



GENERAL ELECTION 2017 – 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.

The election offers us another chance to make sure central government understands that libraries are a low-cost, essential council resource for all communities. They are vital to national agendas such as 'Digital by Default'. And they are 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. Local councils currently face an estimated overall funding gap of £5.8bn by 2019/20. Although libraries are a statutory service, they are often seen as a soft target for cuts. Such cuts often save little but do great damage. If people wait another five years, their own library could go. Nationally, a postcode lottery is 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 reading, learning, information and leisure.

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

They play a crucial role in improving literacy standards and in combatting 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. The many benefits libraries bring to society as a whole complement the work of other public services and national government agendas.

NOTES:

Speak Up for Libraries is an alliance of individual campaigners and national organisations: Elizabeth Ash, Alan Gibbons (Campaign for the Book), The Library Campaign, UNISON and Voices for the Library.

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

- Since 1st April 2016, Public Libraries News report that 134 static libraries and 7 mobile libraries are under threat of closure/handed to volunteers.
- Public Library Statistics produced by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) show that the number of public libraries in the UK has fallen from 4482 in 2009/10 to 3850 in 2015/16 (a drop of 632).
- Statistics compiled by the BBC in 2016 show that the number of paid staff in libraries fell from 31,977 in 2010 to 24,044 now, a drop of 7,933 (25%) for the 182 library authorities that provided comparable data.

Local government funding and expenditure

In a press release issued by the Local Government Association (LGA) responding to the final Local Government Finance Settlement published on 20/02/2017, Chairman of the Local Government Association, Lord Porter, is quoted as saying:

"Councils face an overall £5.8 billion funding gap by 2020. This will push councils perilously close to the financial edge over the next few years and force them all to make significant reductions to the local services communities rely on, including filling potholes, collecting waste, maintaining our parks and green spaces and running children's centres, leisure centres and libraries, to plug growing funding gaps."

<http://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-final-local-government-finance-settlement>

Website: www.speakupforlibraries.org

Twitter: [@SpeakUp4Libs](https://twitter.com/SpeakUp4Libs)

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