

I am here representing the Progressive Librarians Guild–London Chapter, a group of students and professionals in this city who advocate on behalf of librarians, and we are concerned about the proposed freeze of London Public Library’s budget.

Although we have some Londoners among us, most of us are from other cities or provinces, and we would like to share how important the London Public Library has been to us as new Londoners.

The London Public Library is where we connect with our community and the people in it, where we learn more about the city.

We have access to a great university library, but we love LPL and heavily rely on it. Of course we take out books, but beyond that, the library also functions as our study space, as our community space, as our gateway into a new city. We’ve learned about the city in the London room and found community events through bulletin boards. We’ve met colleagues over coffee and we’ve printed out resumes. You may not realize how few places there are like this in the city. Name another place that promotes educational accessibility, encourages social gatherings to build personal and professional skill sets, and serves all community members without discrimination, and all of this is done for free.

LPL adds something intangible—whether a connection to the community, a new friend, or a new skill set—to our lives, ultimately improving them and giving us a sense that we live somewhere great. The library adds something that isn’t there, something that can’t be reduced to numbers or money.

I can’t understand why council would make such a short sighted decision. A small amount of money can make a big difference. Weekend hours are important. In the city where I lived before London, there were only limited Saturday hours in the summer, and evening hours only once a week. It wasn’t consistently there so it was effectively not there. I rarely went.

This is what I mean when I say that a small reduction in hours can lead to a massive change.

Furthermore, reducing hours and the quality of the library’s collection will lead to reduced usage, which given the council’s current fixation, I imagine will be used to justify a continued freeze in the future.

It's clear from the Library's presentation (and Friends of the London Public Library) that the library is excellent value for money. It's clear that the library is part of what makes this a great city. It's clear that the library is a necessary institution in London.

So please don't freeze the LPL budget. Don't choose this path. LPL does so much with the resources they are given, imagine what they could do if they had better resources, if they did not have to fight tooth and nail for every dollar.

Choose the library and choose community. Choose a vibrant city and an open, inclusive space.