

THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

SUPPORTING FRIENDS AND USERS OF LIBRARIES



WINTER 2020
No. 100



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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN – AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

To advance the lifelong education of the public by the promotion, support, assistance and improvement of public libraries through the activities of friends and user groups.



The Library Campaign

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THE LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

maintains a

FREE LIST

of local

FRIENDS AND USER GROUPS

with their contact details, on our website.

If you know of a new (or old!) group that is not on our list, please notify:

thelibrarycampaign@gmail.com



As usual, we've sent you an extra copy of this magazine. Please take the time to pass it on, or place it somewhere people will see it...

ELECTED OFFICERS

Laura Swaffield London

Andrew Coburn Essex

MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Geoffrey Dron Bolton

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The following organisations send representatives to attend steering group meetings:

Unison,

Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals (CILIP).

WHO'S WHO?

Quick guide to some of the many things relevant to libraries ...

1964 Act (Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964) says all local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a public library service, which must be 'comprehensive and efficient' and available to all who wish to use it. Libraries are NOT optional. It gives the Secretary of State power to enquire – and intervene – if standards fall short. These powers have barely been used.

ACE (Arts Council England) now has 'responsibility for supporting and developing libraries'. As yet unclear what that means in practice.

CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals): the professional body for librarians in all types of library.

CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy) collects figures on library performance and on user satisfaction.

MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government): the central government department responsible for local government. It provides most of local councils' funding. It does not determine how much of it is spent on libraries.

DCMS (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport): sets central government's policy on libraries (among other things), but does not fund them. It is headed by the Secretary of State, with one minister more directly responsible for libraries (among other things).

LGA (Local Government Association) lobbies on behalf of local government. Does some useful work on public libraries, but ultimately sides with councils, not library users.

MLA (Museums, Libraries & Archives Council): ACE's predecessor.

NLT (National Literacy Trust): charity 'dedicated to building a literate nation' – which includes promoting reading for pleasure. Huge source of information, campaigns and projects.

LIBRARIES CONNECTED (formerly Society of Chief Librarians) advises LGA on libraries. Does a lot of useful work, including research and resources, but tends to stick to 'quiet diplomacy'.

UNISON: the trade union for most public library staff. Good research and promotional materials.

TRA (The Reading Agency): charity to develop reading, especially via libraries. Dozens of projects to promote books, especially to key groups like children, reluctant readers, ethnic minorities etc.

Taskforce (the Leadership for Libraries Taskforce): set up and funded by the DCMS to lead development following the Sieghart report 2014.

Serious lessons from lockdown

Our cover picture – from Suffolk libraries – shows a versatile librarian and a whole new dimension to reaching people online. Public libraries can be proud of the way they coped with what we now have to call ‘the first lockdown’.

Most local services developed their online resources – despite many obstacles including (of course) lack of time and money. Most also kept up human contact with vulnerable users. That was every bit as important.



The national organisations were also impressive. Libraries Connected, for instance: pushed the government to make up its mind whether libraries were to close or not; co-ordinated extensive guidance on safety and re-opening; negotiated deals with e-publishers to make available their usually paid-for content; ran online conferences for librarians.

Unfortunately, it all has to happen all over again. Arguably, several more times.

It's good, then, that research on the lockdown experience has also been produced – with admirable speed.

Here it's time to sober up and look at the darker side. Two key reports (pp 31-35) both agree that libraries did well – but could have done very much more.

They need councils that understand, and support, what they do. They need funds. They (like other public services) should not have been senselessly cut for 10 years. And they can't go on making bricks without straw, just because they've managed it once.

The reports – and several others – also agree on another key issue. Lockdown exposed as never before the plight of millions who are not online at home. People lost out badly – from isolated older people to schoolkids falling hopelessly behind, from harassed parents of small children, to people suddenly needing to claim benefits, and many more...

And, it's also agreed, the answer isn't just to give people a connection (not that the magic money tree has yet been used for this eminently good value investment). They need a skilled human being to help them make real sense of it.

IT access is just one of the many societal problems illuminated by the pandemic. The virus thrives on inequality. A medical miracle would be nice. But we must still deal with over-crowding, poverty, ill-health, dangerous misinformation, loneliness, domestic abuse, workers who can't afford time off... the list goes on.

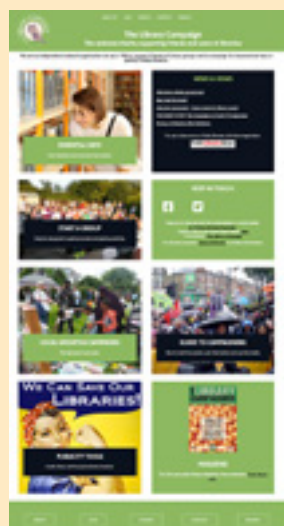
Libraries do more than their fair share to plug these gaps in society. Advice and support, books, IT access, human contact, a quiet place... another list to fill in. It's time libraries were properly recognised for all they do. And properly paid.

Councils are now under unprecedented pressure to make cuts. But public libraries are more vital than ever. Campaigners need to make that point.

And we need to head off ill-advised ideas such as closing physical buildings, making services online-only, replacing skilled staff with volunteers.

None of these ideas has ever made sense. The bitter lessons of lockdown have made this more obvious than ever.

We need all possible tools to protect libraries in these tough times. At TLC we have revised and updated our advice and information resources. And we have had an extensive re-design of our website – to make it easier to find those resources, and to make it easier for new campaigners to find us in the first place.
<http://www.librarycampaign.com>



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Carnegie UK Trust finds that libraries provided a fantastic service during lockdown. But, given the chance, they could do so much more...

33 CREATIVE RE-THINK NEEDED

Libraries Connected has a similar message. Libraries want to continue meeting new needs without neglecting the core services that people value as much as ever. It will be a challenge.

36 **JOIN US!** The more TLC grows, the stronger we get.

UNISON launches £10bn campaign

Librarians' union UNISON has launched a '£10 Billion Bailout' campaign. Sarah Pearce, assistant national officer for libraries, says:

Our Save Our Services campaign is run by UNISON members for UNISON members – and we have a plan to stop cuts to local services.

As lockdowns and tighter restrictions return, and we face a major recession and increased infections, our public library service is more at risk than ever.

While all our essential services are at risk – bin collection and recycling, care for the elderly, public health, child protection, road maintenance, buses – libraries are too often seen as an easy target.

This year, local authorities are facing an enormous funding gap, particularly in deprived areas where councils have been subject to even harsher cuts. In England alone, councils face a shortfall of £10bn.

In the fight against Covid-19, councils increased their spending to deliver food to the most vulnerable, support social care providers, get rough sleepers off the street and administer track-and-trace.

All this was achieved while crucial revenue from business rates dried up. Parking fees, planning fees and income from leisure services have been lost too.

After ten years of cuts, libraries were already stretched. Now councils face a stark funding crisis just as the need for their services increases.

Unless there is more funding from the government, your council will have to make impossible choices: fewer libraries or less money

for children's social care? fund refuse services or licensing services? public health or support for local businesses?

These are choices no-one should have to make. All our local services are vital to a healthy, vibrant, happy and educated community.

As it stands, the only way council budgets will break even this year is if councils delve deeper into their reserves – money put away for dire emergencies – or by cutting local services and jobs. And libraries are likely to be near the top of the queue for cuts. We can't let this happen.

We must make sure that when Covid-19

Typical of the campaign is Northamptonshire, where council mismanagement devastated – among other things – library staff and services [Campaigner no 96, pp8-9]. UNISON East Midlands is running a campaign and petition 'to highlight the value of high-quality community services and the importance of retaining the staff who deliver them'. It fears a coming reorganisation will just be 'a cloak for cuts'.

<https://eastmidlands.unison.org.uk/campaigns/northamptonshire-needs-work>

becomes a memory, libraries that have had to temporarily shut can open their doors once again.

CILIP slams govt information & library cuts

CILIP has issued a sharp call to the government to get its information act together. It also has strong words about government attitudes to education, and to public libraries.

CILIP concedes that Covid-19 has 'no easy answers'. But, it adds, 'we believe that an effective public policy response must be driven first and foremost by the informed and non-partisan use of the best available evidence.'

It wants government 'and all political stakeholders to commit to the open and transparent use of data to drive key decisions, and to publish the basis of those decisions in a way that is independently-verifiable'.

The latest lockdown rules, it fears, 'are driven more by politics and public opinion than evidence or strategy...'

'The circumstances demand a collective effort on the part of the public, public authorities and the media to avoid spreading disinformation about the virus.'

'We urge the government to work with CILIP to bring forward a public programme of support for health, digital and information literacy, so that individual citizens can be empowered to make informed choices about their own welfare and the safety of those around them.'

This 'could deliver very significant benefits by enabling the public to make better and more effective use of health services'.

Face-to-face education has positive benefits

'where this can be achieved safely'. But it may be 'inconsistent' with limiting infections.

'We would welcome clarification as to why, if the risk is considered too severe for staff in retail and other establishments, it is considered appropriate to retain staff in educational establishments, particularly when so much effort has gone into creating digital alternatives.'

CILIP welcomes lockdown rules that permit English public libraries to maintain key services – if it's done safely. This recognises libraries as 'essential services', especially for online access.

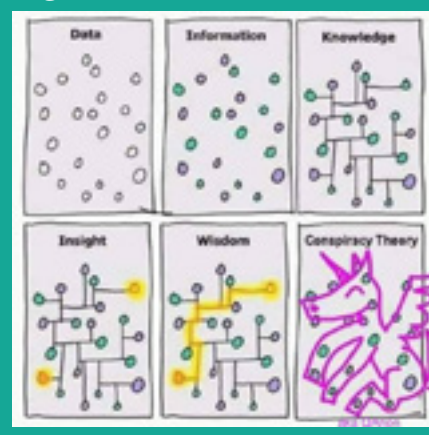
'We believe it is vital that this recognition translates into real political buy-in and investment in the years ahead.'

'Libraries [could] have done even more had they not been systematically under-funded during the past 10 years.'

How can you help?

- ▶ We need every library lover, and every UNISON member, to email their local MP to demand the £10 billion local authorities so desperately need. One easy step here: <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/65995/action/?locale=en-GB>
- ▶ You can also sign the petition to tell the government you support UNISON's £10 Billion Bailout campaign: <https://action.unison.org.uk/page/63837/petition/1>

Sign for our times...



The campaigning goes on...



As yet there are only hints of the bad news to come. But some bad ideas about library services already have a long history.

So, hats off to some of the campaigners who have kept going through rain, lockdown and council intransigence...

SOLE (Save Our Libraries Essex) staged a relay walk through every library in the county – handing on a copy of Michael Rosen’s beloved *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*. It ended with a socially distanced demo in Chelmsford.

Now they are battling Essex County Council’s constantly emerging bright ideas to try to make its ill-thought-out plans work somehow.

These include cramming a Post Office pod into

one small library, and handing over another to a college. [The story so far is told in *The Campaigner* no 97 pp 9-10 and 98 pp 8-11].

Sheffield’s twin campaigns, SCALP (Sheffield Communities Against Library Privatisation) and Sheffield Libraries SOS, have turned to technology. They continue the dogged fight to return the city’s woefully-performing volunteer libraries to council control, attending online council meetings, holding Zoom meetings for campaigners and engaging individual councillors via Twitter.

Now there’s an added campaign to raise heritage funds to restore the empty Tinsley library – a Carnegie library. It is in one of the



city’s worst wards for literacy and educational attainment. Its petition now has hundreds of signatures.

In Hampshire, budget cuts and reductions to opening hours rumble on.

Local campaigners made a good point.

Comparing Covid help

In England, ACE (Arts Council England) provided £150,000 to expand ebook collections. The Welsh government provided an extra £250,000 for ebooks in Welsh library services. Libraries NI invested an additional £783,540 in ebooks. Just saying...

Raise PLR, scrap audio tax!

The Authors’ Licensing & Collecting Society (ALCS) has written to chancellor Rishi Sunak to urge an increase in funding for Public Lending Right (PLR) because of the impact of Covid-19.

The current rate per item loaned is 9.03p (an uplift this year from the previous rate of 8.52p). But this, says ALCS, is ‘still modest, and a reflection of how counting has been affected by the exclusion of the growing number of community run libraries’.

The ALCS also wants an extension to the removal of VAT on e-books to cover audiobooks ‘so that many who enjoy them are not unfairly taxed’.

It adds: ‘We have raised a number of times that support packages, while very welcome, have not always considered the portfolio careers typical to authors and many others in the creative workforce.’

From the BL to your home

As libraries have had to pause public events, the British Library has launched a website to keep up its Living Knowledge Network events. Anyone can access the events free in real time (and ask questions or leave comments), or catch up with them via its archive section. There is a huge range.

Among the varied topics – past, present or future – are: Gloria Steinem in conversation; Sylvia Pankhurst; the Forward Prize for Poetry 2020; David Olusoga on *Black History Matters*; Malorie Blackman on her writing career; Chris Riddell on his new *Alice in Wonderland*; and panels of authors discussing anything from white supremacy to graphic novels. <http://living-knowledge-network.co.uk>



Happy, healthy, together

Suffolk libraries have done a great job of proving their worth. Every service needs to do this...

'For every £1 invested into the Suffolk Libraries programmes, £8.04 is returned in social value created.' This dramatic statement heads up a substantial (56 pages) piece of research¹ which has now been condensed into a more digestible 13-page version – just in time to record the extra value that was shown during lockdown.

The original, published last year, did not look at loans or digital resources. It focused purely on community activities.

National accountancy practice Moore Kingston Smith are experts in the obscure art of measuring social value. Their study focused on just three regular drop-in sessions, all run weekly in several branches:

Top Time (for older people), Baby Bounce/Tot Rock and Open Space (a more general session for 'anyone').

They measured the effects on attenders, their families – and the NHS. They managed to identify 37 'outcomes', ranging from reduced stress to fewer medication muddles.

The ones with 'highest social value' were: literacy skills for children, improved wellbeing for parents, improved mental health and social networks (Open Space) and increased happiness (Top Time).

For details of the eye-watering methodology used to put a price on all this, see the report. But the results were simple: £284,000 saved for the NHS and, yes, £8.04 back for every £ spent (in a meticulous calculation costing everything from staff pension cover to the tea and biscuits).

And that's from just three of Suffolk's many activities. It's a very, very solid piece of work, as it needs to be.

This year Suffolk decided to build on it to produce a shorter, more user-friendly read (in collaboration with Suffolk Mind).² This could, of course, have been bad timing. Lockdown wiped out all those library activities. But Suffolk was able to take this on.

It added in some impressive numbers about the 'dramatic' increase in use of its digital resources. Plus some heart-warming facts about the service's rapid move into human support, from food deliveries to phone-calls.

Top of the list has to be the Ipswich staff who recorded an entire out-of-print book to cheer up a lady aged 102. She was 'absolutely amazed by the kindness of them'. This story sparked coverage by local press and the BBC. Later, head of service Krystal Vittles used the findings for a Guardian article.³

Suffolk libraries comments: 'Like all organisations, we had to learn how to adapt to a 'new world' and find new ways to reach out to our communities to keep them connected and supported.

'Given our focus on wellbeing, and our understanding of the issues surrounding social isolation, we recognised that there was an opportunity – and a need – to offer new services and think outside the box.'

There's also a need to shout about it.



¹ <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/assets/pdf/suffolk-libraries-a-predictive-impact-analysis.pdf>

² Creating positive wellbeing & making lives better: <https://pensive-goldstine-d5dabz.netlify.app/pdf/Suffolk-Libraries-Making-Life-Better.pdf>

³ buff.ly/3dZ0qSR

All photos are by Suffolk libraries.

Human connectivity is what we need

Kira Allmann gives an update on the digital divide – and points out that just giving ‘access’ is not enough. She is co-leader of the Oxfordshire Digital Inclusion Project, a research project looking at the role of public libraries in closing the digital divide



In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the internet has been celebrated as the answer to myriad challenges resulting from the strict nationwide measures.

With shops and restaurants shuttered and millions of people working and studying from home, more of our everyday lives is taking place online than ever before.

It's a fact we seem to have accepted unproblematically, a happy relief made possible by the historical coincidence of facing a pandemic in the digital age. But the current crisis is exposing a widening gap between digital 'haves' and 'have-nots.'

And what's been missing from many of the conversations around digital inequality during lockdown is the immense importance of shared public spaces and human connectivity in closing the digital divide.

PRECARIOUS

For those of us already accustomed to the seamless interweaving of our online and offline lives, broadband providers in the UK promised that their networks could meet the demand of more schooling, working, and playing at home in response to pandemic mitigation strategies.

We also know that higher-paid jobs offer more opportunities for telework, and students in low income families face a widening 'homework gap' because they can't complete work online.

To address the needs of more precarious internet users, the government reached agreements with UK telecom companies to lift data caps on broadband plans, forgive or defer unpaid broadband bills during the crisis, and offer lower-cost mobile and landline packages.

But if we read between the headlines, we can clearly see the limits of these plans to

democratise internet access.

Most of them assume that access occurs in the home, and that users have attained a level of digital literacy that allows them to participate fully in a digital-only or majority-digital world.

Today, 6.6% of homes in England and Wales still don't have a decent fixed internet connection. An estimated 5 million Britons don't use the internet at all.

2019 MANIFESTOS

While those of us with high-speed connections are jostling for adequate bandwidth to stream unlimited high-definition video, many people in Britain remain totally or practically unconnected due to lack of access or lack of digital literacy (or both).

Their right to connectivity seems to be finding its way into public policy a little too late.

Last year 'Broadband for all!' was an unexpected rallying cry for equality in the UK's general election.

In fact, the 2019 manifestos of all three major parties included ambitious national plans to extend broadband, with Conservatives promising an 'infrastructure revolution' to include gigabit broadband for every home.

Broadband isn't exactly bread and roses. But now, as nearly every aspect of our everyday lives is being pushed online in the interest of public safety, the internet is looking more like the social leveller those campaign promises suggested it could be. Of course, none of these ambitious plans have been implemented – yet.

But this spring, just as national internet demand was peaking, the government's pre-existing Universal Service Obligation (USO) came into effect. This gives people the right to request an affordable and decent broadband

connection (at least 10 mbps, enough to stream a Netflix film).

This right to access will eventually constitute an important attempt at narrowing the digital divide.

But in the meantime many people on the margins of connectivity have relied on public spaces for low-cost or free connectivity. And these gathering places became suddenly inaccessible due to the national lockdown.

The Oxford Internet Survey has found that in general, many people use public access points for the internet. Nearly 70% of people in Britain use public wifi, and nearly 20% access the internet in libraries.

For people on low incomes and with limited digital literacy, these spaces are absolutely vital. They not only provide free access but also offer opportunities for in-person knowledge exchange.

EMPATHY

The elderly and the disabled, who have been most severely impacted by both the disease and its mitigation tactics, are also among the least likely to be online.

Organisations like AgeUK and many local libraries offer free, in-person computer assistance to help people build confidence with technology, get online and stay online.

In Oxford, library customers can request assistance from volunteer 'digital helpers' to do everything from set up an email account to learn how to Skype with the grandkids.

Digital helpers are a successful initiative not because they offer digital expertise, but because they offer human reassurance and individual attention to people with limited internet access and skills.

Library staff repeatedly identify patience, empathy, and the ability to be a good listener as the essential qualities of a digital helper.

'But as for the technology or the technical

The online blog includes many links with further details:

<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-and-subject-groups/oxfordshire-digital-inclusion-project>

skills, it doesn't have to be very high,' one staff member told me.

The closure of community spaces like libraries disproportionately affects these people who need free access and training to participate in a digitising society.

Right now, the prevailing discourse imagines internet connectivity as something that happens at home.

But the closure of cafés, restaurants and libraries will disadvantage people who rely on free or low-cost public wifi to perform basic online tasks related to schooling, employment, housing and benefits.

With record numbers of people making Universal Credit applications, the demand for free, public digital services among the most disadvantaged is likely to grow.

SHARED SPACES

Alongside existing strategies to enable business-as-usual for the comfortably connected, safeguards are needed to ensure that people who rely on free, public access points and shared spaces are not left behind because Covid-19 has forced us to rely on access in our own homes.

We need to prioritise opening these spaces up safely as soon as possible, and also coming up with creative solutions to digital isolation. In the USA, some localities are providing free wifi hotspots on roving buses, which can cover a small community area.

The pervasive digitisation of government services in recent years has necessitated policy interventions like the Universal Service Obligation.

But for people currently excluded from home internet access it's too little, too late.

And for those lacking in digital literacy or skills, there is no 'virtual' replacement for in-person training and assistance.

There has never been a more urgent need to re-evaluate the assumption that access alone will make the internet more democratic or equal.

When opportunities for physical connections between people are foreclosed, online inequality will increase.

In a broad sense, the Covid-19 pandemic has focused our attention on our human interdependence when it comes to health and healthcare. But the lessons are no less relevant to our relationship to the internet.

Digital connectivity is about more than technology alone. It's also rooted in our shared humanity.

The digital divide

Two new reports add up to a definitive 'state of the nation' fact file on digital access – and why it matters.

'Covid-19 changed the dial on digital: how we trade, sell and consume.' says Good Things Foundation. 'Basic digital skills are as important as English and maths. Digital skills are now essential for work and business.'

Good Things Foundation is 'a social change charity, helping people to improve their lives through digital'. It supports community online centres – including many in libraries – and runs the annual Get Online Week in October.

It is now calling for an investment of £130m over four years for a Great Digital Catch Up scheme. It's a modest sum (just 2% of superfast broadband infrastructure budget). But, it says, this would 'allow 4.5 million more people to be happier, healthier and better off'.

The campaign is backed by a new 'blueprint'*. In 16 brisk pages it sets out the latest basic facts, the arguments and a comprehensive list of reference resources. Its action plan includes a UK Data Poverty Lab to 'co-design solutions to data poverty. For example: data donating and gifting, wifi sharing, social prescribing, social tariffs, subsidised broadband, extending public internet wifi in towns and cities, and more.'

The lockdown, says the Foundation, has shown as never before the gulf that divides the haves and have-nots. It has made the gulf even wider. But it has also proved there is a way out.

'The community sector has a vital role in bridging the digital divide. Especially where people think digital is not for them, or worry about using the internet for making payments, applying for jobs, or finding health information they can trust.

'Covid-19 has shown how it is possible – although difficult – to give remote support to people with no, low or limited digital skills or internet access.

'Until now, one of the biggest barriers to digital inclusion has been lack of interest and motivation. Covid-19 has created a window for change...

'We need a Digital Strategy that works for everyone, everywhere – to fire up the post-Covid economy, level up opportunity and Fix the Digital Divide – so nobody is left behind.'

* <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/fix-the-digital-divide>



A new report from the Carnegie UK Trust takes the same line. At eight pages, it's even more succinct – and equally bang up to date. Learning from Lockdown: 12 Steps to Eliminate Digital Exclusion* says:

'Since the outbreak of Covid-19 the scale of digital exclusion in the UK has been exposed and exacerbated beyond previous understanding.'

'While new initiatives have been rapidly and successfully delivered, substantially accelerating progress, there is still much more to be done to ensure no one in the UK is left digitally excluded.'

The 12 recommendations call on policy makers, practitioners, academics and industry to tackle this issue. They build on 10 years of work by the Trust, and particularly on what has been learned from lockdown.

Whatever happens, it stresses, 'public provision of digital access through libraries, health and welfare services and community organisations should continue to be made available. This will provide a vital digital safety net to those who need it.'

* <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/learning-from-lockdown-12-steps-to-eliminate-digital-exclusion>



DIGITAL NATION UK 2020

FACTS, STATS AND FIXING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

UK
DIGITALLY EXCLUDED

7m
NO Internet access at home¹

9m
CAN'T USE INTERNET WITHOUT HELP²

38%
non or lapsed users worried about privacy + security³

<£20k earners with least digital engagement pay **42% more on utilities** than the most digitally engaged.⁴

UK
DIGITALLY INCLUDED

27.6m
HIGHLY ENGAGED⁵

5
ESSENTIAL DIGITAL SKILLS FRAMEWORK

42%
of population worried about fraud + scams⁶

£348
I saved on utility bills alone.⁷

11k+ devices with data + support delivered by Good Things during the pandemic.⁸

77%
Online learning benefits my mental health.⁹

44%
I manage my health + wellbeing online.¹⁰

10% of UK economic output is linked to online learning for work.¹¹

55%
I feel more part of a community.¹²

900+ Good Things community partners continue support including remotely.¹³

87%
I connect better with my friends and family.¹⁴

57%
I earn £2,160 more per year.¹⁵

76%
I have improved my job/prospects.¹⁶

73%
of small business owners agree that IT skills are essential for their business to thrive.¹⁷

27%
I used mobile payments for the first time.¹⁸

57%
I improved my digital skills in lockdown.¹⁹

56%
I'm fursoughed and want to learn new digital skills.²⁰



DIGITAL STRATEGY FOR ALL

ACCESS

11m use the internet for social media and entertainment.²¹

2.7m claimant count. 730k less employed in July than March. Many need new digital skills to find work.²²

MOTIVATION

17m use the internet for limited purposes.²³

CONFIDENCE

13.6m workers have digital life skills but lack digital work skills.²⁴

SKILLS

DATA POVERTY LAB

DIGITAL CATCH UP

Good Things Foundation

Improving lives through digital

Learning from the plague



Ian Anstice finds some lessons for public libraries from the Covid-19 pandemic – so far ...

So, that was quite a shock. I wrote in a Public Libraries News editorial back in the prehistoric times of March 15 that libraries were, as they stood then, not Covid-safe.

I remember thinking then that this was possibly a highly dangerous suggestion for me to make as, in my day-to-day work, we were still working normally. It was like crying wolf while still not being sure about the sighting.

Thankfully for the safety of library users – and my job – however, Libraries Connected came to the same conclusion and called for libraries to close just two days later. The prime minister ordered all libraries closed on March 23.

So, barely a week had gone by and what was a possible career-breaking suggestion at the start of that period was government policy at its end.

Library services had to continue running library services without the buildings while still – and this is no exaggeration – being in a state of shock.

Thankfully, there was a core of a decent digital service in libraries to begin with. This allowed access to libraries online. With so much of the population at home, the numbers of those joining libraries online reached record proportions.

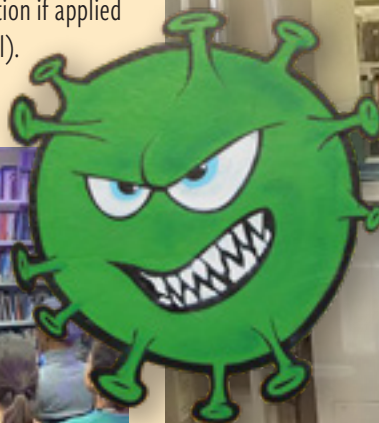
The oft-quoted figure of an increase in 600% is an exaggeration if applied nationally (it was only for a short time in a few services, not all). But doubling and tripling e-book usage were fairly common.

Social media also saw something of a revolution. Rhyme-times were being broadcast on Facebook and other social media within the first week in some authorities. Most services were doing them within a month.

This would have been an unheard-of innovation in most of the country at the start of the year.

A few months later we emerged, blinking, back out of our houses. This time with the realisation that libraries would not reopen after Covid had gone away, but still during the outbreak.

Libraries had to work out how to open as safely as possible. They are still in that process. So what have we learnt from all of this?



Library services are not just the buildings.

This has been a bit of a management cliché in librarian circles for years, but for a quarter of this year it was a statement of fact.

The public had to access the library online. And they took to it in unheard-of numbers, be it in the form of e-books or getting their children to watch a story-time.

Some services, such as Greenwich, reported far higher numbers watching their rhyme-times online than they had ever had physically before.

Perhaps importantly for the future, there's now a significant number of staff who are good at videoing and uploading.

Bookfunds are going to be under even more strain.

It was challenging enough for library services to keep sufficient book spending going beforehand. Now there has been a big increase in e-book lending. This will require more money, especially as central support was, as normal, lacking.

A mere £1,000 per authority from Arts Council England was much appreciated but a small fraction of what was needed.

So how to spend more on e-books? What's happening short-term is that libraries are increasing e-book stock by reducing spending on printed books. But this will not be viable when normal levels of library visits resume (if they ever do).

Things should be physical and digital.

Before, most of what library services did required a physical presence. Putting things online was an afterthought. When it was done, it was a shadow of what could be got in the building itself.

However, there have been three months of people being forced to do everything online. Many of those will have got used to it.

Even now, many are still concerned about visiting libraries. So as libraries get back to normal, Covid-19 willing, we need to plan for those.

What we do, from e-books to events to answering questions to reading groups, needs to be available online as well as in-building. This needs to be planned for from the beginning. This dual physical/digital approach needs bedding in quickly. It could potentially reap huge benefits.



Click and collect

Funding may get tight again.

Things had been looking up for libraries the last two or three years.

This may not have been obvious, but budgets were not being slashed in the same way as they were 10 years ago.

However, councils have been placed under severe strain by emergency spending. Unless there is central assistance – normally lacking – then austerity may come calling once more.

Physical recovery may be slow.

Hampered by having to quarantine returned books for three days, and by a large sector of the clientele being in vulnerable categories, library usage is not returning to normal at the same speed as it is in shops.

It may take years to do so, if it does at all, due to new habits and fears learned. Therefore, the digital side needs to be deeply embedded into the offer, while at the same time not forgetting the buildings.

This is going to be difficult.

Libraries are a good news story.

During the dark times of March and April, councils were looking for good news, any good news. Libraries were often the only service able to provide it. We supplied talking books to the vulnerable (I played a tiny part in keeping a centenarian happy) and joy to toddlers via online video.

That meant something to councillors, and raised our profile. It also gave us permission to do things that we did not have before – social media is often tightly controlled by councils. This, hopefully, will not be taken back.

We need a single digital presence.

A single national website for public libraries has been talked about for at least a decade now, with nothing to show for it.

If there was ever a time when libraries needed a single place for e-books, joining etc it was in March this year. But there was nothing.

The latest people given the task to do something is the British Library. Indications are that it is being realistic and getting things in shape for next year. We can hope that they do. Because the absence was very embarrassing in 2020.



Mixed message

But the vulnerable are often not online.

The most desperate people I was phoning while on secondment were those who did not have the internet. They often felt truly alone, scared, and isolated.

Libraries, while embracing the digital in everything we do, need to remember this and have services in place while many of our users are still not sure about visiting in person.

This could well mean expanding the home library service (door to door delivery) but this will be challenging as, again, there's no extra money. Moreover, such services sometimes rely on volunteers who are understandably fewer now than before.

Library staff are council staff.

A lot of library staff were redeployed to other services during lockdown, such as food distribution and registrars departments. I myself was seconded for half the time to keep in touch with shielded people.

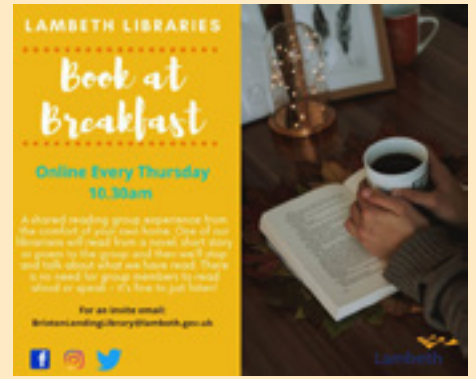
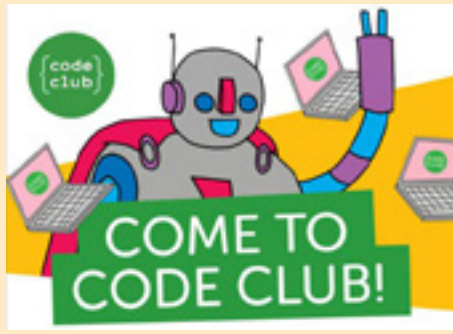
This has given staff a feeling for what has been going on in other services, and there's been a lot of mutual respect going on.

It has increased the standing of libraries in many councils. At the same time, it makes libraries vulnerable to having staff poached. The reopening of some library services has been delayed because of this.

But, you know, the big lesson from the last few months is that libraries survive and adapt. There has been more change in libraries, in social media and online provision, in the last five months than there has been in the last five years.

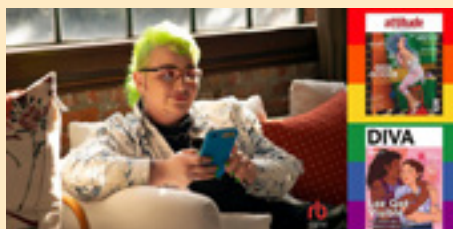
The sector has had a good crisis so far and has operated at the top level of any reasonable expectation while in lockdown.

But we are still in uncharted waters. Much of what that means to libraries is still guesswork. One thing is for certain: things will continue to change. After all, they always do. And the sector needs to adapt with them. The last few months have shown that it can.



INFLUENZA MASKS.
 Among the efforts to turn war equipment to peace time uses we might consider the suggestion to convert the gas masks worn by our soldiers into influenza masks. The Red Cross Society is busy making anti-influenza masks to cover the mouth and nose. They are to be supplied to the transports taking back troops to the Dominions. The nosebag precaution is also being tried in America, and in some of the influenza-stricken towns on the Pacific Coast there is a general muzzling order in force which requires people to wear influenza masks when abroad. The disease is proving much more deadly in this country than all the German air-raids and bombardments put together, but as yet we are content with such measures as the closing of schools and banning public meetings. No doubt conditions will have to get much worse than they are before the public will assent to a general anti-influenza muzzling order.

All our photos chronicle what happened in just one service – Lambeth. Lambeth libraries have (or had) a famously good events programme. On page 10 (left) are Diana Evans and Bernardine Evaristo with Tim O'Dell at Brixton library, and Caroline Mackie (right) in the same library transformed. During lockdown, staff worked hard to transfer a huge range of existing services into online form (clockwise): code clubs and business support; reading groups; storytimes; targeted ads for digital resources; interesting finds from the archives; the usual festivals for Windrush, Pride and more; Summer Reading Challenge – with special efforts to distribute physical books.



rb How to get free digital content from your library.

- 1 Download and open the RBdigital App, click register now.
- 2 Tap and scroll to choose your country then Choose Library & Create Account.
- 3 Enter your library card number and create a username then password.
- 4 Enter your details and tap Register.

Top Tips.

- Enter library card number without spaces
- Make a note of your username
- Want to enjoy content offline? Select **DOWNLOAD** first
- Can't find your titles? Swipe down to refresh your Checked Out content
- Want to read a magazine in text view? Tap on an article and choose **TEXT**

Available on the **amazon appstore**, **App Store**, and **Google Play**.



Lambeth Lock-down Diaries Project

We need your help.

We are living through a period of time that should be recorded and archived for posterity. Lambeth Archives would like volunteers to help build this archive. No archive was created during the last pandemic - Spanish Flu in 1918 - so this time we would like to make amends.

Please collect anything that shows life in Lambeth during the lock-down: photos, videos, diaries, scrapbooks, leaflets, posters, newspaper cuttings, cartoons that amuse you, articles, masks, government instructions, songs, poems, art-work, quilts, supermarket directives etc.

We would be grateful if these could



They worked even harder to invent completely new services (clockwise): a special archives project to record experiences of lockdown; a club where people watched together a film from the online collection and swapped comments on social media; local history walks and talks moved online (and getting much bigger audiences); a quiz on Zoom; book reviews by staff; new events for teens; a kids' writing competition with neighbouring Southwark and King's College; adding books to the council's food parcels; and lots of stunts staged in staff's own homes...



How good is YOUR digital service?

We were happy to help publicise this year's survey of libraries' digital services by DCA (Digital Content Associates). Though it took in the effects of Covid-19, it's really a valuable snapshot of what's provided by whom – and whether library users even know what's available, let alone all those potential users... Barney Allan, DCA Managing Director, sums up the findings.

As an agency, we represent digital services that are committed to helping libraries get more usage. We wanted to get some insights into patterns of demand for e-content and how the experience of lockdown has affected library usage.

We also wanted to learn more about librarians' sentiment and expectations around unlocking and how they saw this affecting digital provision, marketing, training and budgets.

We wanted to know how the experience of lockdown had tilted the library field. Finally, we were interested in how marketing is done at libraries and in particular how data is being used to drive library marketing.

We mailed the survey out directly and via our friends at Libraries Connected, Public Library News and The Library Campaign – thanks to them for their support. Thanks most of all are due to all our brilliant respondents for their very helpful and thoughtful responses.

USAGE

How did we do? Well, as our American partners would say: we did awesome! The 87 responses to the survey exceeded our expectations and uncovered some very positive vibes around the new potential for libraries to do better online. This was encouraging. They also revealed some areas to work on, which was useful.

So here goes with the good news stories:

72% either agreed or strongly agreed that their online resources are under-used.

We already knew this, having been slinging e-content around the world for the past two decades or so. First rule of e-content in libraries: usage always disappoints. That's because no-one knows it's there, they don't know how to use it, or the content or access model is no good.

But it's got to be great news that there is all this potential to grow usage of library e-content.

76% of respondents said e-resource usage had increased or dramatically increased since lockdown.

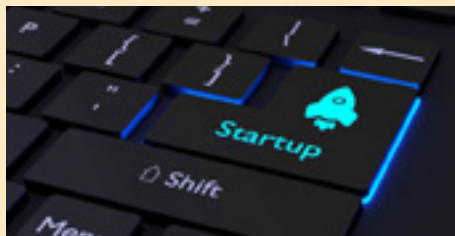
Yes, we know that to have not achieved an

increase in online usage, at a time when library buildings were closed and people were locked down, would have been a surprise – if not an epic failure.

But several respondents saw the spike in usage as both a sign of potential and something to build on, especially at a time when partial re-openings and declining footfall were trending.

80% of librarians say they do not have a strategy for promoting their library resources to non-users.

More wonderful news! Just think how much we could grow usage if we could let people know what's on offer – not just e-books, but physical stock, programmes, events and the broader social mission. And guess what? We can help you whip up some quick strategies that will have a transformational effect.



Over 60% of responding librarians think that their library website is doing a good job of promoting their services.

Now this was a surprise. Our experience of library websites would allow us to agree with only the kindest possible interpretation of 'good job' as a description. But as they sometimes say on Antiques Roadshow, 'It's not worth a lot, but if you like it, it's very nice'.

But wait...

51% say they have no, or little or no, control over their library website.

In fact, only 9% said they had 'total control' over this aspect of their library offer.

So we have to assume that most librarians are happy with the user experience currently offered by their municipally-controlled sites. We are not sure how many other groups would accept being given so much responsibility with so little power.

As marketing people, we're used to mixed reactions from librarians: we've seen how they back away from our admittedly grim trestle tables at conferences, and we've seen the comments such as 'marketing is about capitalists conning people'.

So it was no surprise to hear that most libraries don't have a marketing strategy for non-users. But we've embraced this too. We prefer to think that this huge untapped audience, who have no idea that your e-resources exist let alone how they could be making use of them, is an opportunity rather than a scandal.

DATA

So, thank you to the 80% who said that they have no strategy for promoting their library sources to non-users because it's very significant news and we can help you with that.

Even better news, for us at least, was that only 5% of respondents use search engine optimisation or marketing (SEO/SEM) to promote their online resources. This is despite the fact that many of them qualify for free SEM via the Google Ad Grant. Now we really can help you with that.

If marketing is not so much of a thing with libraries, surely data is?

It seems it is indeed. A stonking 88% said they relied on usage data to drive collections, and a more modest 75% used it for marketing.

It's less clear is what this data is and how it is used, but we were happy to see that it was valued.

To summarise, our survey achieved most of what it set out to do. It helped us understand that most libraries make little effort to reach non-users and that their e-resources are underused.

It may even have achieved more than we expected. It has helped us think about things in a new way.

For example, the very weakness of libraries' marketing to date may be their strength and opportunity. Starting from such a low base

means we can make a very real difference.

And many respondents who expressed concerns about funding, budget cuts and redundancies seem to see improving their digital presence as a way to mitigate these issues.

The post-Covid world presents libraries with immense challenges around their physical sites, funding and safety.

But the crisis has exposed areas of opportunity where libraries can regroup, refocus their strategies and redeploy resources.

For example, by putting their services where people spend their time, which is online, and by doing things that every other organisation does to get users' attention – doing marketing that is informed by data.

It may be that the experience of the pandemic has shown a way forward for libraries, or at least highlighted some areas which would repay study and further work: marketing, the quality of the digital presence, how data is used, and how to support users with the training, tools and understanding that they need to make better use of online services.

Many locked-down libraries have proved able to use their web presence to drive traffic. There is no reason to assume that this cannot be translated to greater physical usage as reopening progresses.

There should be a healthy correlation between increased library use and a lot of positive outcomes: literacy, supporting children and the elderly, business start-ups, training and employment, digital inclusion.

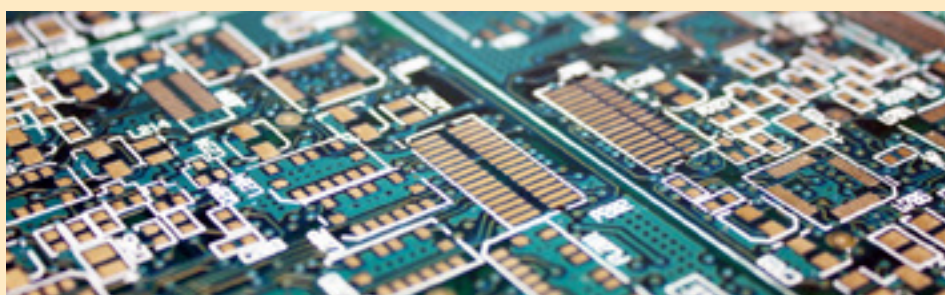
Minority inclusion too: BAME users make up the majority of urban library users.

There may also be correlations between those outcomes and better chances of retaining funding and saving library jobs.

There's much more in the survey results that we haven't been able to cover here.

Stay tuned for further updates on training and budgets in particular.

DCA is a business that focuses on building usage of libraries' digital content. Their services include staff training, content including music and the arts, childrens' edutainment, childrens' ebooks and Arabic interactive reading (demos and trials available), plus help with getting library services to show up on online searches. Non-profit bodies can get the latter free.
<https://digitalcontentassociates.com>



How does your service match up?

The DCA survey shows what is available online, what library services do to promote them – and how successful they think they are...

These are the digital resources most commonly available. How many does your service have?

- ▶ Total respondents: **87**
- ▶ E-books and audio services **100% (87)**
- ▶ Newspapers, magazines and comics **96.55% (84)**
- ▶ Business and reference databases **70.11% (61)**
- ▶ Online courses and training **54.02% (47)**
- ▶ Children's e-learning resources **44.83% (39)**
- ▶ Digital entertainment (music, film, multimedia) **39.08% (34)**
- ▶ Other **9.20% (8)**

These are the less common 'other' resources. How many does your service have?

- ▶ Ancestry, local photo archives
- ▶ Online family history (Ancestry, Find my Past)
- ▶ Online book club
- ▶ Free access to external sites such as Ancestry.com, citizenship practice, driving theory tests, Access to Research
- ▶ Archive photos, library app, online catalogue
- ▶ Musical works filmed and music but not just films

These are the most common improvements services made in response to lockdown. Which did your service manage?

- ▶ Total respondents: **86**
- ▶ Expanding e-book and audio services **95.35% (82)**
- ▶ Introducing virtual events (story time, tech help) **72.09% (62)**
- ▶ Improving website to improve access to online resources **62.79% (54)**
- ▶ Increased access to newspapers, magazines and comics **62.79% (54)**
- ▶ Increased children's resources **40.70% (35)**
- ▶ Expanding digital entertainment services (music, film, multimedia) **27.91% (24)**
- ▶ Other **12.79% (11)**

These are the less common 'other' improvements...

- ▶ Emails to borrowers highlighting online resources, social media promotion
- ▶ Taken out temporary, free e-subscriptions
- ▶ Negotiated home access for some of our 'in branch only' web resources, where suppliers were willing
- ▶ Enabled access for online joiners with temporary membership numbers
- ▶ Trial access to other resources
- ▶ Worked with online theatre company
- ▶ Commissioned original content for virtual delivery
- ▶ Interactive communal activities such as Lego challenges and quizzes
- ▶ Relaxed joining requirements to enable easier access to ebooks and online resources

This is what services thought about their success in promoting their digital resources....

- ▶ Total respondents: **85**
- ▶ Most users are very aware of the online resources on offer **3.53% (3)**
- ▶ Users are familiar with the online resources we offer **44.71% (38)**
- ▶ Users have little awareness of the online resources we offer **28.24% (24)**
- ▶ Most users are not aware of the online resources we offer **10.59% (9)**
- ▶ I don't know **5.88% (5)**
- ▶ Other **7.06% (6)**

Comments:

- ▶ Users who are digitally active and confident are aware of our resources. Those who have more limited experience are less so, and need the resources promoted to them.
- ▶ Users are more aware of e-lending type resources than the traditional reference resources.
- ▶ Used to have little awareness, but this has improved since the lockdown.
- ▶ There is increasing awareness, but lots of people – including lots of non-library users – are not aware of the range and quality of the resources or the fact that they are easy and free.
- ▶ Unclear who doesn't know about them but are not interested in using them. Increase in usage must be partly down to increased promotion as well as greater customer demand for online resources.
- ▶ It's a work in progress – people are becoming more savvy about what's available as we go on, but you have to keep trying. We've done some radio and press to help this.

These are the social media platforms libraries use most often to promote their digital resources. Which does your service use?

- ▶ Total respondents: **85**
- ▶ Twitter **28.24% (24)**
- ▶ Instagram **2.35% (2)**
- ▶ Facebook **62.35% (53)**
- ▶ LinkedIn **0.00% (0)**
- ▶ TikTok **1.18% (1)**
- ▶ Other **5.88% (5)**

How services responded to the statement 'Our online resources are under-used'

- ▶ Total respondents: **86**
- ▶ Strongly agree **11.63% (10)**
- ▶ Agree **60.47% (52)**
- ▶ Neither agree nor disagree **13.95% (12)**
- ▶ Disagree **6.98% (6)**
- ▶ Strongly disagree **2.33% (2)**
- ▶ I don't know **4.65% (4)**

These are the main ways used to promote digital resources

- ▶ Total respondents: **86**
- ▶ Social media **95.35% (82)**
- ▶ Our website **91.86% (79)**
- ▶ In-library advertising (posters, leaflets etc) **89.53% (7)**
- ▶ Email campaigns **44.19% (38)**
- ▶ Search engine optimisation/marketing **5.81% (5)**

Other ideas. Has your service tried these? Could your user group help with any of them?

- ▶ Outreach events not within the library
- ▶ Local media, council internal circulars and intranet.
- ▶ Verbally promoted in branches and outreach events
- ▶ Podcast
- ▶ Ebooks, e-audiobooks, e-magazines automatically imported to and maintained in our catalogue
- ▶ Providing articles to editors of local community newsletters
- ▶ Radio
- ▶ Weekly e-newsletter
- ▶ Mailing lists to known groups
- ▶ Billboard advertising, vehicle advertising
- ▶ Virtual festivals and door drop leafleting
- ▶ Informing members as they join the library and through conversation with existing members.
- ▶ Drop-in sessions to demonstrate the resources.
- ▶ Word of mouth
- ▶ Face to face conversations with customers using the service and at promotional talks/ events outside the library to non users



'Amazing work'

Digital or physical, books remain the core of libraries' offer. So it's good to see the book world recognising their importance.

Lambeth librarian Zoey Dixon has been named a 'Rising Star' by The Bookseller – the UK's main trade journal. The list highlights 'forward-thinking individuals whose actions have caught the eye and who have been singled out as possible leaders of the future'.

Zoey is the only librarian among this year's list of 41. She says: 'I hope it's partly due to my work in championing Black writers and writing, as well as young and LGBT+ voices – I am very passionate about that. But it feels very validating that my work and expertise has been acknowledged by the wider book world.'

'They know libraries play an important role growing and developing readers. Children's author Louie Stowell has said: "Libraries are such a vital part of the book ecosystem."

'Librarians do amazing work. We should be shouted about more! Without us, many authors wouldn't have the success they have.'

'The Bookseller actually want more librarians put forward for the award.'

'But perhaps we're too modest.'

Zoey manages four Lambeth libraries and is also a development librarian. For the past five years she has been on the selection panel for The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge and Booktrust's Letterbox Club. For the past two years she has judged the 2020 Booktrust Storytime Prize and CILIP's Carnegie and Kate Greenaway awards.

In lockdown, Zoey managed the library service's social media and online content. She says: 'I'm excited to see what new opportunities arise from having to deliver a library service post-lockdown.'

'With the move to virtual events, you're not restricted by who is physically available. This will allow us to reach new audiences – and authors from around the world!'

Libraries: essential to local recovery

This is an edited extract from a new paper by Libraries Connected, setting out the case for libraries post-lockdown.

The whole paper is at: <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/local-advocacy-libraries-essential-part-local-recovery>

The lockdown has caused widespread economic problems and triggered unprecedented government action to protect businesses and jobs. Predictions for the future are bleak. Some workers are disproportionately impacted: workers from a global majority background, women, young workers, low paid workers and disabled workers. The OECD predicts a slump in UK national income of 11.5% in 2020 – the worst damage in the developed world.



ECONOMIC RECOVERY

WHAT LIBRARIES DO

'Libraries allow for social mobility; they are places of possibility, opening doors in later life for many people for whom school didn't work.'

Darren Henley, Arts Council England

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Local libraries provide a range of help for job seekers to find work and improve their skills¹:

- 86% of library authorities support the unemployed to get online
- 76% support job-searching online
- 71% help with CV writing
- 63% provide short courses to improve IT skills.

THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIES MAKE

'I feel my computer skills have really improved, that's why I am confident to attend the group job search sessions now.'

Job seeker, Solihull

Learners reported these positive impacts from using the library²:

- 88% said it made them more confident
- 76% said it encouraged them to improve their qualifications
- 51% said it put them in a stronger position to get a new job.



E.G. STOKE-ON-TRENT EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT 'I would not have been able to get my job if it wasn't for the courses you provided.'

The library service supports people with basic ICT needs and those who need assistance to get back into employment or learning. The team offer digital access, basic ICT skills, numeracy and literacy assessments, CV support and job searching.

They also address barriers to accessing jobs and training, which for some customers with complex needs is a growing concern. This includes working with NHS Step On for people who have experienced mental health difficulties. The libraries provide:

- Volunteer IT buddies – up to eight free one-to-one sessions. From April 2019 to March 2020 volunteers delivered 507 sessions and 237 hours supporting work clubs.
- Library work clubs – eight work clubs each week, with an average attendance of 230 each month. Support and information in accessible, user-friendly formats.
- One-to-one employability support – up to four free sessions for people who need extra help finding a new job, or with their digital skills.
- Virtual college – online courses for library members including construction, hair & beauty, hospitality, IT and social care.



BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEUR SUPPORT 'Without the BIPC I could never have afforded to see the reports. I have zero budget for those things, yet they are vital lifelines for small businesses.'

BIPC report³

BIPC (Business & Intellectual Property Centres) in libraries are physical hubs where people can come together to learn, network and access support to protect and commercialise a business idea, including:

- Free access to high-quality UK and global market intelligence, customer insights and company data (worth over £5m), and intellectual property advice
 - Free and low-cost one-to-one support, mentoring and training by British Library and private/public sector business experts
 - Topical, inspirational networking events, with role model entrepreneurs
 - Welcoming spaces with PCs, desks and wifi. Over the past three years they have achieved remarkable successes: They have:
 - Supported the creation of 12,288 businesses, 47% of them in the north.
 - Helped businesses create an estimated 7,843 (FTE) new jobs.
 - Boosted local economies – net Gross Value Added was an estimated £78m.
 - Raised £6.95 for every £1 invested. About 10% of BIPC users were unemployed or looking for work when they first received support.
 - Just under half are now running their own business (46%); a further quarter (23%) are in employment.
 - 22% of users are drawn from the top 20% of the most deprived areas in the UK.
 - Of the users who went on to start a new business, 55% were women (65% in London), 31% were from a global majority background (44% in London) and 17% had a disability.
- Plans to extend this success around the country depend on libraries in local communities to deliver these services.

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- 2 Understanding our value: assessing the nature of the impact of library services, City University London, 2010
- 3 Economic Impact Evaluation of the British Library Business & IP Centre National Network, July 2019



EDUCATION SUPPORT

WHAT LIBRARIES DO

‘I would never have become an author if it hadn’t been for my local library as a child.’

Malorie Blackman

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

Libraries provide free, local access to IT, learning and information for schoolchildren of all ages. These include:

- Free computer and internet access: libraries are safe spaces for children to access the internet and work in an environment that supports learning, especially those without space and/or internet access at home.
- Homework clubs: supervised by staff, they support students using both reference books and online learning resources.
- Class visits: libraries work with schools to offer learning beyond the classroom, inspiring children in different environments and equipping them with lifelong learning skills.
- STEM and code clubs: a powerful, enjoyable way to engage with computer programming, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. They allow young people to try new things and gain knowledge, skills and experience.
- Makerspaces: where people can co-create, share resources and knowledge, work on projects, network, build and inspire.
- National reading and learning partnerships: libraries host activities to support the Summer Reading Challenge, National Numeracy Day, British Science Week, Holocaust Memorial Day, Empathy Day, World Book Day and Fun Palaces.

THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIES MAKE

‘Key educational transition points... can be worrying times for children. The library can provide a safe and familiar atmosphere for them.’

ASCEL¹



LITERACY AND SUPPORT

A major strength of libraries is their ability to support the development of children’s literacy skills and encourage them to acquire a love of reading from an early age.

Libraries support children at vital times in their lives such as their transitions to primary and secondary school, and from early teenage years to adulthood. They are also vital spaces for students to access online and offline learning resources and support.²

- Around four in 10 library users on free school meals said the library is a friendly space and it helps them to do better at school.
- Almost four in 10 young people who use the (public) library believe that doing so will help them do better at school.

A British study found that the cumulative effect on children’s progress of reading books often, going to the library regularly and reading newspapers at 16 was four times greater than the advantage gained from having a parent with a degree.³

Libraries are critical to levelling the playing field for some of our most disadvantaged pupils.

E.G. SOMERSET DIGITAL SKILLS ACADEMY

‘I really enjoyed learning what it means to be a graphic designer and it was good to understand how to make a logo using proper design software’.

Somerset Libraries foster innovation and digital and creative skills in young people. Around 20 pupils from four secondary schools were given a valuable insight into the world of creative digital with workshops led by local digital businesses and other partners. These gave information on career opportunities, skills development and the chance to try cutting-edge tech rarely available in schools: film and animation; 3D printing and scanning; graphic design; augmented reality; coding, robotics and virtual reality. In one session, students linked live with the vice-president of tech giant NVIDIA in Silicon Valley. All four schools want to be involved in future programmes.

Somerset Libraries also runs Idea Box to engage young people in STEM. The boxes provide everything needed to run a session in schools or elsewhere, on coding, robotics or 3D design.

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- 3 Evidence review of the economic contribution of libraries, Arts Council England, June 2014

ISOLATION MITIGATION

WHAT LIBRARIES DO

‘Where would you go if you hadn’t got the library to come to?’

Jean, library user



SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Libraries offer creative and social activities which engage and connect individuals and communities, combat loneliness and improve wellbeing. These include:

- Social prescribing: libraries connect people to community groups and services, and raise awareness of local support
- Early years activities: baby bounce, rhyme times and stay & play sessions provide social opportunities for young children and their carers
- Community groups: connect a range of people including teens and older people, knit and natter, coffee mornings and reading groups
- Libraries of Sanctuary: working with City of Sanctuary, libraries welcome refugees and other new arrivals, and foster a culture of inclusivity
- Support for those with special needs: including autism-friendly libraries, visually impaired reading groups and sensory equipment, plus support and connections for carers
- Mobile libraries & home delivery services: a key source of social interaction for those who have difficulty leaving their homes.



A SUPPORTIVE SPACE

Libraries are free, safe spaces in local communities, making a valuable platform to address loneliness and social isolation. A survey in 2020 of over 1,000 reading group members found that¹:

- 84% feel more connected to other people

- 71% said their mental wellbeing improved. Emerging findings on the Reading Well scheme for young people indicate:
- 96% said it offered support in dealing with difficult feelings and experiences
- 87% said the books offered advice for coping with pressures that could affect mental wellbeing.

Mobile libraries bring books and human contact to those unable to leave their homes. Some services also loan out iPads with internet access, and help in using them.

This helps ensure that those at risk of becoming isolated can access the same resources as others.

THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIES MAKE

‘I don’t feel alone any longer. It’s so good to chat to someone and good to have a laugh.’

Reading Friends member



E.G. HYTHE LIBRARY DEMENTIA GROUP

‘They also support each other, particularly the carers, because once they go away from here they’re at home on their own with their partner and they don’t see people, they can’t go out, they can’t have friends, so here is a real lifeline to them.’

Kent Libraries have a strong agenda on social isolation and are well placed to bring people together in their 99 libraries. They host numerous community groups, mostly volunteered, including Talk Time coffee and chat sessions. In the last year there were 4,282 Talk Times, with 34,655 attendances. They help people with mental health problems, and people who are new to the area and feeling isolated.

At Hythe’s small but busy town library, a drop-in Dementia Support Group is held, in partnership with Hythe Town Council Dementia Awareness Forum. It is extremely popular, with 580 attendances over the last year.

Run by volunteers and staff, the group offers support, guest speakers, signposting to professional help, social activities, or on occasion just a coffee and chat session. It is a first port of call for those who are newly diagnosed.

REFERENCE

- 1 <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/new-survey-reveals-reading-groups-offer-insight-into-different-cultures.html>



CULTURAL PARTNERSHIP

WHAT LIBRARIES DO

‘I always thought art was not for people like me. How wrong I was. We have become a little family of people who would not have the opportunity to meet each other apart for the love of creating art for ourselves and our communities.’

Art club participant

Libraries are often the first place that children and young people experience art and culture. Whether it is arts or crafts with an emerging artist, a performance or storytelling with an established practitioner, an exhibition touring libraries, live music in a city centre library – libraries understand what it takes to create a quality and diverse cultural experience, and the lasting impact that has on people’s lives.

A report¹ in 2017 found that library services support the local arts community by providing:

- Space: 94% provide or hire out space for cultural activities
- Activities: Over 80% provide cultural activities
- Events: Over 80% organise books events such as talks and workshops with writers. Over 60% organise events such as film screenings, live performances and concerts
- Partnerships: 81% have some form of cultural partnership with arts, museums and galleries. 40% have cultural education partnerships and digital partnerships. 26% have economic partnerships with creative businesses.
- Programmes: Over 80% offer programmes such as Celebrating Shakespeare or Fun Palaces.

THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIES MAKE

‘It was also great to see a wide range of people taking the [art] class, from children to pensioners of all races and religions.’

Art club participant

No other public body has the same reach across diverse local communities, or the networks, economies of scale and flexibility to respond to local needs. The cultural experiences that libraries offer reach people who do not normally participate in arts and culture.

Libraries are perfectly placed to help arts and culture organisations to reach these communities.

Public libraries are also a gateway to a community or region’s wider cultural offer, including museums, galleries, theatres, heritage projects and the creative industries. Regional Bridge Organisations and local arts development officers and agencies help libraries make the links.

Library spaces are ideal for local arts organisations who are looking to extend their audience reach, develop new practice and continue to work when many traditional venues remain closed.

This support will be crucial over the coming years to help ensure the survival of much of our cultural ecology.

E.G. ST HELENS ART IN LIBRARIES

‘The library has allowed me to work with an audience that I wouldn’t normally engage with.’

Artist

As part of Arts Council England’s National Portfolio, six library services have received investment to deliver arts activities, tailored to their communities, from 2018–23.

St Helens Library Service, one of these services, has been working with artists to develop and showcase new and established work over the past decade. Crucial to their success has been their work with local artists. Support has been provided in many ways, including:

- Opportunities to create, rehearse and stage work in libraries free of charge
- Small pots of money for local artists and voluntary arts organisations to create new work
- A mentoring and support programme for emerging artists.

The relationship between libraries and artists delivers multiple benefits. Libraries reach new audiences through an established network of local artists. Developing their skills, opportunities and career prospects is crucial to the borough’s new Arts Strategy. Working with libraries enables artists to receive professional support and be more experimental.

Artists reached a more diverse range of people by working in libraries, with 35% of audiences coming from the least engaged Audience Spectrum segments.²

As we emerge from lockdown, the relationship between libraries and artists is an integral part of ensuring the survival of our cultural institutions in the places we live.

REFERENCES

- 1 Public Libraries Universal Culture Offer report, Society of Chief Librarians, March 2017
- 2 <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/off-the-shelf/audience-spectrum/profiles>



DIGITAL INCLUSION

The digital divide is 'fast becoming a defining social justice issue of this crisis.'

Polly Neate, Shelter

WHAT LIBRARIES DO

'Before I went along to Stourbridge Library, my digital skills were non-existent.'

Lynne, Marie Curie nurse

DIGITAL ACCESS

Libraries offer a huge amount of digital support, training and access to some of the most disadvantaged people, including:

- 26m hours of supported internet access each year on 40,000 PCs¹
- Free wifi at an estimated 99.3% of libraries, thanks to DCMS funding¹
- One-to-one and group support at 91% of libraries²
- Specific support for older people at 76%²
- 18,426 library staff have digital skills training.

Half of the people in England who do not have the internet at home, but use it in public places, do so in a public library. Libraries offer a range of resources that include Silver Surfer clubs, internet safety sessions, Tech & Tea events and tablet loans.²

The Online Centres Network tackles digital and social exclusion.

Around half of the 6,000 UK centres are based in libraries. These have a considerably higher footfall: an average 300 users per week compared to 40 a week in other centres. Of the 2m users annually, three-quarters are counted as socially excluded, and around half have no formal qualifications.³

THE DIFFERENCE LIBRARIES MAKE

'If you say to someone: Do you want to learn about computers? they will often say no. If you ask: Do you want to speak to your daughter in Australia or find a job?, it's a different matter. It's finding what's important to people.'

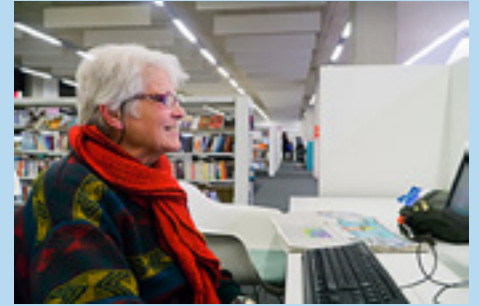
Charlotte, library team

Sixteen library services in England benefited from the Library Digital Inclusion Fund in 2016, to develop new ways to deliver basic digital skills. They helped identify potential savings for government services of £800k pa in their areas. If similar activities were rolled out nationally, they would save £7.5m per year. The library services helped more than 1,600 people – including people on low incomes, long term unemployed, unpaid carers, people with disabilities and those who were housebound and socially isolated – in more than 200 libraries (both rural and urban), people's homes, day care services and community centres.⁴

Digital skill requirements vary substantially from region to region.

Data and design skills are important in London for the finance and creative industries; engineering and advanced manufacturing skills are important in towns like Cambridge and Bristol. Library services are the ideal delivery partner because they can tailor their offer to meet specific, local need.

E.G. LIBRARIES NI DIGITAL CITIZEN PROJECT
'Having been through a lot of health problems and feeling isolated – going along to these digital help sessions has really given me a new lease of life.'



In September 2018, with funding from the Department for Communities, Libraries NI launched a project to help people become Digital Citizens. A Digital Citizen can use digital technology confidently to communicate, find information, purchase goods/services, solve problems and create.

In Northern Ireland, 19% have never used the internet, while a third of people aged 16–65 years have limited or no digital skills.⁵ The project demonstrated that libraries are uniquely positioned between communities and government to help adults.

It targeted adults in rural areas, areas of significant deprivation, adults with disabilities and retired and older people. Six trainers delivered free tailored training, and group and one-to-one support, in libraries and outreach locations.

This allowed sessions to be structured to meet the needs of the community, and offered a link to the local library where further resources are always available. A key success was the way trainers established relationships with groups and communities. Between October 2018 and March 2020, over 1,400 sessions were delivered. Of the people who took part:

- 76% of Go On participants were aware of how to be safe online after the sessions
- 58% of eClinic participants said they were more confident gathering information online
- 57% said they had been online more since completing Go On sessions.



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- 3 Role of public libraries in promoting and supporting digital participation. CFE for MLA, 2010
- 4 Library Digital Inclusion Fund Action Research Project Final Report, Good Things Foundation, July 2016
- 5 Digital Inclusion Research Report, NI Department of Finance, September 2017

It takes a village...

The pub, the church, the school, the shops ... a whole village worked together to make a success of a struggling mobile library. User groups don't just fight cuts. They are a vital part of a library service's team. Nick Harvey tells the story.

Hunmanby is one of the largest villages in Yorkshire, but is only three miles from the small town of Filey.

The popular, purpose built village library was the first casualty of library cutbacks in the North Yorkshire eight years ago. Details: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-13764589>

At the same time 10 mobile libraries in the county were replaced by one Super Mobile Library, which now serves the whole county.

The only location found in Hunmanby was at the rear of the White Swan public house (made available free of charge). The Super Mobile was hidden away, on an incline, with no signage to advertise its presence.

User numbers dropped, and a series of vehicle breakdowns and poor weather in 2019 left the village for long periods with no library provision.

Hunmanby was the largest settlement served by the Super Mobile, but had one of the lowest user rates, averaging just eight people in a two hour visit.

For the few remaining users, mainly elderly and in poor health with no or limited computer skills, the Super Mobile Library helped reduce social isolation.

After a series of misses, a chance conversation aired concerns that with such an intermittent service and low use, it was a question how long before it disappeared altogether. So the campaign was started. Full details: <http://hunmanbymobilelibrary.btck.co.uk/ThemovetoBayleyGardens>

Finding a better location was the key. There was a layby on the main shopping street. It had been looked at before. The reason it was not used were 'lost in the mists of time'.

The Hunmanby Parish Council clerk contacted North Yorkshire Highways, who advised that as long as the main road and the 'keep clear' signs were not obstructed and All Saints Church had no problems with access for weddings and funerals, that use would be fine.

It took some effort, but all this helped to promote the library stop and raise its profile!

All Saints Church was fine. No funerals take place on a Saturday. If an early wedding was required on a Saturday morning, the White Swan would allow its car park to be used by the library.

The library van would complement the church's Spring Café, a community run inclusive café, supporting vulnerable and elderly people. The venue is welcoming, warm and dementia

friendly. The church was also happy to promote its accessible toilet facilities.

The group of volunteers who look after Bayley Gardens were very excited, as the relocation would be a great way to bring people into this beautiful open space.

The adjoining householders were spoken to, before going any further. They were fully behind the project. North Yorkshire County Council Library Service required community support to justify the move.

From the start, Hunmanby Parish Council and local councillors at Scarborough Borough and the County Council were fully supportive of the move to outside Bayley Gardens.

To demonstrate this, a petition was presented signed by all 20 traders in the village, with a second petition of 60 names of local people using the Spring Café.

North Yorkshire County Council agreed to the move and the use of the layby in the heart of the village. But the community would be needed to keep the layby clear of parked cars.

Volunteers offered to put out traffic cones on a Friday evening to keep the layby clear of parked cars until the Super Mobile arrives just before 10am on alternate Saturdays.



Initial meeting at Bayley Gardens in September 2019 to agree to the trial move.



The Super Mobile library at the restart of the service on Saturday 25 July 2020.

An open air meeting was held in Bayley Gardens with the General Manager of the North Yorkshire Library Service, who was impressed with the level of community support. She agreed the move could take place, initially as a trial.

North Yorkshire County Council provided road cones, a trolley to move them, flyers and a publicity banner. The latter is put out the week of the visit on the Bayley Gardens fence. All the equipment is stored at the White Swan.

Most Friday evenings the layby has cars parked. But thanks to Andy, the landlord of the White Swan, who goes out at 1am on a Saturday morning to move the cones into place, the layby has always been clear for 10am!

Volunteers designed posters to put up in local shops along with the flyers. Hunmanby Junior School helped to promote the re-launch by notifying families with children at the village school.

The library has helped to enhance the village's main shopping street. The new service started on Saturday 30 November 2019. There was a well attended press launch.

Up to the start of the Covid shutdown, average numbers were 35 people per visit, a big increase on eight. This led to the Hunmanby stop being the busiest in the county, with two members of staff needed on the vehicle to cope with demand.

Hunmanby Mobile Library users started a story time for young people, to encourage young

families to use the community facility. Due to the Covid situation, this has been suspended.

<http://hunmanbymobilelibrary.btck.co.uk/StoryTimeforfamilieswithyoungchildren>

There was a nice article publicising the Super Mobile in the Scarborough Review at the end of March [emphasising its benefits for people having to self-isolate, while local shops were also doing their best to keep open safely for the general good].

<https://www.thescarboroughreview.com/news/2020/3/30/mobile-library-combats-social-isolation-in-hunmanby>

But the visit on 21 March 2020 ended up being the last for four months due to the Covid shutdown.

The service restarted on Saturday 25 July 2020, initially on a four-weekly visit for order and collect. Nobody could enter the van.

Hunmanby Mobile Library Users sent a letter to the local press to publicise it and explain the Covid-19 rules. They also organised a team of volunteers and a phone contact for people who couldn't get to the library and needed books delivered to their homes.

On the re-opening day, 30 people used the library – again, the highest in the county at a mobile library stop.

North Yorkshire County Council aimed to have one person on the Super Mobile at a time with screens in place and users wearing a mask.

Sadly, visits were reduced to monthly through the summer when further Covid-19 requirements meant the library could visit only one location per day.

[As we go to press, there is optimism about resuming a fortnightly service for the winter...]

Hunmanby Mobile Library Users have a website. Websites like these are provided free by BT and may be of help to other library users, says Nick.

The website is a delight, with information not just about the council service and the User group's story time, but the story of the campaign, information on step-free access, what to do if you don't have a library card, the beauty of Bayley Gardens as a place to sit and read, the group of cats who choose to hang out there, and some wonderful local history.

The most useful bit, probably, is the list of planned visiting times, with information on the safety systems used.

<http://hunmanbymobilelibrary.btck.co.uk/>

What is quality?

At last! Some teeth for the 1964 Act?

Before the pandemic threw everything in the air, work started on what could be the most hopeful development in years for England's libraries. The work continues...

Any library campaigner in England will tell you – councils have a legal duty to provide a decent library service. But it's almost impossible to get this taken seriously at local level. Let alone enforce action.

The duty is laid down in the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act.

Government (the DCMS) is given quite draconian powers to get improvements made if a service fails to be 'comprehensive and efficient'.

They have barely been used. The problem is defining what 'comprehensive and efficient' means in detail, in practice.

Many campaign groups have tried to use the Act, either in direct complaints to the DCMS or in judicial reviews. Dealing with the DCMS has been very hard work, with success rare to vanishing.

Judicial review judgements have done something, piecemeal, to define some issues at local level. But this is no way to get a coherent blueprint for an essential, nationwide public service.

It wasn't always like this. In 2001 the DCMS Secretary of State, Chris Smith, launched England's official Public Library Standards (PLSs).

The aim was to define 'comprehensive and efficient' in clear terms that had some authority.

Over the years they were changed (watered down, largely). They were finally dropped in 2008. Scotland and Wales still have standards. England does not – and frankly, it shows.

While they lasted, the PLSs did good work. Every English library authority had to write a coherent 'annual library plan', instead of just carrying on whatever they were doing without any clear thought.

And they had to report annually how well they were meeting the PLSs. This concentrated minds – and gave campaigners valuable information they could use to effect.

There were 23 original PLSs, devised by librarians (not library users!). They covered in some detail (take a deep breath): number of

branches, hours open, number of PCs, number of professional staff, expenditure on new stock, quality of stock (fiction and non-fiction), reservation service, number of active users and visits, website visits, access to the online catalogue, quality of information provided – and several measures of user satisfaction.

They were designed not just to measure for the sake of it, but to indicate where improvements would be needed. Councils were expected to write these into their next annual library plan. And all this information was publicly available.

In some ways the 2001 PLSs show their age. They were based too much on 'input' rather than the effects of the service on people. They didn't demonstrate an underlying philosophy. They, of

course, said little about digital services.

And they didn't take into account some big issues that are now very prominent – such as volunteer libraries, activities in libraries, outreach to socially excluded people, the need to train and support people with no internet skills, the widespread dangers of fake news.

Now Libraries Connected is working on a whole new project to 'clearly define what a high-quality library service looks like'.

It has at least reached out (a bit) to get opinions from library users. It held a well-attended Zoom conference in the summer to discuss 'quality'.

TLC will make sure that campaigners' views are fully represented in the planned consultation.

Libraries Connected says...

We have secured a grant of £128,456 from ACE (Arts Council England) to clearly define what a high-quality library service looks like.

We aim to develop and deliver an authoritative, sector-led scheme to help libraries in England to meet the needs of their local communities.

We will work closely with ACE and CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals) to develop the new framework.

Shared Intelligence will deliver the consultation and co-creation, to ensure that we develop a practical scheme that works as a service development tool. The process will include desk research and consultation, to reach a model that supports an innovative and quality service.

We are pleased to also be working with The British Library and The National Archives on this project. This is part of an overall programme of sector development [see *The Campaigner*, no 98, p.7].

This latest award comes after years of lobbying by CILIP and its members, so Libraries Connected is delighted to work with CILIP to steer this crucial work.

The scheme will ultimately help libraries assess how well they:

- Identify and monitor individual and community needs
- Develop resources, activities and services to meet these needs
- Are run and resourced to meet these needs.

Unlike the rest of the UK, public libraries in England have no set standards to support their planning or guide their decision making.

Each local authority decides how it will deliver its responsibilities under the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964, which defines these responsibilities quite broadly.

This has led to significant variations in service.

There is clear desire in the sector to address this situation. Heads of library services want a system that will help libraries to improve their services and create a more consistent offer around the country.

Libraries Connected will work with the libraries sector, local government and funders to develop a fit for purpose framework that has the support of all key partners.

What is quality?

Three things...

Alison Richards lives in Northamptonshire. She was closely involved in the battle that ensued when the county council ran out of money and made a hasty decision to close 21 libraries unless their communities could run them completely independently. This was proved unlawful by judicial review. She is still involved in sorting out the consequent difficulties.



The elements of a quality library service basically fall into three categories:

1. PEOPLE

Firstly there are those providing the service. Most obviously these are staff and volunteers. No quality library should be lacking in access to professionally qualified librarians.

By 'library' I mean each individual library service point – not the service as a whole, whether from the relevant statutory library authority or from some other 'independent' body.

Many public libraries in the statutory sector are not professionally staffed.

While many well-trained, but not professionally qualified, library managers do a good job that is often only because they have access to professional staff.

In the independent or 'community-managed' sector, reliance on unqualified and untrained, or inadequately trained, volunteers may be very heavy indeed. The quality of the service may consequently suffer.

For public libraries we also need to look at the quality of the elected councillors and other council officers, as well as those directly working in any public library provision. The quality of councillors is key.

If they are not supportive of libraries, the service will suffer. The same applies to chief executives, who are very powerful individuals in the local government hierarchy.

The most important people are the library users. Here quality can be summed up as QUID: Quality = Universality, Inclusivity and Diversity.

All library users, regardless of race, gender or any other attribute, should be treated with

respect and courtesy. Every individual must be valued and made to feel welcome.

2. BOOKS & INFORMATION

The quality of what the library offers must accord due prominence to these two core attributes.

Digital publications and information, as well as physical books, periodicals etc, must be able to meet the needs of the local library's community.

A quality service will have considerable input regarding the selection of these items. It will not rely entirely on whatever a library supply firm may choose to decide is suitable.

A quality library service will support library users in enhancing their digital skills. It will encourage reading for all age groups through book clubs, advice and promotion by staff. And it will have an in-built ethos of never turning away an enquirer for information empty-handed.

A quality library service offers efficient inter-lending between its own service points and through regional and national inter-lending, as well as the means to request books prior to publication.

It should be able to provide specialist publications of local interest, for loan or to consult on library premises. It should support local authors in promoting their books.

3. SOCIAL, COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC VALUE

A quality service will have a building that is publicly funded, attractive and well maintained.

It should be regarded as a community asset that is valued by all who use it. Its value must also be promoted to those who do not use it – in particular to local councillors, who need to

perceive that it, and the service to be found within, is worth the necessary funding.

As physical spaces, libraries have come to be regarded as safe and welcoming places in most instances. This can create an ambivalent situation.

Problems can arise when the 'social value' starts to push out the core provision of books and information.

A quality service will, both deliberately and accidentally, provide a very effective (and cheap) means of combating social isolation. That should be valued all the more since Covid-19 arrived.

However, a quality service should not over-emphasise provision of craft activities for adults, knit-and-natter groups and the like.

These can start to push out core library functions and can easily take place in other settings.

I have seen libraries become subject to people who only ever go in for such activities and who find that the books are 'in the way – can't we get rid of them?'. This is not conducive to a quality library service.

In economic terms, and again this will be ever more important since Covid-19, libraries have an important part to play in helping those who need digital access in order to apply for jobs.

Clinics for job seekers, access to Citizens Advice provision, information for business holders all have economic value and are aspects of a quality service.

Thriving local communities offer good schools, facilities such as doctors' surgeries, shops and post offices or banks.

A quality library service should feel part of those local facilities, in communities fortunate enough to have retained their local libraries.

What is quality? Books, knowledge, literacy

Liz Miles (Twitter @Liz_Miles) is a writer, and a campaigner for Save Our Libraries Essex.



Libraries Connected received a £128,456 grant from the Arts Council to 'clearly define what a high-quality library service looks like'.

The big question is: will the views of library users – including children, teachers, single parents, the unemployed, the vulnerable, the digitally excluded, and many other minority groups, who have real-life in-library experiences, and an acute awareness of their own needs – be reflected in the Libraries Connected definition?

I hope so. These library users (including, may I say, well-informed library campaigners) know what works in libraries, what doesn't work, and what they'll need more than ever, post-Covid.

Unfortunately their voices about their statutory library services aren't often heard above the noise of groups, other services and companies that shout out their offers as potential 'library partnerships'.

And library users certainly aren't listened to by local authorities such as Essex County Council. As a writer in the field of child literacy, a long-time library user, and having accrued a broad knowledge of library users' views as a campaigner, my call would be for a library service that's reignited with books, knowledge, literacy at the core.

Books, particularly printed books, are still the most popular library offer. Even Essex County Council, who cut 27% of Essex Libraries' book stock over the last 10 years, now admit that: 'Books and reading are still far and away the top priority: that's what 90% of users visit libraries for now and what survey respondents say is priority for the future'.²

Library users in Essex and beyond are still calling for more printed books, and better selections, on the shelves.

While e-book loans rose during temporary library closures, once libraries can fully open again, printed book borrowing will likely boom – following the explosion of book sales in September when shops reopened.³

And we must also remember that the rise in e-books was, in fact, from a very low base. It doesn't amount to much. For example, in 2018-19 only 2% of library loans in Essex libraries were digital. So even a 22% increase (as reported by Essex County Council) is tiny.⁴

Perhaps I'm biased, but I believe that print book popularity should be applauded, given the increasing concerns that screen reading leads to shorter attention spans and social media distraction.

And, more worryingly, as discovered by University College London, more time spent on social media causes lower literacy levels.⁵

Knowledge from books, online sources and other media, has to be at the core of libraries too.

Knowledge – factual knowledge – must be free and accessible in any democracy.

The famous quote from Neil Gaiman still stands: 'Google will bring you back, you know, a hundred thousand answers. A librarian will bring you back the right one.'⁶

Trained professional library staff should be available to help find the right book, a reliable website or even a correct fact. We need this now more than ever.

Yet, for example, Essex County Council are pushing libraries down a different road, 'to create the largest network of community-run libraries in the country'.⁷ 'Community-run' in this strategy means no professional paid staff, limited book stock, no building, no computers, no accountability, no guaranteed accessibility to knowledge.⁸

At a SOLE (Save Our Libraries Essex) rally, a child asked: 'Why do they want to close down libraries, when my mum and teacher keep telling me to read books?'

Why indeed? Literacy should be at the core of our library network. With a prediction that the UK will fall four places in global literacy tables by 2030 (from 10th to 14th out of 17 countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development))⁹ it's time for libraries to focus. Libraries must provide accessible reading

materials and the quiet space to concentrate, as well as opportunities for developing speaking and listening skills – for example, through shared reading.

The Covid lockdown proved how families without wifi, tablets or quiet space to read or work suffered most.

The National Literacy Trust's 2020 survey found that only three in four (74.4%) children and young people had a quiet space at home, with fewer still among those who receive free school meals.¹⁰

Essex County Council doesn't seem to be aware of these needs. Even now, they have squeezed a post office into a small branch library, leading to disruption and noise from a source that is completely unrelated to books, knowledge or literacy.

Like many authorities, Essex County Council has a 'new way of working' for their libraries. I fear that it will be a tide of disruptive schemes, from Amazon lockers to children's cake parties to smart card entry and staff-less empty spaces.

Books will be wheeled aside by the council in the hope that library users who don't have money to spend will stay away, pacified by their tablets or smartphones at home.

It's now up to the authoritative bodies to bring library users into the conversation to ensure that the destructive route Essex County Council is taking is halted, once and for all, and that books, knowledge, literacy are held up as core.

If this doesn't happen, the real value of libraries will collapse forever and the local and national purses will suffer long-term.

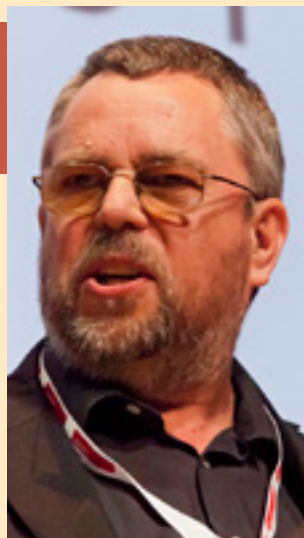
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What is quality?

It's high time

Alan Gibbons (Twitter @mygibbo), former teacher, author, founder of Campaign for the Book and long-time library campaigner



How do you make every public library as good as the best? It matters because of the way libraries are run – a statutory service existing across England, but delivered by local government.

For years this has been an issue for library campaigners and advocates. Government often says: 'Don't ask us, look at local delivery.' Local authorities will say: 'Where is the national funding and direction?'

It can be extremely frustrating as local communities seek to protect and enhance their local services.

NATIONAL

There was a time when library standards were uncontroversial, and promoted from the heart of government. In 2001 the then Secretary of State, Chris Smith, established standards governing opening hours, the number of branches, how many staff were required, the quality of the stock and more.

I can well remember debating one MP about eight years ago and he said, astonishingly, that

national standards were all very well, but had to be local! I suggested if he spent more time in his local library he might see the problem with that comment.

PROTECTION

Surely the point about standards is that they have to be national... and consistent – minimum levels of quality and effectiveness below which no individual library should dip, enabling the weakest to reach the level of the best.

Then there is genuine protection for a service that has often been low on the priorities of those in power. Without a vision, a structure, a plan, there is the danger that libraries struggle along without a sense of direction or the minimum levels of delivery expected of them, making them

What is quality?

The basics

Alan Wylie (Twitter @wylie_alan), long-time library campaigner, now workforce rep on the DCMS Re-opening Libraries Taskforce



The vast majority of library users want:

- ▶ Welcoming, easily accessible and well-maintained buildings.
- ▶ Fantastic collections of books/ebooks/newspapers/magazines.
- ▶ Free PC use.
- ▶ Paid and trained library staff.
- ▶ Let's forget the blue-sky thinking and just concentrate on the basics.

vulnerable to the vagaries of funding.

If the rest of the UK can establish and maintain such standards, it is high time England fell in line.

If this scheme helps restore a sense of purpose and consistency, everybody who works in libraries and uses them can feel more optimistic about the future of the sector.

After the last few years, that would be some much-needed good news.

What is quality? Why bother?

Shirley Burnham (Twitter @shirleyburnham) established the Friends of Old Town Library group in Swindon in 2008, now Save Swindon Libraries

In September 2020 the world recoiled in shock when the British prime minister and his closest advisors openly contemplated breaking international law to suit their purposes (for a speedy Brexit).

I'd claim that people should not have been so surprised. Such apparent disregard for laws, both international and domestic, has been manifest for ages.

It can be illustrated by the demise of our beloved statutory public libraries, for example. Because the national media considers the topic

too 'niche' to make headlines, a scandalous contempt for the law has been overlooked.

Here stands the citizen's only and last line of democratic defence against destruction of the library service he relies on, the 1964 Public Museums & Libraries Act.

It has never been repealed, but has been illegally re-invented, or ignored, by central and local government as an act of political expediency.

Important statutory duties are discarded and safeguards removed with impunity, because those



in power value their political ideology more than the public trust.

The 1964 Act requires a 'comprehensive' library service that is arranged so as not to exclude the people who wish to use it. It is intolerable to communities when a library service is being systematically squeezed so as to exclude thousands of people from access.

It is similarly intolerable to them to be presented with sub-standard substitutes for their existing public library that do not measure up to any citizen's definition of what a library is.

In order to shirk this legal requirement, the service is often described by decision-makers as a 'discretionary' one and not a statutory one – a lie.

EFFICIENT?

The 1964 Act also requires an 'efficient' public library service. Ministers, however, by virtue of their official statements, purvey the propaganda that the overriding definition of an 'efficient' library service is one which renders it cheaper to run, with little regard to its quality or civic purpose.

Indeed, government reports and statements have served as no more than charters, stuffed with jargon, for reducing costs!

That approach has given free rein to the application of disproportionate cuts: mass closures; mass staff redundancies; and mass 'handing over' of libraries to beleaguered residents.

FIGHT

More properly, I'd claim, the adjective 'efficient' ought to apply to a nationally consistent standard of service provided by public libraries to all their users.

Why bother? Are we so complacent as to infect each other with a deadly virus? No, so we 'bother'.

Should we apply the law to public libraries and condemn the machinations of those who pervert it? Yes, we should 'bother'.

What will remain of our beloved country when its countryside is built over, its asylum seekers vilified or tortured, its public libraries razed to the ground and its National Health Service privatised? The answer is Very Little Indeed.

Fight for these things!

What is quality – and why does it matter?

Bob Usherwood, Emeritus Professor, University of Sheffield, widens the perspective – and raises some vital issues that simply didn't exist in 2001 when England last published quality standards.

If memory serves correctly, not that I was around at the time, one of the first documented considerations of quality and public libraries was in an 1849 Select Committee report, which noted that there had been much debate on how public libraries might be organised to deliver services of quality.

Since then many professionals, me included, have added to the literature of the subject. I will not attempt to review previous works but will endeavour to answer the question, while recognising the havoc wrought by a government that, in the words of Professor William Davies (2020), 'sees little intrinsic value in a public library...'

Early in my career Orr (1973), when considering the question posed above, argued that those involved in the management of libraries should consider two things: 'How good is this library?' and '[h]ow much good does this library do?'

At that time much of the literature tended to be concerned with the quantitative assessment of libraries, and often reflected management methods from the commercial sector.

Unlike many of those currently responsible for public libraries, I am not convinced that such ideas transfer successfully to public services. They are not the same: they exist to serve the public, not to make a profit, and operate differently.

Thus, following some post-retirement research, I came up with two answers to the question set by the editor: Equity and Excellence. Each covers a multitude of issues.

EQUITY

A recent article in The Guardian stated that: 'At their heart, [libraries] are about social equity.' (Heath 2019).

Up to a point this is true, but there can be inequality at the most basic level.

Some library authorities, happily decreasing in



number, still deny membership to the homeless who are unable to provide an address.

In addition, equity of access can also be affected by physical disability or economic disadvantage, such as the travelling costs to reach a library in a rural county.

There are also important considerations such as race and class when managing the equitable distribution of services between different groups and communities.

Some readers may recall when public libraries undertook equalities service reviews, which featured in the management literature of the time under various acronyms such as STEPS (Strategic Equality Plans in Services), LibQUAL+ and SERVQUAL.

EXCELLENCE

A quality public service is one that provides equality of access to 'the best', that is, to excellent collections and services.

To paraphrase the dramatist Arnold Wesker, public librarians should not just give people what

they want – because they deserve better than that.

A quality service will encourage users to experiment and try some different, and perhaps more difficult, reading experiences. It will support the vulnerable while satisfying and extending the able.

CURIOSITY

Such a service will provide what Richard Hoggart (1991) described as ‘the liberating experience of uneducated adults giving meaning to their lives in and through the pursuit of knowledge and understanding’. He was also aware of the differences between public services and business-related ventures, observing that: ‘If you put the most important cultural elements in society into the hands of commercial people who want to make a profit, they will bring it down to the lowest common denominator.’ (BBC News, April 2014).

This does not mean that public libraries should be relentlessly highbrow. But it does signify that staff are respecting their users and that they recognise that intellectual curiosity does not depend on class, gender, ethnicity or any similar categorisation.

Some in our profession have accused Hoggart of cultural elitism, but such criticism was and is wide of the mark. As he stated in *The Uses of Literacy* (1963): ‘The strongest objection to the more trivial popular entertainments is not that they prevent their readers from becoming highbrow, but they make it harder for people without an intellectual bent to become wise in their own way.’

INFODEMIC

Recently, CILIP’s Chief Executive argued that public libraries need a mission ‘of the same scale and ambition as the BBC’s “to inform, educate and entertain”’. (Poole nd) The first of these now provides new threats and opportunities for public libraries.

As this is being written, we are in the midst not only of a pandemic but also an infodemic. In terms of the Covid virus, public libraries have confirmed and even enhanced their reputation, especially as trusted sources of information.

The provision of accurate and trustworthy information is, of course, an essential requirement of a quality library service.

Few would argue that professionally qualified librarians should not warn users about unreliable sources of medical information.

But political infodemics, spreading misinformation which damages our democracy, seem more difficult to deal with. A recent Democratic Audit (2018) from LSE (London School of Economics) stated that the ‘biggest source of concern about the democratic qualities of the UK’s media system has been that most of the press perennially back the Conservative Party (in very forceful ways in most cases)’.

Furthermore, as I write, our government, like that in America, has for some time had a known liar at its head.

DUTY TO WARN

In the United States, psychiatrists and mental health experts concerned by The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump have considered embracing their ‘duty to warn’ ‘at times of danger... not only sounding an alarm but [by] continually educating and engaging in a dialogue our fellow human beings’. (Lee 2017)

Now is the time for professional librarians to engage with their public and include the same duty as part of a quality service.

There are tools available. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has, for example, developed an infographic on how to spot fake news.

These problems are increasing – nowhere faster than on social media, the intellectual dark web and sundry other digital platforms. To quote James Harding’s (2018) Cudlipp lecture: ‘Connectivity currently rewards crap and punishes quality.’

‘In the digital world, an hysterical message is likely to carry further than a considered one.’

FAKE NEWS

Given this amount of misinformation, fake news et al, we should expect librarians to advise users about sources that can be trusted and those that can not.

Additionally, where relevant, they might also identify the editorial position of different sources.

The Liberal Democrats (2019) have suggested that the BBC, as well as providing impartial news and information, should ‘take a leading role in increasing media literacy and educating all generations in tackling the impact of fake news’.

A quality library service should offer something similar, providing it has enough professional staff with the necessary skills to offer such a service.

To do so would see our users recognised as the

citizens they are, rather than the ‘customers’ some in our profession want them to be.

Too many in the present library world appear to have been persuaded that outsourcing library services to private companies, volunteers, trusts et al is now the appropriate direction for the service.

In truth, this is the result of government cuts and a political ideology that wants to reduce the size of the state.

We are now instructed to take ‘a more commercial approach to income generation in libraries’.

This is in direct opposition to our first requirement for a quality service: ‘equity’. And, in particular, equity of access.

One of the unique qualities of public libraries is that they are one of very few places that anyone can use without paying or being expected to pay.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

As the author David Wharton told me earlier this year, public libraries ‘are there to open up the possibility of education and self-improvement.’

‘It’s what they did for me early on: [they] provided a safe, quiet place where I could explore books and ideas almost randomly, free of charge, with neither a curriculum nor the expectation of testing to narrow my interests.’

Such quality cannot be easily measured. Those that try often end up measuring what is measurable and missing what is important.

Such exercises were not helped when the Public Library Standards introduced by Chris Smith in 2001 were discontinued. Some, me included, would suggest that greater use should be made of qualitative research.

SOCIAL AUDIT

There are a number of methods such as ‘contingent valuation’, which has been used by the British Library and theatres.

Back in the day, during my time at Sheffield University, we undertook a social audit of public libraries and specific library activities such as the impact of reading on individuals and communities.

As a profession we need to demonstrate that qualitative assessments are often a more meaningful way of demonstrating the value, the impact and the quality of a service than relying on what David Boyle (2010), in a book of the same name, called *The Tyranny of Numbers*.

Fourteen or so years ago, a Chief Librarian told me: ‘If quality and excellence is at the heart of public library services then the rest will follow as a matter of course.’

Moreover, equity is at the heart of this approach because everyone can freely access and use public library services if they so choose.

If the politicians and professionals responsible for a public library service have a clear sense of purpose, and believe and make sure that they have the means to be, and provide, ‘the best’ then equity and excellence can co-exist.

It can occasionally be seen in a few library authorities. However this is no longer true at a national level.

Following years of austerity, the increasing de-professionalisation of staff and the antics of populist politicians, citizens’ access to an excellent and equitable service is now dependent on a post-code lottery.

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Why facts matter

Misinformation, including the political kind, is very much with us. And it's very much a professional matter for librarians. So said CILIP last November...



Among all the election ballyhoo, CILIP singled out a ploy by the Conservative party to disguise its own @CCHQPress twitter account as an independent fact-checking site during leaders' debate on TV.

In a strongly-worded official complaint to the party, CILIP CEO Nick Poole said: 'Rarely has it been more important that all political parties respect the role of evidence and accountability in public life.

'Your party's actions in misrepresenting itself as a legitimate fact checking service cross a line which ought never to be crossed – raising the spectre of state-sponsored misinformation and the deliberate undermining of truth and accountability which should have no place in British politics.

'We should emphasise that our engagement on this issue is not a party political matter. Since 2017, we have led a campaign called #FactsMatter calling on all parties and holders of public office to make a clear commitment to evidence and accountability in our politics.

'As a profession and as a professional association, we believe that it is the right of every citizen to receive accurate and open information, and the responsibility of public authorities to ensure that they are providing it – including political parties.

'We are committed to supporting citizens in finding and making use of accurate information as part of our work in combating online harms...

'To claim that retaining the underlying twitter ID while changing the handle of the account does not misrepresent the nature of the account is entirely insufficient as a justification for this action...

'Mis-representing political messaging as "fact" is clearly failing to use the best evidence and evidently discriminatory.'

The full text of the complaint is at: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/news/478714/Complaint-concerning-CCHQ-misrepresentation-on-social-media.htm>.



Dress to impress!

The aim is welcome: raising awareness and funds for UK public libraries. The means is refreshingly different – clever T-shirts, totes and more!

Say hello to Public Library Apparel. It's the brainchild of Isle of Wight library assistant Lottie Begg – and maybe one good thing to come out of the misery of lockdown.

She found herself at home with little work to do. 'The first thought from my colleagues and myself was the well-being of our regular, and mostly vulnerable, patrons,' she told Public Libraries News.

'The lockdown highlighted the absolutely crucial part libraries play in people's lives.

'Most people are aware they can borrow books and access the internet at their local library, but it offers so much more.

'It was here the idea came for raising awareness of what is available through public libraries, and who it is available for (hint: everyone).

'I've always had a passion for art and design. After years of creating promotional material for my library, the idea of designing apparel was a natural next step for me.

'For me, public libraries are the epitome of a healthy society, offering all individuals a physical and digital place to educate, entertain and empower themselves.

'I have found the service provided is now holistic to a person's well-being, filling in gaps from other services that are now defunded or underfunded to a point they can no longer support the individuals they are intended to help. The lockdown has emphasised this.

CHECK IT OUT!

- publiclibraryapparel.com
- Twitter @ApparelPublic
- Facebook @PublicLibraryApparel



The logo – stylish but just a little bit dilapidated – like the public library service, says Lottie...

'I passionately believe libraries need more funding and better promotion in the UK.'

TLC passionately agrees! And we are delighted to see that her designs are witty, attractive and very relevant. Her initial range is based on George Orwell's 1984.

'Very few books,' she says, 'have resonated with current world wide issues so much as 1984. With its themes of power and information, it resonates with libraries' core values of empowerment for all through information, learning and knowledge.'



Lottie Begg is a senior library assistant at the Lord Louis Library in Newport, Isle of Wight

'In the book, information is repressed and manipulated. The library is there to help you get the quality information you need.

'Empowerment through individual learning is one of the public library's core values. By providing qualified staff, quality ICT, and reputable and diverse materials that everyone can use regardless of status and power, anyone can start their journey to empowerment by using their library.

'The designs have a retro feel that is a nod to the golden years of public libraries and vintage book cover art.'

But there was nothing retro about the way Lottie got started. She launched an online Kickstarter appeal for £2,400 to cover production of the first collection. Fifty-five people chipped in and TLC added a final £800 to make sure Public Library Apparel launched.

It's a worthwhile investment, we think.

Not only are the T-shirts – plus bookmarks, tote bags, enamel pins and more ideas in the pipeline – a fresh, lively way to show what libraries are all about, Lottie will donate 20% of profits monthly to a library. You can nominate yours through an online form on the website.

Of her own library, she says: 'Coming through the doors we see a real mix of people. We have quite affluent people but we've also got a lot of poverty.'

She told The Big Issue: 'We just don't have enough resources to help. We've got a lot of frustrated people coming to us, there are people who have not had internet since lockdown and they rely on the library.'

'I want to raise awareness because I still don't think people know how much the library does for the community.'



The first 1984-themed collection

So much potential!

With typical thoroughness, the Carnegie UK Trust has produced a suite of four solid reports about libraries during lockdown. They cover the whole UK. They are a treasure-chest of facts and comments. And, unlike certain other reports, the trust actually asked library service users for their views! This is an edited extract from the over-arching report **Making a Difference: libraries, lockdown and looking ahead**. Four positive messages emerged. Plus eight ‘action areas’ – because given the chance, library services could have done even more... See: <https://bit.ly/2GJvum>



The Covid-19 pandemic saw the vast majority of library buildings close their doors during lockdown. Yet whilst the building is a core part of the library service, it is not the whole of it. Staff worked hard to provide digital as well as physical services.

Digital services included e-books, e-resources and a wider range of online activities. Physical services included welfare and keeping in touch calls, home delivery services, information provision and a handful of buildings-based services.

Some library services also worked hard to tackle digital exclusion during lockdown through tablet lending or distribution schemes, and providing support over the phone.

SUCCESS

This report acknowledges success – and offers a challenge. It draws on new evidence to make the case that UK public library services played a positive and supportive role during the lockdown.

It illustrates the significant contribution they can make in mitigating and overcoming the short, medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic.

It also points to the fact that they could have done more. It challenges local and national

The Trust conducted public polling of 2,196 UK adults, analysed 1,196 responses to a public library staff survey and carried out in-depth interviews with 22 heads of service. The survey also drew on the skills listed in CILIP's PKSB (Professional Skills & Knowledge Base) framework 'to gauge which skills, if any, came to the fore during lockdown'.

governments, sector support bodies and the sector itself to go further – to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to experience the enabling impact of the best services.

As a welcoming space at the heart of communities, free at the point of access and open to all, with a network of physical spaces and skilled staff, public library services have incredible potential as social infrastructure.

Too often we refer to ‘libraries’ rather than ‘library services’. This conjures up images of buildings as static objects, rather than the dynamism, connection and potential of their combination of people, ethos and skill.

POTENTIAL

Urgent conversations are happening all around us about how the state can empower individuals and communities to achieve positive change for themselves, to participate fully and to help each other.

There is real potential to harness the potential of public library services in this context.

But for this potential to be realised, the sector requires:

- a sustainable financial settlement;
- a stronger voice in local authority structures;
- an excellent blended physical and digital service (including, but not only, outstanding provision of both physical books and e-books);
- investment in staff and organisational culture.

To stand still is to fall behind. There will always be a need to be constantly alert, to listen and adapt, to work with communities, to form partnerships with others to innovate and meet local needs. There will be further, unknown, disruptive events ahead.

Investment in staff and culture are as critical as funding and status in creating a resilient,

flexible service to meet the demands of both today and tomorrow.

Many of the identified areas for action will feel familiar. In light of the new ways of working we have seen during lockdown, and the challenges that arise, this now feels a critical moment to address these issues once and for all.

The context is already set by multiple calls to action for:

- a new settlement between central and local;
- outcomes-based budget setting;
- holistic place-based approaches.

It is vital that our public library network takes its place at the centre of this conversation.

KEY MESSAGES

Public library services:

- 1 had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown
- 2 made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response via their staff
- 3 could have delivered much more, but faced barriers
- 4 have huge potential to support individuals and communities as they navigate the short, medium and long-term impacts of the pandemic.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT

Around three in 10 people engaged with public library services during lockdown. Over 60% of these pointed to a range of benefits: from being provided with useful information to experiencing a positive impact on their wellbeing, from feeling more connected to their community or feeling less alone, to being supported to develop an interest or hobby.

STAFF MADE A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION

Some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff deployed day-to-day pre-Covid-19.

Staff that were redeployed to support the local authority drew heavily on: customer service skills, learning and support skills, information and knowledge management skills, and skills relating to adaptability and working in new teams.

The transferability of the core skill set enabled staff working outside the library service to support communities during an intense and challenging time.

Adaptability and innovation were also key for staff working within the library service. They enabled staff to respond to need as it arose in their communities. For example, some services provided PPE for local NHS and care home staff by using the 3D printers in their Makerspaces, or worked with local groups to deliver new services.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES COULD HAVE DELIVERED MUCH MORE

Despite the positive impact that public library services had on those who engaged with them, and the important contribution that library staff made to the broader response to Covid-19, it was widely felt that there were significant gaps in how library staff were able to support their communities during lockdown.

The limitations of digital delivery included:

- digital exclusion impacted on reach;
- digital formats had a negative impact on

services' ability to provide quality interaction and support;

- services were unable to provide access to physical resources.

Digital versions of in-person library activities were not like-for-like replacements, and did not deliver the same outcomes.

The loss of a civic, agenda-free space that could be entered without payment or permission, providing the potential (but not the obligation) for interaction and encounters, was also felt.

This curtailed library services' ability to deliver a curated social experience and a wider range of benefits to their communities.

Factors external to the sector affected service development and delivery:

- finances;
- differing attitudes to risk within local authorities;
- the extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does and how it can contribute;
- the extent to which the library service has a voice in local authority structures.

Factors internal to the sector included:

- consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown;
- organisational culture;
- effective communication and engagement with the public;
- preparedness and contingency planning;
- partnerships;
- digital skills.

The impact of these various barriers meant that public library services were unable to act as a service of first resort in the way they did before lockdown: a safety net for communities, the

lonely or isolated, and 'borderline' or 'hidden' vulnerable people.

In some cases, it also meant that staff were unable to draw on their valuable skill set to support communities and local authorities in the most effective way.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES HAVE HUGE POTENTIAL

Public library services are a vital part of social infrastructure. The best of them enable, empower and equalise.

Covid-19 has not changed the strategic priorities of library services so much as sharpened their focus. It has also made staff acutely aware of the levels of need and vulnerability in communities.

Looking ahead, public library services have tremendous potential to support individuals and communities across a range of local authority and government priority areas, made ever more pressing by the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown.

The issues they can help tackle include:

- strengthening communities
- employment and financial wellbeing
- education
- digital inclusion
- physical and mental health
- knowledge and information
- cultural engagement
- literacy
- equality, diversity and inclusion.

It is clear that public library services have tremendous potential. It is, however, equally clear that the sector needs to continue to adapt and innovate. It requires adequate funding and support to fulfil its potential.

8 ACTION AREAS

It is a matter of increasing urgency and importance that the barriers and issues highlighted – long-standing or otherwise – are overcome, to enable public library services to fulfil their potential and deliver for individuals and communities across the UK.

The action areas draw on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified by those who participated in the research directly, through analysis, or through the Carnegie UK Trust's broader experience of working with the sector over the past eight years.

Many of the action areas will feel familiar to the sector, albeit to lesser or greater degrees

across the UK and across different local authorities.

In many cases, work is being conducted across a range of the areas identified.

Given the differences in how governments and the library sector in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are progressing library-related agendas, and the ever-shifting external environment, the items listed are broad areas and ideas.

We believe they should be taken into consideration by local and national governments, sector support bodies and the sector itself in developing services during the next period:

- 1 Deliver a sustainable financial settlement.
- 2 Strengthen status and voice in local authority structures.
- 3 Value, and invest in, skilled and confident staff.
- 4 Build a positive organisational culture that supports leadership at all levels.
- 5 Recognise that the digital future is here, and deliver a high quality blended service.
- 6 Resolve the longstanding, complex issues around e-books.
- 7 Balance coherent and consistent national offers with the power of the regional and the appeal and benefits of the hyper-local.
- 8 Advocate effectively and powerfully.

Creative re-think needed

Libraries Connected asked its members (heads of service) about their lockdown experiences. There's much to celebrate – but some big questions arise...

CASE HISTORIES The report includes heartening stories about services in Barking & Dagenham, Barnsley, Bracknell Forest, Bridgend, Bucks, Suffolk and St Helens. <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/library-services-online-events-lockdown>

OVERALL VIEW

Lockdown has highlighted the role of libraries in keeping communities connected and supporting the most vulnerable in our society.

It has also demonstrated their skills, empathy and flexibility to meet immediate and long-term changes in community needs.

The role of libraries will be crucial as we begin to see the longer-term impact of coronavirus on our health, our economy and our society.

At Libraries Connected, we plan a strong advocacy campaign, with key sector partners, to emphasise the vital role library services and buildings will play in community rebuilding.

We will gather and share accurate information about the sector, and its evolving needs, to the key decision-makers in central and local government.

We offer incredible value for money, given all that we deliver.

OFFICIAL VIEW

We both believe that libraries have the potential to play a key role in future recovery and renewal efforts across the country.

DCMS officials will be looking for opportunities and examples of how this can happen locally, to help make that case with colleagues across government.

LGA is planning to provide support for portfolio holders in understanding the contribution that public libraries can make to local renewal, and helping them to be better equipped to provide personal leadership during this period.

Yours sincerely

*Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister for Digital & Culture;
Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, Chair of the Local Government Association Culture, Tourism & Sport Board*

* extract from a letter, dated 16 July 2020, to council leaders and chief executives

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Digital borrowing was not just a 'fad' at the start of lockdown. After an initial surge, the higher level of demand has been sustained.

Ebook use increased overall by 146% (in individual services ranged it between 38% and 714%). Its scale is still small compared to lending of physical material.

The increased investment in digital lending may double its costs this year. This is unlikely to be sustainable.

The market for online resources, particularly ebooks, has developed significantly in recent years, although online costs and licensing models are considerably higher than for physical books.

The digital offer still requires significant improvement to match popular commercial retail and streaming services.

'We reached new audiences who had previously thought digital was not for them, including one 94-year-old who signed up for digital audio. An additional 2,160 residents joined online so they could access our digital offer. We offered telephone digital support, which was really successful.'

As the current licensing model continues to operate restrictively for public libraries, public expectation may outstrip supply. This is particularly true for children's ebooks, where traditionally the demand has been lower than for adult titles.

Other online resources also saw large increases in checkouts during lockdown: audiobooks 113%; magazines 80%; newspapers 223%; comics 497%.

There were substantial variations between authorities. While the increases were often from a low base, other authorities already had a mature digital platform and user base from which they could expand rapidly.

DIGITAL EVENTS

Many services moved physical events online, often exploring digital meeting and broadcasting platforms for the first time.

This was a major innovation for most. It revealed untapped staff skills and resourcefulness, but also presented many challenges.

Over 75% delivered 'libraries from home' events. Storytimes, rhymetimes, arts and crafts, reading groups and Lego clubs were the most common (over 50%). Key barriers were 'limited experience in delivering events online' (66%), 'inflexible IT systems' (47%) and 'staff redeployment' (37%). Also cited were corporate policies and lack of equipment.

Some activities, for example storytimes, were possible only because Libraries Connected (or individual services) could negotiate relaxed copyright restrictions with publishers.

More than half of services (56%) increased their event audience online. A good social media presence (80%), strong staff digital skills (77%) and strong senior management/political support (68%) were important.

There was strong positive feedback from users, and anecdotal evidence of profound benefits for individual and family wellbeing.

But this may have exacerbated digital divides. There was clear and widespread concern about the impact of poor digital access in the community, making digital library services 'niche' even if use increased.

Online events raised the profile and reputation of the library service with elected members and senior officers, as an asset or exemplar service.

But they highlighted gaps in digital capacity and skills, and low levels of online resources and licences in some places.

Many services are now re-thinking digital provision, to build on the lockdown experience and address the reality of the digital divide.

HOME LIBRARY SERVICES

HLSs (home library services) are run by most library services, providing vital comfort and books to a small client base of vulnerable users who cannot use in-person services.

Some are delivered by volunteers. The availability of older volunteers was a significant factor for many services.

During lockdown, clearly the number of people self-isolating or shielding was many times greater. 60% of services managed to continue delivering HLSs.

Almost one in five operated an 'enhanced' service, open to more people, with extra support to help combat loneliness and improve digital skills. Some services widened their criteria for receiving HLS or relaxed them altogether, so that anyone could self-refer. However, this was only possible for a minority.

One HLS moved from 429 deliveries to 75 users, to 1,964 deliveries to 1,044 users.

The skills and resources most frequently cited as helping to deliver the HLS was 'availability of skilled staff' (89%), 'high staff motivation and morale' (80%), 'strong senior management/political support' (66%), and 'availability of transport' (62%).

'One home library service user told me that when I first phoned her she was so overwhelmed that the library service had made the effort to contact her that she just cried with relief after she put the phone down.'

RELATIONS WITH THE COUNCIL

Redeployment often generated a beneficial (two-way) integration with other council departments supporting vulnerable people. This will continue to produce value for councils in the future.

Library staff demonstrated essential skills and capabilities which were highly valued by councils, particularly customer service and communication and a flexible and collaborative approach to working with colleagues and partners.

Library staff were often singled out for praise by elected members and senior managers.

But staff skills, particularly for digital communication, social media and communication, could have been better used by some councils, particularly to support digitally excluded and isolated people.

'Elected members and senior officers realised the range of our digital offer. Staff learned new digital skills very quickly. We realised we could do things we hadn't tried before. I was reminded how creative, adaptable and capable our library staff are in a crisis!'

PHONE-CALLS

Keep-in-touch calls were widely used to support and comfort shielding, isolated and vulnerable citizens.

Many library services delivered these calls – directly within the service structure, or while redeployed to other council teams.

This showcased library services, and staff skills and knowledge, to council colleagues.

Several services made over 10,000 calls.

The key assets which helped were 'strong communication skills (84%), 'availability of skilled staff' (82%) and strong senior management/political support (55%).

The main barriers were 'staff redeployed to urgent Covid activity' (40%), 'staff absence' (30%) and 'restrictive corporate policies' (13%).

Library staff were valued because of their customer skills. The experience gave staff more confidence but it was emotionally challenging.

Remote services will continue to be important for creating a 'blended' or 'hybrid' service, marrying the digital and physical offer to reach those who need library services most.



'Thank you for the amazing online library resources which you have built up at no additional costs to the user. It's so good to be able to offer this to the school community at a time when I think [they] will be appreciated possibly for the first time by many families.'

CHILDREN

There was particularly strong feedback from parents and families that online resources and events, newsletters and other communications made an enormous contribution to learning and home schooling.

Of school library service providers, 19 offered a restricted or no service during lockdown. Nine provided a standard or enhanced service – examples included increased use of online resources, book boxes for schools, use of social media to contact school staff, and the importance of maintaining engagement with schools.

Services which delivered an SLS during lockdown cited 'availability of skilled staff' (62%), 'strong commitment from schools' (41%) and 'strong senior management/political support (35%).

'Lack of access to premises' (61%), 'corporate policies' (39%), and 'school commitment issues' (35%) were key barriers.

THE GOOD NEWS

Public libraries have the broadest reach of any cultural sector in the UK, with 3,583 libraries and 226m visits in 2019, a third of the population visiting a library at least once, and a user base which broadly reflects the UK population.

During lockdown most library services responded by innovating online, upskilling staff and reaching out to their communities in ways which had a profound impact, genuinely saving lives in many cases.

Libraries' experience during lockdown points to a potential renaissance, in which their huge contribution towards supporting communities puts them front and centre of social and economic recovery.

Opportunities for extending digital engagement are married with library staff's strengths in supporting wellbeing, combating isolation and bringing people together, potentially reinventing how the library offer is delivered physically as well as digitally. Typical quotes:

'It's really put library staff up there. People don't normally talk about libraries corporately. Now they are and we're seeing how we can make library spaces work for communities in a new way.'

'Our CEO said that our agile experience of working with colleagues on community support during redeployment has furthered plans for a greater role for libraries in council customer services.'

‘Like many older people, my mother loves her reading. Being without books is a great loss in her life, as they keep her mentally agile and help her wellbeing. I know you are all working in very difficult circumstances, so taking the time to get a good collection of books together and deliver them was really appreciated. Thank you.’

THE BAD NEWS

Success in delivering digital and remote services could be viewed, erroneously, as a substitute for a physical offer, or adequate as a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service.

Among the many challenges around re-opening, 61% of respondents cited ‘justifying our service’s existence in the context of budget reductions’.

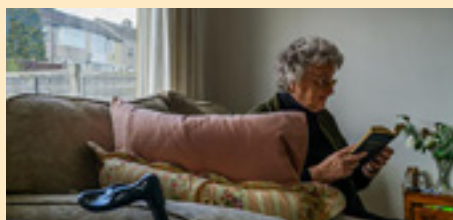
Typical quotes:

‘[There is] a very strong line from the directors to use the pandemic as an opportunity to significantly reduce the physical library estate.’

‘Some of our directors may say we should shift entirely to ebooks, but so many of our residents still want a physical book. Our success at running an expanded home library service during lockdown is now haunting us. It is clearly being regarded by some as a possible way to replace static libraries.’

‘Many councils will attempt to keep libraries closed by stealth.’

‘Covid-19 affected the core role of the library, a



safe space for people to spend time and reflect. The shift to a digital offer raises concerns regarding senior directors’ [support for] a changed service, less focused on buildings. This now impacts on the next serious challenge – how to find savings for the next budget cycles...’

‘I suspect we are at a hinge point where a fresh approach is required, rather than an attempt to reanimate where we were in March.’

‘As we welcome people back gradually, we’re caught between wanting to do more and doing things safely. When we start up more with events, we can show we’re ready to take things on as a partner who can deliver for health and social care.’

NEXT...

Despite the problems, many services are using recovery to accelerate existing plans to put libraries at the heart of local strategies.

These include collaboration, commissioning, co-location and integration with other council services.

Based on the positive experience of library staff working more closely with public health and other community services during the lockdown, opportunities are presenting themselves for libraries to become a core delivery partner.

Before the lockdown, services focused on maximising visitor numbers, dwell times and space usage. Re-opening represents a wholesale re-think.

Many services would like to continue elements of the additional support they offered through lockdown, often on a one-to-one basis.

However, with the additional costs of restoring physical services, and increased expenditure on ebooks and other resources, it is clear that current capacity cannot support everything.

Creating a ‘blended’ or ‘hybrid’ offer will therefore require considerable creativity and planning, as well as some hard choices for councils.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Local councils and government agencies should recognise that public libraries are an essential service for recovery from the pandemic, uniquely equipped to offer hope and enrichment to the broadest range of people.

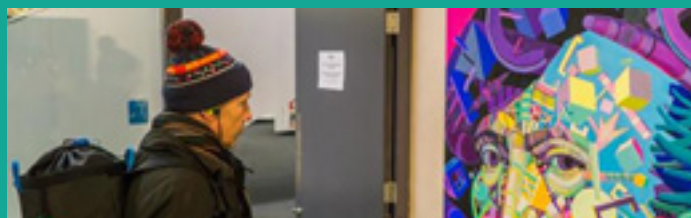
Libraries are not just partners but core agencies that regularly provide direct services and prevent the escalation of issues such as deprivation and loneliness.

Library services should:

- ▶ continue to collaborate with other council services and partners, to prevent future cost burdens to welfare, education, health and social care.
- ▶ absorb the implications of changes in footfall, working patterns and space requirements when thinking how library spaces could be best used in future.
- ▶ prioritise investment in digital capacity, to meet consumer expectations of a modern digital service.
- ▶ develop their funding and income generation strategies, to align with the emerging needs of community resilience and regeneration, and changing working patterns.

Councils should:

- ▶ recognise that digital and remote services provide mitigation for isolation – but communities also need and want social spaces with the values and reach of public libraries.
- ▶ use the skills of library staff to ensure all residents have access to digital services, particularly young people and those facing isolation as social distancing continues.
- ▶ remove barriers which prevent libraries from delivering a high-quality digital offer, including corporate limitations on web platforms and use of social media.
- ▶ value and leverage their libraries’ reach, assets and trusted brand to enhance their preventative strategies. They should consider libraries first when commissioning, rather than viewing them as a source of short-term savings.
- ▶ with library services, build on the way staff have demonstrated and developed skills during lockdown to deliver a workforce ready to respond to future needs and to advocate for their services.





The Library Campaign

Registered Charity (England and Wales) No. 1102634

Standing Order Form

To the Manager, _____ Bank _____

Post Code _____

Please set up the following Standing Order and debit my account accordingly, payable to:

Account Name: The Library Campaign

Account Number: 61277405

Sort code: 40-40-39

Holding Branch: HSBC, 2-4 St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7HD

Please quote membership number: _____ (to be allocated by TLC, for reference)

Please pay the sum of £_____ every year, starting on _____/_____/_____
until further notice.

My bank details:

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I wish to join The Library Campaign.

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Please tick which is applicable

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I also enclose a donation to The Library Campaign of £_____

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Gift Aid declaration

giftaid it

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money made to **The Library Campaign**

today in the past 4 years in the future Please tick all boxes that apply

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give on or after 6 April 2008.

Signed _____ Dated _____

Please notify us if you want to cancel this declaration, change your name or home address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

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We will forward the Standing Order form to your bank, with a membership reference.
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