



Department  
for Culture,  
Media & Sport

## Annual Libraries Report 2024 to 2025

Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 17 of  
the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

July 2025



**Department for Culture, Media and Sport**

# **Annual Libraries Report 2024 to 2025**

**For the period from April 2024 to March 2025**

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Department for Culture, Media & Sport



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## **Ministerial Foreword**

I am delighted to serve as the new minister with responsibility for public libraries and contribute to the ongoing success of this vital public resource. Having personally benefited from library services from early childhood, I understand first-hand the profound impact libraries have on individuals and communities.

Libraries ignite imaginations, support local groups, provide essential business advice, and serve as welcoming spaces for all, whether this is a parent bringing their child along, an exam student finding a space to study or an older person at a dementia support group. During my recent visits to Harlesden, Willesden Green, Rugby, and Leeds Central libraries I had the pleasure of meeting the committed and passionate staff who serve their communities so diligently. Witnessing their tireless efforts to support and empower local residents was inspiring. I know this is not unique to these locations, but rather, a reflection of the remarkable commitment and hard work that is mirrored across our nation's entire public library network.

In supporting the Secretary of State in her statutory role to superintend and promote the improvement of public library services, the DCMS Libraries team speaks with numerous councils on proposed changes to their public library provision. This collaboration is crucial; I encourage library services to keep the Department informed of their plans.

I want to stress the government's unwavering commitment to supporting public libraries. We recognise the significant challenges libraries face, their potential to contribute to broader government missions and our plan for national renewal. This is why we have committed £5.5m to the DCMS Libraries Improvement Fund in 2025/26. We want to see libraries thrive, offering diverse services such as digital inclusion and cultural enrichment, all freely accessible to everyone.

I look forward to engaging with library services across the country in the months and years to come and working in partnership with the library sector to strengthen this vital public service.

**Baroness Twycross - Minister for Gambling and Heritage**

## Introduction

Section 17 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to lay annually before Parliament a report on the exercise of their functions under this Act. Those functions include a duty to:

- superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England; and
- secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under the Act.

The report focuses on the exercise of these functions and also the work of the DCMS Libraries team in supporting the sector. It covers the period April 2024 to March 2025.

Further information on individual organisations' work in the library sector during the period covered by this report is expected to be available later in the year, including organisational annual reports where applicable. Links to the publication pages where such information is expected to appear are listed below:

[Arts Council England](#)

[The Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians](#)

[Libraries Connected](#)

[The Local Government Association](#)

[The British Library](#)

[CILIP The Library and Information Association](#)

[Community Managed Libraries Network](#)

[Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association](#)

## Government engagement with libraries

The DCMS Libraries team supports the Secretary of State in their statutory duty under the Act to superintend and promote the improvement of local authorities' provision of public library services in England. For the first three months of this reporting period the DCMS Secretary of State was The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer MP, KC and she was supported in these duties by Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Libraries. For the remainder of the reporting period the DCMS Secretary of State was The Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP and she was supported in these duties by Sir Chris Bryant MP, Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism.

The DCMS Libraries team also leads on policy areas including the Public Lending Right Scheme, and sponsorship responsibility for the [British Library](#) and [The National Archives](#). We work across government departments, on behalf of the sector, to promote public libraries' contributions to a range of important agendas and encourage a "libraries first" approach to delivery of government projects and policies.

## Library Usage and Research

- *Annual Participation Survey Data*

The [Participation Survey](#) provides nationally representative estimates of physical and digital engagement with the arts, heritage, museums & galleries, and libraries, as well as engagement with tourism, major events, live sports and digital. The annual survey results for 2024/25 will be published in Summer 2025.

- *Quarterly Participation Survey Data*

Quarterly Participation Survey data for the first [three quarters](#) of the reporting period shows the following percentage of adults engaged with library services physically or digitally in the last 12 months:

	Visited a public library building or mobile library in person at least once	Used public library services digitally or online in the last 12 months
April to June 2024	25%	16%
July to September 2024	26%	16%
October to December 2024	26%	15%
<i>January to March 2025</i>	<i>Not currently available</i>	<i>Not currently available</i>
April 2023 to March 2024 (previous annual data for reference)	25%	14%

The most popular physical activities in libraries are indicated in the table below;

	Browsing, borrowing, and returning reading and media materials	Took a child to borrow, browse or return books	Used free Wi-Fi, computer or printing facilities	Used the library as a study space
April to June 2024	62%	26%	26%	22%
July to September 2024	61%	28%	25%	20%
October to December 2024	60%	24%	28%	23%
<i>January to</i>	<i>Not currently</i>	<i>Not currently</i>	<i>Not currently</i>	<i>Not currently</i>



<i>March 2025</i>	<i>available</i>	<i>available</i>	<i>available</i>	<i>available</i>
<i>April 2023 to March 2024 (previous annual data for reference)</i>	60%	27%	23%	19%

The fourth quarter data (January to March 2025) is expected to be published on GOV.UK in the autumn.

- *Understanding the barriers to library use*

DCMS commissioned Ipsos to "investigate the main reasons why people do not use or engage with libraries and understand potential effective policy interventions that could be deployed by local or national government to promote library usage".

- Phase 1 was an exploratory qualitative approach including 22 focus groups, 20 depth interviews and an online journal task during which 12 participants took part in depth interviews to understand why some people were not engaged with libraries. The [Report](#) and [Written Ministerial Statement](#) were published in the House on 31 October 2024.
- Phase 2 - was to test the findings and insights from phase 1 at scale through a nationally representative survey this contract was awarded to Ipsos in November 2024. The work ran to March 2025, and the report will be published in Summer 2025.

## **Superintendence**

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places a duty on the Secretary of State (in practice, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport) to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England and to secure the proper discharge of the statutory duties placed on local authorities as library authorities under that Act. The 1964 Act also places a duty on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Library authorities are upper-tier councils and there are 152 in England.

Public libraries are funded by these local authorities and each local authority is responsible for determining how best to meet the needs of its communities and fulfil its statutory duties within available resources. If the Secretary of State is satisfied, following the holding of a local inquiry, that a local authority has failed to carry out its duties under the 1964 Act, the Secretary of State may make an order directing it to take steps to rectify the breach. The Secretary of State may call an inquiry following receipt of a complaint that the local authority is failing to carry out its duties, or of the Secretary of State's own volition. Only one inquiry has been held under the 1964 Act which was in 2009 in respect of Wirral Council.

DCMS officials monitor and keep under review any proposals by library authorities to make changes to their library service provision, and any complaints made under the Act, 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*

We encourage councils to engage with the DCMS libraries team at an early stage about any proposals to make significant changes to their library services. This provides an opportunity for councils to inform the libraries team about proposed changes to their service provision; or to learn about good practice from other library services. It also provides an opportunity for the DCMS libraries team to gather insights on each council's policy on libraries; to follow up on media stories or public correspondence about changes to library services; and to remind the local authority of its responsibilities, and the guidance documents that are available.

In this reporting period DCMS directly engaged with 53 local authorities, involving 100 conversations - either in person or virtually. In addition, representatives of the DCMS libraries team attended, in person or virtually, and participated in a number of sector stakeholder events. These included the Libraries Connected Annual Seminar on 4 - 5 June 2024; the formal opening of Putney Library (Wandsworth) on 19 July; the Booktok awards on 17 August; the launch of EverySpace, at March Library (Cambridgeshire) on 20 September; CILIP's Libraries Change Lives parliamentary reception on 21 October, the reopening of Highgate Library (Camden) on 4 December; and Spellow Lane Library (Liverpool) on 12 December. Representatives of the DCMS Libraries team also attended a number of local authority library staff conferences in Camden, Cornwall and Norfolk, as well as a number of Libraries Connected regional meetings. Attendance at these events allows the DCMS Libraries team the opportunity to understand the sector and its work better, share information on the role of DCMS and answer questions.

- *Formal complaints*

Superintendence also involves the consideration of formal complaints that library authorities are not carrying out their duties under the 1964 Act. Any representations received by DCMS that a local authority may be failing to meet its statutory duties in respect of the provision of library services are carefully considered on a case-by-case basis. Information about the [statutory duties](#) on local authorities and the Secretary of State, and how the Department will consider formal complaints under the 1964 Act is published on GOV.UK.

A complaint is considered in two stages. The first stage is a thorough analysis of the background and evidence relating to any complaint that the local authority is not meeting its statutory duty to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service. The analysis will consider representations submitted by the complainant, including the specific issues which they believe make the library service provision not comprehensive and efficient and so mean that the local authority is not fulfilling its statutory duty under the Act. We also examine information provided by the local

authority relating to these issues. Following this, the DCMS libraries team puts 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 letter is sent to the council and the complainant, and is also published on GOV.UK. It gives the opportunity for anyone to make further representations in relation to 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. All decision [letters are published on the libraries pages](#) on GOV.UK.

Over the period of this annual report, Ministers did not issue “minded to” or final decision letters on any complaint.

## **Byelaws**

Section 19 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 enables local authorities to make byelaws regulating the use of library facilities provided by them under the Act. It is not mandatory for a local authority to put in place such byelaws; however, if a local authority wants to introduce them or amend their existing byelaws, the byelaws must be confirmed by the Secretary of State before they can come into effect.

Following consultation between DCMS and Libraries Connected, DCMS published revised model [public library byelaws](#) on 10 March 2025 for local authorities to use to introduce or revise / update their existing library byelaws.

## **Local authority spending on libraries**

Local government has a statutory responsibility for the provision of public library services. Library authorities do this alongside the other duties for which they are responsible as well as the wider role they play in local place-making.

Many councils face financial constraints which continue to add pressure to local choices around the delivery of services, including high cost, high profile statutory areas such as adult social care and children’s services.

Outturn data of local authority revenue expenditure and financing for the financial year April 2024 to March 2025 is expected to be published later in the year. This will show the total net expenditure by local authorities on library services across the reporting period.

The final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2024-25 made available over £64.7 billion for local authorities in England, an increase in core spending power of up to £4.5 billion, or 7.5% in cash terms, on 2023-24.

## **Libraries data**

DCMS needs more robust data about public libraries to carry out its statutory superintendence functions and also to have strong evidence to promote the contribution public libraries make to other policy areas across government. The Libraries Team has been working with ACE and other libraries stakeholders to improve the collection and use of a range of timely and accurate data about public libraries.

Arts Council England published an updated basic dataset of public libraries in England on 9 July 2024 covering libraries as at 31 December 2023. DCMS analysis of this basic dataset estimates the number of static libraries open is 2,877, and the number that have closed (and not been replaced by or relocated to a new static library) since 2010 as 276. ACE also collected data covering libraries as at 31 December 2024 during this reporting period, to be published in Summer 2025.

On 20 November 2024, Arts Council England began the collection of a retrospective quantitative dataset of library service activity (including the number of events, loans, active borrowers and physical visits) relating to Financial Year 2023/2024. This dataset is currently being validated by ACE with a view to publication in summer 2025.

During the reporting period, an ACE-led working group on library data met regularly to work towards the possibility of increased automated collection of data from public libraries in future.

## **DCMS Funding**

- *Libraries Improvement Fund*

On 20 February the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP, [announced](#) funding of £5.5 million for the Libraries Improvement Fund as part of the Government's commitment to ensure libraries are able to upgrade their physical and digital infrastructure to adapt to changing user needs and can be enjoyed by future generations. Expressions of interest for funding opened on 6 May 2025.

This funding for 2025/26 builds on the £20.5 million which has already supported 95 projects in the first three rounds of LIF covering the period 2021 to 2025. Examples of some of the LIF projects from the earlier rounds that have completed within the period of this report are included at Annex B.

- *Private Finance Initiatives*

A library PFI is where private sector investment is used to fund library projects, run and managed by the library authority.

The Department currently has PFI arrangements with the following local authorities:

- Bournemouth – Central Library and community library ICT system
- Brighton – Jubilee Library
- Liverpool – Central Library and Archive Redevelopment

Newcastle – City Library and High Heaton Community Library  
Oldham – Oldham Library & Lifelong Learning Centre  
Worcester – Worcester Library and History Centre

These arrangements will be coming to an end over future years. The government is working with the relevant library authorities to manage this process smoothly.

## **Public Lending Right Scheme**

The Public Lending Right (PLR) is the right for authors and other eligible rights holders to receive payments from a central fund in respect of their books that are lent out to the public by local library authorities in the United Kingdom. The PLR applies to the lending of books, audiobooks, e-books and e-audiobooks from public libraries. The central fund is provided by the Government, and the PLR Scheme is administered by the British Library Board.

PLR payments are made annually by the British Library to eligible authors who register their books with the British Library's PLR Office.

- *PLR Rate per loan*

The PLR Scheme year runs from 1 July to 30 June each year. Payments for the Scheme year 2023/24 were made in 2024/25. The British Library reaches the estimated figure of loans of each eligible book by collecting actual loans data from a representative sample of public libraries throughout the UK and then 'grossing' up using total overall loan figures obtained by the ACE Libraries Data Group (English Libraries only), the PLR sample, directly from Library Authorities, and through estimation (using established methodology) where actual figures have been unobtainable.

Funding was allocated to the British Library for Public Lending Right (PLR) during the 2023/24 Scheme year (July 2023 to June 2024) of £7.04 million - £6.41 million for payments to authors and other rights holders and around £0.63 million for Scheme running costs. The 'Rate Per Loan' is calculated by dividing the PLR fund by the previous year's national public library loans figures. The current rate per loan (with effect from February 2025) is set at 11.76p. This is down from the previous rate of 13.69p, because the number of loans from public libraries has risen. This had a minimal impact on the overall distribution of earnings and this year the central fund was distributed to 24,275 authors in respect of the 2023/24 Scheme year (compared to 22,698 authors in respect of the 2022/23 Scheme year).

## **Promoting the role of public libraries within government**

During this year DCMS has worked with colleagues across government on a wide range of issues – these discussions were paused following the announcement of the General Election, and then restarted after the formation of the new Government. Examples of where DCMS has worked with other Government Departments during the reporting year are:

- Liaising with library stakeholders so they could respond to the Department for Education [call for evidence on its Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).
- Regular bi-laterals with the Department for Education on cross cutting issues including promoting the benefits of reading and better integration of public libraries into policy work which supports families and early years. DCMS is also building on the work of [the reading framework](#) guidance for primary and secondary schools by exploring ways to prompt education establishments to understand the potential power of library partnerships.
- Regular bi-laterals with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's Digital Inclusion team on the [National Digital Inclusion Action Plan](#).
- Regular engagement with the Department of Business and Trade, especially around their Small Business work. DCMS facilitated a presentation by the British Library, with IPO, to the Small Business Forum to raise awareness of the network with relevant officials from across Government.
- Working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government towards a Local Government Outcomes Framework and to ensure the importance of public libraries as community assets and local community infrastructure is recognised.
- Working with the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to ensure that any policy work to support access to digital services engages library services; to build on the importance of libraries as rural community infrastructure; and to highlight the potential for public libraries to be used as a hub to deliver assisted digital support services for those in rural areas.
- Working with the Cabinet Office (Government Digital Service) to discuss the potential for increased reference to libraries as assisted digital partners for digital by default government services.
- Regular bilaterals with the Ministry of Justice to discuss how stronger links could be built between prison libraries and public libraries.
- Regular bilaterals with the Department for Work and Pensions to explore ways to strengthen the links between DWP's local partnership managers and the local library service. Through this joint working both parties have been able to maximise their impact and connect with local communities.

**New Year's and HM The King's Birthday Honours list**

Congratulations to the following library sector people on being awarded Honours during this reporting year in recognition of their contribution to libraries:

**Order of the British Empire (OBE)**

HM The King's Birthday 2024

Nicholas Poole - Former Chief Executive Officer, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. For services to Libraries, to the Arts and to Museums

**British Empire Medal (BEM)**

HM The King's Birthday 2024

Julie Kay Duffy - Vision Impairment Services Officer, Portsmouth Library Service. For services to Public Libraries and to the community in Portsmouth

Andrea Claire Ellison - Former Chief Librarian, Leeds Libraries. For services to Libraries

New Year 2025

Jill Terrell - Former Head of Libraries and Information Service. For contributions to library services in Suffolk and the East of England

### **Libraries Improvement Fund - completed projects<sup>1</sup> in 2024/25**

During the period of this report 23 library service projects, supported by the first three rounds of the Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF), were completed. Examples of these include:

#### **Barnsley**

The children's area at Wombwell Library area reopened on 30 August 2024 following a refurbishment enabled by LIF funding. The updated space features a sensory story wall, cosy hideaways, bespoke furniture, tiered soft seating and new shelving. All the new additions have been installed whilst preserving the historic character of the building.

#### **London Borough of Newham**

LIF enabled the library service to turn the Rotunda gallery space at Beckton Globe Library into a multifunctional performance area / community room. To deliver this acoustics needed to be improved; lighting reviewed and lighting rigs installed; sound and lighting tech installed; along with new wooden (sprung) flooring and bleacher seating. The result is a unique room for the community that will be used as a rehearsal room, meeting room or event space.

#### **Wigan**

A £110,000 investment at Leigh Library has delivered a redesigned space which includes the creation of an accessible toilet and baby change, movable shelving to maximise use of space for community groups and a flexible stage/seating area for accessible, inclusive community usage, and increased collaboration with a wider range of cultural partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Completed means ACE has made the final payment in relation to the project





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