



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Annual Libraries Report 2025 to 2026

July 2026

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

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For the period from April 2025 to March 2026

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

July 2026

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Department for Culture, Media & Sport



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Ministerial Foreword

I feel privileged to serve as minister responsible for public libraries. I am passionate about the impact libraries can have, changing lives for the better for individuals and communities. This comes from my personal experience and also from talking to people I have met on visits across the country - decision makers, skilled and experienced library staff, volunteers and above all those who use them.

During visits in the last 12 months to Muswell Hill, Dagenham, Stratford and Liverpool, I have seen how brilliantly the libraries and their services support and empower local residents. I know that this is the case across the country. I am pleased that we are now working on developing a new strategy for libraries, to be published later this year. I am proud of the work that DCMS has been doing to support the National Year of Reading and continue to run the Libraries Improvement Fund.

But DCMS does not work alone and collaboration is crucial. I am hugely grateful for the support and contribution provided by a broad network of organisations, including Arts Council England, Libraries Connected, Libraries Rising, the Local Government Association, CILIP The Library and Information Association and others, to support the library sector in developing and delivering its vital services to communities.

Thank you to everyone who works so hard to strengthen and develop this vital public service.

Baroness Twycross - Minister for Museums, Heritage and Gambling

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 2025 to March 2026.

Further information on individual organisations' work in the public 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](#)

[Libraries Rising](#)

[Libraries Connected](#)

[The Local Government Association](#)

[The British Library](#)

[CILIP The Library and Information Association](#)

[Community Managed Libraries Network](#)

[Chief Cultural & Leisure Officers Association](#)

Annex A sets out the work undertaken by Arts Council England over the year in its role as national development agency, and the consideration of the recommendation on the national development agency from the Hodge Review of Arts Council England.

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.

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.

- Ministerial visits

Baroness Twycross undertook several engagements during the year including:

- the reopening of Muswell Hill Library (Haringey);

- a celebration of Green Libraries Week at Stratford library (LB Newham);
- the launch of Job Centre Plus, Universal Credit Hub at Dagenham Library (LB Barking and Dagenham);
- attending and speaking at the Libraries Connected’s celebration event to mark 175 years of the Public Libraries Act 1850 at Manchester Central Library;
- the British Library’s Business and Intellectual Property Centre National StartUp Day; and
- the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians annual virtual conference

Library Usage and Research

- *Annual Participation Survey Data*

The [Community and Engagement Survey](#) (previously the [Participation Survey](#) and [Community Life Survey](#)) provides nationally representative estimates of physical and digital engagement with the arts, heritage, museums & galleries, archives, and libraries, as well as engagement with tourism, major events, live sports and the respondent’s community, allowing respondents’ views to be heard on a range of issues affecting their local area. The annual survey results for 2024/25 was published on 30 July 2025 (as part of the Participation Survey).

- *Quarterly Participation Survey Data*

Quarterly engagement 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 2025	26%	16%
July to September 2025	25%	16%
October to December 2025	31%	18%
<i>January to March 2026</i>	Currently not available	Currently not available
April 2024 to March 2025 <i>(previous annual data for reference)</i>	25%	16%

Note: Data until September 2025 was collected via the Participation Survey. All data from October 2025 is taken from the Community and Engagement Survey.

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 2025	58%	28%	24%	24%
July to September 2025	59%	26%	22%	18%
October to December 2024	58%	25%	26%	21%
<i>January to March 2025</i>	Not currently available	Not currently available	Not currently available	Not currently available
<i>April 2024 to March 2025 (previous annual data for reference)</i>	62%	26%	26%	22%

Note: Data until September 2025 was collected via the Participation Survey. All data from October 2025 is taken from the Community and Engagement Survey.

We expect the fourth quarter data (January to March 2026) to be [published on GOV.UK](#) in the Summer of 2026.

- *Understanding the barriers to library use non users research*

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".

We tested the findings and insights from an earlier piece of qualitative research ([Barriers to library use - Qualitative research report](#)) published in October 2024, at scale through a nationally representative survey. This contract was awarded in November 2024. The work ran to March 2025, and that report ([What works to engage library non-users](#)) was published on 10 July 2025.

Superintendence

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (1964 Act) 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 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.

- *Engagement with local authorities*

DCMS expects local authorities to conduct needs assessments to ensure their service is meeting local demand, but particularly before making any changes to the service. DCMS provides guidance on its expectations. We encourage councils to engage with the DCMS libraries team and sector bodies at an early stage about any proposals to make significant changes to their library services.

In this reporting period DCMS directly engaged with 40 local authorities, involving 62 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 10 - 11 June 2025, a local authority library staff conference in Camden on 2 October, and a number of Libraries Connected regional meetings. DCMS also presented on its superintendence process at a Libraries Connected webinar on 12 March.

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](#) of local authorities and the Secretary of State, and how the Department will consider formal complaints under the 1964 Act, is published on [GOV.UK](#), along with all ministerial decision [letters](#).

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

- Closures

Arts Council England published an updated English public libraries location dataset in January 2026 covering libraries as at 31 December 2024. DCMS analysis of this location dataset estimates the number of static libraries open is 2,866, with the number that have closed (and not been replaced by or relocated to a new static library) since 2010 as 298. This includes 17 in the calendar year 2024.

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 have byelaws in place; 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.

In this reporting period 17 local authorities submitted a request for approval of their public library byelaws, with one (Oxfordshire) being formally approved and active.

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.

Outturn data of [local authority revenue expenditure and financing](#) for the financial year April 2025 to March 2026 is expected to be published on GOV.UK later in 2026. This will show the total net expenditure by local authorities on library services across the reporting period.

Libraries data

DCMS needs 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. We welcome ACE and other libraries stakeholders' work to improve the collection and use of a range of timely and accurate data about public libraries.

In August 2025, Arts Council England published the first annual English Public Libraries Activity Dataset, capturing activity within public libraries in England between April 2023 to March 2024. The dataset is collected from library services and contains metrics such as the number of active users, the number of and attendance at events, and information on loans and PC use. On 25 September 2025, DCMS published a secondary data analysis of this Activity Dataset to provide estimates of the national level of activity for a number of metrics. The headline analysis for 2023/24 were:

- 6 million library members
- 725,000 in-person events with 11 million attendees
- 130 million physical book loans and 2 million physical audiobook loans
- 13 million ebook loans and 12 million e-audiobook loans

- 143 million physical visits
- 25,000 public PCs and devices used for 14 million hours

DCMS Funding

- *Libraries Improvement Fund*

The fourth round of the Libraries Improvement Fund, which supports public libraries to upgrade their buildings and technology to meet changing needs to better serve their communities, opened for expressions of interest on 6 May 2025. Decision making for round 4 took place over the 2025/26 year and successful projects were announced on 16 April 2026.

In January 2026 the Secretary of State, Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP announced a £1.5 billion Arts Everywhere package of capital funding for cultural organisations. This includes up to £27.5 million over the five years of the Parliament for the Libraries Improvement Fund.

- *National Year of Reading*

On 2 March 2026 DCMS [announced](#) additional funding of up to £150,000 to support National Year of Reading projects in 100 places, across 72 library authority areas, that are disadvantaged by high deprivation, weak social infrastructure and low library engagement. This micro-grant funding will support targeted library authorities to carry out activities which are aimed at raising the awareness and many benefits of library membership, either generally for the service or specific to National Year of Reading target audiences.

In addition, the government awarded a £1,000 cash prize to each of the five English regional winners of The British Book Awards Library of the Year 2026 to continue local reading projects, celebrating the best of civic pride across England. The award ceremony took place on 11 May 2026.

- *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, ending February 2032
- Brighton – Jubilee Library, ending November 2029
- Liverpool – Central Library and Archive Redevelopment, ending January 2039
- Newcastle – City Library and High Heaton Community Library, ending February 2034
- Oldham – Oldham Library & Lifelong Learning Centre, ending January 2031
- Worcester – Worcester Library and History Centre, ending January

The government is working with the relevant library authorities to manage the process as these contracts come towards an end.

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.

The DCMS contribution to the PLR fund is fixed at £6.6 million (£6 million for payments to authors and £0.6 million for Scheme administration). However, the British Library has raised the amount of funding available in line with rising general costs such as inflation and an overall increase in its overall grant-in-aid allocation. Funding allocated by the British Library to PLR for 2024/25 is £7.19 million - £6.54 million for payments to authors and other rights holders and around £0.65 million for Scheme running costs.

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 2024/25 were made in 2025/26. The British Library reaches the estimated figure of loans of each eligible book by collecting loans data from a representative sample of public libraries throughout the UK, which in accordance to the PLR Scheme is then 'grossed' up by PLR region using national loan figures (obtained directly from library authorities) to produce a national loans estimate for each book/audiobook/e-book registered for PLR. The total registered loans figure is divided into the money available for distribution from the PLR fund, making the necessary adjustments to apply PLR's minimum and maximum payment thresholds, to provide a rate per loan.

The current rate per loan (with effect from February 2026) is set at 12.40p. This is up from the previous rate of 11.76p), because the number of loans from public libraries has decreased. This had a minimal impact on the overall distribution of earnings and this year the central fund was distributed to 24,992 authors in respect of the 2024/25 Scheme year (compared to 24,275 authors in respect of the 2023/24 Scheme year).

Cross-government advocacy and the public libraries strategy

The Libraries Team in DCMS advocates regularly across government about the contribution that public libraries can make to a wide range of government policies. This involves regular contact with a large number of different teams dealing with all sorts of issues - from early years to Neighbourhood Health, from business support to

individuals' employability, from literacy to digital service delivery and from culture to social cohesion. Public libraries were included in strategy documents relating to [Neighbourhood Health](#), [Child Poverty](#) and [digital inclusion](#).

Over the year the team laid the foundations for work on a new government strategy for public libraries. It engaged with 10 departments; ran workshops with library sector representatives and those from a wider range of local government, think tanks and library partners; and supported wider consultation through a Ministerial letter. Library sector organisations also met with the Minister to share their thoughts and insights. The intention to publish a strategy was formally announced on 2 March and we expect to publish this in summer 2026.

Libraries Development Agency: and the Independent Review of Arts Council England

[Arts Council England](#) (ACE) is the national development agency for public libraries.

In 2025–26, it invested in [development activity](#) generating important outcomes for the sector, including the Libraries Connected regional development programme, which is creating opportunities for place-based fundraising, collaboration and advocacy. Its data collection and development of a Libraries Insights Tool aims to support better-informed decision-making in libraries, while its investment in e-licensing research is helping strengthen relationships between libraries and publishers. ACE also funded eight English libraries to take part in the [Europe Challenge](#), creating international skills development opportunities and supporting projects with social, digital and environmental benefits for local communities. It has invested in helping libraries [to improve access and long-term engagement for low-income families](#) and has commissioned [Digital Leadership for Libraries](#) skills training to future-proof the workforce.

Additionally, ACE launched the [Libraries Development Framework](#). Twenty library services joined and gained national recognition for strong practice in community engagement, place-based working, leadership and workforce development; and partnered with the Local Government Association to provide improvement support, including a development programme for senior library and culture officers.

ACE also commissioned sector research, including [an evaluation of small grants programmes for libraries](#) which will inform future investment through a better understanding of barriers and success factors; [guidance on Local Government Reorganisation](#) to help the sector prepare for change; and a [National Year of Reading toolkit](#) to support libraries in advocating to local authorities for reading for pleasure as a strategic investment priority.

In its sector leadership role, ACE has continued to convene partners to strengthen strategic planning for the libraries sector through the [English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group](#) (EPL). It has explored collaboration opportunities with the creative industries; and it has provided learning for the EPL group on professional values and the ethical implications of AI.

ACE continued to invest directly in public libraries and sector support organisations as part of its national portfolio and National Lottery Project Grants, and to deliver the Libraries Improvement Fund on behalf of DCMS, supporting library infrastructure and digital innovations.

The Hodge Review

The [Independent Review of the Arts Council conducted by Baroness Margaret Hodge](#) was published in December 2025 and included a [recommendation](#) that: *“DCMS should review whether the development role for libraries would be better*

done by the British Library with a transfer of resources to the British Library if they agree to take on the role.”

The Review reflected on feedback heard by Baroness Hodge from the sector about the level of success enjoyed by Arts Council as the development agency for libraries. This included frustration with the extent of integration within the Arts Council and the perceived value libraries had within it.

The government's response was [published](#) on 26 March 2026, accepting the recommendation to review the role. Sector leaders, including Libraries Connected, Libraries Rising and CILIP made representations to DCMS, in support of keeping Arts Council as the libraries development agency. They saw wide structural change as disruptive and highlighted strengths in the current model. This included libraries being recognised as a cultural asset in communities, expertise in grant management, economies of scale, work with children and young people, and existing relationships and regional structure to work with public libraries. However there was a strong appetite for reform. They wanted to see a sense of priority amongst Arts Council objectives, and more opportunities for the sector to shape these for public libraries. They also wanted more engagement to ensure that the needs of the sector were reflected in the Arts Council Delivery Plan.

DCMS undertook to consider these representations in deciding how to take forward the development agency role in the future. It has subsequently been decided to retain the Arts Council as development agency. It will engage with DCMS and the sector over the coming year to develop future approaches to ensure what it offers fully meet the needs of the sector. Work on this will be reported on in next year's Report.

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:

Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)

HM The King's Birthday 2025

- Julie Bell. Head of Cultural Services, Lancashire County

New Year 2026

- Bobby Seagull, teacher, author, and broadcaster
- Val Birchall, Assistant Director for culture, tourism and sport at Hammersmith and Fulham Council

British Empire Medal (BEM)

HM The King's Birthday 2025

- Charlotte Rebecca Clark. Manager, Southwold Library
- Jason Tutin. Head, 100% Digital Leeds.

New Year 2026

- Annabel Gittins, Library Support Manager, Shropshire Council; and Chair of Libraries Rising
- Marguerite Ruffles, Home Library Service Volunteer, Royal Voluntary Service
- Anna Simmons Head of Libraries and Information, Luton Libraries
- John Vincent, owner of The Network – Tackling Social Exclusion

Libraries Improvement Fund - completed projects¹ in 2025/26

During the period of this report 16 library service projects were completed. Examples of these include:

- Sefton - Bootle Library has a new children's library indoor activity space, funded through LIF. The imaginative space features an equipment trolley for sustainable materials used in popular sessions like Squish and other young family activities. Warmth and colour have been brought to the area to provide a welcoming environment for all ages. Outside the garden areas have been made more accessible with new awnings meaning the patio is usable even on rainy days.
- Dudley - a £145,000 investment from LIF has enabled the transformation of Lye Library. This has included installing VR headsets, improving the seating and creating more flexible communal space with moveable shelving and new flooring. The extensive makeover has breathed new life into the space which now offers a bright and welcoming venue that has something for everyone.
- Middlesbrough - £220,000 LIF investment has transformed the library services digital offer. Seven IT areas have been refurbished across the service, with the introduction of loanable laptops, and the installation of new self-service machines at four venues. At Thorntree Community Hub and Library, the IT area has been redesigned to create a modern and vibrant space. A dedicated seating area has been created for customers wishing to bring their own devices into the Community Hub and Library with the ability to plug in and charge up using new USB connections. WiFi connectivity has been improved throughout the Hub, enabling customers to access the internet and use the new WiFi printing service. The LIF Funding has also enabled the replacement of public computers with a range of 21in and 24in monitors across the service, alongside the introduction of surge-protected power points and USB charging facilities.

¹ Completed means ACE has made the final payment in relation to the project

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