

GENERAL ELECTION 2015 – SPEAK UP FOR LIBRARIES

The Speak up for Libraries alliance* is urging people everywhere to make public libraries a central issue in the General Election.

This is a once-in-five-years chance to make sure central government understands that libraries are a low-cost, essential resource for the work of local councils and for national agendas such as 'Digital by Default' – and deeply valued by local residents and the nation as a whole.

Already, many library services are threatened by, or experiencing, deep cuts, widespread closures of vital local branches – or the damaging policy of turning them over to volunteers to run.

Yet the Government continues to cut the grants given to local authorities meaning that although libraries are a statutory service they are often seen as a soft target for savings. Such cuts often save little but do great damage.

If people wait another five years, their own library could go. Nationally a postcode lottery will become a reality with only some communities benefitting from the presence of a council funded and professionally run library.

Libraries remain the lynchpin of communities, offering access to learning, reading, information and enjoyment.

Libraries are, or should be, a trusted public space for everyone.

They play a crucial role in improving literacy standards and in combating the digital divide.

Speak up for Libraries believes that libraries, far from being obsolete, are more important than ever. That is why we are asking the government to make a public commitment to their survival and development.

Speak up for Libraries is asking MPs to sign up to the following manifesto when standing for election;

- Give libraries a long-term future, with a vision for their future development and clear standards of service.
- Enforce the commitment in law for local authorities to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service. This commitment should also include digital, ICT and e-book services.
- Acknowledge that libraries are important to individuals and communities – especially in times of hardship.
- Enforce the duty that local authorities have to properly consult with communities to design services that meet their needs and aspirations.
- Ensure that local authorities receive sufficient funding in order to deliver properly resourced and staffed library services.
- Recognise that properly resourced library services contribute to the health and well-being of local communities and of society as a whole and therefore complement the work of other public services and of national government agendas.

Notes:

· Speak Up For Libraries is an alliance of individual campaigners and national organisations: Elizabeth Ash, Campaign for the Book, CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals), The Library Campaign, Unison, Voices for the Library.

· 2015 Elections - This year there will be a General Election on 07 May, on the same day in England direct elections are to be held in all 36 metropolitan boroughs, 194 of the second-tier districts, 49 of the unitary authorities, as well as for various mayoral posts.

Decisions on policy and funding for public libraries in the devolved countries (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) are made by their own assemblies/parliaments. Therefore those seeking election to Westminster will have no say on library provision in their own countries.

· Library closures:

- Public Library Statistics produced by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) show that in the five years up to April 2014 330 libraries (including mobile libraries) have been closed.

- Since April 2014, Public Library News report that 233 static libraries have been put under threat of closure/passing to volunteers. 8 mobile libraries under threat. 11 libraries (3 static and 8 mobile) libraries closed, 9 libraries passed to volunteers. 1 entirely new volunteer-run library.

<http://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/>

· Local government funding and expenditure:

- There was a 33% real term cut to government funding of local government in England between 2011- 2015 (Comprehensive Spending Review 20112-2015)

- A further 10% cut to Government's Core Funding of local government in England planned in 2015/2016 (Spending Review 2016-2016)

- Additional funding cuts are widely expected in 2016-2018

In a press release issued by the Local Government Association on announcement of the 2015/2016 Spending review, Sir Merrick Cockell, Local Government Association Chairman is quoted as saying:

“...the fact remains that some councils will simply not have enough money to meet all their statutory responsibilities. Services such as culture and leisure facilities, school support, road maintenance and growth-related programmes will bear the brunt of these cuts”

http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/4044082/NEWS

Website www.speakupforlibraries.org

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