295
123	Suffolk's Libraries IPS Ltd	Ev w297
124	Martin Hext	Ev w300
125	Serena Brunke	Ev w300

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2012-13

First Report	The Gambling Act 2005: A bet worth taking?	HC 421
Second Report	Racism in Football	HC 89

EMBARGOED