

Election questions

You might possibly know there's a general election this year – and quite a few local elections too. Here's a useful pick'n'mix selection of questions to ask candidates – devised by the workshops at the 2014 Speak Up For Libraries conference.

BASICS

Do you use a public library? What for?

Which libraries are you a member of?

How old were you when you took out your first book?

How would you define a public library?

Would you like to see your local library close?

What do you think a public library does?

What do you think a public librarian does?

What is the main purpose of the public library?

PARTY POLITICS

Will you be providing a clear statement/manifesto on public libraries for the election?

What would you do that [the other party] has not done?

What is your doorstep message/elevator pitch for libraries?

What is your action plan to safeguard the future of public libraries?

What is your vision for public libraries?

How much money should be invested in libraries?

What would convince you to invest in public libraries?

Have you considered the wider implications of public library closures?

How would society look in a post-public-libraries world?

What do you think personally, and how does this differ from your official party policy?

FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

In light of how public libraries contribute to the delivery of numerous key government objectives, why isn't the Secretary of State intervening against cuts and closures?

Why are other government departments contributing so little to the work public libraries do to support their priorities?

Why is the government not co-ordinating and publishing information on local cuts and closures?

Why are there no government reviews of the effects of proposed closures?

Why is there no research into the sustainability of volunteer public libraries?

FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

How much of your council's budget is spent on public libraries?

Are you aware of the effect of current cuts on the service to residents?

What can you/we do to influence 'philistine councillors' who don't understand the role of public libraries?

What are you going to do about fictitious council consultations?

CHECKLIST OF EXAMPLES

How do you see public libraries' role in supporting...

- ✓ digital inclusion?
- ✓ community cohesion/activities?
- ✓ literacy and reading?
- ✓ pre-school literacy?
- ✓ school-children?
- ✓ students?
- ✓ teenagers?
- ✓ adult learners (including adult literacy)?
- ✓ public health and mental health?
- ✓ business and the local/national economy?
- ✓ children and families?
- ✓ older people?
- ✓ unemployed people/benefits claimants?
- ✓ deprived areas?
- ✓ arts and culture?
- etc!

PLUS...

Where else will these services be found if public libraries shut?

Why are public libraries seen as a luxury rather than a driver for local and national government priorities?

Do you assume everyone has online access? Even if they do, why should this mean closing public libraries?

ADVANCED QUESTIONS!

Do you want to keep the statutory public library service? If so what do you mean by the phrase?

What alternative do you offer to volunteer libraries?

What would your party do nationally to ensure that localism does not result in a postcode lottery for library services?

What about having national standards for public libraries? (They are still in place in Ireland, Wales and Scotland. Why doesn't England still have them?)

What do you think of the idea of a national Library Development Agency?

Who has the teeth to ensure that library standards are upheld?

Are you aware of all the research evidence in support of public libraries?

How do you expect public libraries to deliver professionally-run services, with a growing range of services, when funds are being cut and many 'libraries' are becoming volunteer-run?

What should the public library service look like in 10, 20 years' time?