



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport

Report pursuant to Section 17 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for 2019/20

July 2020

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Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport

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FOREWORD

I was delighted to be appointed as Minister of State for Digital and Culture with responsibility for libraries, on 13 February. Libraries are a valuable asset, sitting at the heart of communities, and as the Prime Minister described them, they help “bring communities together, and give places new energy and new life”. They help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, and are a fantastic source of entertainment and education. Libraries also help both central and local government achieve strategic outcomes by delivering services in communities - health, social cohesion, reducing loneliness and social isolation, information and digital literacy, or jobs and business support.

As Minister, with responsibility for public libraries policy in England, I'll be promoting the value of investing in libraries and the importance of what they deliver. I'll work across local and central government to encourage a 'libraries first' approach to deliver services to communities, and to ensure the valuable contributions that library services can and do make to priority outcomes are recognised. The Government will be investing in helping libraries transform to meet changing user needs through the Libraries Transformation innovation fund, providing capital for digital and building projects to increase flexibility. I was delighted that in the March 2020 Budget the British Library received £13 million to extend the reach of its Business and Intellectual Property Centres further across the public libraries network.

The role public libraries played in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown their importance, particularly the digital offer, into strong relief. Library services reacted quickly to the surge in demand for e-books and e-audio, and to the closures of physical library locations by developing innovative and exciting digital ways to provide services such as Rhyme Time and Storytimes, often reaching far more people than before. And the underlying skills of library staff and volunteers was demonstrated through the work they undertook when redeployed into response roles - with information handling, community insights, and empathy with vulnerable groups at the top of the list.

I take seriously the department's role to superintend and promote the improvement of public library services provided by local authorities in England; this report describes what we've done this year. Library services continue to face challenges to meet the needs of the people they serve within available resources. We have investigated a number of complaints about whether councils are meeting their statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service, and we will take action if necessary.

During the period covered by this report, DCMS worked with the Libraries Taskforce to promote and support the work of public libraries. The Taskforce ceased at the end of March 2020, but DCMS is funding Arts Council England for a further transition year, to embed the work and collaborative approach the Taskforce pioneered into sector 'business as usual'.

Caroline Dinenage MP - Minister of State for Digital and Culture

Introduction

This report covers the period April 2019 to March 2020.

This report should be read alongside the Libraries Taskforce [ninth](#) six month progress report to ministers, published in November 2019. Production of the tenth and final progress report, covering October 2019 to March 2020 has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, as has its closure report on the Taskforce's activities and impact throughout its lifetime (2015 to 2020). These will both be published later in 2020. These reports contain information on the work, activities and achievements of the Taskforce and also cover the activities of its individual member organisations.

Further and more detailed information on individual organisations' work in the library sector during the period covered by this report will be available later in the year (there are delays in finalising these due to the current COVID -19 pandemic).

Links to the publication pages where these will be appear are listed below:

[Arts Council England](#)

[The British Library](#)

[Libraries Connected](#)

[Local Government Association](#)

[The Reading Agency](#)

Government engagement with libraries

There has been significant engagement with the library sector by departmental ministers and officials during the year.

Library visits, events and meetings

Following the appointment of Caroline Dinenage as Minister for Digital and Culture (with responsibility for public libraries) on 13 February 2020, she visited the British Library on Monday 2 March.

Her predecessor (Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism (MAHT) Helen Whately MP, visited Willesden Green Community Library (Brent), Margate (Kent) and the British Library (along with Nicky Morgan, Secretary of State for DCMS) during Libraries Week in October 2019. Also during Libraries Week Baroness Barran, the DCMS Lords Minister who leads on civil society work, visited Suffolk Libraries, which was celebrating its 7th year as a public service mutual. DCMS Libraries Team also arranged Libraries Week visits by Lord Gardiner (Defra minister leading on rural services) to a Buckinghamshire library co-located with other community services; and by Carl Creswell, Director, Professional Business Services, Retail

and Post at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to the colocated library and Post Office at Crayford in Bexley.

Between April 2019 to September 2019, the previous MAHT, Rebecca Pow MP, visited Storyhouse (Chester); and Michael Ellis (her predecessor) attended the launch of the [BL launch of 'Start-ups in London libraries'](#) and visited the British Library at Boston Spa in May. He also met with the Head of the Libraries Taskforce Steven Broomhead. Minister for Digital and Broadband Matt Warman MP, met Roly Keating from the British Library, Adrian Smith from the Alan Turing Institute, and several staff from both organisations.

The Department's previous Lords Minister, Lord Ashton spoke at the launch of the Summer Reading Challenge at the British Library on 10 July 2019; and Baroness Barran visited Wolsingham Library (Durham) in February.

Senior DCMS officials visited the Library of Birmingham, Foleshill (Coventry), Margate (Kent), Oxford Central Library, Liverpool Central Library and Manchester Central Library. During Libraries Week (in October 2019) members of the DCMS team visited Leamington Spa (to mark the opening of a 3rd makerspace, building off the success of the existing makerspaces in Rugby and Nuneaton that were funded by the DCMS-backed and ACE-managed Libraries: Opportunities for Everyone innovation fund); Church Street and Pimlico libraries in Westminster; South Clapham library in Lambeth; and Canada Water in Southwark. A member of the team subsequently attended the opening of Great Sankey community hub in Warrington on 21 January, and the opening of the Plumstead Centre in Greenwich on 29 February.

Local authority library services

DCMS officials encourage local authorities to talk to them at an early stage about proposals to make significant changes to library services. DCMS engaged with 19 different local authorities and undertook 41 separate discussions. This included visits by officials to meet with council officers in Bradford, Essex, Surrey and Worcester to discuss their future plans for library service provision. DCMS officials continue to engage regularly with public library sector partners and those with an interest in public libraries. This includes Arts Council England, Libraries Connected, Local Government Association, CILIP, The Reading Agency and British Library.

Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964

The Public Libraries and Museum Act 1964 (1964 Act) places a duty on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Councils fund and run public libraries and remain best placed to assess the needs of their local communities and design library services to meet those needs within the requirements of their statutory duty.

The 1964 Act also places a duty on the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by councils in England and to secure the proper discharge of the statutory duties on local authorities.

DCMS takes these statutory responsibilities seriously and officials monitor and keep under review proposals by library authorities to make changes to their library service provision, providing advice to ministers accordingly. DCMS also considers any complaints made to the department on library provision where the council may be failing to meet their statutory duty on a case-by-case basis. [Further information](#) about the statutory duties on local authorities and the Secretary of State, and the department's consideration of formal complaints under the 1964 Act is available on GOV.UK.

The process of consideration of a complaint includes ministers making a decision indicating whether the Secretary of State is 'minded to' order a local inquiry, and inviting further representations before a final decision is made. Over the period of this report, ministers issued a final decision letter and 'minded to' letters on formal complaints to DCMS about library services in London Borough of Barnet, Swindon and Lambeth. These [letters are published online](#).

Immediately following the government instruction on Monday 23 March to stay at home and the closure of library locations in response to the coronavirus pandemic, DCMS Libraries team updated the guidance "Libraries as a statutory service". The guidance noted that DCMS would interpret compliance with the councils' duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service in light of public health guidance and the government instruction and that this interpretation would apply until such time as the government announced removal of the closure restriction.

Other public libraries developments

Local authorities in England continued to invest in their library services with net expenditure in 2018 to 2019 totalling £622 million. There are numerous examples of councils investing in new libraries and the refurbishment of others to provide modern services and facilities. Some examples are:

- Newport Pagnell library re-opened on 17 December 2019 after a four month refurbishment costing £100,000 which was financed by contributions from developers which go towards community and social infrastructure. The 50 year old building has been modernised with a new layout and extensive re-decoration, new furniture and fittings - and thousands of new books. A new Libraries Xtra system allows customers to access the library without staff in the building. More than £15,000 has been invested in 2,500 new titles for the library which offers a wide selection of the latest paperback, audio and digital books.
- Kentish Town Library reopened on 19 February 2020 as part of the Council's £1.5m investment to ensure Camden's libraries continue to thrive in the future. Users now benefit from a brand-new community space and study areas as well as improved digital facilities, including state of the art tech and better and faster computers. The refurbishment also offers more space to enable community groups to work together.
- Library @ the Lightbox in Barnsley, opened to the public on 13 July 2019, and was the first new building of the Glass Works development in the centre of Barnsley. The library also provides new community space and has been described by Barnsley Council as the town's "new cornerstone". The building's glass exterior is designed to illuminate a new town square as part of the town's £180m regeneration. The facility offers users access to over 20 PC's, digital learning and coding clubs. There is an events room, a quiet room for autism sufferers to use when they need a quiet space, away from the busy library. The Children's Library is bursting with colour and has many items of interactive furniture for little children to read their favourite books.
- Great Sankey Library (Warrington) - the former Great Sankey Leisure Centre has been transformed into a neighbourhood hub, which encompasses leisure, library, health, and cultural facilities under one roof it is believed to be the first fully integrated, dementia friendly wellbeing building and public library in the UK. The new library, officially opened in 2020, has an open access space without physical boundaries located close to the entrance on the ground floor. In addition to providing library books the layout provides a flexible space for use by all hub users. The wider library offer includes computer facilities, wi-fi access, a separate quiet space for study, relaxation, or for use for specific activities such as reading groups or for crafts. The provision of books is not confined to one space and can be found distributed throughout the public spaces across the hub.
- Weymouth Library and Learning Centre reopened on 28 September 2019. The new centre has been transformed from a modest library into a modern, community hub. The building is now home to a fantastic new library area, featuring a bespoke children's reading area with sensory toys, as well two classrooms for adult learning and a community meeting room for hire. Citizens Advice and the Skills and Learning team are also based in the same building.
- Milton Road Library in Cambridge reopened on 24 June following a complete rebuild and refurbishment of the site. The library has retained the original stone portico at the entrance to the library and now includes two new flexible community spaces for

meetings, a kitchen for event use and an accessible garden area. The library also benefits from public PCs, free Wifi, study spaces, self-service facilities for issue and return of items and a bright new children's area.

Cultural Investment Fund

DCMS announced a £250 million Cultural Investment Fund in October 2019 which aims to drive local growth and reinforce the role of culture at the heart of communities. This included £125 million of funding for regional museums and public libraries. Public libraries will benefit from a Libraries Transformation Fund, focussed on upgrading buildings and technology so public libraries across England are better placed to respond to the changing ways people are using them.

The department is currently working with ACE and other partners to develop processes for allocating this funding. More details will be announced later in 2020.

Libraries data

For an eighth consecutive year, DCMS provided around £45,000 of funding to enable the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to develop and publish a set of comparative profile reports for library authorities in England for 2018 to 2019. The reports enable a local authority to compare its service with a group of similar authorities, to allow it to consider like-with-like, and pinpoint areas where it could improve performance. These [reports](#) are publicly available through the CIPFA website.

CIPFA also published its annual library statistics for April 2018 to March 2019 in December 2019, using data provided by library services, with 83% of library services responding. The data indicates total net expenditure of £621.7 million for library services in England, supporting a library network of 2,828 library service points open 10 or more hours per week (including mobiles). The network attracted 187.7 million physical visits, as well as 101 million visits to library websites and 157.4 million physical book loans.

DCMS has also been taking forward work for the Libraries Taskforce concerning Open Data. Over the year we have:

- hosted a [workshop](#) for Taskforce members, front-line library practitioners and data experts to reflect on what had already been achieved and on next steps;
- Supported a small volunteer and sector-led team to develop draft schemas for six core datasets and tested them with 11 library services¹;
- Championed the work to the sector through representation at Libraries Connected

¹ Barnet, Bristol, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Devon, Kent, Lancashire, Newcastle, Plymouth, Stockport and Surrey

Committee meetings.

Although some planned work at the end of the year was delayed, in fact the subsequent COVID situation has exposed further the difficulties of not having up to date, easily collated and consistent data from the sector. We will continue to pursue this work later in the year, championing the concept generally and the path to a sector solution in particular.

Annex 1

Other DCMS libraries work

The DCMS libraries team undertakes other activities relevant to the public library sector. This also includes sponsorship of the British Library.

British Library sponsorship

British Library is a non-departmental public body sponsored by DCMS. The Chair and members of the Board are all appointed by the Secretary of State, with the exception of one member who is appointed by HM The Queen. One member of the Board is appointed after consultation with Scottish ministers.

As a legal deposit library, the British Library is required by law to receive, preserve and maintain copies of all books produced in the UK. Since 2013, these legal deposit requirements have extended to maintaining copies of non-print works, including e-books, e-journals, and the UK web archive. The British Library is also the national repository for recorded sound, and it administers the Public Lending Right scheme on behalf of the government. Through this scheme authors receive payments from a fund to compensate them for the borrowing of their books from public libraries in the UK.

Crucial to ensuring it can continue with this legal deposit function, the British Library have ambitious plans to transform its Boston Spa site in West Yorkshire with additional storage and a modernised public offer. At Spring Budget 2020² the Government confirmed funding up to £95 million for this work which will also underpin the British Library's plans to open a major new site in the centre of Leeds, creating a new British Library of the North. The government will provide a £25 million Heritage Fund to the West Yorkshire Combined Authority to support the Library in establishing this new site.

Although British Library is not governed by the Secretary of State's library superintendence under the 1964 Act, it plays an important and active role across the public libraries sector. Its [network of Business and Intellectual Property Centres](#) based in libraries across the country, provides entrepreneurs and SMEs across the UK with free access to databases, market research, journals, directories and reports worth thousands of pounds. An evaluation of the impact of the network - [Democratising Entrepreneurship](#) - was published last year and demonstrates that BIPCs deliver excellent return on investment, creating enterprises and jobs, and boosting local economies. In particular BIPCs are hugely effective at minimising the failure rate among SMEs, have had a particularly positive impact on female and BAME business people, a sector under-represented in business, and are attractive to creative, media and tech start-ups.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2020-documents/budget-2020>

This impressive impact was vital to DCMS securing a further £13m at Budget for British Library to expand and accelerate the network to reach 20 hubs outside London and the further roll-out of the ‘spoke’ model, meaning that the BIPC network can continue to support growth and prosperity across the country.

In May 2019, the British Library’s Business & IP Centre launched Start-ups in London Libraries, a 3-year project to support London’s entrepreneurs from all walks of life to get their business idea off the ground. This coordinated network of free support for start-ups officially launched in over 60 public libraries in September, in partnership with ten London boroughs. With funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), supported by JP Morgan and ACE, the project is being delivered in the boroughs of Bexley, Croydon, Greenwich, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest.

DCMS also supports the British Library in its work on a scoping project (funded by ACE and Carnegie UK) to establish the demand for and possible shape of, a single digital presence for UK libraries. A recommendations paper, [Digital Transformations for UK public libraries: five approaches to a ‘Single Digital Presence](#), set out what a national online platform (or “single digital presence”) for public libraries could look like, what it could be used for and how such an offering might fit in with existing digital library systems. It is now conducting a further scoping exercise to explore the feasibility of different types of transformation.

In April 2019, following a two-year pilot, the British Library and its library partners launched the Living Knowledge Network, a UK-wide partnership of national and public libraries. This [network](#) currently includes over 20 public libraries, the British Library itself, the National Library of Scotland and the National Library of Wales. It aims to facilitate collaborative working across the UK public libraries sector to increase public impact – creating unique services and memorable experiences for the Network’s audiences, and to improve knowledge exchange – sharing skills and resources for professional development.

Public Lending Right (PLR) Scheme

Following a recommendation from the British Library and a public consultation undertaken by DCMS that closed on 29 November 2019, and subsequent ministerial approval, the rate per loan was revised upwards in January 2020 to 9.03 pence. This came into force on 4 February 2020.

This was the first time that remote ebooks were included as part of the Scheme following a statutory instrument that came into force in July 2018. Authors now receive payments from the PLR fund in the same way as for lending of physical books and audiobooks.

Library byelaws

Section 19 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 enables local authorities to make [byelaws regulating the use of library facilities](#) run by each authority under the Act. The Secretary of State is required to confirm such byelaws before they can come into effect. Over the period covered by this report the department approved revised library byelaws for Oldham, Southwark and City of Sunderland. The Department has also agreed to support work being done by Libraries Connected later in 2020 to update the model byelaws.

Libraries Taskforce

The Libraries Taskforce (co-sponsored by DCMS and Local Government Association) was funded up to March 2020. Since December 2018 Arts Council England has provided secretariat and support services for it. Six month progress reports on its year's work, and a closure report on its activities and impact during its lifetime (2015 to 2020) will be published on GOV.UK once cleared via its sponsors.

DCMS remained an active member of the Taskforce, providing policy and advocacy support. For example, it has helped achieve recognition of the role public libraries play in contributing to the strategic Outcomes identified in the Taskforce's Ambition strategy document.

Increased reading and literacy

DCMS worked with the Early Intervention Foundation to get libraries mentioned in guidance for those undertaking peer challenges on early years speech and language development. Following new library and Booktrust peers' training, some have now started to take part in challenges.

The Libraries Team continued to work with officials in the Department for Education's Home Learning Environment team on the role of libraries on early years speech and language development. As a result of brokering stronger public libraries involvement in developing their thinking, the '[Hungry Little Minds](#)' campaign (launched on 2 July 2019 with representation from the public libraries sector) has linked into public libraries resources.

Improved digital access and literacy / greater prosperity

DCMS Libraries Team worked with the DCMS Digital Skills team to explore ways to anchor library services within their future planning for digital inclusion work. It led a session for the Cross Government Digital Inclusion Steering Group in January focussing on the contribution that public libraries can and do make to this agenda, alongside Leeds Council who talked about the digital inclusion work being led by its library service. The Libraries Team has also

contributed to thinking on developing future strategy for Local Digital Skills partnerships, and promoting the role of public libraries within them.

The Libraries Team has continued to participate in cross-government meetings on disinformation and online media harms, promoting library services' work on these topics, and their important role in education and running and hosting work to develop people's knowledge and confidence in navigating the online world and the information promulgated through it. As part of this the Libraries Team has promoted some of the work already in train across library services (e.g. the [privacy guidelines](#) developed between Carnegie UK Trust, CILIP and Newcastle City Council) as a model that could be used as a springboard for wider learning and application.

DCMS Libraries Team has engaged with senior officials in BEIS to promote the profile of public libraries to support SME and growth businesses, complementing other BEIS initiatives. It also promotes the role that libraries can play in Local Industrial Strategy work, eg to support business support, skills training etc.

Stronger, more resilient communities

DCMS Libraries Team has promoted the role of public libraries to the Social Mobility Commission, particularly around 'levelling up' and boosting people's life chances. In October 2019 it organised a meeting between Farrah Storr, the commissioner leading on culture, media and sport issues, with Subnum Hariff-Khan (from Oldham Libraries).

DCMS is embarking on work to develop a youth offer across the country. The Libraries Team is represented on the departmental working group that is working on options for this. It is also actively promoting the role that public libraries can and do play in placemaking, at the heart of local communities. It has been contributing to documents such as the prospectus for Towns Funding, the High Streets Task Force work, etc.

Healthier and happier lives

The National Academy for Social Prescribing was launched in October by the Health and Social Care Secretary. We have contributed to the development of this work, including highlighting library-based social prescribing activities.



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**4th Floor, 100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ
www.gov.uk/dcms**