

SPEAK UP FOR LIBRARIES CONFERENCE 2013: FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOPS

The four workshops at the Speak Up For Libraries conference were all asked what assistance they needed in their work to help save our public library service. Suggestions on how to best deal with the range of problems that library campaigners face were also put forward.

Below is a summary of what was discussed in the four different workshops.

We have then compiled a list of 7 key requests for help that were generated by the workshop discussions.

These key points will help guide the work of the Speak Up For Libraries coalition in the future.

What help do library campaigners need

1. A central (online?) information point where campaigners et al can go to for data, legislation, reports, good practice etc is needed. Needs to be kept up to date.
2. A centralised list of groups and campaigns involved in protecting the public library. More networking between groups and sharing of experiences, advice, strategies etc.
3. We need a full time person to co-ordinate resources and a national campaign.
4. There is an urgent need to make Councillors, Senior Officers and politicians more aware of what libraries do and what they can achieve. There is a need for more joined up thinking in local and central government, linking libraries in with other strategies.
5. There is an urgent need for a clearer leadership structure within the public library sector and a desperate need for enforceable standards.
6. More emphasis on positive stories and more evidence about the socio-economic impact of libraries is needed.
7. Targeted promotion of library services locally and nationally especially to non-users. Prioritise outreach. Use social media more to reach targeted audiences.

Voices For Libraries Workshop

- We need to make campaigners aware that the information that can help them is out there, because at the moment they don't know where to find it.
- We need a full-time paid person to coordinate this activity - there is a lack of time for any of us to do this properly on a voluntary basis.
- We need to provide a resources sheet for campaigners that includes regular updates about campaign activities and links to other groups (the network of campaigners and supporters).
- There needs to be a focus on campaigning for both positive and negative reasons ie say why libraries are great and the positive stories
- We need to get information about what advocacy work is going on into the physical libraries, so we attract the interest of those people who might be aware of all the online activity, websites, blogs etc.

CILIP Workshop

- We need a study to provide evidence of the economic contribution of the Library Service
- We must be savvy with our use of Performance Indicators to help evidence how vital libraries are
- We must ensure ebooks form part of the offer for libraries now (get public lending rights for ebooks)
- Libraries should not be afraid to join up with other council services (e.g. Kent libraries now house registration services)
- We must reach out to our local communities in a range of ways (social media, outreach work etc) to make them more relevant to people
- Allow councils to be at the forefront of developing and using modern technology
- Seek out and use a range of library activists (e.g. users, volunteers, celebrity users)
- We need a clearer leadership role for the public library service
- We need national standards and a national development program for libraries
- We need to make better use of targeted promotional campaigns to get more people using libraries
- Staff need to be given more training (e.g. re-chartership, stronger emphasis on CPD), there need to be more sharing of good practice and they need to be able to show their passion for libraries
- Local groups and larger bodies can take the lead on resolving some problems but as individuals we can also contribute by joining the debate on the future of libraries. Contribute to every blog you read

The Library Campaign Workshop

- Several participants noted no closures, but cuts to services, book stock, professional librarians who leave not being replaced.
- Worry that Birmingham's new library has been built at the expense of a thriving wider network of community libraries and that outsourcing is a real threat.

- Hammersmith & Fulham said to have 'decimated its service - there are no professional librarians at all, most of the information services closed including one-stop shops & services for refugees. There is a campaign to put millions back into the libraries budget.
- Croydon an 'absolute disaster', with the previous service badly run down and the new contractors, Carillion, announcing more cuts (including staff) as soon as they took over.
- In general 'enormous' gains are possible by sharing services with 'the local authority next door'
- Campaigners need to be relentless in holding their authorities accountable. There are good authorities.
- DCLG (Department for Communities & Local Govt) has a policy of not intervening. It assumes that budget cuts will force councils to amalgamate in the end.
- The LGA has a small unit helping councils work together on the big-budget services. This might be extended to cultural services.
- Requiring a service to have a clear 'vision' is not enough. Brent has a vision but it is 'utterly wretched'.
- Politicians want to see figures, but they are hard to find.
- CIPFA reports come out very late, are not analysed nationally, are hard to get hold of & the data can be unreliable. The 'comparator' sets, which group together facts on a sample of similar authorities, have improved considerably since first issued.
- It is vital to make sure libraries are used well. Otherwise politicians will point to declining use. Importance to children and old people is the main argument to make.
- Lincs libraries have already stopped most of the activities they ran, although there are enough staff.
- Freedom of Information requests are very useful and can hold councils to account
- GLL runs Greenwich libraries for 25% than the council did. Users are up, issues are up.
- Some groups need help with posters. They have no money to produce them.
- OCLC (company) did a 'geek your library' campaign to promote public libraries in the USA. They might do the same here. They have a new marketing person.
- The most powerful campaigns are local. You need to see the whites of their eyes... Need to involve the community, without getting that turned into an excuse for creating volunteer libraries.
- Some libraries don't help themselves - refusing donations of books, refusing posters for the notice board. Councillors should be informed about such matters.
- What's to come in the future is infinitely worse. It is the worst situation in decades.

Our main needs

- We need library statistics. Help in analysing them and what questions we should then ask and how we can subsequently make non-damaging savings
- We need to get libraries on the agenda for the upcoming local & national elections.
- We need advocacy materials, posters etc that people can access and use
- Raise the issue of shared services where this is done well –perhaps by working with the LGA?
- We need a national information/campaign on the value of libraries and librarians.

UNISON Workshop

- We need to look at councils that have managed the cuts without library closures etc and other examples of good practice which can then be shared rather than focusing purely on the horror stories.
- Library leaders need to be more vocal about what libraries do and the future of the library service
- Councillors need to be informed more about the great work that libraries do and the benefits they provide to the community and the wider work of the council
- We need more clarity from the Government over their plans for libraries
- What are CILIP doing? They could bring back Library Standards
- The consensus on cuts at a national level needs to be challenged
- How can we ensure that library workers ability to speak to the local media is not curtailed by local councils gagging library workers?
- We need to form a national campaign with prominent personalities.
- We need to make councillors aware of the legal framework that libraries operate in
- Local campaigns need to improve dialogue with local unions and through them the staff
- UNISON should try and run a national campaign via the TUC
- We should try and work with the RNIB given that their home delivery book service is adversely affected by the cuts plus the loss of libraries
- Success stories should be publicised. Communication of initiatives, stories and projects is not as effective – we need a central source of info.