

Report pursuant to Section 17 of the Public
Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for 2020/21
July 2021

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FOREWORD

When I was appointed Minister for Digital and Culture, I was delighted to be given responsibility for public libraries. Libraries are the cornerstone of communities, providing a safe, trusted environment open to all, and they're also a place to meet people, to learn new skills and find a new favourite book. While I have not been able to get out and see the full range of activities and support offered across England by our excellent library services this year, I am really looking forward to seeing these services in action as national restrictions are lifted.

It was down to the hard work and dedication of our public library sector that library services were never completely closed during even the most stringent national restrictions. My department worked hard to protect this vital access and secure exceptions for library services to the restrictions that were imposed, including identifying library staff as essential workers. While access to library buildings was limited, libraries continued to provide essential services, for example PC access for employment or benefit services, or to access health and other support.

I was especially impressed with how libraries quickly found innovative ways to support some of the most vulnerable groups in their communities, for example providing 'click and collect' loans, extending home delivery services, ringing vulnerable customers at home, and providing virtual group activities for children and parents such as Rhyme Time. Public libraries were also recognised by the Department for Education as a great resource to support parents and children through homeschooling; and DCMS directly helped support their work to combat social isolation and its mental health effects by funding specialist book collections and reading group activities.

I spoke at the Libraries Connected virtual annual seminar in December 2020 and was able to offer my personal thanks to those attending for their hard work and dedication. I want to say thank you again to all those involved in the monumental task of keeping libraries running safely and providing much-valued support to their communities. This was an effort led by the sector, and delivered by brilliant individuals, some of whom were rightly recognised for their efforts in the 2020 Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Throughout the pandemic the DCMS libraries team has also continued to support me in the department's role to superintend and promote the improvement of public library services in England. During this period we have spoken to a number of local authorities to assist and provide guidance on issues like public consultations, new library openings, local authority restructuring, or new local service offerings. These conversations are invaluable for the department to continue to provide the support needed, and I would encourage library services to keep us informed of their work.

I hope that library services can continue to build on the successes of this extraordinary year, and reflect positively upon the lessons we have all have learned about how best to meet changing user demands and plan for the future. Libraries are vital to the national recovery, and a treasured asset to celebrate.

Caroline Dinenage MP - Minister of State for Digital and Culture

Introduction

This report is on the exercise of the Department's statutory functions under the 1964 Act. It covers the period April 2020 to March 2021. It aligns with the annual reporting periods for other relevant libraries sector organisations and bodies, including Arts Council England, Libraries Connected and the British Library. More information on the work of these individual organisations during the period covered by this report is available in Annex B.

Government engagement with libraries

The DCMS Libraries team supports the Secretary of State by assisting him in his statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to superintend and promote the improvement of local authorities' provision of public library services in England. Additionally, we work with the Minister for Digital and Culture to support the Secretary of State with those duties. The team also leads on policy areas including the Public Lending Right Scheme, and sponsorship responsibility for the British Library. We work across government departments, on behalf of the libraries sector, to promote libraries' contributions to a range of important agendas and to seek a "libraries first" approach to government projects and policies.

The COVID-19 pandemic curtailed the number of visits to libraries and personal engagement with library stakeholder events that would typically be undertaken by the Minister for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage. However the Minister made two visits - the first to Bournemouth Central Library on 28 September 2020 and the second to the British Library on 16 October 2020 to preview the 'Unfinished Business' exhibition and to support the launch of the 'Reset.Restart' programme.

The Minister also spoke at and took part in a question and answer session at the Libraries Connected virtual annual seminar on 2 December 2020. The focus of her speech was the reopening / restoration of the library sector in England; the government vision for libraries; and government support for libraries. This was received extremely positively by the sector.

The Minister provided a video message to the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians virtual annual conference on 3 November to reinforce support for this part of the sector and to recognise the hard work of library staff who have continued to provide library services during the pandemic. The Minister also showed her support for the Summer Reading Challenge, contributing to the Reading Agency's <u>article</u> marking the launch of the 2020 challenge: "The Summer Reading Challenge is a brilliant opportunity for young people to find their favourite stories, learn more about themselves and their world, and share their new favourite stories with loved ones."

Finally, the Minister contributed to the virtual guest book to mark the opening ceremony of the Danum Gallery, Library and Museum on Wednesday 17 March.

Superintendence

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 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. The 1964 Act also places a duty on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Councils fund library services, assess the needs of their local communities and design library services to meet those needs.

DCMS officials monitor and keep under review any proposals by library authorities to make changes to their library service provision, and provide relevant advice to ministers accordingly. The process of superintendence involves informal active engagement by the DCMS libraries team with local authorities as well as consideration of formal complaints.

Engagement with local authorities

Local authorities are encouraged to engage with the DCMS libraries team at an early stage about proposals to make significant changes to library services. This provides the opportunity for local authorities to inform the libraries team about changes to their service provision; raise concerns they may have about their service provision; or to learn about best practice from other library services. It also provides the opportunity for the DCMS libraries team to gather insight about libraries policies, to follow-up on media stories or public correspondence about changes to their library service and to remind local authorities of the guidance documents that are available.

In this reporting period DCMS directly engaged with 30 local authorities, involving 51 conversations to discuss their library service provision. In addition, DCMS presented at a Libraries Connected webinar on 15 February on Navigating Budget Setting, to explain superintendence and the purpose and benefit of the informal engagement on offer from the department.

Formal complaints

Superintendence also involves the consideration of formal complaints. Any representations received by DCMS that a local authority may be failing to meet its statutory duty are carefully considered on a case-by-case basis. We publish information about the <u>statutory duties</u> on local authorities and the Secretary of State, and how the department will consider formal complaints under the 1964 Act on GOV.UK.

The process of consideration of a complaint is in two stages. The first stage is a thorough analysis of the background and evidence relating to a complaint that the local authority is not meeting its statutory duty to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service. The analysis will consider the representations submitted by the complainant, including the specific issues which they believe makes the library service provision not comprehensive and efficient and the local authority not delivering its statutory duty under the Act. The analysis also involves consideration of detail provided by the local authority relating to the agreed changes to the library service provision. Following this the libraries team put advice and recommendations to ministers, resulting in a Ministerial "minded to" letter; this indicates whether or not the Minister is minded to order an inquiry on the basis of the evidence considered.

This is sent to the council and the complainant, and published on GOV.UK. It gives the opportunity for anyone to make further representations to support the complaint.

The second stage follows careful consideration of any further representations from library users or other interested persons (which are new and or additional or bring up to date previous detail submitted in relation to the complaint) before a final Ministerial decision letter is issued.

Over the period of this annual report, Ministers issued final decision letters on complaints regarding Swindon, Lambeth and Southampton, as well as both "minded to" and final decision letters in respect of Bedford. All decision letters are published on the libraries pages on GOV.UK.

Public libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic

The DCMS libraries team moved rapidly at the start of the pandemic to amend the guidance "Libraries as a statutory service", to reflect DCMS's approach to superintendence in light of revised government restrictions during the pandemic. This approach to superintendence was also supported by the issuing of a joint letter on 16 July by the Minister for Digital and Culture and the Chair of the Local Government Association Culture, Tourism and Sport Board to Leaders and Chief Executives of Local Authorities in England. The letter noted the exceptional circumstances and challenges of delivering library services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also reminded recipients of the Secretary of State's statutory duty to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities. The letter asked local authorities to share their plans for the restoration of their library service from July 2020 onwards. Of the 150 local authorities in England, 149 responded to this request.

In May 2020, DCMS established a Cultural Renewal Taskforce to develop guidance for the safe reopening of DCMS sectors, with sub-groups to look at requirements for specific sectors. The Library Services Working Group was established to represent the sector and consider the specific requirements that were needed for public libraries to continue providing services safely. A list of the organisations represented on the working group is at Annex A.

The first meeting of the Library Services Working Group was on 27 May 2020. Its responsibilities included:

- supporting Libraries Connected (the sector support organisation) to draft and publish a guidance toolkit for the restoration of public library services,
- reviewing the guidance document and identifying any issues/gaps and identifying and resolving practical, sector-specific guidance-related issues, and
- raising specific questions that need to be answered by the government or Public Health England, so the toolkit could meet both government and practitioner requirements.

The group continued to meet on a periodic basis to discuss library service recovery and issues relating to COVID-19 regulations and national restrictions. It also held some themed meetings; on economic recovery, digital inclusion, and place and community engagement. A list of the meetings during this period is included at Annex A.

From the start of the pandemic in March 2020 the sector pivoted rapidly to providing virtual access to services. Many provided online events such as rhyme times and book groups that achieved significant reach; for example Kingston Libraries had events that swiftly experienced 10,000 views. The sector also saw a marked rise in people registering to use online loans (e-books, e-audio and newspapers and magazines) - up to 600% in some areas.

Working through the DCMS libraries team, the sector also achieved important exceptions to restrictions on physical services. Even during full national restrictions, libraries were able to provide some physical services such as access to their public computers to help people to use essential services, order-and-collect loan services, and school and home library services. Many services also made regular welfare calls to their most vulnerable users; and many members of library staff were redeployed to assist with other critical COVID-19 work by councils, such as shielding and test and trace work, based on their community connection skills and knowledge.

The first sector toolkit, drawn up by library practitioners, was published by Libraries Connected in June 2020. It was endorsed by Public Health England and the Health and Safety Executive. The <u>Toolkit</u> was updated frequently during this period to reflect changes in COVID-19 regulations, and was also used by libraries outside the public libraries sector, for example school and academic libraries. In line with overall government guidance the Toolkit laid a strong emphasis on library operations being planned in the light of robust risk assessments, to ensure the safety of both users and people providing library services.

Libraries Connected also ran numerous well-received webinars for the sector and its members through the year, both to assist library services in meeting the challenges of the pandemic and also to start thinking through public libraries' potential contribution to post-covid recovery.

On 11 January the Libraries Minister issued a letter confirming that library staff were regarded as key workers by the government. This provided help for those delivering these important frontline services during lockdown to take advantage of school provision for children of key workers at that point; and also clarified to those charged with enforcing the regulations that people travelling to operate these services were doing so legitimately.

Public Lending Right Scheme

The Public Lending Right Act 1979 provides a right for authors, known as the "public lending right", to receive payments from a central fund in respect of such of their books (physical books, e-books and audiobooks, as well as the remote lending of e-books and e-audiobooks) that are lent out to the public by local library authorities in the United Kingdom. The central fund is provided from government grant-in-aid,

and the PLR Scheme is administered for DCMS by the British Library.

The PLR Scheme sets out a rate per loan used to calculate the payments that authors can expect to receive. The rate per loan was revised upwards in December 2020 to 9.55 pence from 9.03 pence in 2019, and came into force on 11 January 2021. This followed a recommendation from the British Library; a public consultation undertaken by DCMS that closed on 27 October 2020; and subsequent ministerial approval. Payments were distributed to 20,911 authors and contributors in January 2021 for the 2019/20 Scheme year.

In 2019-20 remote e-books were included in the Scheme for the first time, and 2020-21 was the first time the British Library published tables for the most borrowed e-books. Top of the list was *Elinor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman, with other popular e-book titles including *Circe* by Madeleine Miller and *Normal People* by Sally Rooney.

In 2020 the British Library introduced simpler registration for authors and other rights holders, along with a simpler system for registering titles. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen more people using PLR online to register, access and maintain their accounts, and the PLR team continues to work on service improvements to support this in coming years.

Other public libraries developments

Funding

Tackling loneliness

DCMS has continued to focus on loneliness. Libraries have an important role to play in tackling loneliness through events and activities, offering space to meet and supporting volunteering in communities. In June 2020 Carol Stump, President of Libraries Connected and Chief Librarian at Kirklees Council, was appointed to represent Libraries Connected on the government's Tackling Loneliness Network, enabling the voice and experience of libraries to be fed into this vital work.

Additionally, in December 2020, DCMS announced £3.5m for 2020/21 to support programmes tackling loneliness and the impact of loneliness. It enabled national provision of The Reading Agency's Reading Well: Books on Prescription mental health collections (for adults, young people and children) to all library branches in England. Book collections were distributed to library services over March and April 2021 and the programme will measure digital book interactions and loans up to the week ending 6 June.

In addition, the funding supported The Reading Agency to establish Reading Friends groups initially in 75 library authorities, extending to 102 due to overwhelming demand. This has meant that, rather than the 16,000 befriending interactions which had been anticipated, engagements for the period 28 January to 4 May totalled nearly 60,000.

Libraries data

DCMS provided £20,000 for the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to formulate library data, provided by local authorities, into an interactive spreadsheet to enable local authorities to compare and benchmark against other services. The <u>report</u> is publicly available through the CIPFA website.

CIPFA also published its annual library statistics for April 2019 to March 2020 in December 2020, using data provided by library services, with 81% (121 of the 150) of English library services responding. The data indicates total net expenditure of £609.6 million for library services in England, supporting a library network of 2,899 library service points open 10 or more hours per week (including mobiles). The network attracted 178.4 million physical visits, as well as 110.3 million visits to library websites and 142.7 million physical book loans.

New and refurbished libraries

Local authorities in England continued to invest in their library services. There are a number of examples of councils investing in new libraries and the refurbishment of others to provide modern services and facilities. Some examples include:

World of Glass (St Helens Borough Council) - officially opened in September 2020. Occupying space on both the ground floor and mezzanine level of The World of Glass Museum on Chalon Way East, it offers a lending library for children and adults, complete with more than 18,000 brand new books, as well as a computer suite and study area.

Wood Street (London Borough of Walthamstow) - officially opened in August 2020. The new library offers community meeting spaces, digital access for the public, and a café with profits invested back into the library.

Uffculme Library (Devon County Council) - officially reopened following refurbishment on 7 December 2020. It was funded with community help, an Investing in Devon Grant (County Council), and Uffculme Library Friends. It includes new shelving, paintwork, noticeboards, children's tables and chairs and a new external returns box so people can take their books back outside hours.

Belper Library (Derbyshire County Council) - officially opened 10 August 2020. The new £1.7 million library in Derwent Street replaced one previously in Bridge Street, and is part of a wider council development. The building has windows along one wall letting the public see into the building and the stock and services on offer. It combines the old and the new, bringing different elements together.

Doncaster Central Library (Doncaster Council) - the Danum Gallery, Library and Museum held a virtual opening on 17 March 2021. The new Library is part of the Council's £14 million project which brings together multiple strands of cultural activities for the people of Doncaster. The Library is at the main entrance, the first thing visitors see, and offers a mix of traditional and new ways of learning, with research spaces. The children's library is in a separate section of the museum, with a spectacular view of the railway engines.

Library services working group members

- Arts Council England
- CILIP the Library and Information Association
- CIVIC
- Community Managed Libraries Peer Network
- Cultural and Leisure Officers Association / Community Leisure UK (representing mixed use leisure trusts)
- Good Things Foundation
- Libraries Connected
- Libraries Unlimited
- Local Government Association
- Suffolk Libraries
- UNISON (the Public Services Union)
- UNITE
- 3 Heads of Service (1 London Borough (Merton), 1 county (Suffolk), 1 metropolitan authority (Manchester))
- A library worker representative

Representatives of other government departments attended where themes were relevant to their work, for example the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Dates of meetings

27 May 2020 (with Minister)

2 June 2020 (with Minister)

23 June 2020

30 June 2020

14 July 2020

6 August 2020 – themed meeting: Economic Recovery

20 August 2020 – themed meeting: Digital Inclusion

15 September 2020 – themed meeting: Place and Community Engagement

5 November (with Minister)

3 December (with Minister)

Annex B

Library sector partners

Organisations with which DCMS engage regularly and that undertake activities to support the public libraries sector include: Arts Council England, Libraries Connected, Local Government Association, CILIP, The Reading Agency and the British Library. A summary of activities of some of these organisations, during the year, is as follows.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England (ACE), is the development agency for libraries in England and invests in public libraries, through strategic and other funding programmes.

Reflecting their strategy, <u>Let's Create</u> and in their role as national development agency, ACE <u>supports libraries</u> as venues where arts and culture happen through their national portfolio funding, project grant funding and a grant in aid budget.

Examples of work undertaken by ACE during this year include:

- ACE awarded £302,000 to library authorities through 2 grants to supplement e-book and e-audio collections, to help provide digital loan material during the pandemic in response to user demand
- Working with <u>Good Things Foundation</u>, Communities Lottery Fund and other stakeholders to consider some of the issues contributing to the digital divide (e.g. geographic signal gaps and digital device poverty) and support the development of solutions
- Mobilising the <u>Arts Council Digital Tech Champions</u> network to deliver seminars and support individual library services with activities such as social media training
- understanding local issues arising from the pandemic and celebrating library successes in delivery
- integrating libraries in ACE's work on place and cross-cutting agendas such as health, wellbeing and social justice
- developing offers for families and children and young people in alignment with DfE, e.g. supporting the <u>Reading Together Day</u>
- promoting reading for pleasure with literacy, well-being, leisure, civic and social outcomes e.g. working with its literature and library National Portfolio Organisations on projects such as <u>Reading Friends</u>, <u>Reading Sparks</u>, and <u>Reading Well</u>
- supporting programmes such as <u>100 Novels that Shaped the World</u> and Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF)
- Following on from the Libraries Taskforce, ACE has continued in a leadership role and, with 1 year financial support from DCMS, successfully established the English Public Library Group to deliver ongoing support for developments in the sector.

ACE Grant in Aid budget also supports research and development. Examples include work on: public library accreditation; staff skills; international work; Single

<u>Digital Presence</u>; <u>peer challenges (with LGA)</u> including recovery and renewal panels providing a framework and process for peers to help councils to reflect on their learning to date from managing the COVID-19 crisis and support.financial resilience and commercial enterprise; evaluation of the Summer Reading Challenge; the impact of public libraries on individuals' employability.

The British Llbrary

The British Library is a non-departmental public body sponsored by DCMS.

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. 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.

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. This year, the network adapted quickly to the pandemic by delivering services online, with over 26,000 entrepreneurs supported via webinars, one-to-one sessions and networking events.

With support from DCMS, the Library also launched a new programme called *Reset.Restart*, a series of ten webinars designed to support small businesses to respond to the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic; covering subjects ranging from product and service innovation, to marketing, finance and adapting business models. The expansion of the BIPC national network continued despite the restrictions in place over most of the year. With Treasury funding, the aim is to have 20 regional centres and 90 local centres by 2023. New pilot sites in Worcestershire, Brighton and Hove, and Kent were established, and the other 13 existing cities were supported to expand their service to libraries within their region, reaching more high streets and communities across the UK.

DCMS also supports the British Library in its work (funded by ACE and Carnegie UK) to scope the potential for a single digital presence for UK libraries. The Library published a recommendations paper in June 2019, <u>Digital Transformations for UK Public Libraries: five approaches to a 'Single Digital Presence'</u>, which sets out what a national online platform (or "single digital presence") for public libraries could look like. Since then, the Library has completed a discovery phase and an alpha phase of development and conducted extensive user research. It is hoped this will form the basis of a major new phase of work with public libraries across the UK over the coming year.

In April 2019, following a two-year pilot, the British Library and its library partners launched the Living Knowledge Network. The Living Knowledge Network is a UK wide partnership of national and local libraries which enables collaborative working to increase their impact – creating unique services and memorable experiences for the Network's audiences, improving knowledge exchange, and sharing skills and resources for professional development. By March 2021, the network had grown to 31 with 6 new library authorities (Jersey, Coventry, Nottinghamshire, Kent, Bristol, and Surrey) joining.

From April 2020 and continuing throughout the pandemic, the Network opened up to all UK library authorities to support library professionals across the country working hard to respond to the challenges of the pandemic. Meanwhile, Network partners delivered panel exhibitions across the country in conjunction with the Library's *Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights* exhibition, programming local events and using local collections to interpret the national exhibition in a local way. Examples included Warwickshire Libraries focusing on the experience of women in the Land Army in WWII and Norfolk Libraries who profiled local figures in the Women's Liberation Movement. The Library also made a wide range of digital content available through a new Living Knowledge Network player, sharing British Library events to over 15,300 public library users across the country.

Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is a membership organisation and charity open to heads of every library service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is primarily funded by Arts Council England (ACE) as a National Portfolio Organisation, commissioned to work as a Sector Support Organisation for libraries.

Throughout 2020/21 Libraries Connected's main focus was on providing support for libraries to adapt their services during the pandemic. It also continued to deliver its core programme of work, including projects funded by Taskforce funding and project grants from ACE.

Libraries Connected has continued delivering Public Library Skills Strategy (PLSS) activity by its Leading Libraries programme to foster confident and diverse leadership, and the roll out of their library apprenticeship scheme. There has been significant progress with other areas of the PLSS, including expanded take up of the library apprenticeship scheme, and ongoing delivery of the Leading Libraries programme to foster confident and diverse library leadership.

Libraries Connected also tested a potential model of support for libraries at a regional and local level through 5 development projects, and provision of bespoke expertise. Support was provided to 5 regional networks, and 3 individual library services. This resulted in 3 new toolkits:

- Evaluation Toolkit, designed to enable public libraries to evaluate their service
- <u>Partnership Toolkit</u>, designed to enable public libraries to develop and embed partnership development work
- <u>Developing a communications and engagement plan</u>, to be used by any library service looking for guidance on developing a more strategic approach

to communication and engagement for the wider sector.

In addition, templates for governance development for regional networks were drawn up, to help grow their capacity as peer networks and platforms for strategic partnerships.

During the reporting period, Libraries Connected also expanded its communications function by developing evidence based advocacy for the power of libraries. This included expanded material and published case studies focusing on the impacts of library services and sharing good practice, including through expanding its social media activity, developing its website and publishing advocacy materials such as Libraries, an Essential Part of Recovery.

Libraries Connected began a capacity building programme, funded by ACE, to support libraries to develop their skills in generating income and diversifying their financial base. The programme has 3 streams – a cohort of services that will receive a core program of development support, a series of webinars and events for the wider sector on key themes, and projects designed to develop income in specific areas such as room hire and contracted services. Libraries Connected has also completed the first phase of scoping an accreditation framework for public libraries in England, and has progressed to the design and test phase, which will conclude in autumn 2022.

Libraries Connected continued the BBC Novels that Changed the World programme supported by ACE and BBC Arts, and worked with 55 library services to engage communities with novels and reading in innovative and enjoyable ways. This year due to the pandemic the events had to be reprogrammed, and many moved online demonstrating the tenacity and flexibility of libraries and celebrating the power of reading and books.



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