



Library Note

Local Libraries and Independent Bookshops in the UK

On 13 October 2016, the House of Lords will debate the cultural, civil and educational significance of local libraries and independent bookshops in the United Kingdom.

It is argued that public libraries have a number of societal benefits. Public libraries can help promote literacy among children and adults by providing a number of services, such as book clubs and reading programmes. They can also help improve people's digital literacy by providing access to the internet and computer technology, and through running digital skills classes. Moreover, some studies have found a relationship between regular library use and the reporting of good health. A number of public libraries also provide health-related services, such as 'Reading Well Books on Prescription' scheme that provides books for people with mental health conditions. In addition, it has been suggested that public libraries can help promote prosperity by running services to help jobseekers, such as CV workshops, and by providing information to help businesses start and grow.

Similarly, arguments are made about the importance of independent bookshops. For example, the Bookseller's Association has argued that bookshops can help promote literacy, excellence in academic research, enrich the UK's culture, and the organisation has also emphasised that bookshops help ensure that the UK's high streets thrive.

The provision of public library services in England and Wales are underpinned by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Under this Act, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide "comprehensive and efficient" library services. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport explains that it is up to local authorities to determine how library services meet local needs.

According to figures released by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), there were 3,917 libraries in 2014/15 in Great Britain compared to 4,023 in 2013/14. In 2012, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee published a report on library closures that argued that a number of local councils were potentially failing their statutory duty to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. In December 2015, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) launched its 'My Library By Right', campaign for the right to a quality library.

This Library briefing presents some of the arguments made in support of local libraries and independent bookshops. It provides background about the history of public libraries, legislation governing its provision and statistics on public libraries and independent bookshops. It concludes by highlighting some recent developments in these areas.

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I. Significance of Libraries and Bookshops

On 13 October 2016, the House of Lords will debate the cultural, civil and educational significance of local libraries and independent bookshops in the United Kingdom.

In 1994, the Public Library Manifesto was adopted by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) which set out the significance of public libraries in society.¹ The manifesto states that:

Freedom, prosperity and the development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.

The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups.

This manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.²

The manifesto outlines the "mission" of the public library as follows:

- Creating and strengthening reading habits in children at an early age
- Supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels
- Providing opportunities for personal creative development
- Stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people
- Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations
- Providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts
- Fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity
- Supporting the oral tradition
- Ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information
- Providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups
- Facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills
- Supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.³

¹ United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, '[UNESCO/IFLA Library Manifestos](#)', accessed 21 September 2016.

² United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, '[UNESCO Public Library Manifesto](#)', 1994.

³ *ibid.*

In the *Independent Library Report for England*, published in 2014, the chair of the panel, William Sieghard, outlined his view of the importance of public libraries:

Libraries are, let us not forget, a golden thread throughout our lives. Despite the growth in digital technologies, there is still a clear need and demand within communities for modern, safe, non-judgemental, flexible spaces, where citizens of all ages can mine the knowledge of the world for free, supported by the help and knowledge of the library workforce. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable in society who need support and guidance and to children and young people who benefit from engagement with libraries outside of the formal classroom environment.

The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community. It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning, from babies to old age, offering support, help, education, and encouraging a love of reading. Whether you wish to apply for a job, or seek housing benefit, or understand your pension rights or the health solutions available to you, or learn to read, the library can assist.⁴

The Arts Council England (ACE)—the development agency for public libraries in England—has argued that:

Public libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them, people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture. We know that libraries play a broad role in their communities, and we take particular interest in the ways that library spaces can be used to connect the public with other cultural activities.⁵

In January 2012, the ACE launched a research project to “help us understand the future for libraries” called ‘Envisioning the Library of the Future’.⁶ The report of the project argued that the “core purpose of libraries is, and looks set to remain, enabling people to access, explore and enjoy reading and knowledge”.⁷ In his response to the project, the then chief executive of the ACE, Alan Davey, suggested that public libraries help:

- Develop basic skills and habits of modern literacy and learning with the help of books and digital resources
- Support business and economic growth by information and skills development
- Help us understand ourselves, our place in the world, and the heritage of the communities in which we live
- Encourage us to explore our own culture and creativity, and that of others around us
- Improve our health and well-being by helping us to make sense of what is happening to us and how we can shape our lives
- Build a healthy democracy by providing free access to reliable information through which we form our opinions.⁸

⁴ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Independent Library Report for England](#), 18 December 2014, p 5.

⁵ Arts Council England, ‘[Supporting Libraries](#)’, accessed 20 September 2016.

⁶ Arts Council England, ‘[Envisioning the Library of the Future](#)’, accessed 26 September 2016.

⁷ Arts Council England, [Envisioning the Library of the Future Phases 1 and 2: Full Report](#), 14 March 2016.

⁸ *ibid*, p 4.

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has published guidelines on what makes a good library service. It argued that a “good library service provides a positive experience for local people, and demonstrates the value a local authority places on its community”.⁹ In addition, CILIP suggested that:

Libraries provide a popular and heavily-used service for everyone, allowing unbiased and unparalleled access to the world’s knowledge. Libraries benefit everyone, whether they use their local library or not. They stand for intellectual freedom, democratic engagement, community cohesion, social justice and equality of opportunity.¹⁰

The Bookseller’s Association, the trade body for booksellers in the UK and Ireland, has similarly highlighted the importance of bookshops. In April 2016, it launched its *Bookselling for Britain Manifesto* as part of its lobbying campaign to government. The manifesto argued that:

Bookselling helps underpin excellence in education and research, promotes literacy and reading for pleasure, develops present and future authors and writers, while preserving those of the past, and helps drive innovation and excellence in new forms of reading.

Books enrich our culture, and help inspire other creative sectors—like theatre, cinema, television and music.¹¹

The manifesto also stated that the book industry could help the Government in a number of areas:

- Ensuring school children achieve higher levels of literacy and numeracy
- Helping consumers to access creative content in a safe online environment
- Maintaining the UK’s world class research and higher education community
- Helping the UK make the most of technological innovation
- Helping the UK’s high streets to thrive and stay vibrant.¹²

1.1 Public Libraries: Benefits

A number of commentators have considered how public libraries benefit their communities.

Economic Benefits

In February 2014, the ACE commissioned BOP Consulting—which specialises in providing research on culture and the creative economy—to review the evidence on how public libraries and their services contribute to the economy.¹³ The report highlighted the limitations of the available evidence given that “traditional metrics for measuring the economic contribution of an industry are not appropriate in a public library context”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the report argued that

⁹ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, [What Makes a Good Library Service](#), December 2010.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Bookseller’s Association, [Bookselling for Britain: A Manifesto from the Booksellers Association](#), 4 April 2016, p 3.

¹² *ibid.*, p 3.

¹³ Arts Council England, [Evidence Review of the Economic Contributions of Libraries](#), June 2014, p 2.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p 2.

the evidence was “already sufficient to conclude that public libraries provide positive outcomes for people and communities in many areas”.¹⁵ It argued that:

[P]ublic libraries, first and foremost, contribute to *long term* processes of human capital formation, the maintenance of mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and the cohesion of communities. This is the real economic contribution that public libraries make to the UK.¹⁶

However, the report contended that:

The fact that these processes are long term, that the financial benefits arise downstream from libraries’ activities, that libraries make only a contribution to what are multi-dimensional, complex processes of human and social development, suggests that attempting to derive a realistic and accurate overall monetary valuation for this is akin to the search for the holy grail.¹⁷

The Government’s Library Taskforce has outlined a number of ways in which public libraries can contribute to greater prosperity in a recent blog post. It argued that libraries can help businesses start and grow by “providing information, expertise and guidance and working with local economic development organisations to signpost businesses to sources of support and advice”.¹⁸ The Libraries Taskforce also argued that libraries help contribute to a sense of ‘place’ and improve quality of life in an area which can help attract businesses. On an individual level, it also observed that public libraries support individuals seeking work through the running of programmes, such as CV clinics, advice sessions and job fairs.¹⁹

Health Benefits

The ACE also commissioned Simetrica—an organisation which specialises in research on social impact analysis and policy evaluation—to conduct a study in 2014 into the health and wellbeing benefits of public libraries. Its analysis of health and subjective wellbeing data found that “library use is positively associated with subjective wellbeing after controlling for a wide range of factors”.²⁰ The report argued that:

Library usage is associated with higher life satisfaction, higher happiness and a higher sense of purpose in life (although usage was also associated with higher levels of anxiety). These results suggest that libraries generally have an important role in library users’ quality of life and wellbeing [...].²¹

The study suggested that regular library users had a 1.4 percent increased likelihood of reporting good general health (when controlling for other factors). It estimated that the improvement in health associated with library use saved the NHS £1.32 per person per year in terms of reducing GP visits. The report suggested that the “aggregate NHS cost savings across the library-using English population” could save the NHS £27.5 million per year.²²

¹⁵ Arts Council England, [Evidence Review of the Economic Contributions of Libraries](#), June 2014, p 5.

¹⁶ *ibid*, p 5.

¹⁷ *ibid*, p 5.

¹⁸ Libraries Taskforce, [‘Greater Prosperity: How Libraries Deliver’](#), 12 September 2016.

¹⁹ *ibid*.

²⁰ Arts Council England, [The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Public Libraries](#), March 2015, p 7.

²¹ *ibid*, p 7.

²² *ibid*, March 2015, p 7.

In June 2013, the Reading Agency and the Society of Chief Librarians (SCL) launched their ‘Reading Well Books on Prescription’ scheme to support people with mental health through “self-help in book form”. The service provides books that have been endorsed by experts and GPs to help people understand their mental health condition.²³ An evaluation report found that over half a million people had used the service in the two years since its launch and that 90 percent of users surveyed (there were 64 respondents) had found the books helpful for understanding more about their condition.²⁴

Educational Benefits

On 23 March 2016, the Libraries Taskforce published its draft document, [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021](#), for consultation which ran until 3 June 2016. The document emphasised the importance of public libraries for improving reading and literacy. It stated that “literacy and reading are two of the most fundamental skills in life” and observed that evidence from the Department for Education indicated that “reading for pleasure grows self-confidence, strengthens community participation and improves knowledge and understanding of other cultures”.²⁵ The document noted that the UK faced a number of literacy challenges which it said was demonstrated by a recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).²⁶ The OECD found that around one in ten university graduates in England had low literacy and numeracy skills and 40 percent of unemployed people have low basic skills.²⁷

The Libraries Taskforce has stated that libraries can “encourage reading by running reading programmes, hosting book clubs and by providing advice to help people extend and develop their reading choices”.²⁸ In addition, the SCL and the Reading Agency have developed the ‘Universal Reading Offer’, which is a strategic planning framework which “enables us to develop, deliver and promote reading services within libraries”. The framework “sets out what public libraries will offer in order to provide a modern reading service within a local community”.²⁹ The Reading Agency also run an annual ‘Summer Reading Challenge’ which encourages children aged four to eleven to read six books borrowed from their local library during the summer holidays.³⁰ The Reading Agency stated that 800,000 children participated in the Summer Reading Challenge last year.³¹

The [Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021](#) document also noted that libraries help promote lifelong learning by providing access to learning resources both in hard copy and online, providing space to study and promoting learning opportunities.³² David McMenemy, Lecturer in Computer and Information Sciences at Strathclyde University, writes

²³ Reading Agency, ‘[Reading Well Books on Prescription](#)’, June 2013.

²⁴ Reading Agency and Society of Chief Librarians, [Reading Well Books on Prescription, Evaluation 2014–15](#), pp 3–4.

²⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, ‘[Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021](#)’, 23 March 2016.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, [Building Skills for All: A Review of England](#), February 2016, pp 14 and 74.

²⁸ Libraries Taskforce, ‘[Increased Reading and Literacy: How Libraries Deliver](#)’, 23 August 2016.

²⁹ Society of Chief Librarians, ‘[Universal Reading Offer](#)’, accessed 21 September 2016.

³⁰ Reading Agency, ‘[Summer Reading Challenge](#)’, accessed 22 September 2016.

³¹ Reading Agency, ‘[Summer Reading Challenge 2016 Book Collection Titles Announced](#)’, 29 February 2016.

³² Department for Culture, Media and Sport, ‘[Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016–2021](#)’, 23 March 2016.

that a “key goal of the public library movement was to provide the population with the means to access materials that would help them self-educate”.³³

The Libraries Taskforce has emphasised the role that libraries play in improving digital access and literacy through free WiFi and access to computers. It argued that digital skills “gives people the opportunity to access services more easily, to learn, and to interact with others” and argued that “digital skills also boost people’s employability, and the productivity and prosperity of the organisation they work for”.³⁴ The Libraries Taskforce highlighted the fact that not everybody in the UK has access to the internet at home. The latest statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that 11 percent of households in Great Britain did not have internet access in 2016.³⁵ In 2014/15, public libraries in England, Wales and Northern Ireland ran digital skills sessions helping around 192,000 people, according to a survey by the SCL.³⁶

Cultural Benefits

The Libraries Taskforce has stated that “libraries are well-placed to increase participation in cultural activities because of their use by all social groups and their role as inclusive cultural hubs within communities”.³⁷ The Taskforce suggested that they “also point people to wider cultural activities, objects, knowledge and sites, and encourage individuals to explore different cultural experiences and to create things themselves”.³⁸

In June 2016, the SCL announced the introduction of a new Universal Culture Offer for public libraries in addition to its existing reading, information, digital, health and learning offers.³⁹ The SCL announced that the Universal Culture Offer was being developed with the ACE and that “library staff will be trained to become confident Cultural Champions for their communities, and SCL will provide resources for libraries to maximise partnerships with local and national arts organisations”.⁴⁰ The SCL observes that the “benefits of art and culture are well documented” and stated that “almost 60 percent of people are more likely to report good health if they have attended a cultural place or event in the last 12 months”.⁴¹

David McMenemy has observed that libraries fulfil a leisure role for local communities but this function had sometimes proved controversial. He writes that:

A fundamental debate about the existence of public libraries centres around the tension some commentators see between the public library supporting leisure reading and interests versus its role to support the cultural needs of the community.⁴²

Mr McMenemy argued that “in reality both are supported” but noted that since their formation, public libraries have come under pressure to promote usage that is “worthy and educational” rather than recreational.⁴³ For example, he observed that the so-called ‘Great Fiction Question’

³³ David McMenemy, *The Public Library*, 2009, pp 96–97.

³⁴ Libraries Taskforce, ‘[Improved Digital Access and Literacy: How Libraries Deliver](#)’, 19 September 2016.

³⁵ Office for National Statistics, ‘[Internet Access—Households and Individuals: 2016](#)’, 4 August 2016.

³⁶ Libraries Taskforce, ‘[Digital Skills Partnerships in Libraries](#)’, 17 December 2015.

³⁷ Libraries Taskforce, ‘[Cultural and Creative Enrichment: How Libraries Deliver](#)’, 31 August 2016.

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Society of Chief Librarians, ‘[Universal Offers](#)’, accessed 27 September 2016.

⁴⁰ Society of Chief Librarians, ‘[Libraries to Invest Time and Resources in Art and Culture](#)’, 16 June 2016.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² David McMenemy, *The Public Library*, 2009, p 62.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p 62.

has revolved around the debate about whether public funds should be used for people to read fiction, but also the about the ‘quality’ of fiction provided by libraries.⁴⁴

Communities and Civic Life

The DCMS has stated that:

Public libraries contribute directly to community cohesion by creating a sense of place for their users and providing an inclusive, free and safe space for all. Each public library is at the heart of its community, supported by trained staff skilled in community engagement and customer service. Libraries can uniquely partner with community organisations and liaise between communities and government.⁴⁵

In a blog post for the Libraries Taskforce, CILIP’s Nick Poole outlined how public libraries can change lives and build better communities.⁴⁶ In addition to providing services that help improve digital literacy, support for employment and enterprise and public health, he argued that public libraries are a “key resource and a safe place for vulnerable groups and those at a social disadvantage”.⁴⁷ For example, Mr Poole noted that public libraries have “long offered support services for refugees” while others provide support for victims of domestic abuse.⁴⁸ In addition, David McMenemy has said that “public libraries have offered pathways into the social life and culture of Britain for minority communities and immigrants since their inception”.⁴⁹

1.2 Bookshops: Benefits

On 9 July 2014, the House of Lords held a debate on books. Introducing the debate, Baroness Miller of Chilthorne Domer (Liberal Democrat) emphasised the importance of the book industry in the UK. She argued that:

We in the UK have a terrific tradition of free speech and a free press. That freedom has relied on the book trade to nurture authors, their ideas and the books they write.

[...]

It is a time of great change in the book trade. Much of that change comes from the move from print to digital. That move offers opportunities, but it also comes with enormous risks. There is a lot to be positive about. The book trade is worth £3 billion a year to the UK, and the quality and range of British writing is recognised around the world. Forty percent of publishing industry revenues are derived from exports, a bigger proportion than in any other country. The UK is the largest e-book market in Europe.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ David McMenemy, *The Public Library*, 2009, p 62.

⁴⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [‘Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2015–2021’](#), 23 March 2016.

⁴⁶ Libraries Taskforce, [‘How Public Libraries Change Lives and Build Better Communities’](#), 23 October 2015.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ David McMenemy, *The Public Library*, 2009, p 55.

⁵⁰ [HL Hansard, 9 July 2014, col GC139.](#)

The then Lords spokesperson for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Lord Gardiner of Kimble (Conservative) remarked that:

Like all speakers in the debate, I come to it as a great supporter of books and, indeed, bookshops. I am afraid that I probably have far too many books cluttering my house but they are much loved and much enjoyed. This came to me very vividly when I saw a photograph in the newspaper only last week of a man in Ukraine rescuing his books from his burning house. I also reflected on how totalitarian regimes have suppressed and destroyed books, fearful of the power that they represent. Dreadful massacres have, alas, often been accompanied by the destruction of books. The dark age and destruction of civilisation that, alas, our continent has seen all too much of, contrasts with the age of the enlightenment that is represented by the book.⁵¹

He also noted that he was:

[P]articularly struck by what my noble friend Lady Miller said about the book trade. The statistics for the UK show that book clubs, festivals and so on comprise the firmament of the love of books and of reading. The extraordinary success of book festivals is an indication of the place of the book in our national life [...]⁵²

2. Background

2.1 History of Public Libraries in the UK

Free public libraries first appeared following the passing of the Public Libraries Act 1850. This Act allowed municipal boroughs in England and Wales—the Act was extended to include Scotland and Ireland in 1853—to establish public libraries funded through a small increase in local rates. Alistair Black, Professor of Library and Information History at Leeds Metropolitan University, explained that before 1850 a “patchwork of libraries of various kinds” had developed across the country, but these usually charged the public for their services.⁵³ Professor Black noted that there were a number of proposals for free public libraries funded by public money prior to 1850.⁵⁴ For example, in 1834, a House of Commons committee report on drunkenness recommended the establishment of “district and parish libraries, museums and reading rooms, accessible at the lowest rate of charge [...]” as a means to tackle public intoxication.⁵⁵ The MPs William Ewart and Joseph Brotherton, and the librarian Edward Edwards, had campaigned for the introduction of free public libraries for a number of years.⁵⁶ In March 1849 a House of Commons committee was appointed, chaired by Mr Ewart, to find the “best means of extending the establishment of libraries freely open to the public especially in large towns in Great Britain and Ireland”.⁵⁷ Edward Edwards, who at the time was serving as an

⁵¹ [HL Hansard, 9 July 2014, col GC150.](#)

⁵² *ibid*, col GC152.

⁵³ Alistair Black, ‘Introduction, the Public Library in Concept and Reality’, in Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume III 1850–2000*, 2006, p 21.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, p 21.

⁵⁵ House of Commons Committee on Drunkenness, [Report from the Select Committee on Inquiry into Drunkenness](#), August 1834 HC Paper 559, p viii.

⁵⁶ See Chapter 1 in Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845–1965*, 1973, pp 3–16.

⁵⁷ House of Commons Committee on Public Libraries, [Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries](#), 23 July 1849.

assistant in the British Museum Library, presented evidence on library provision in Britain and abroad and was the first witness called.⁵⁸

The Public Libraries Bill was introduced by William Ewart in February 1850 but faced opposition from Tory MPs during its passage through the House of Commons.⁵⁹ The historian Thomas Kelly observed that MPs objected to the Bill on a number of grounds, including cost, the argument that the provision of libraries should be left to private enterprise; and that libraries might lead to public agitation.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the Bill received royal assent on 14 August 1850, although Mr Ewart was forced to make a number of concessions to ensure its passage. The Act enabled municipal authorities with a population of 10,000 or more to establish a public library, funded through an increase of one half-penny in the pound on local rates. However, before this tax could be levied, town councils needed to secure the support of two-thirds of ratepayers in a poll. Moreover, the Act only allowed the levy to be used to build and maintain a library building, and not to purchase books.⁶¹ Professor Black argues that while the Act provided the “bedrock for a later flowering of public libraries”, it was “in reality a relatively limited, and therefore limiting, piece of legislation”.⁶² He noted that it took “four decades for the public library movement to move into top gear”.⁶³

Over the years, a number of other acts have modified and extended the provision of public library services, such as the Public Libraries Act 1919, which allowed county councils to become library authorities and abolished limits on library spending.⁶⁴ On 31 July 1964, the Public Libraries and Museums Act received royal assent and it continues to underpin the provision of library services in England and Wales today. A number of commentators have analysed the significance of the Act of 1964. For example, the historian RJB Morris argued that:

The Act of 1964 as it finally became law was the most comprehensive ever enacted for the public library service, repealing virtually the whole of what had gone before [...].⁶⁵

Professor Black states that the Act:

[B]rought a formal end to the permissive basis on which libraries had developed since 1850. Henceforth, library authorities had a *duty* to provide a library service, one that was ‘comprehensive and efficient’, moreover.⁶⁶

2.2 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Public library services in England and Wales are governed by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Different legislation applies to Scotland and Northern Ireland (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland has published a table outlining

⁵⁸ Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845–1965*, 1973, pp 12–13; and RJB Morris, *Parliament and the Public Libraries*, 1977, pp 19–20.

⁵⁹ Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845–1965*, 1973, p 14.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, pp 14–15.

⁶¹ *ibid*, p 15.

⁶² Alistair Black, ‘The People’s University: Models of Public Library History’, in Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume III 1850–2000*, 2006, p 25.

⁶³ *ibid*, p 25.

⁶⁴ RJB Morris, *Parliament and the Public Libraries*, 1977, p 125.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, p 153.

⁶⁶ Alistair Black, ‘The People’s University: Models of Public Library History’, in Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume III 1850–2000*, 2006, p 26.

what legislation applies to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).⁶⁷ Under the 1964 Act, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for citizens living in the area. Section 7(1) of the 1964 Act states:

(1) It shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof—

Provided that although a library authority shall have power to make facilities for the borrowing of books and other materials available to any persons it shall not by virtue of this subsection be under a duty to make such facilities available to persons other than those whose residence or place of work is within the library area of the authority or who are undergoing full-time education within that area.

(2) In fulfilling its duty under the preceding subsection, a library authority shall in particular have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

(c) of securing, in relation to any matter concerning the functions both of the library authority as such and any other authority whose functions are exercisable within the library area, that there is full co-operation between the persons engaged in carrying out those functions.

According to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), it is up to local authorities to determine the nature of the library services provided:

In considering how best to deliver the statutory duty each library authority is responsible for determining, through consultation, the local needs and to deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the requirements of their communities within available resources.⁶⁸

The 1964 Act also imposes a number of statutory duties on the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and section 1(1) requires the:

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

⁶⁷ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland, [Public Library Legislation in the UK](#), December 2014.

⁶⁸ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [‘Libraries as a Statutory Service’](#), 16 December 2015.

In Wales, the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism has a duty to “superintend and promote” the improvement of library services as the Welsh Government is responsible for implementing the 1964 Act.⁶⁹

Further, the Secretary of State can order an inquiry into whether a local authority is fulfilling its statutory duties. This power was last used in 2009 when the then Culture Secretary, Andy Burnham, ordered a public inquiry into Wirral Council’s library services.⁷⁰ The subsequent report found that the “Council’s decision to restructure its Library Service to be in breach of its statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 [...]”.⁷¹

2.3 Statistics on Public Libraries and Independent Bookshops

Public Libraries

In response to a parliamentary written question, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Civil Society, Rob Wilson, recently explained that data on the number of public libraries is collected and published annually in December by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).⁷² CIPFA’s latest annual survey, released in December 2015, found that in 2014–15, there were 3,917 libraries in Great Britain. It stated that this represented a 2.6 percent fall in the number of libraries from 4,023 in 2013–14. The figures do not include library service points open for less than ten hours a week.⁷³

A parliamentary written answer provided by the DCMS on 24 February 2016, which used CIPFA figures, outlined the number of library service points open ten hours or more per week, including mobiles libraries, in England between 2000 and 2015 (extracts provided below).⁷⁴

Number of Public Libraries in England (2000–2015)

Year beginning 31 March	Total service points open ten hours or more per week, including mobile libraries, in England
2000	3,501
2005	3,474
2010	3,428
2011	3,393
2012	3,243
2013	3,181
2014	3,142
2015	3,076

CIPFA had also reported that total expenditure for UK library services fell from £0.99 billion in 2013/14 to £0.94 billion in 2014/15 and that library visits dropped 3.9 percent from 276 million in 2013/14 to 265 million in 2014/15.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Welsh Government, [Guidance on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales](#), 22 May 2015.

⁷⁰ House of Commons Library, [Public Libraries](#), 15 April 2016, p 5.

⁷¹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [A Local Inquiry in the Public Library Service Provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council](#), September 2009, p 6.

⁷² House of Commons, [Written Question: Public Libraries](#), 20 September 2016, 46019.

⁷³ Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, [Library Funding Cut by £50m](#), 9 December 2015.

⁷⁴ House of Commons: [Written Question: Public Libraries: Closures](#), 24 February 2016, 25858.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

The DCMS' most recent *Taking Part* survey, which measures cultural and sporting engagement, found that:

In 2015/16, 33.4 percent of adults reported using a public library service in the last twelve months. The proportion of adults who use a public library service has decreased year on year since the survey began in 2005/06, when it was 48.2 percent.⁷⁶

The survey also found that:

A higher proportion of non-working adults (37.1 percent) used a public library service in 2015/16 than working adults (31.0 percent). There has been a decrease in the proportion of working adults using public library services since 2013/14 (from 33.4 percent in 2013/14 to 31.0 per cent in 2015/16), while the proportion of non-working adults using libraries has remained stable. This means the gap between the two groups is widening.⁷⁷

It also noted that in 2015/16 45.6 percent of black and minority ethnic adults used a public library service in comparison to 31.6 percent of adults from the white ethnic group.⁷⁸

Data on book stocks, based on CIPFA figures, has been set out in the House of Commons Library briefing on public libraries.⁷⁹ It reported that book stocks in public libraries fell by 27 percent between 2005 and 2015. As at 31 March 2005, there were approximately 102,887,000 books in the public library system, by 31 March 2015, there were 74,751,000.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Commons Library reports that the total number of books loaned by public libraries has also fallen from 322,172,000 in 2004/5 to 209,354,000 in 2014/15.⁸¹

Independent Bookshops

In 2014, the Bookseller's Association reported that the number of independent bookshops in the UK had fallen below 1,000, based on its annual membership figures.⁸² Between February 2013 and February 2014, the number had fallen from 1,028 to 987 and over a third of these had closed since 2005 (when there were 1,535 in the UK).⁸³ The *Bookseller* magazine suggested that:

Independents have been suffering from rising rents and rates; less trade as high streets suffer and customers are deterred by parking charges; and competition from supermarkets, online retailers and readers migrating to e-books.⁸⁴

By November 2015, the number of independent bookshops—based on the Booksellers Association's membership figures—had fallen to 895. However, the organisation's chief

⁷⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Taking Part 2015/16 Quarter 4 Statistical Release](#), July 2016, p 26.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p 28.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p 28.

⁷⁹ House of Commons Library, [Public Libraries](#), 15 April 2016, p 23.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p 18.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p 20.

⁸² *The Bookseller*, '[Indie Numbers Fall Below 1,000 for the First Time](#)', 24 February 20147.

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

executive, Tim Godfray, described the latest figures as “deeply depressing” but said that the rate of decline was slowing.⁸⁵

The Publishers Association reported that in 2015 physical sales of books and journals rose for the first time in four years. Between 2014 and 2015, physical sales of books and journals increased by 0.4 percent from £2,748 billion in 2014 to £2,760 billion in 2015, while digital sales fell by 1.6 percent to £554 million in 2015.⁸⁶ The *Financial Times* noted that the figures did not include sales of self-published titles or those published by Amazon or certain other digital media companies, so they understated the total British e-book sales.⁸⁷ A BBC News article observed that it initially looked like the rise of e-books “posed an existential threat to publishers and sellers”, but “contrary to expectations, the printed book is still surviving alongside its upstart e-book cousin”.⁸⁸

3. Recent Developments

3.1 Library Closures in England

In 2012, the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee published a report on library closures. The report observed central government grants to local authorities had reduced (while restrictions on raising council tax and business rates continued) following the implementation of the Coalition Government’s 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review. The Committee noted that local authorities faced:

[A] decrease of, on average, 28 percent in their income over the Spending Review period and, in reviewing which services they should cut, some local authorities have decided to close one or more libraries in their area.⁸⁹

The report stated that this “has sparked a series of campaigns and protests in areas where library closures have been planned”.⁹⁰

The report acknowledged that local authorities were “under considerable financial pressure at present and have to make budgetary decisions swiftly”, but suggested that “a number of councils have drawn up plans that fail to comply with the requirement to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ service”.⁹¹ Nevertheless, the Committee argued that:

Although the current crisis may appear to bode ill for the future of public libraries, it also presents an opportunity for a thorough reassessment of their role and of the way they are organised.⁹²

Responding to the report, the Coalition Government argued that the “library service in England remains strong and popular”. It suggested that “this is not a service in crisis” and described the

⁸⁵ *The Bookseller*, ‘[Godfray Hails Bookselling Entrepreneurship in ‘Challenging’ Year](#)’, 24 December 2015.

⁸⁶ The Publishers Association, ‘[Strong Year for UK Publishing Industry as it Grows to £4.4bn](#)’, 13 May 2016.

⁸⁷ *Financial Times*, ‘[UK Physical Book Sales Rise for First Time in 4 Years](#)’, 13 May 2016.

⁸⁸ BBC News, ‘[Did Technology Kill the Book or Give it New Life?](#)’, 14 August 2015.

⁸⁹ House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Library Closures](#), 6 November 2012, HC 587 of session 2010–12, p 5.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p 3.

⁹² *ibid.*, p 3.

library service as “delivering against a backdrop of significant public sector efficiencies, to a population which retains an appetite for reading and engagement in council services”.⁹³

Statistics on the number of public libraries have proved contentious, in particular the number of closures. In response to a parliamentary question on 23 February 2016, the then Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Edward Vaizey said “from January 2010 to January 2016 approximately 110 static public libraries in England closed and at least 77 new public libraries have opened, including relocations to new buildings”. This was based on desk research conducted by the DCMS.⁹⁴ However, these figures were criticised by CILIP who cited CIPFA figures that indicated that there had been a net reduction of 178 libraries between 2009/10 and 2014/15.⁹⁵

In March 2016, a BBC investigation, based on data compiled from freedom of information requests to 207 local authorities in the UK found that 343 libraries had closed since 2010. The BBC explained that of these: 132 were mobile services; 207 were based in buildings; and there were four others providing other services, such as home delivery. In addition, there were 4,290 council-run libraries in 2010 in the UK, and 3,765 in 2016.⁹⁶ It also reported that the number of paid library staff fell from 31,977 in 2010 to 23,044 in 2016 based on data provided by 182 library authorities, while the number of volunteers had increased from 15,861 in 2010 to 31,403 in 2016.⁹⁷

The then Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy, Edward Vaizey disputed the figures obtained by the BBC and also highlighted the difficulties in gathering accurate statistics on library services in a Westminster Hall debate on library services in Thornton Cleveleys held 14 June 2016:

We take library closures as an indication of the health of the library service and I bat figures between myself, library campaigners and, I am afraid, the BBC, which has not been as accurate as it could have been about the number of library closures. It is always difficult to have an accurate figure. That might sound surprising; most people would look at a library and say that they know what a library looks like, but people can have different interpretations of the definition of a library. As far as we are aware in the Department, just over 100 libraries have closed their doors and some 200 libraries are open but managed by the local community and volunteers. There are still 3,000 libraries in England that can count as part of the statutory service. Some £700 million is spent a year for libraries to provide the great service that they do to my constituents, my hon. Friend’s constituents and others.⁹⁸

3.2 Library Service Provision

Concerns have been raised about the provision of public library services by some external organisations and interested bodies. In December 2015, the Chartered Institute of Library and

⁹³ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Government Response to the Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Third Report of Session 2012–13: Library Closures](#), January 2013, Cm 8535, p 3.

⁹⁴ House of Commons, [‘Written Question: Public Libraries’](#), 23 February 2016, 27175.

⁹⁵ CILIP, [‘Use of Flawed Figures by Ed Vaizey MP about the Number of Libraries Strongly Criticised by Chartered Institute’](#), 1 March 2016.

⁹⁶ BBC News, [‘Libraries Lose a Quarter of Staff as Hundreds Close’](#), 29 March 2016.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ [Westminster Hall Debate on ‘Library Services: Thornton Cleveleys’](#), HC Hansard, 14 June 2016, cols 362–3WH.

Information Professionals (CILIP) launched its 'My Library By Right' campaign which has been backed by the Society of Authors.⁹⁹ CILIP claimed that:

[M]any library services are being put at risk through a combination of neglect, short-term thinking and the failure of HM Government to carry out their legal duty to the public.¹⁰⁰

CILIP's Nick Poole, in support of the campaign's launch, argued that:

Public libraries are not a luxury. Their provision is not discretionary—local councils have a statutory duty. For millions of people every year library services are a lifeline. That is why the statutory right to a quality public library service was established under the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

Through My Library By Right we will hold the Government to account for these legal duties, including working with the Secretary of State to provide a clear and meaningful statement of the characteristics of a 'comprehensive and efficient' service for local authorities to follow.

We urge all authorities currently considering or implementing changes to their library services without statutory guidance to put these plans on hold pending the outcome of these discussions with DCMS. Changes made to library services without reference to an appropriate statutory guideline may not be lawful, not only under the 1964 Act, but also in respect of the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act.¹⁰¹

Alternative approaches to library service provision have been proposed. For example, an Adam Smith Blog post suggested that given the falling proportion of adults visiting libraries in England, "at some point the public lending library will simply be obsolete".¹⁰² It argued that because technology allows people to access tens of thousands of free titles, "it simply becomes less necessary to have that publicly funded service".¹⁰³ Similarly, in an appearance on BBC 5 Live in March 2016, Kate Andrews, the News Editor at the Institute of Economic Affairs, argued that the Government should not spend money on public libraries when the numbers of people using them are in decline. She suggested that some of this money should be used to help provide internet access for those without it.¹⁰⁴

3.3 Libraries Taskforce

In February 2014, the DCMS and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) commissioned the philanthropist, entrepreneur and publisher, William Sieghart, to

⁹⁹ *Guardian*, ['Joanna Trollope: UK Cannot Afford to Close One Single Public Library'](#), 13 January 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, ['Government Failures Put Libraries at Risk Warns New Campaign'](#), 16 December 2015.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² Adam Smith Institute, ['At Some Point the Public Library Will Be Obsolete'](#), 18 August 2016.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Institute of Economic Affairs, ['Government Spending on Public Libraries in Rapid Decline is a Waste'](#), 29 March 2016.

chair an expert panel and produce a report on England's public library service.¹⁰⁵ The report was published in December 2014 and made three major recommendations:

1. The provision of a national digital resource for libraries, to be delivered in partnership with local authorities.
2. The setting up of a task and finish force, led by local government, in partnership with other bodies involved in the library sector, to provide a strategic framework for England, and to help in implementing the following.
3. The task force, to work with local authorities, to help them improve, revitalise and if necessary, change their local library service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement.¹⁰⁶

The report recommended the creation of a taskforce to “provide leadership; to implement the recommendations [of the report] and to help reinvigorate the public library service in England”.¹⁰⁷ It also called on the Government to provide funding “to extend WiFi access, computer facilities and workforce training for all public libraries in England”.¹⁰⁸ The newly created Libraries Taskforce held its first meeting in March 2015.¹⁰⁹ In November 2015, it published a six month progress report which noted that £7.4 million had been made available to enable universal WiFi coverage in public libraries in England and would be administered by the ACE.¹¹⁰ The progress report also discussed the possibility of developing a document that sets out the “Government’s and the Taskforce’s shared vision for public libraries in England [...]”.¹¹¹

On 23 March 2016, the Libraries Taskforce published its draft vision for public libraries in England, *Libraries Deliver: an Ambition for Libraries in England 2016–2021*.¹¹² The document “sets out a vision of the value and impact of public libraries—a national network that delivers transformation and progress for people, communities and the nation”, although it is not a statement of government policy.¹¹³ A consultation on the document ran from 23 March 2016 to 3 June 2016 and the Government is currently reviewing the feedback from this consultation.

CILIP’s Nick Poole welcomed the publication of the *Libraries Deliver* document. Poole explained that CILIP had been involved in drafting the document and argued that it was an “important step toward the realisation of an exciting and positive vision of the way ahead for public libraries in England”.¹¹⁴ However, Desmond Clarke, a libraries campaigner, argued that:

The Ambition document is clearly intended to contribute to the debate about public libraries. However its weakness is that it almost avoids any mention of real numbers and

¹⁰⁵ Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department for Communities and Local Government, ‘[William Sieghart to Chair Panel to Produce Independent Report on England’s Public Library Service](#)’, 8 February 2014.

¹⁰⁶ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Independent Library Report for England](#), 18 December 2014, p 5.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, p 9

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, p 9.

¹⁰⁹ Libraries Taskforce, ‘[So What is this Leadership for Libraries Taskforce Thing Anyway?](#)’, 21 August 2015;

¹¹⁰ Department for Culture Media and Sport, [Leadership for Libraries Taskforce: Six Month Progress Report \(April–September 2015\)](#), 26 November 2015.

¹¹¹ *ibid*.

¹¹² Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Libraries Deliver: an Ambition for Libraries in England 2016–2021](#), 23 March 2016.

¹¹³ *ibid*.

¹¹⁴ Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, ‘[CILIP Welcomes Step Towards a Strategy for Public Libraries in England](#)’, 23 March 2016.

how the decline in usage can be reversed. Most significantly, it fails to provide a simple and clear vision for a modern library service and an innovative plan to achieve it.¹¹⁵

The Libraries Taskforce held a workshop in December 2015 to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of data on library services and how these could be improved. Following further consultation, it currently plans to publish a new model core data set at the end of September 2016.¹¹⁶

Further information on recent policy developments can be found in the House of Commons Library briefing on Public Libraries.¹¹⁷

3.4 ‘Saving Bookshops’

There have been recent reports of initiatives that aim to increase the number of people shopping at independent bookshops. The *Guardian* reported that the “rise of online retailers and e-books have had a devastating impact on the UK’s independent bookshops” but suggested that a number of online initiatives were “fighting to save these physical outlets from further decline”.¹¹⁸ For example, the NearSt app shows shoppers which nearby stores are selling items that they want and allows them to place an order to pick it up.¹¹⁹ The Hive initiative—founded by the book wholesaler Gardners—allows customers to purchase books through the Hive website, with a percentage of the sale going back to over 300 independent bookshops.¹²⁰ In addition, the Bookseller’s Association—as part of their Books Are My Bag campaign to celebrate bookshops—launched the ‘Civilised Saturday’ initiative. First held on 28 November 2015, it aimed to be an alternative to the “annual discounting frenzy” of so-called ‘Black Friday’ and saw independent bookshops offering a number of promotions, such as providing customers tea and cake.¹²¹

4. Further Reading

- Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (eds), *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Volume III 1850–2000*, 2006
- House of Commons Library, [Public Libraries](#), 15 April 2016
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, *IFLA Public Library Service Guidelines*, 2010
- Thomas Kelly, *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845–1965*, 1973
- David McMenemy, *The Public Library*, 2009
- RJB Morris, *Parliament and the Public Libraries*, 1977

¹¹⁵ *The Bookseller*, [‘Libraries Taskforce ‘Ambition’ Report Lacks Detail on Numbers’](#), 23 March 2016.

¹¹⁶ Libraries Taskforce, [‘Basic Data Set—First Steps’](#), 8 August 2016.

¹¹⁷ House of Commons Library, [Public Libraries](#), 15 April 2016.

¹¹⁸ *Guardian*, [‘Could Online Apps Help Save Indie Bookshops?’](#), 8 December 2015.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *Guardian*, [‘Bookshops Launch Civilised Saturday as Antidote to Black Friday’](#), accessed 20 November 2015.

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