



**Labour's
Policy
Review**

Libraries: Innovation, Co-location and Partnership

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Libraries should be at the heart of our communities.

Labour believes in One Nation communities, in which everybody has a stake, prosperity is fairly shared, and where we value the institutions that underpin our common life. Libraries can make an important contribution to all of these ideals.

Labour demonstrated a clear commitment to our library service in Government. We understand the social, educational and cultural value of the library service and are committed to ensuring highly effective library provision across all cities, towns and communities.

We believe that libraries are not a luxury: they are a practical tool and vital public space for individuals and families across the country. They are a resource for parents with young children, for school children without a place to work at home, for job seekers trying to gain new skills and employment, for elderly people living in isolation, for community groups and, increasingly, an incubator for new ideas and businesses to come to fruition. Millions of people can tell you how real an impact libraries have had on their lives. Today that impact is more valuable than ever. Labour's vision is to build on the potential libraries offer - to make them an asset rooted at the heart of every community, and responsive to its needs.

Labour will continue to hold the Government to account for the damage that is being inflicted on the service. In 2011, 130 libraries were reported as closed or handed over to volunteers; with another 300 gone or under threat this year. 10 per cent of all UK libraries have been affected in less than two years - and many believe there is worse to come. In addition, libraries are suffering from reduced opening hours, cuts to already low spending on stock and the loss of hundreds of librarians. Councils are being forced to make painful decisions due to cuts which go too far, too fast - and the results of these cuts will do permanent damage to a service that is highly valued by communities across Britain.

The Government has repeatedly underplayed the seriousness of the problem. At a time when many library services are under threat, there is no sense of urgency, no coherent strategic direction, no guidance for local authorities, and no idea about what might be the minimum acceptable outcome.

Labour understands the importance of libraries, but we also know that they must adapt. The defining mission for any service is to meet the needs of the community it serves. Libraries are provided at a local level and councils rightly have the first claim to leadership. But the Government has a clear duty to minimise the damage being done to the library service, and to provide an overarching strategic vision.

Recent library success stories have demonstrated that co-location provides a framework for libraries which both fulfils the more traditional, core role of lending books and ensures that users can learn and access information in new and innovative ways. Libraries have been co-located with a range of organisations including local colleges and job centres. They have also provided an access point for everything from IT to language training, job clubs to books on prescription, Healthy Living Hubs to theatre space.

Some councils have also successfully combined back-office functions with other authorities, making significant savings in the process. Much more could also be done to link libraries to other government services like health, education and employment.

In order to achieve libraries of this quality, Labour understands that government has a responsibility to maintain standards and provide direction. We believe that this Tory-led Government is currently falling woefully short of this responsibility: there must be a better way for national and local government to work in partnership to fully realise the potential of libraries.

Dan Jarvis MP, Shadow Minister for Libraries

"A library is a unique public space and should be an expression of our local communities. If we believe in a society in which everyone, regardless of background, is able to pursue their interests, education and personal development; libraries are a fundamental tool."

"Budgetary pressures facing local government in the current climate are extreme. That's why national government should be working closely with local government to ensure that the full potential of libraries is realised and to explore all options for preserving the library service which is even more valuable during times of austerity."

"Labour wants every child and adult to have access to services which will help them to thrive, whether that's learning to read, building a CV, studying a language, developing skills, meeting new people or building a new online business'.

"Our communities will be best served by an effective, innovative and responsive library service working with community partnerships".

Why libraries matter in the 21st century

Any vision for the library service must be based both on an understanding of their value to our communities and to our country; and on a belief in their untapped potential to do more. We recognise the role they can play in education, in culture and in access to information; ensuring that everyone can gain the skills they need to learn, work and socialise. Government at all levels should aim to strengthen this traditional mission, but also to build on the unique ability of libraries to create new partnerships, anchor other services and be a more effective asset for the communities they serve - which in practice can mean anything from Baby Rhyme Time to business incubation.

Here are a number of reasons why Labour believes libraries are valuable:

- **Community and Regeneration** - Libraries should act as a focus for community life. They are a place to spend time and socialise for young people, students, parents, elderly people and others, no matter what your background. One study found that Peckham library has been a major contributor in halving the number of residents wanting to leave the community.
- **Social Justice** - Libraries embody a basic principle of equality of opportunity, providing access to information and learning for all. They are ladders to improve social mobility.
- **Education and literacy** - One in six UK adults is functionally illiterate, costing the economy an estimated £81 billion a year. Libraries have an important role in encouraging reading and literacy, particularly amongst children; one in three of which do not own a single book.
- **Digital Exclusion** - 23 per cent of households still do not have internet access. Libraries helped get 1 million people online last year.
- **Business and employment** - The British Library Business and Intellectual Property Centre provides information tailored for businesses and start-ups; other libraries provide "business hatcheries" and Enterprise Hubs which offer start up advice and mentoring, IT advice and CV and finance workshops.
- **A trusted space and partner for co-location or anchoring of other services** - services within libraries can be run by the local authority or other businesses or organisations, providing a greater range of services for users, increased footfall and additional revenue for the library. Library spaces may also be shared spaces

with other community groups. Co-location can enhance a library's role as a centre of community life, while providing good value for money - ensuring that existing premises and infrastructure are being used effectively to protect services at a time when there's less money around. Co-location can range from Barnsley central library hosting a Citizen's Advice Bureau to the new Library of Birmingham, opening in September 2013, which will provide a studio theatre, outdoor amphitheatre, a recording studio and a BFI mediatheque.

Libraries in our community

Libraries should be rooted in and responsive to their communities and the services they offer should reflect this. Labour knows that different communities require different services and the way in which these are delivered will also differ.

Labour believes that volunteers can make a valuable contribution in a One Nation society, and can do much to improve the library service and to bring it closer to the needs of the community. Community, volunteer run, libraries should be encouraged and supported where there is genuinely no other alternative to closure. But too often David Cameron's talk of the 'Big Society' has been a fig-leaf for cuts. We need to value and celebrate volunteering in its own right, not use it crudely as a substitute for important public services where government has failed to live up to its responsibility for providing them.

One Nation means preserving the institutions that bind us together. Libraries can play an incredibly important role as a hub of community life, and Labour's commitment to protect our library service recognises the contribution of libraries as a place where citizens can come together, meet and socialise. While it may not be possible to stop every closure, it is vital that decisions about library provision reflect the wider value of libraries to their communities.

Councillor Mike Amesbury, Former Member for Culture and Leisure, Manchester City Council:

"Manchester loves libraries and is proud to work alongside partners, renewing our city and community network. The service plays a vital role in the heart of every neighbourhood, from children's holiday activities to health information to the incubation of business ideas. Libraries help people find jobs, find entertainment and find answers. Books are just an important tip of the iceberg."

Libraries for a new economy

In a knowledge-based and increasingly digital economy, the services libraries can provide will be vital to ensuring the next generation have the skills required.

Miranda McKearney, Director of The Reading Agency:

"Libraries are one of the community's most precious assets, as the public have been so loudly expressing recently. Libraries symbolise, in a unique way, our commitment to each other, to a high ideal of sharing the world's knowledge and ideas. They build a fairer society by making sure everyone has an equal chance to become a reader. No wonder communities feel strongly about them."

"In a post-industrial society, there are few jobs which don't demand high level reading skills. Children who use libraries are twice as likely to be above average readers, and Oxford University research shows that 16 year olds who enjoy reading are much more likely to get better jobs. Libraries' superb ability to inspire the next generation to enjoy reading has never been more desperately needed."

Libraries in an increasingly digital world

The way people access information is changing. Universal broadband and e-books provide new challenges for libraries but one which Labour believes they must embrace and national and local government must support.

In a digital world the commitment to the underlying principles of access, guidance and equality of opportunity will need to be more determined than ever. As emerging technology becomes more common, libraries must provide a space in which people can become both digitally literate and can access resources in a digital format.

There have been concerns that libraries may become obsolete as society increasingly shifts to digital formats. This seems unlikely; the underlying principles of a library as a place to freely access knowledge, learning and culture will endure, even if they must evolve. An e-book cannot host a children's reading group, provide a quiet space to study, supply expert help or ensure access to technology for all. But an increasingly digital world demands more systematic and imaginative solutions to the long-term development of the service and a more coherent effort to integrate existing technologies. Access to e-book lending must be included as part of a wider offer of library services. The evolution of technology should not be seen as an opponent to more traditional formats and roles, but rather as a stimulus for libraries to develop in tune with the needs of their communities.

The Role of Library Staff

As libraries evolve and adapt to the changing needs of their communities, the skills of library staff will also need to develop, around a core of professional knowledge. The contribution of librarians is often greatly under-valued. Their role remains vital and with the proliferation of information sources, the diversification of the work of libraries and the need to forge new relationships with communities and beyond, it has the potential to be broader and more valuable than ever.

Libraries working together

Labour believes the potential of libraries must be realised in the first place by local authorities, with strong collaboration and support from national government. Given the wide array of services libraries can provide for our communities, Labour also believes that there is a good case for a dedicated body to support development, innovation and best practice – including measures to find efficiency savings and increase impact, helping lessen the pressure for cuts to services. This idea was backed by 89% of the respondents to Labour's recent library consultation, and it could largely be achieved by re-shaping the existing bodies dealing with libraries and strengthening their mandate, rather than through any significant new bureaucracy.

In October 2011, the Arts Council took over responsibility for supporting and developing libraries from the former Museums, Libraries and Archive Council (MLA). The MLA also had a supervisory role of libraries which the Arts Council does not; this should be addressed by government, either by strengthening the mandate of the Arts Council or by other means. At a time when libraries are withering on the vine in many communities, oversight is more critical than at any time before.

Cross party and organisational working must be at the heart of any potential organisation. The Departments for Education, Health, Culture, Media and Sport, Business, Innovation and Skills and Communities and Local Government all have a role to play, as well as organisations such as The British Library, Booktrust, The Reader Organisation, National Literacy Trust, Arts Council England, CILIP and The Reading Agency.

Desmond Clarke, Library Campaigner and Former Director of Publishing:

"The first priority should be to address the "leadership void" and establish a Library Development Board, possibly within ACE, to provide strategic leadership, to develop a vision for libraries in the 21st Century, to promote best practice and service innovation and to provide powerful advocacy. It must listen to those for whom the service exists to serve."

‘That body must work with and support library authorities to provide the best possible service. In order to succeed, it must have people with the passion, the expertise and the commitment to deliver.’

Developing this agenda

Labour is looking at how we would do things differently if we were in government. As part of the Policy Review we are looking closely at the following areas;

- A concerted effort to engage with councils and help them minimise the impact of cuts on frontline services - for example through a stronger focus on co-location and support for sharing of back-office functions.
- A comprehensive review of the services libraries could offer their communities, and of opportunities for collaboration with other departments and outside bodies.
- Developing a long-term strategy, in partnership with local authorities, to suit an evolving, and increasingly digital, society.
- Developing ways in which libraries can engage with local communities to ensure they are responsive to their needs.
- An organisation working across government and in collaboration with councils to effectively promote better libraries - sharing ideas, encouraging best practice and new partnerships, raising awareness, promoting efficiency, providing advice to ministers and local authority leaders and supporting libraries across England (and also engaging with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).
- National reading and business challenges, and other measures to raise the profile of local libraries and increase usership.
- A clearer and stronger system for oversight and standards, that strikes the right balance between effectiveness and avoiding bureaucratic constraint.

Annie Mauger, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals

‘We welcome this policy document from Labour and their commitment to a forward looking library service that supports people in the Digital Age. Libraries are suffering from a lack of leadership and vision for the future, and some of the cuts that have been made are the result of a lack of understanding about their potential to deliver on key issues for the nation, particularly in terms of literacy and digital literacy.’

"Libraries bring experts in information, knowledge and reading to support communities. We recognise that their role is in rapid flux and change and leadership from government is essential to ensure that they realise their future potential to support a prosperous society."

"We need to see that national vision and strategy for the public library service of the future to articulate how they will work in partnership with other agencies to support local people and to build digital and information literacy, skills and employability."

Case studies: 21st Century Libraries in practice

Manchester: a Libraries renaissance

The Manchester library service is in the process of a major programme of investment, and has seen increases in borrowing and visits. Key elements of its approach include:

- **Community support:** Mike Amesbury, the Councillor formerly responsible for libraries described the plan as a tangible contribution to regeneration, jobs and skills and attracting visitors.
- **An innovative, needs based approach:** Manchester's library strategy is based on responding to local needs and offering other services, as well as core book provision. Libraries have integrated new technologies, providing e-books and using Radio frequency identification (RFID) to reduce costs
- **A "hub and spoke" model:** This recognises the role of smaller, local libraries as well as a large central branch.

Rotherham: 'Imagination' Library

Since 2008 Rotherham's Imagination Library scheme has sent one free book a month to young children enrolled in the scheme.

- As of March 2012 it was reaching some 13,871 children under five, or 86 per cent of the target population in Rotherham. Early indications are that the innovative programme to encourage reading has shown a measurable impact on development.
- At the same time Rotherham has invested in six refurbished or new libraries since 2007, in its own words "an ambitious programme of construction, modernisation, replacement and refurbishment." Under pressure to cut costs it is now closing one library, but only after a careful effort to consult the local community.