

Havens and Libraries

A woman and a man, both wearing puppets, are seated at a white desk. The woman on the left wears a pink hat, a red beanie, and a yellow and white checkered shirt. The man on the right wears a brown hat and a brown and white checkered shirt. They are positioned in front of a large window with a blue frame. The desk is cluttered with various items, including a pink box, a black bag, and some papers. A small potted plant is visible on the windowsill.

Pictured above as ""Wombles" Madame Cholet and Bungo, are Catherine "Lady False" Faulks, RBKC Lead Member for Economy, Employment and Innovstion – and on the right, David Fletcher, businessman (more about him in a bit) .

But that's enough of that... About all that Faulks and Fletcher really have in common with Wombles is that they too are rather odd creatures.

If anyone hasn't heard of David Fletcher before they will have now. Mr Fletcher is a successful businessman from Wimbledon who runs "Wimbletech" CIC and is behind "The Workary" – a chain of shared workspace hubs. The Workary are based in several locations both in and just outside greater London, including Kensington, Chelsea and Brompton locally. What is worrying, is that our Council appear to be giving Mr Fletcher and his organisation special privileges to use some of our Council premises free of rates at the expense of others, and what is also concerning, is that they appear to be in the act of hiding this from the public. Furthermore, we have reason to believe RBKC's rather cosy relationship with Mr Fletcher poses a threat to the future of our public Libraries. We also have some further information on Libraries and private interests, that will be alarming to many...

First of all, over to our friends at fellow Kensington blog [From The Hornets Nest](http://fromthehornetsnest.blogspot.com/?m=1) (<http://fromthehornetsnest.blogspot.com/?m=1>):

"Dame, thank you for allowing me to put my position. I thank 'Surveyor' for his lucid analysis of how Council favouritism has more or less put me out of business.

Cllr Faulks makes this claim, *"We are here to help support our businesses and self-employed during this unprecedented time"*

That claim rings hollow.

Cllr Faulks was persuaded by this successful entrepreneur, David Fletcher, to use council properties free of Business Rates and at below-market rents. He is a lucky man.....

On the other hand, the Council expects me to run a competitive business whilst paying £25,000 a year in Business Rates and a full market rent for a prime location. Even though I charge very little I am unable to compete with the Council's business partner, The Workary.

As a result twenty-five of my long term co-working tenants have had to leave. One asked Faulks what he should do... she recommended another co-working office!

Her other bizarre advice was that I should adjust my rates to compete with the Workary...and she is supposed to understand business?

Justin Downes"

Here is what "Surveyor", the respondent to the blog, wrote back:

"I wonder if it would help to look at this dispassionately and to try to look at the numbers, so far as they are available.

To make a rationally based judgement, we really need some more numbers (like what rent Workary are paying the Council) Perhaps the Dame could ask Councillor Lady Faulks to respond with a reasoned and factual response?

The facts so far as we know them. Mr Downes is saddled with non-domestic rates of about £25,000 a year.

A hefty burden for a small business.

The Chelsea Library Complex is rated at £120,000.

It is many times the size of Mr Downs' small office of about 120 square metres, but benefits from a favourable treatment as a public library.

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So, it pays non-domestic rates of about £60,000 a year.

Less than two and a half times the rates that Mr Downes pays for a building many, many times larger.

It would appear that the Workary is not paying rates at all.

Why is this? It is because public libraries benefit from a special rating concession. The Council seems to have passed this benefit on to the Workary.

If anyone wants to look this up, see the Rating Manual for Valuation Officers Section 6 Part 3, Section 620.

This concession has caused problems when a local authority, for example, delegates the Library function.

In this case, the Serviced Office provided by Workary, should have been assessed by the Valuation Officer as a separate hereditament and as a commercial enterprise.

You would have expected the Council to inform the Valuation Officer of the situation and to arrange for a separate entry to go into the List.

If this has not been done, it should be corrected as soon as possible, and back rates paid either by the Council or the Workary Business.

I am not sure what happens at Workary's other branches, but the situation is likely to be the same. So, what about the Workary and why is the Council giving them what appears to be such a 'sweetheart' deal, that is putting the competition out of business?

The pitch is that it is offering space to young entrepreneurs starting out in life and to not-for-profit organisations.

This is a fiction.

The Workary is a highly successful large business established by David Fletcher some few years ago.

It has numerous branches and is far from the 'pitch' for if you look at its website it boasts that its services are available to people who are part of big companies, freelancers or just getting started (comes last in the blurb!)

So, it looks as if the Council are living in a parallel universe and totally unwilling to accept that it is subsidising a commercial business that is putting its own local businesses out of business. This is what appears to be the position, but please Dame, ask Councillor Lady Faulks to respond."

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On a website, called "Stop the Privatisation of our Libraries", THINKers found this:

David Fletcher, the founder of Wimbletech CIC (<http://www.wimbletech.com/>), was on radio recently talking about why libraries matter. Wimbletech, based in Wimbledon Library, and their library spin-off 'The Workary' rent out desk space to entrepreneurs. They claim that they want to work with local councils to transform "under-utilized library space" and to "help libraries increase revenues, footfall, awareness & relevance" They are at this very moment sniffing around the burning embers of a once proud Barnet library service, so just another SocEnt cashing in on the crisis facing public libraries? For arguments against renting out once public library space to entrepreneurs read me and others in a recent Bookseller article (<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/forest-hill-starts-renting-desk-space-576116>), re Forest Hill Community Library which by the way is leased and co-run by V22 (<http://colouringinculture.org/blog/v22transnationalartwashing>), an offshore arts org!

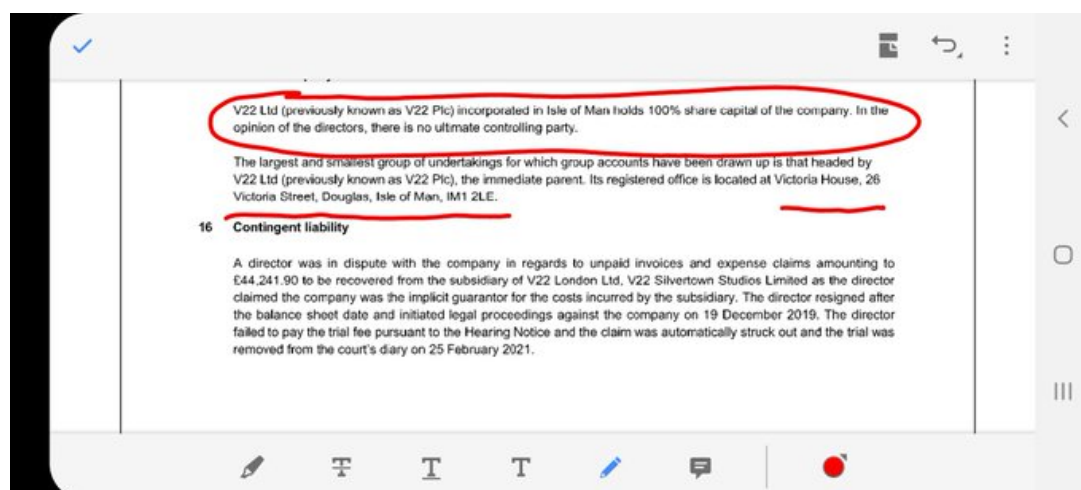
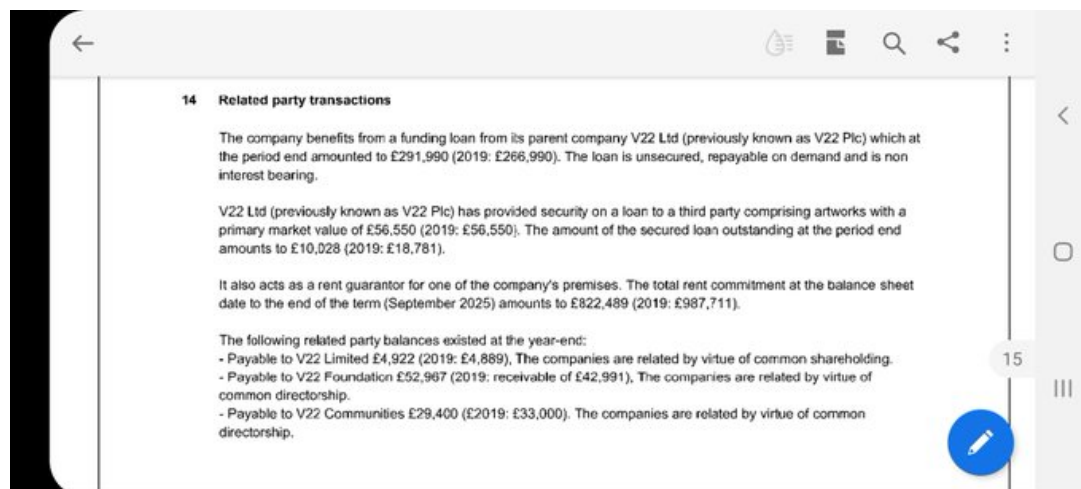
Wimbledon? Lewisham? Public subsidy misused? Wealthy businesspersons with offshore tax havens? Taking over public libraries?

While we are not suggesting that Mr Fletcher's chain is part of V22 Collection at all – the Privatisation of our public libraries and the funnelling of public money from local authorities into successful private firms is highly concerning to say the least. We'll just highlight some further reasons for our concern:

We looked into V22 who appear to be based in Lewisham (so some of us may wonder if our Chief Exec and former Lewisham Chief Exec Dr Barry Quirk knows of them):

<https://www.v22collection.com/communities/> (<https://www.v22collection.com/communities/>).

But rather than Lewisham or Wimbledon, V22 appears to be registered in the Isle of Man .



In fact, the interests and activities of V22 CEO, Tara Cranswick and her colleagues may be based much further afield, possibly exploiting natural resources, as well as having possible vested interests tied up in property and tax avoidance. How many others?? Here is the excellent must-read blog Colouring In Culture with some very interesting further information on Ms Cranswick and her organisation:

COLOURING IN CULTURE ([HTTPS://COLOURINGINCUL TURE.ORG/](https://colouringinculture.org/))

STEPHEN PRITCHARD

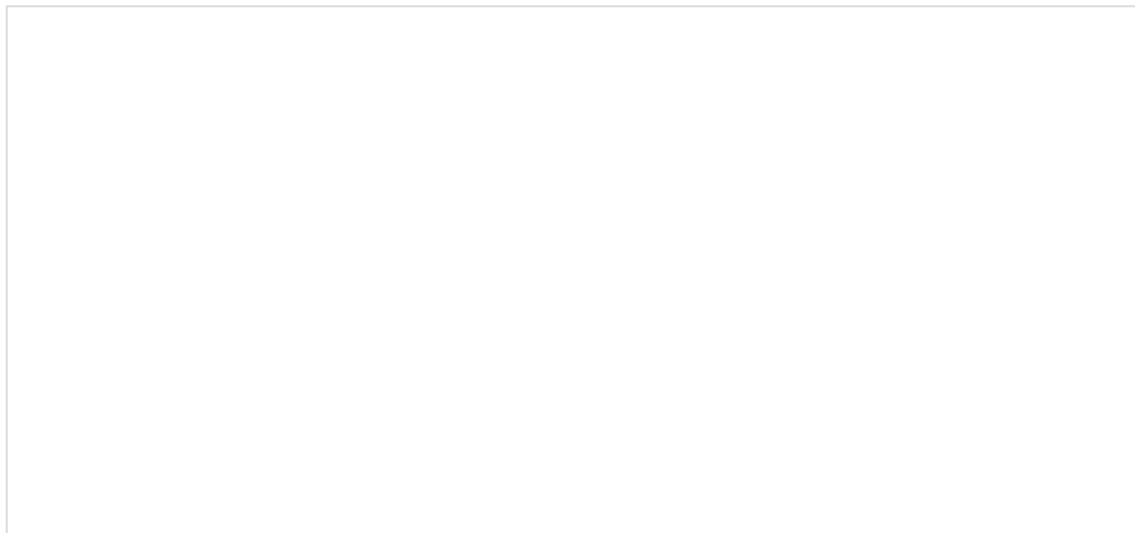
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dilemma**

**([https://colouringinculture.org
/blog/complexwebsofartinvesto
rs/](https://colouringinculture.org/blog/complexwebsofartinvestors/))**

Posted on 📅 March 30, 2017

(<https://colouringinculture.org/blog/complexwebsofartinvestors/>)

by STEPHEN PRITCHARD (<https://colouringinculture.org/author/colour36bg/>)



Back to RBKC and we didn't find much on the Council website; which only shows that our Council is rather reluctant to share any information on Mr Fletcher, his colleagues and use of our public money, resources and any special privileges he and his non- local organisations may or may not be receiving – totally unacceptable. This is most of what THINKers attempting to look papers and meetings up were greeted with:



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All we could find on the RBKC website about David Fletcher and his company – were this – from papers from a meeting of the RBKC Childrens and Family Services Scrutiny Committee, dated 10th of May 2017:

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations under Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

3 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 March 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 PROVISION OF CO-WORKING HUBS IN LIBRARIES (THE WORKARY) AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Mr David Fletcher was introduced by Mr Clarke and gave a presentation on the Workary and his journey towards founding affordable co-working spaces in London.

Mr Fletcher was asked how they make space at the Workary for people on the waiting list. Mr Fletcher responded that nobody was forced out, but as it is a provision for start-ups, members tend to grow out of the space.

In response to a question about the success rate of start-ups in these spaces, Mr Fletcher estimated it was about 2 to 3 times higher than in other similar spaces.

Mr Clarke explained that they had brought Mr Fletcher to Scrutiny as they were hoping that there would be potential to expand his provision in the Borough by bringing him into more places. The Committee were supportive of this and encouraged Mr Fletcher to liaise with property in order to find more space.

Mr Fletcher wants the CIC to grow and have a bigger impact. He will be hosting a 200-people event for NEETs which will offer them free spaces in the Workary. Officers to pass this information onto EPIC CIC, as they may wish to get in touch with Mr Fletcher about his work with NEETs.

Action by: Miss Fairhead

Cllr Lindsay thanked Mr Fletcher for his talk and his work in the Borough.

5 REPORT ON CHILDREN NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (NEET) AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Mr Heggs introduced the report. He corrected a typo in the report at 2.14 - the NEET/not known figure is to be reduced to below 4.0% by October 2017, rather than 40%.

Here's who the Deputy Chair of that Council Committee was at the time:

A meeting of the Family and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee held at Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London W8 7NX at 6.30pm on 10 May 2017

PRESENT

Members of the Committee

Councillor David Lindsay (Chairman)

Councillor Catherine Faulks (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Anne Cyron

Councillor Bevan Powell

Councillor Mohammed Bakhtiar

Councillor James Husband

Councillor Harrison Littler

Councillor Sarah Addenbrooke

Co-opted voting Members

Why it's Lady False again- what a coincidence!

We'd also like to know if Tony Redpath and Richard "The Bogeyman" Egan are still in Council employment? Maybe this is why these documents are being hidden from us. They were supposed to have resigned after their shady dealings regarding KCC and Wornington College. While the Kroll Report may have exonerated RBKC from any wrongdoing over that, we'll just share these Grenfell Action Group blogs from back in 2016 and 2017 so our readers can decide for themselves:

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2016/07/24/rbkc-and-their-private-business-deal/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2016/07/24/rbkc-and-their-private-business-deal/>).

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/01/22/save-wornington-college/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/01/22/save-wornington-college/>).

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/02/03/when-they-go-low-we-go-foi/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/02/03/when-they-go-low-we-go-foi/>).

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/03/24/redpath-holgate-and-brickley/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/03/24/redpath-holgate-and-brickley/>).

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/kcc-board-coming-apart-at-the-seams/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/04/10/kcc-board-coming-apart-at-the-seams/>).

<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/wornington-college-the-smoking-gun/>
(<https://grenfellactiongroup.wordpress.com/2017/05/17/wornington-college-the-smoking-gun/>).

We ask about Redpath and Egan because they are supposed to have left RBKC ages ago, but they are mentioned recently.



<https://www.webtest.rbkc.gov.uk> › ...

Notice of Meeting - Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

7 Jul 2021 — Tony Redpath, RBKC's Director for Strategy & Local Services; ... Workary” to an organisation whose work has a positive social impact on ...



<https://www.webtest.rbkc.gov.uk> › ...

Notice of Meeting - Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

7 Jul 2021 — 113 Exhibit 72, Email from Mr. Richard Egan, F The Isaac Newton ... Workary” to an organisation whose work has a positive social impact on ...

All our attempts to look into whether they are still here only got this again :



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“NEET” stands for “not in education, employment or training”, but RBKC aren’t helping people to get out of such situations if they happen to be giving public money and benefits to wealthy people who don’t need it, at the real cost to others who are struggling to get by. Our residents have already suffered steep rises in council tax, business rates and rent as it is. Most “NEETs” certainly do not have disposable income to hire workspaces and study spaces so we would hope that anyone with a genuine concern for them, wouldn’t have vested interests or potentially would be in the act of ever taking away what precious free public study space there is left.

Until Grenfell, RBKC had been set to lease North Kensington Library to Notting Hill Prep School. This was one of the unpopular plans of former disgraced Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Property, “Jailhouse Rock” Feilding-Mellen.

Thankfully (and thanks to the campaigning of Friends of North Kensington Library) it has been saved for community use.

But what about the future of our other Libraries?? See our blog from back in February on Kensal Library:

<https://thisisnorthkensington.wordpress.com/2021/02/01/rbkc-consultation-and-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-kensal-library/> (<https://thisisnorthkensington.wordpress.com/2021/02/01/rbkc-consultation-and-the-beginning-of-the-end-for-kensal-library/>).

So we are concerned that RBKC may well be having a “love-in” with David Fletcher, Wimbletech and The Workary, for the purpose of having them as for “partner” for privatising the use of our other libraries.

It certainly looks like it – and if not Mr Fletcher and his firm then some other private company or interest:



Trellick Tower and Edenha... · 8h ...
Can you just reopen the library?



Royal Borough of K... · Oct 19

We're continuing our search for a partner to share the space at Kensal Library 📖

If you represent a community organisation looking for a base in North Kensington, why not take a look?



rbkc.gov.uk/newsroom/conti...



Any resident parents living near Golborne Road who may have been hoping to introduce their children to the delights of Elisabeth Beresford's Wombles books or DVDs of the classic childrens' TV programme at their local Library will be in for disappointment as Kensal Library is closed today and is closed a lot of the time – all the while RBKC isn't exactly making much of an effort to fund it properly and reopen as normal.

Kensal Library is a small but fully disabled accessible local Library in Golborne Ward – the Council ward with the highest levels of social deprivation, so RBKC are not exactly helping NEETs or anyone else who is disadvantaged, as whether the Library remains closed or whether it is run or part-run by Fletcher and co or other private interests, they would be taking away quiet study space as well as general Library space from people in the poorest part of the borough, where it is most obviously needed – as obviously more residents there live in cramped, noisy or overcrowded accommodation.

Local residents there most certainly aren't too happy about their Library being closed – this is from Twitter a couple of months ago:



Florrie May @florriemay61 · 1h



Replying to @RBKC

Open the library now.

How dare you repeat your attempts to deprive North Kensington of basic provision of libraries?

Repeating past failures.



Clare Slaney @clareslaney · 1h



Replying to @RBKC

Just. Fund. The. Library.



The RBKC Cabinet Member responsible for Libraries? Surprise surprise, Lady False again!

Cllr Catherine Faulks is responsible for:

- Supporting COVID-19 response and recovery
- Economic development, employment and skills
- Policy for street markets and street trading
- Local labour market and supply chain strategies
- Sustainability of high streets and retail
- Social enterprise
- Apprenticeship within the council, local partners and suppliers
- Alternative career pathways for residents 16+
- Further and adult education, skills and employability
- Library services

Talking of Cllr Faulks' decisions, it's also questionable for her to be responsible for "supporting Covid-19 response and recovery" when she goes and does a daft thing like this:

<https://thisisnorthkensington.wordpress.com/2021/12/08/catherine-faulks-not-leading-by-example-again/> (<https://thisisnorthkensington.wordpress.com/2021/12/08/catherine-faulks-not-leading-by-example-again/>).

We remind this Council that our poorest and most vulnerable residents do not have the money to pay for any sort of workspace/study space at all and of their studies suffering as a consequence. The writers of this blog are part of Friends of North Kensington Library, we campaigned to save it and we will strongly resist any attempt by RBKC to close and/or privatise any of our other Libraries in this borough – they are valuable community assets, much-needed quiet spaces, meeting places and hubs of lifelong learning that are free to all. It should not be regarded a questionable investment by this Council to fund them properly.

We also hope our local councillors do read the Colouring In Culture article as this should serve as a potential warning about getting "private partners" involved and questionable investments as to where the money may end up going..


Whatever the case, if depriving our residents of Libraries well as affecting other residents who run workspace firms with the use of our own money, wasn't outrageous enough, what sort of interests and firms and persons we could all end up really subsidising as a result is truly alarming. Our special thanks go to Stephen Pritchard of the Colouring In Culture blog for alerting us to this – we certainly weren't going to get any responses from RBKC – the borough that now pretends FOI requests don't exist....

If Cllr Faulks and RBKC are genuinely not in the act of unfairly giving favourable benefits to certain workspace providers above others, if they are not in the act of looking to privatise or part-privatise our Libraries, they're not exactly doing anything to convince us otherwise. We demand and deserve answers.

Posted in [North Kensington](#) Tagged [Catherine Faulks](#), [Colouring In Culture](#), [David Fletcher](#), [From The Hornets Nest](#), [Grenfell Action Group](#), [Kensal Library](#), [Lewisham](#), [North Kensington](#), [RBKC](#), [Richard Egan](#), [Tara Cranswick](#), [The Workary](#), [Tony Redpath](#), [V22 Collective](#), [Wimbledon](#)

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