



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2019-0188, 9 July 2019

# General Debate on Public Libraries

## Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on public libraries is scheduled for Thursday 11 July 2019 at 1.30 pm. The Member leading the debate is Matt Western MP.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Background

The *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964* requires local authorities in England and Wales to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service”.

“Comprehensive and efficient” are not defined. It is the responsibility of each local authority to determine how to deliver public library services in the context of local need.

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport can order an inquiry where there is concern that a local authority is not fulfilling its duties under the Act. This has not happened since 2009 when an inquiry looked at the library services provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

Concerns about the future of library services are ongoing. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has a [“My Library By Right”](#) campaign.

For further information, see the Library Briefing Paper, [Public libraries](#) (CBP 05875, 20 June 2019). This focuses on libraries in England.

## Wales

For information on libraries in Wales see:

- Welsh Government website, [Libraries](#)
- [Welsh Public Library Standards](#) (March 2018)

## Scotland

In Scotland, local authorities have a duty, under s163(2) of the *Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973*, to “secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area”. For further information see:

- [The Scottish Library and Information Council](#)
- [Ambition & Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020](#)
- MyGov.Scot website, [Public libraries](#)

## Northern Ireland

The public library service is administered by the Northern Ireland Library Authority, known as Libraries NI. The functions of Libraries NI are set out in the [Libraries Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2008](#). For further information on public libraries see the Northern Ireland Executive [website](#).

## 2. Media

### 2.1 Press releases

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

[Libraries lose branches and staff as spending continues to drop](#)

07 December 2018

### 2.2 Articles and blogs

Guardian

[Public libraries are not just about books. At their heart, they are about social equity](#)

10 May 2019

Local Government Association

[Debate on public libraries - House of Commons, 11 July 2019](#)

01 July 2019

Arts Council

By Stephen Bloomfield, Chair of the Libraries Taskforce

29 April 2019

Guardian

[Campaigners warn of 'book poverty' as UK celebrates World Book Day](#)

07 March 2019

Guardian

[The vandals destroying libraries should have the book thrown at them](#)

13 January 2019

Times

[Volunteers left to stack bookshelves as hundreds of libraries are closed](#)

07 January 2019

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Guardian

[Feminist Library saved from closure as supporters raise £35,000](#)

03 January 2019

Guardian

[Closing libraries puts vulnerable new mothers out in the cold](#)

17 December 2018

BBC

[More young people using libraries, study finds](#)

10 April 2017

## 3. Parliamentary Business

### 3.1 Debates

[Public Libraries](#)

HC Deb, 23 May 2019

[Public Libraries](#)

HC Deb, 11 April 2019

[Public Libraries: Northamptonshire](#)

HC Deb, 07 March 2019

[Libraries: Closures](#)

HL Deb, 19 February 2019

[Local Authorities: Essential Services](#)

HL Deb, 24 January 2019, cc842-44

[Public Libraries](#)

HC Deb, 13 December 2018

[Public Libraries: Funding](#)

HC Deb, 06 September 2018

### 3.2 Parliamentary Questions

[Public Libraries: Staff](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent estimate he has made of the number of public libraries operating for all or part of their opening hours without staff.

24 Jun 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 266107

Asked by: Brennan, Kevin | Answered by: Mims Davies | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they are giving to sustaining libraries in England.

09 May 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL15352

Asked by: Lord Kennedy of Southwark | Answered by: Viscount Younger of Leckie | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Mobile Libraries: Finance](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure the adequacy of the level of funding to ensure a mobile library in each local authority area.

29 Apr 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 244094

Asked by: Shannon, Jim | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Public Libraries: Closures](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many libraries have closed in England since 2010.

19 Mar 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL14384

Asked by: Lord Hain | Answered by: Lord Ashton of Hyde | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Business of the House](#)

It is nice that the Leader of the House talks about World Book Day, but 700 libraries have closed since 2010 under this Government. May we have a debate about that, because earlier this week the National Literacy Trust released research showing that a quarter of eight to 18-year-olds now read daily, compared with 43% back in 2015? That is a pretty shocking statistic; is not the loss of our libraries a lot to with that?

07 Mar 2019 | Business questions | House of Commons | 655 c1144

Asked by: Kevin Brennan | Answered by: Andrea Leadsom | The Leader of the House of Commons

### [Public Libraries: Learning Disability](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to ensure that people with learning disabilities are able to access resources in unstaffed libraries.

21 Feb 2019 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 222767

Asked by: Brennan, Kevin | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Topical Questions](#)

You are too kind, Mr Speaker. Essex County Council is preparing to close over a third of libraries in Essex, with three out of five libraries in deprived areas in Harlow at risk of closure. Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the importance of free library services, particularly for the vulnerable and for equality in society and education? Will she talk to Essex County Council and keep our libraries open?

07 Feb 2019 | Topical questions - 1st Supplementary | Answered | House of Commons | 654 c404

Asked by: Robert Halfon | Answered by: Penny Mordaunt | Department: Women and Equalities

### [Mobile Libraries: Disadvantaged](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will take steps to increase the number of library buses in deprived areas.

20 Dec 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 202148

Asked by: Shannon, Jim | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

### [Business of the House](#)

Can we have an urgent statement on protecting public libraries? In a potential act of barbarism and cultural vandalism, Essex County Council is threatening to close libraries in disadvantaged and deprived areas of my constituency of Harlow—a disgraceful decision. These libraries are treasured by the community and schoolchildren as an important place of reading. Will my right hon. Friend work with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and get these cuts reversed?

06 Dec 2018 | Business questions | House of Commons | 650 c1067

Asked by: Robert Halfon | Answered by: Andrea Leadsom | The Leader of the House of Commons

### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether spending on public libraries has fallen for a fifth successive year in 2017–18.

06 Dec 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL11731

Asked by: Lord Shipley | Answered by: Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth |  
Department: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

#### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government whether an audit has been undertaken of library provision in each local authority to assess whether any local authority is now failing to meet statutory requirements in relation to public access; and if so, which authorities are not currently meeting those statutory requirements.

03 Dec 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL11732

Asked by: Lord Shipley | Answered by: Lord Ashton of Hyde |  
Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Finance](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, if he will meet the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to discuss local government funding for libraries and how the library taskforce can support councils to deliver library services.

28 Nov 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons |  
195049

Asked by: Gwynne, Andrew | Answered by: James Brokenshire |  
Department: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

#### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to his Department's document entitled: Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021, published in September 2016, if he will publish the criteria by which his Department assesses whether communities are being provided with safe, welcoming and accessible physical and virtual environments freely open to all.

14 Nov 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons |  
189600

Asked by: Brennan, Kevin | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department:  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Barnet](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what recent assessment he has made of whether Barnet is meeting its statutory requirements under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

14 Nov 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons |  
189599



Asked by: Brennan, Kevin | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department:  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Standards](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what guidance his Department has issued to local authorities on the criteria for a comprehensive and efficient library service.

13 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons |  
171367

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew | Answered by: Michael Ellis |  
Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Northamptonshire](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he plans to take in response to the high court ruling that judged Northamptonshire's bid to close 21 libraries as unlawful.

13 Sep 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons |  
171366

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew | Answered by: Jeremy Wright |  
Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many public libraries have closed since 2010; what action they have taken to ensure that all the services previously provided by those public libraries are provided by other organisations; and what assessment they have made of the national research project conducted by SERIO to explore the service effectiveness and sustainability of community-managed libraries in England the results of which were published on 5 September 2017.

03 Aug 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9871

Asked by: The Marquess of Lothian | Answered by: Lord Ashton of Hyde |  
Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Finance](#)

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to deliver a properly funded and sustainable future for libraries.

03 Aug 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL9768

Asked by: Lord Bird | Answered by: Lord Ashton of Hyde | Department:  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Standards](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will make an assessment of whether local authorities providing unstaffed public libraries using open technology are fulfilling their duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

15 May 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 142903

Asked by: Furniss, Gill | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries: Closures](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Answer of 21 March 2016 to Question 904216 on Public Libraries: Closures, if he will publish the (a) name and (b) location of the 110 libraries that closed between 2010 and 2016.

01 May 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 138390

Asked by: Cooper, Yvette | Answered by: Michael Ellis | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

#### [Public Libraries](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans she has to reintroduce public library standards.

13 Nov 2017 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 111382

Asked by: Brennan, Kevin | Answered by: John Glen | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

## 4. Organisations and further reading

Arts Council Website, [Libraries Taskforce](#), Accessed 9 July 2019

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Twenty-third meeting of the Libraries Taskforce](#), Meeting date: Wednesday 20 March 2019, Published 21 May 2019

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Report under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for 2017/18](#), October 2018

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Corporate report: Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021](#), Updated 28 September 2018

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Analysing data: CIPFA statistics and the future of England's libraries](#), 16 August 2018

Local Government Association, [Delivering local solutions for public library services: a guide for councillors](#), August 2017

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Guidance: Libraries as a statutory service](#), 16 December 2015

CILIP, [My Library By Right: Changes or proposed cuts to library services: what we do](#), 15 December 2015

Department for Culture, Media & Sport, [Independent Library Report for England](#), 18 December 2014

Carnegie Trust UK  
[Future Of Public Libraries](#)

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