



Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
4th Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

020 7211 6000

www.gov.uk/dcms

Lord Collins of Highbury
House of Lords
LONDON SW1A 0PW

CMS 278115/asg
16th February 2016

Dear Ray,

During the Lords Question about Libraries and the Local Government Finance Settlement on 11 February, I undertook to write to you and share information about some of the actions we have taken in relation to particular local library authority areas.

Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (1964 Act), the Secretary of State has a duty to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of their duties under Act. We take these duties very seriously and DCMS carefully monitors developments concerning library services across England.

As you know, the Secretary of State has a statutory power under the 1964 Act to make a remedial order against a library authority following a local inquiry. A local inquiry can be commenced either on receipt of a complaint or of the Secretary of State's own motion. In determining whether to order an inquiry the Secretary of State carefully considers a number of factors, including whether there is any serious doubt or uncertainty as to whether the library authority is (or may cease to be) complying with its legal obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Since 2010 the Secretary of State has considered formal complaints raised relating to the following local authorities in England:

- Brent
- Lewisham
- Bolton
- Isle of Wight
- Newcastle
- Sheffield
- Lincolnshire
- Harrow
- Southampton.



In each of the first six cases the Secretary of State has determined not to intervene and the reasons in each case are set out in the final decision letters. These letters are publicly available on the GOV.UK website. With regard to the remaining local authorities, consideration of the individual complaints is continuing and final decisions will be in announced due course.

DCMS actively engages with representatives of library authorities where proposed changes to library service provision are causing particular concern. Meetings have since 2010 taken place with representatives from numerous local authorities including:

- Gloucestershire
- Somerset
- Doncaster
- Brent
- Bolton
- Lewisham
- Isle of Wight
- Sheffield
- Harrow
- Lambeth
- Southampton.

In addition, officials have engaged with many other authorities, including Lancashire County Council, the subject of last week's question from Lord Greaves, in monitoring the library service provision of local authorities and proposed changes that are proposed. This supports DCMS policy development and oversight of the public library service.

Finally I should add that I have been very impressed by some of the new or modernised libraries I have had the pleasure of visiting in the last few months, for example at Canada Water and in Stafford.

A copy of this letter has been placed in the library of the House.

Warm regards

Lucy

Baroness Neville-Rolfe DBE CMG
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State