



BRIEFING PAPER

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Public libraries

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Summary

The [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#) requires local authorities in England and Wales to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service”.

“Comprehensive and efficient” are not defined. It is the responsibility of each local authority to determine how to deliver public library services in the context of local need.

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport can order an inquiry where there is concern that a local authority is not fulfilling its duties under the Act. This has not happened since 2009 when an inquiry looked at the library services provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.

There have been concerns about the future of library services. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals has an ongoing [“My Library By Right”](#) campaign. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to new concerns that financial pressures on local authorities could mean cuts and reductions to library services.

The main body of this Paper focuses on public libraries in England. For information on libraries in Wales, see the Welsh Government website: [Libraries and archives](#).

An Appendix gives statistics on library visits, book loans, service points, internet access, expenditure, and the number of employees and volunteers working in libraries. These have been compiled from CIPFA statistics for Great Britain.

Scotland

In Scotland, local authorities have a statutory duty, under [section 163\(2\)](#) of the *Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973*, to “secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area”. For further information see:

- [The Scottish Library and Information Council website](#);
- [Ambition & Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020](#). A [new strategy](#) is in development;
- MyGov.Scot website: [Public libraries](#).

Northern Ireland

The public library service is administered by the Northern Ireland Library Authority, known as Libraries NI. The functions of Libraries NI are set out in the [Libraries Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2008](#). For further information, see the Northern Ireland Executive [website](#).

1. The provision of library services

1.1 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

The main legislation governing public libraries in England and Wales is the [Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964](#).

Under section 7(1) of the 1964 Act, each local authority must “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service”. In fulfilling this duty, local authorities must consider the desirability of:

- (a) ...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) ...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) ...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.¹

“Comprehensive and efficient” are not defined. It is the responsibility of each local authority to determine how to deliver public library services in the context of local need.²

In recent years, in addition to local authority-run libraries (where the service is funded, run, and managed by local authority staff), other organisational approaches have been adopted:

- a **commissiomed library** is part of the statutory service and funded by the local authority, but the running of the service has been transferred to a separate trust or organisation (e.g. a social or commercial enterprise);
- a **community-run library** has some level of ongoing support from the local authority, but staff may sometimes be volunteers. Work is according to a joint agreement such as a Service Level Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or contract. It may or may not be counted as part of the statutory service;
- an **independent community library** is managed by a non-local authority body and is outside the local authority statutory network.³

¹ Section 7(2) of the 1964 Act

² [HL4368 on public libraries](#), answered 14 December 2015

³ DCMS, [Definitions for types of libraries in the extended basic dataset](#), January 2018; Joan O'Bryan, [Analysing data: CIPFA statistics and the future of England's libraries](#), August 2018, pp6-7

There are commissioned library services in Bromley, Greenwich, Dudley, Wandsworth and Lincolnshire (run by Greenwich Leisure Limited) and Torbay and Devon (run by Libraries Unlimited). There are community-run libraries in many authorities, including Bradford, Leicestershire, and North Yorkshire.⁴

Government guidance

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has published [guidance](#) (updated 30 June 2020) on “libraries as a statutory service”.

1.2 The role of the Secretary of State

The 1964 Act imposes a duty on 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.⁵

Power to order local inquiries

Under section 10 of the Act, the Secretary of State can order a local inquiry where he receives complaints that a library authority is not fulfilling its duties under the Act.⁶ Interventions by the Secretary of State will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In determining whether to order an inquiry, the Secretary of State considers factors such as:

- if there is any serious doubt or uncertainty that the council is (or may cease to be) complying with its legal obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service
- if the council appears to be acting in a careless or unreasonable way
- if the decision is (or may be outside) the proper bounds of the council’s discretion, such as a capricious decision to stop serving a particularly vulnerable group in the local community
- if the council appears to have failed to consult affected individuals or to carry out significant research into the effects of its proposals
- if the council has failed to explain, analyse or properly justify its proposals
- if the local proposals are likely to lead to a breach of national library policy
- the advantages of decision making by expert and democratically accountable local representatives
- if there is any other good reason why a local inquiry should be ordered⁷

⁴ Joan O’Byrne, [Analysing data](#), p7

⁵ Section 1 of the 1964 Act

⁶ Section 10(1)(a) of the 1964 Act

⁷ DCMS, [Libraries as a statutory service: guidance](#), updated June 2020

[Decision letters](#) in relation to complaints about library services are published on Gov.UK.

The power to order a local inquiry has been used once, in April 2009, when the Secretary of State ordered an [inquiry](#) into the library services provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council.⁸

The Inquiry into Wirral library service, 2009

The Council's plans to close 11 of Wirral's 24 public libraries had been the subject of a large volume of correspondence, mainly from the public, but also from professional bodies. The Council was asked to work with the then Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)⁹ on the proposed restructuring of its library services. The MLA subsequently wrote to the Secretary of State, expressing concern about the situation in the Wirral.¹⁰

The inquiry, led by Sue Charteris, was significant as it examined the factors determining whether a local authority was in breach of its statutory duties.

What did the report say?

The inquiry's [report](#) was published in September 2009 and found that Wirral Council's decision to restructure its library service was in breach of its statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" service.¹¹

The Council had "failed to make an assessment of local needs (or alternatively to evidence knowledge of verifiable local needs) in respect of its library services."¹² It had taken the decision to close 11 libraries "in the absence of a strategic plan or review of the Library Service" and "without a clear understanding of the extent and range of services [then] being provided in the libraries".

There had been "a further breach in relation to the needs of deprived communities" and a key concern was that there had been "an absence of an adequate plan for and commitment to a comprehensive outreach service." Without an assessment of needs and a strategic Library Service review, the Council had "displayed a lack of logic around why some facilities were recommended for closure and not others."¹³

The report concluded that there was a strong case for reviewing the decision and/or retaining at least some physical service at some sites earmarked for closure.¹⁴ A number of recommendations were made to the Secretary of State, including that Wirral Council produce a strategic

⁸ "[Culture secretary Andy Burnham orders local inquiry into public library service](#)", DCMS press release, 3 April 2009

⁹ From 1 October 2011, the MLA's functions transferred to Arts Council England and the National Archives

¹⁰ DCMS press release, "[Culture secretary Andy Burnham orders local inquiry into public library service](#)", 3 April 2009

¹¹ DCMS, [A local Inquiry into the public library service provided by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council: led by Sue Charteris](#), 2009, p6

¹² Ibid, p6

¹³ Ibid, pp7-8

¹⁴ Ibid, p8

development plan for its library service within six months of the report's publication.¹⁵

Outcome

In November 2009, the DCMS issued a statement explaining that, since Wirral Council had subsequently revoked its decision to close 11 libraries, it was no longer appropriate to rule on whether the earlier decision was in breach of the 1964 Act.¹⁶

CILIP welcomed the Inquiry's conclusions as "arguably, a clear updating of the 1964 Act".¹⁷

Annual report

Section 17 of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish an annual report on the exercise of his functions under the Act. The most recent [report](#) was published in July 2020.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid, p9

¹⁶ Archived DCMS website, [Wirral library service inquiry](#) [snapshot taken 7/4/10] [accessed 13 January 2021]

¹⁷ "Wirral report says user needs and staff input are central to legal duty", *Update*, January-February 2010, p6

¹⁸ DCMS, [Report under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for 2019/20](#), July 2020

2. Arts Council England

[Arts Council England](#) invests Government and National Lottery money to support the arts and culture in England. It is the development agency for libraries. The Council's website explains its role:

As agreed with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Arts Council's role is to develop and advocate for libraries. Although we don't have any statutory responsibilities for libraries, we do use our experience to support and encourage their development.

Our national role means that we are well-placed to stimulate debate and offer support to the development of public libraries. How that is reflected in local library services will be determined by each council based on their own priorities and the needs of their communities.

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. Libraries contribute to the wider goals of both national and local government, as well as the communities that they serve. We work with the leaders of library services and other partners to shape what we hope our libraries in England will look like in the future.

The [envisioning the library of the future project](#) has helped us to understand the future for libraries, and how we can enable them to develop. Our response to that report sets out four priority areas for development:

1. Place the library as the hub of the community
2. Make the most of digital technology and creative media
3. Ensure that libraries are resilient and sustainable
4. Deliver the right skills for those who work in libraries

A range of information on the Council's role is available from its [website](#). This includes:

- ["More than a house for books" podcasts](#);
- [Programmes and initiatives](#);
- [Resources and research](#).

The Council funds [Libraries Connected](#) - the membership body for public library services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.¹⁹

¹⁹ Libraries Connected, [Written evidence to DCMS Committee](#), 2020

3. Independent Library Report for England (December 2014)

In February 2014, the Government commissioned William Sieghart to look at:

- the core principles of a public library into the future;
- whether the current model of delivery is the most comprehensive and efficient;
- the role of community libraries.²⁰

The [Independent Library Report for England](#) was published in December 2014. Two themes emerged “consistently and dramatically” from the investigation:

- there had been “far too many library reviews in recent years which have come to nothing”;
- not enough decision makers “appear sufficiently aware of the remarkable and vital value that a good library service can offer modern communities of every size and character”.²¹

The Report noted the continuing importance of libraries and called for their re-invigoration:

(...) 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...²²

Three major recommendations were made:

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

²⁰ [“William Sieghart to chair panel to produce independent report on England’s public library service”](#), DCMS/DCLG press release, 8 February 2014

²¹ DCMS, [Independent Library Report for England](#), December 2014, p4

²² Ibid, p5

service, while encouraging, appropriate to each library, increased community involvement.²³

The Libraries Taskforce

As recommended by the Independent Library Report, a [Libraries Taskforce](#) was set up to take forward the Report's recommendations. The Taskforce reported to the DCMS and the Local Government Association. It came to an end on 31 March 2020.²⁴

The Taskforce published a "Libraries Deliver" [strategy](#) for 2016-21. This set out the Taskforce's vision for public library services and detailed the outcomes that the public library network supports:

- cultural and creative enrichment;
- enhanced reading and literacy;
- increased digital literacy and access;
- helping everyone achieve their full potential;
- healthier and happier lives;
- increased prosperity;
- stronger, more resilient communities.

A range of material on the provision, management, and funding of library services is still available from the [Taskforce's website](#).

[Progress reports](#) on the work of the Taskforce were published every six months. A [final report](#) was published in November 2020.

²³ Ibid, p5

²⁴ DCMS, [Libraries Taskforce: six month progress report \(October 2019 to March 2020\)](#), November 2020, section 3

4. The impact of Covid-19

In [written evidence](#) to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Libraries Connected explained that libraries quickly developed an online offer during the first national lockdown. This saw a “surge” in digital engagement by users. The [#LibrariesFromHome](#) offer included:

- E-Lending of books, magazines, newspapers and audio;
- Access to online resources;
- Live online activities for children, families and adults;
- Access to selected cultural and information activities and resources from other cultural providers.

In addition, libraries used “core staff skills of empathy, information provision, organisation and understanding their communities” to support isolated and shielding residents – for example, through “keep in touch” phone calls.²⁵

Libraries Connected warned that financial pressures on local authorities could mean cuts and reductions to library services, rather than the development of their capacities to support community recovery. Areas where libraries could contribute included:

- Rebuilding the local economy and high street;
- Supporting people back into work and benefits seekers;
- Tackling isolation and mental health issues;
- Supporting the bereaved;
- Supporting children and students, including the digitally excluded who suffered an education gap;
- Tackling the digital divide to get more people online and digitally confident;
- Rebuilding connectivity and trust across communities;
- Harnessing new volunteers into library volunteering;
- Supporting the local culture economy.²⁶

Helpful support from the Government and Arts Council England would include:

- Evidence based advocacy for the impacts and value of library services, including their SROI [social return on investment];
- Clarity on the statutory responsibilities of councils in relation to delivery of a library service, including whether a digital-only service is appropriate;

²⁵ Libraries Connected, [Written evidence](#) to DCMS Committee inquiry on the impact of Covid-19. The Committee’s [report](#) (HC 291) was published in July 2020. The Government’s July 2020 [report](#) on public libraries also noted their role in responding to the pandemic

²⁶ Libraries Connected, [Written evidence](#) to DCMS Committee inquiry on the impact of Covid-19

- Clarity on consultation and evaluation processes necessary when considering major changes to library service provision;
- Sharing good practice on library service provision and remodelling.²⁷

Government support

In October 2020, a Lords PQ [asked](#) what steps the Government was taking to “guarantee the future of public libraries” through the pandemic. The DCMS replied:

The Government is providing local councils with unprecedented support during the pandemic with a £4.3 billion package, including £3.7 billion which is not ringfenced and £600 million to support social care providers. This is part of a wider package of almost £28 billion which the Government has committed to support local areas, with funding going to councils, businesses and communities.

DCMS has a statutory duty to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England. To assist delivery of this statutory duty, DCMS issued a joint letter with the Local Government Association to all local authorities in England requesting detail of restoration of their library services given the opening of physical library buildings is now permitted. This detail is assisting the department’s engagement with local authorities and its ongoing monitoring of library service provision.

DCMS continues to work closely with Libraries Connected and other key stakeholders to ensure that the Libraries Connected Service Recovery Toolkit remains relevant and continues to assist libraries with their opening and reintroduction of their services during the pandemic.

In response to the rise in demand for e-lending immediately following the closure of libraries in March, Arts Council England provided £151,000 (around £1,000 per library authority in England) to supplement existing e-book funding.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ [HL written question \(HL8910\)](#), answered 15 October 2020

5. Concerns about library closures

When the Coalition Government came to power in May 2010, there was concern that reductions in central government grants to local authorities could result in reduced library services and closures. In its January 2013 [response](#) to a [report](#)²⁹ by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the then Government said:

A 'comprehensive and efficient' library service represents the balance to be struck by each local authority in meeting local needs within the context of available resources in a way which is appropriate to the identified needs of the communities they serve.

The 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act does not seek to be overly prescriptive but instead anchors the delivery of a local service to the needs of the local community. The closure of one or even a number of library branches does not necessarily signify a breach of the 1964 Act.

(...)

The Government will maintain national oversight and retain the statutory duty on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service...The Secretary of State will use the powers of intervention where it is assessed that an authority is in breach of this responsibility. This is a serious matter, and certainly not one based on willingness and unwillingness; rather, it is a judgement on the individual facts of the case...³⁰

Data sources

There are two main data sources on public libraries that are not directly comparable:

- The DCMS' [Public libraries in England: basic dataset](#) – gives a list of libraries indicating [type of library](#), book stock, opening times and changes in service between 1 April 2010 and 1 July 2016. A unit is an individual library. The DCMS data does not include mobile libraries.
- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) [Public Library Statistics](#) - give data by local authority for UK from 2004/05. However, since 2014/15 they cover Great Britain only. The statistics include a broad range of indicators: types of library, opening hours, staff, book stock/issues, computer work stations, visits and financial data. CIPFA define a library as one which is open for at least 10 hours per week.

What's been said since the Committee report?

In March 2019, the DCMS said that it "monitors" proposed changes to library service provision in England but does not hold "complete

²⁹ Culture, Media and Sport Committee, [Library closures](#), HC 587 2012/13, November 2012

³⁰ [CM 8535](#), January 2013, pp5-6

figures” on closures.³¹ In October 2017, when asked why it doesn’t collect or publish data on closures, the DCMS [said](#) that it:

(...) does not seek to duplicate the collection of data that is collected and published by others. The Libraries Taskforce collected and published basic data about the number and locations of each public library in England as at 1 July 2016 and has worked with the libraries sector to define the data proposed for inclusion in a future core dataset for public libraries in England.³²

The dataset referred to above is [available](#) from Gov.UK.

Controversy in 2016

In a February 2016 [written response](#), the DCMS estimated, on the basis of desk research, that approximately 110 static public libraries in England had closed between January 2010 and January 2016. At least 77 new public libraries had opened during the same period.³³

The Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals ([CILIP](#)) challenged the net reduction of 33 libraries implied by the DCMS response. CILIP pointed to CIPFA figures of a net reduction of 178 libraries in England between 2009-10 and 2014-15.³⁴

2018 report

In August 2018, the DCMS published a [report](#) analysing public library trends in England. It also assessed the reliability and limitations of CIPFA’s statistics. The report’s “key takeaways” were that:

Overall, the CIPFA data shows a continuing decline in public library use (both in visits and book issues) in England. But:

- a. The downward trend may be slowing
 - b. The overall trend masks significant variations across and within library services
2. Over one quarter of all library services are trendbuckers, meaning they have shown an increase in use (visits or issues) over the past year and/or the past decade.
 3. The report considers 7 arguments - including cuts, the digital shift, and the failure to modernise - posited as explanations for the overall trend of decline in use of libraries, using data to analyse them when possible. No one argument was found to be sufficient as an explanation for decline on its own.
 4. Analysis of the arguments pointed at underlying (unmeasured) variables which distinguish the “high-performers” from the rest, namely forward-thinking leadership alongside the political support and purchasing flexibility needed to innovate in response to structural changes.
 5. The second half of the report comments on the limitations of the data collected by CIPFA. The CIPFA statistics sheets were not designed to be a dataset and have only been used as such due to

³¹ House of Lords [written question](#) [HL14384] on library closures in England since 2010, answered 19 March 2019; See also [PQ 107956](#), answered 19 October 2017

³² [PQ 109055](#), answered 26 October 2017

³³ [PQ 27175](#) [on public library closures in England], answered 23 February 2016; see also [PQ 904216](#) [on library closures], answered 21 March 2016

³⁴ “Use of flawed figures by Ed Vaizey MP about the number of libraries strongly criticised by Chartered Institute”, CILIP news release, 1 March 2016

the lack of any alternative national figures. The statistics sheets have significant flaws that undermine their ability to be used as a definitive and authoritative source of data on trends in public library usage over time. The flaws fit into 5 broad categories: issues with structure, consistency, accuracy, standardisation, and variable selection and measurement.

6. The flaws in the data impair our ability to understand trends at the national level in a comprehensive way. It may be possible to remedy this if all library services contribute in the future to a consistent and comprehensive open dataset, along the lines of the work currently being led by the Taskforce Team on implementing the collation and publication of the Core Dataset previously agreed by the sector.³⁵

³⁵ Joan O'Bryan, [*CIPFA statistics and the future of England's libraries*](#), August 2018, p64

Appendix: public library statistics

The following statistics are compiled from CIPFA public library statistics reports from 2005 to 2020. The end of this section contains the main data from which all graphs and figures are derived.³⁶

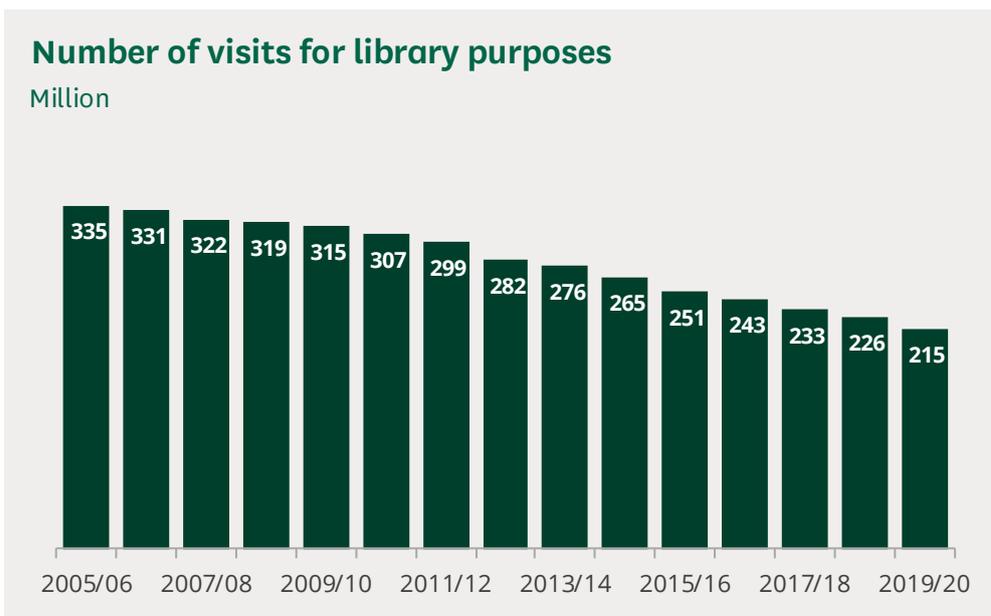
A joint DCMS and LGA sponsored taskforce undertook an [analysis](#) of the CIPFA statistics for English libraries only, which was published in August 2018. The taskforce highlighted some [issues](#) regarding the [methodology](#) used by CIPFA and the accuracy of the data stating, “Although the CIPFA data is the most complete, continuous set of data we have regarding the state of the nation’s library services, it is flawed.” As such the CIPFA figures should be treated with caution.

Visitor numbers

According to the CIPFA figures, in 2019/20, there were approximately 215 million visits to public libraries across England, Wales and Scotland – representing a reduction of roughly 121 million visits (36%) from a peak of 335 million in 2005/06.

From 2006/07 onwards, there was a year on year decrease in visitor numbers.

Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, visitor numbers had decreased by 5%. During the period 2009/10-2019/20, visitor numbers decreased by 32%. The largest single decrease occurred in 2012/13 with an 5.8% reduction on the year before. The chart below shows the number of visits to public libraries since 2005/06.



Source: [CIPFA](#), Public Libraries, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

³⁶ Figures and charts in the appendix prepared by Yago Zayed

The DCMS sponsored taskforce analysis of the CIPFA data has noted that over the ten years up to 2016/17, only 100 of 151 library services in England reported visit data throughout the decade which means that:

As a result, total visits are hundreds of thousands below the aggregate numbers reported by CIPFA. However, the trend line demonstrated is more likely to be accurate, as it measures directly like against like.³⁷

It also noted that the downward trend in visits is slowing and that it masks significant variations across and within library services.³⁸

Furthermore over a quarter of libraries are trend-buckers, having shown an increase in either visits or issues over the past year and/or decade.³⁹

Other problems concerning the data collected were that library visits are difficult to measure.

Due to co-location, libraries may share buildings with other public services such as a Jobcentre Plus, which is likely to increase the number of visits recorded by a library where it is not easy to distinguish which services are being used by visitors in these buildings.

The use of electronic door counters is CIPFA's preferred method of measuring the number of visits to a library. However, people are counted twice as they enter and leave, with some library services failing to halve the numbers from electronic door counters when reporting.

Where electronic door counters are not used, CIPFA relies on sampling based on the number of visits in a particular week with the figures extrapolated to cover 50 weeks with two weeks discounted due to bank holidays. Libraries are free to choose the week of the sample and may select a week which is particularly popular.⁴⁰

Book stock, book loans and requests for specific items

As with visitor numbers, the number of books in stock within public libraries has been reduced over the last decade. As at 31 March 2005, there were approximately 103 million books in stock across public libraries. By 1 April 2019, the number of books in stock stood at approximately 75 million – a reduction of roughly 28 million (27%) on the 2005 figure.

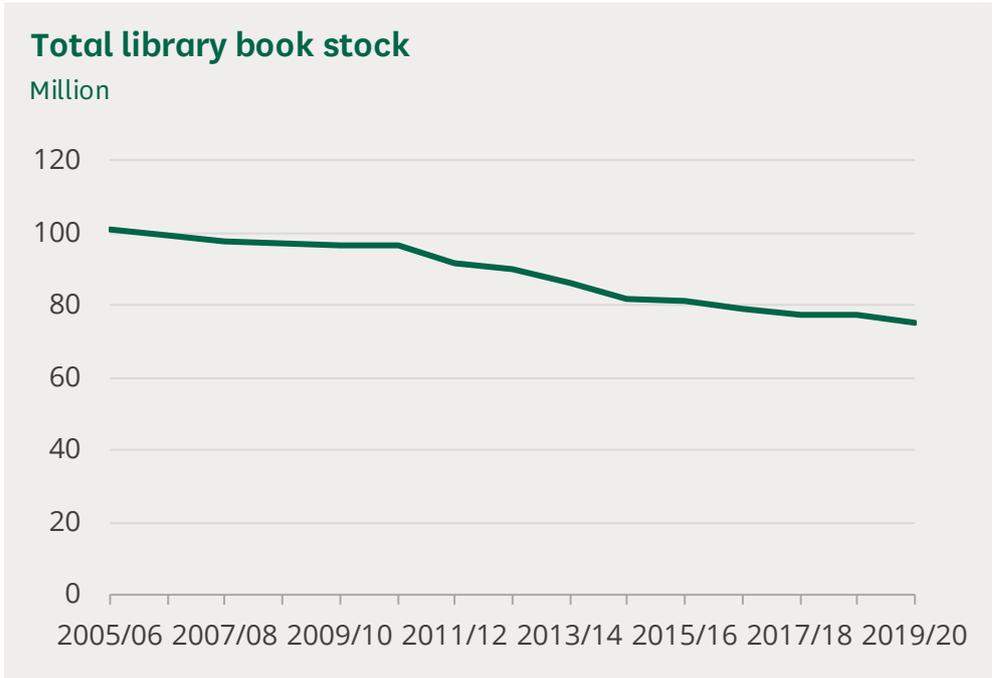
Between 2004/05 and 2009/10, public library book stocks had decreased by 7%. During the period 2010/11-2019/20, public library book stocks fell by 22%. The largest single decrease occurred in 2014/15 when the book stock at 31 March 2015 was just under 5% lower than the year before. The chart below shows the number of books in stock in public libraries.

³⁷ Joan O'Bryan, *Analysing Data: CIPFA Statistics and The Future of England's Libraries*, p.10

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.5

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.64

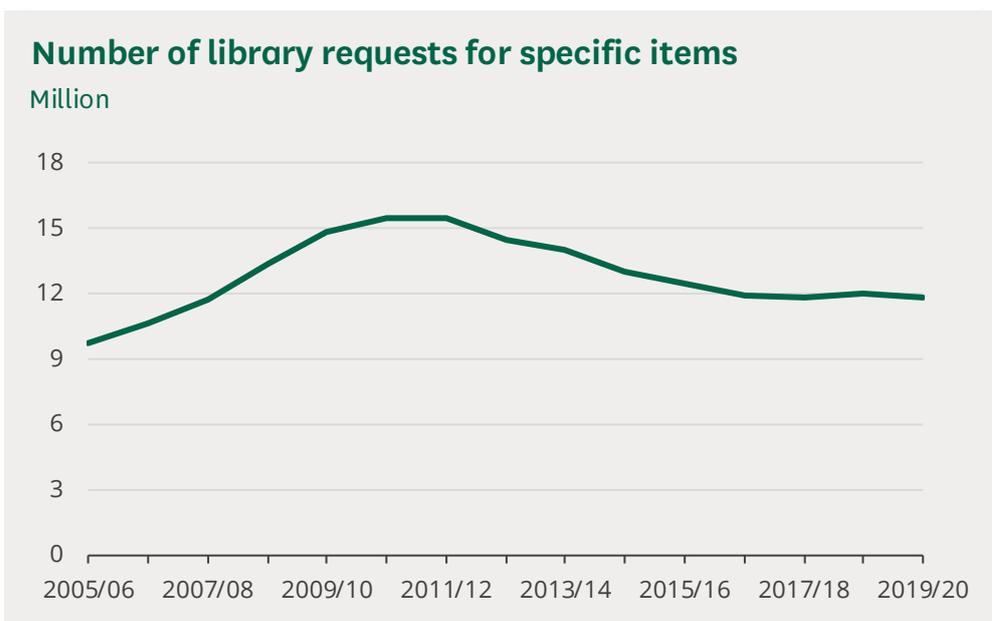
⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp.59-63



Source: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

As to be expected with the reduction in visitor numbers to public libraries, across the last decade total book borrowing also decreased, although at a greater rate. Between 2004/05 and 2019/20, the total number of books issued for loan fell from approximately 323 million to 166 million – a reduction of 157 million (49%).

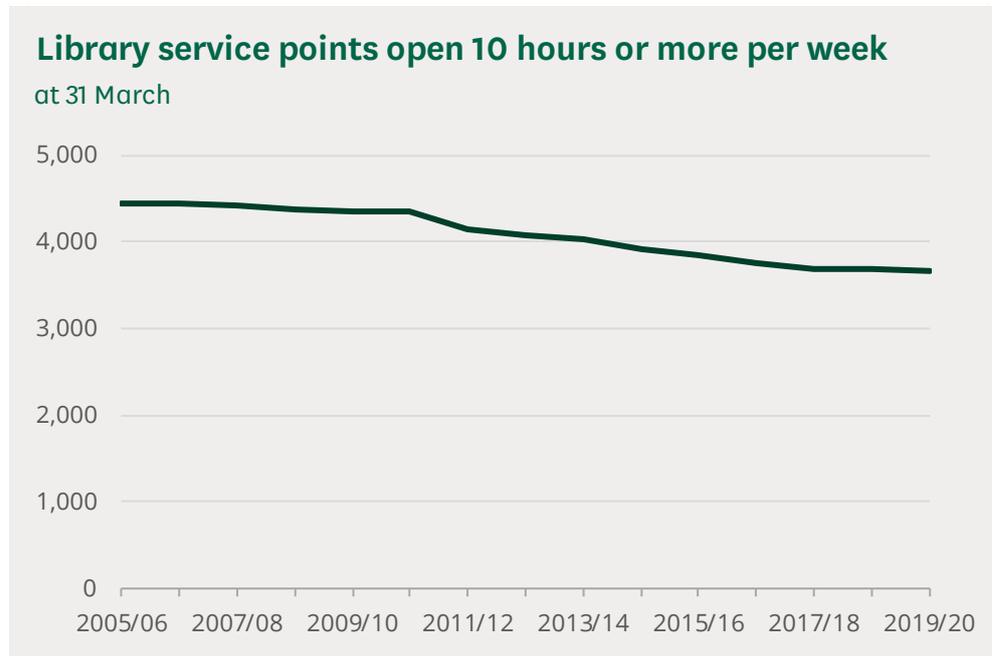
CIPFA figures show that since reaching a peak in 2010/11, the number of requests for specific items in libraries has fallen by around 3.7 million, from 15.5 million to 11.8 million in 2019/20 (a fall of 24%).



Source: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 20 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

Library service points and internet access

The number of public libraries is measured in service points to include mobile as well as static libraries. The chart below shows the number of library service points open 10 hours or more per week.



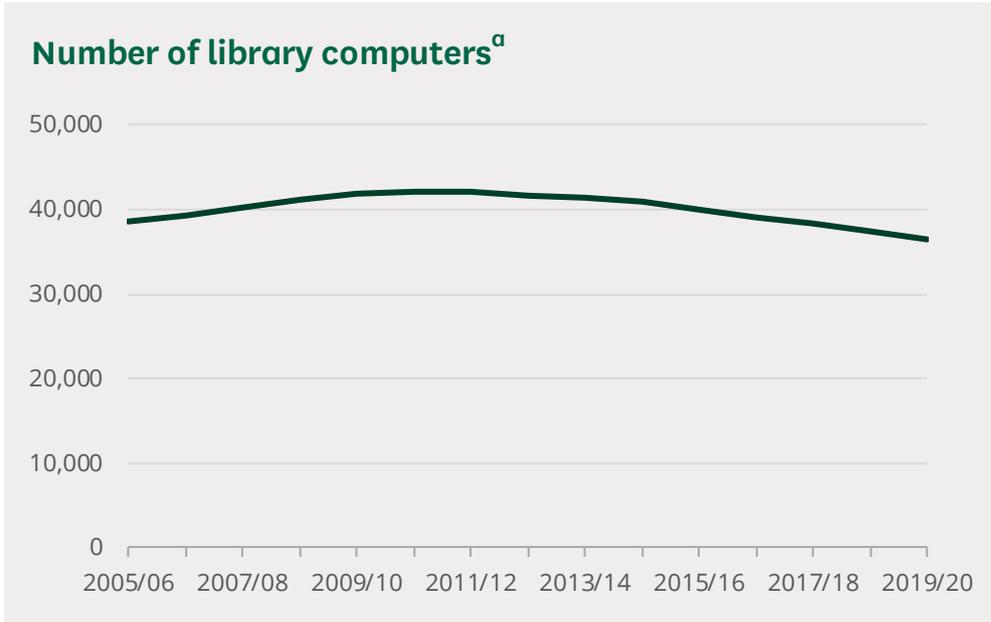
Note: Following an amendment to a previous data calculation file, the figures for service points in 2017-18 and 2018-19 Actuals have been updated

Source: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

As at 31 March 2005 there were a total of 4,367 service points that were open 10 hours or more per week across England, Wales and Scotland. At the same date in 2020 this figure stood at 3,667 – a reduction of 700 (16%). Between 31 March 2005 and 2010 the number of such service points decreased by 11 (0.3%). During the period 2010-2020 the number of such service points fell by 689 (16%).

The number of libraries which were open 10 hours or less per week accounted for a small proportion of total service points throughout the period – around 3 to 4%. The number of such libraries as of 31 March 2005 stood at 138. Since then their numbers have fluctuated with a high of 158 in 2006/07 and a low of a 119 in 2011/12. As of the 31 March 2020, the number of such libraries was 135.

Aside from being a service purely dedicated to the storing and loaning of books for the public, libraries also offer computer terminals, often with access to the internet. The chart below illustrates the number of computer terminals with access to library catalogues and the internet.

**Note:**

a) Number of terminals with library catalogue and internet access

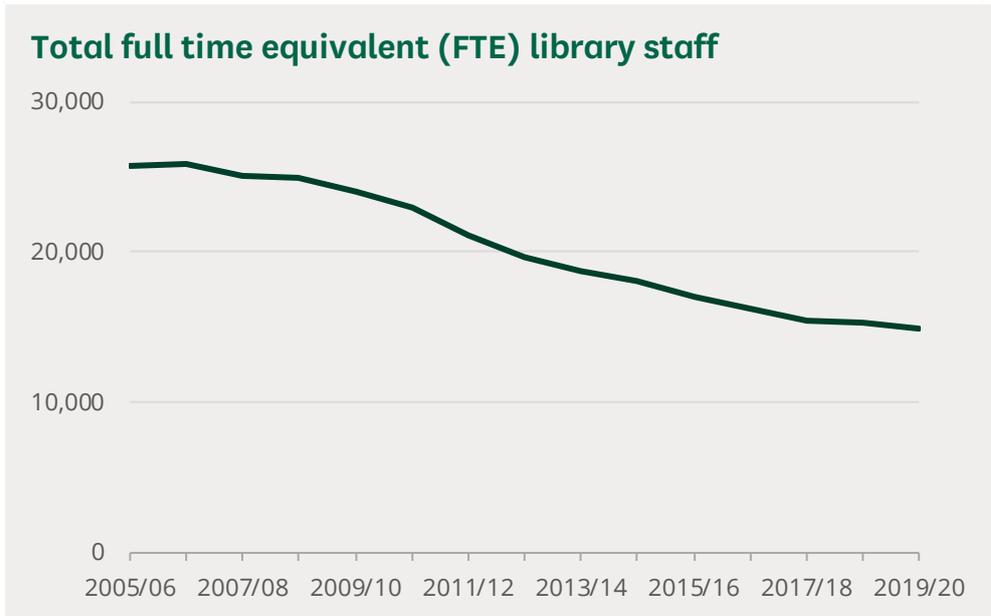
Source: CIPFA, [Public Libraries](#), December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

At 31 March 2005 there were a total of 36,302 terminals with library catalogue and internet access. This figure increased year on year to reach a peak of 42,125 on 31 March 2011. Since then terminal numbers have declined each year. At 31 March 2020 there were 36,564 computer terminals with catalogue and internet access – 13% lower than in 2010 although an increase of 1% on 2005.

The number of terminals with access to Wi-Fi as at 31 March 2012 stood at 1,183. By 31 March 2020 this figure was 3,213 – a 172% increase on 2012.

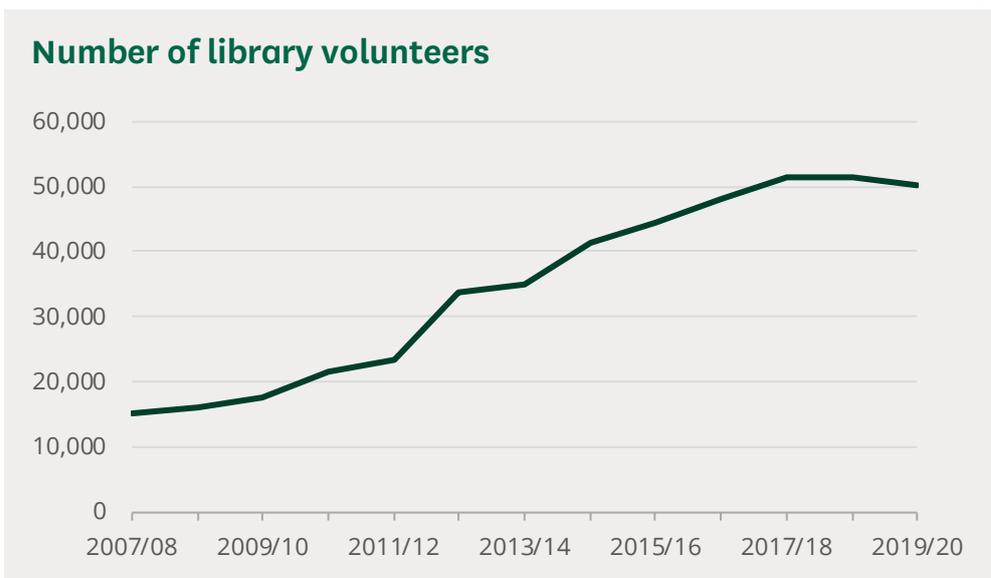
Employees and volunteers

As at 31 March 2005 there were 25,777 full time equivalent (FTE) employees working in public libraries across England, Wales and Scotland. At the same time in 2020 this figure was 14,925, representing a reduction of 42%. Since 2007 the number of people employed by public libraries decreased year on year. Between 2010 and 2020 the number of employees decreased by 9,116 (-38%).



Source: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

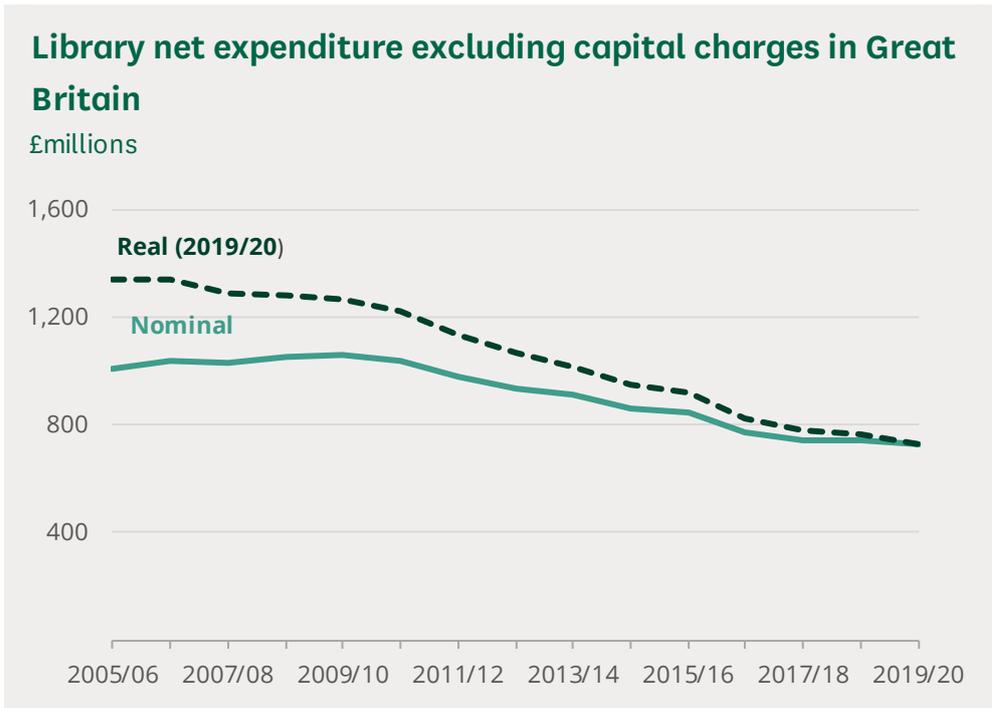
While employee numbers were decreasing over the period in question, the number of volunteers working in libraries increased. At 31 March 2009 there were 15,894 volunteers. By 2020 this figure had increased to 50,128 – a 215% increase. The figure for 2020 was the first decrease annually in the number of volunteers since 2006/07, where there were 1,350 less volunteers than in the previous year a decrease of 3%. Volunteer hours though since 2018/19 have increased by a total of 1.8 million (1.4%).



Source: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020

Expenditure

Since 2010/11, library net expenditure excluding capital charges has declined by 40% in real terms from £1.22 billion to £725 million in 2019/20. Between 2004/05 and 2009/10 spending in real terms declined by 6%.



Sources: CIPFA, *Public Libraries*, December 2020 and earlier editions accessed on 22 December 2020
 HM Treasury, *GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2020 (Spending Review)*

23 Public libraries

Local authority library statistics

Great Britain, 2004/05 to 2019/20

	Service points open 10 hours and more per week	Service points open 10 hours or less per week	Total service points (10+ and <10 hours per week	Number of terminals with library catalogue and internet access	Number of terminals with access to Wi-Fi	Employees: Professional posts (FTE)	Employees: All other posts (FTE)	Employees: Total posts (FTE)	Number of volunteers	Total book stock (000s)	Total book lending stock (000s)	Total book issues (000s)	Requests for Specific items (000s)	Number of library visits for library purposes (000s)	Net expenditure excl. capital charges (Cash) £million	Net expenditure excl. capital charges (real) £million ^a
2004/05	4,367	138	4505	36,302	-	5,940	19,837	25,777	-	103,443	76,563	323,248	8,767	332,565	989	1,343
2005/06	4,432	150	4582	38,665	-	5,732	20,031	25,763	-	101,013	74,730	316,742	9,683	335,255	1,011	1,338
2006/07	4,431	158	4589	39,367	-	5,562	20,320	25,882	12,668	99,484	73,353	308,798	10,668	330,814	1,040	1,339
2007/08	4,411	149	4560	40,169	-	5,186	19,873	25,059	15,008	97,747	72,886	301,781	11,765	321,784	1,051	1,316
2008/09	4,381	130	4511	41,201	-	4,867	20,092	24,958	15,894	97,001	72,835	304,775	13,338	318,563	1,053	1,283
2009/10	4,356	130	4486	41,968	-	4,893	19,149	24,042	17,550	96,543	72,579	303,446	14,829	315,142	1,057	1,268
2010/11	4,345	126	4471	42,125	-	4,298	18,713	23,011	21,494	96,420	72,228	294,090	15,494	307,101	1,034	1,218
2011/12	4,138	119	4257	42,039	1,183	3,602	17,535	21,138	23,397	91,942	70,840	281,700	15,425	299,187	979	1,136
2012/13	4,069	122	4191	41,583	1,550	3,505	16,182	19,688	33,685	90,082	69,959	257,185	14,499	281,731	937	1,066
2013/14	4,023	137	4,160	41,421	2,063	3,014	15,734	18,748	34,880	86,019	67,885	242,037	14,043	276,075	911	1,017
2014/15	3,917	143	4,060	40,936	2,742	2,911	15,117	18,028	41,402	81,921	65,402	220,606	12,978	265,280	859	946
2015/16	3,850	132	3,982	40,100	3,285	2,683	14,381	17,064	44,501	81,241	64,799	205,509	12,428	250,772	842	921
2016/17	3,745	144	3,889	38,971	3,321	2,389	13,805	16,194	48,025	79,133	62,938	192,567	11,907	243,419	772	823
2017/18 ^b	3,698	148	3,846	38,383	3,300	2,340	13,143	15,483	51,394	77,290	61,763	182,895	11,797	233,094	741	777
2018/19 ^b	3,685	136	3,821	37,461	3,235	2,199	13,100	15,300	51,478	77,398	60,058	174,696	12,028	226,018	745	763
2019/20	3,667	135	3,802	36,564	3,213	2,092	12,833	14,925	50,128	75,225	58,304	165,885	11,803	214,624	725	725

Notes:

Data based on 203 local authorities up until 2009; 205 local authorities thereafter

(-) No information available

a) 2019/20 prices

b) Following an amendment to a previous data calculation file, the figures for service points in 2017-18 and 2018-19 Actuals have been updated.

Sources: CIPFA, *Public Library Statistics, (various years)*, accessed on 22 December 2020
HM Treasury, *GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2020 (Spending Review)*

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