



Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

Date: MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2020
Time: 11.30 am
Venue: VIRTUAL PUBLIC MEETING (ACCESIBLE REMOTELY)

AGENDA

12. **BARBICAN AND COMMUNITY LIBRARIES - EXEMPTIONS FOR SERVICES DURING THE SECOND LOCKDOWN**
Report of the Director of Community & Children's Services.

For Information
(Pages 1 - 118)

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Committees:	Dates:
Culture Heritage and Libraries Community and Children’s Services	23 November 2020 11 December 2020
Subject: Barbican and Community Libraries - exemptions for service during the second lockdown	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3 and 4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	Revenue funding
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	Y
Report of: Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Carol Boswarthack	

Summary

The regulations governing the current second national lockdown list several exemptions for English Public Libraries. These are: “Click and Collect” services, essential PC use, schools’ library services, home delivery services and digital and virtual services. All these services will be delivered by Barbican and Community libraries staff at least until lockdown is lifted.

These exemptions were made because of the proven positive impact public libraries had on people’s mental health, social and digital inclusion as well as the support staff gave to local authority pandemic plans during the first lockdown and beyond. This impact is detailed in 2 recently published reports from the Carnegie UK Trust and Libraries Connected. The key findings in the former are that:

- Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown - Over 60% of those who engaged with public library services pointed to a range of benefits they derived from this engagement
- Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response - some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities in lockdown required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff deployed day-to-day pre-Covid-19
- Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more but faced barriers in doing so. Some UK library services experienced the following challenges:
 1. The limitations of a digital mode of delivering services.
 2. Factors external to the sector such as the extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does and how it can contribute.
 3. Factors internal to the sector including consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown.

4. Organisational culture; effective communication and engagement with the public; preparedness and contingency planning; partnerships; and digital skills.

Barbican and Community Libraries staff were not unduly affected by any of these limitations.

Recommendation

Members of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee are asked to:

- Note the content of this report.

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London has three lending libraries: Barbican Library; Shoe Lane Library; and Artizan Street Library and Community Centre. Together these comprise Barbican and Community Libraries (B&CL).
2. Public libraries are a statutory service and the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 provides for the free lending of books. In recent years, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's (DCMS's) Library Taskforce has redefined libraries as community hubs that offer safe, neutral community spaces to all customers with trusted staff. As such, our lending libraries are perfectly positioned to carry out a range of services and activities that have a positive impact on many aspects of our customers' lives, including their health and wellbeing. In addition to the provision of comprehensive lending stock, modern library priorities include social inclusion and social mobility, alongside the more traditional activities of promoting reading for pleasure, supporting literacy and learning and providing access to culture. Public computers with internet access and a range of Microsoft products are standard in all UK public libraries.
3. Our libraries are well used, with around 28,000 members who borrowed 421,962 physical items of stock in 2019/20. Most of our members are City workers, many of whom are currently working from home or furloughed.
4. The City's libraries lend digital and physical stock: eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines and eComics are available to download, alongside other digital services such as language learning, streaming music and video and online reference tools. The majority of these services are accessible from home.
5. During the first lockdown, Barbican and Community Libraries staff quickly established a full and varied range of virtual activities – our "Library without walls" – for customers of all ages. This includes Dragon Café in the City, virtual Rhymetimes, STEAM and craft activities for children and families and online talks and clubs. Staff have made heavy use of social media including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube and clubs/talks/events are held via Zoom. Our eLibrary has been heavily advertised and usage has soared. Staff also

responded to online/emailed enquiries on any topic and provided remote IT training to assist digitally isolated customers to get online.

6. Our libraries also offered an extended, contactless home delivery service to all housebound City resident customers, including those aged 70 and above who had been advised to shield. They made befriending calls to many elderly and lonely library members. Additionally, a group of trained and DBS checked library staff phoned all shielding City residents to help assist with their food, medical and social needs.
7. Feedback from people engaging with our library services has been universally positive with a large number describing them as “a lifeline”.
8. All our libraries reopened on 20 July 2020 with extensive COVID-19 safety measures and detailed risk assessments of spaces and processes in place. All have offered a limited range of space-based services which include a full enquiries service and time-limited browsing and PC use. Our virtual services have continued to be provided and are constantly refreshed.
9. Across the country, public libraries responded to lockdown in similar ways. Two recently published reports detail the positive impact libraries had on both, the lives of their customers and local authority pandemic responses. These reports are attached at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Current Position

10. The regulations governing the current second lockdown were passed by parliament on 4 November 2020 and until 2 December 2020, library buildings must close to the public. However, due to the positive impact made by public libraries during the first lockdown, there are a number of exempted services which our staff can continue to offer including:
 - **Home delivery:** Barbican and Community Libraries offered its home delivery service to housebound City residents throughout lockdown and will continue to do so. The service was subject to a COVID-19 risk assessment to ensure it is carried out safely.
 - **Schools Library Service:** The Schools Library Service is operated by Barbican Children’s Library staff and provides local schools with termly project loans to support the National Curriculum. The loans are delivered and collected by the library service’s own drivers using the section’s electric van. The service has been risk assessed to ensure it is COVID-19 safe.
 - **Digital and virtual services:** as detailed in point 5 (above). Our digital and virtual services have been a source of comfort, education and pleasure to many thousands of library customers. Staff will continue to expand our eLibrary and provision of virtual events, clubs and activities will continue for the foreseeable future.
 - **Click and Collect:** Click and Collect services are brand new and aimed at those people who can visit the libraries on foot or by cycling. The City’s service is called “Select and Collect” and all three libraries

from Monday 9 November 2020. Customers can consult the library catalogue online and phone or email their chosen library with the titles of the books they wish to collect. Staff will find the books, issue them to the customer's membership card and advise when they can be collected. Collection will take place from the rear of Barbican Library, opposite Shakespeare Tower and from the main entrance at Shoe Lane and Artizan Street Libraries.

- **Essential PC use:** This service targets local people who have no IT access at home and who need to get online. Barbican Centre is closed to the public and with no separate external library entrance, it is not possible to offer this service from Barbican Library but it will operate from the socially distanced public computers at Shoe Lane and Artizan Street libraries. Customers have been advised to phone ahead and reserve a timeslot. They will not be allowed to wait inside the library for a PC to become free and staff will clean the equipment between usages.

11. Our new services have been publicised in a number of ways:

- Information has been emailed to all library customers who have supplied an email address
- Corporate Communications will issue a news release
- Colleagues in Housing and Early Years will publicise via their networks/publications
- Notification is on the library web site and the catalogue. Staff are publicising via social media channels and local networks

12. Feedback from library customers has been universally complimentary and positive. Responses to the all-customer email include:

“Many thanks for your email about the service you're offering during lockdown. Your books are helping keep me sane in these strange times, so I'm most grateful for all that you and your staff are providing.”

“Thank you. This is really helpful. Thank you for finding ways to be operative despite the obstacles.”

“Just to say thanks so much. What a super efficient service this morning!”

“I was so pleased to read that you are beginning a 'select and collect' service. I would love to take advantage”

“Thank you very much for offering this new service - really great!”

“Thank you for offering your services during this challenging time”

“Thank you very much for offering this service!”

“I received your email about the Select and Collect services, and I would like to request some books! I'm super happy you are offering this service, it's

incredibly appreciated right now to be able to borrow books to keep me company during lockdown :)"

"Many thanks for offering a "Click and Collect" service; it is a tremendous idea"

13. Library staff have once again assisted in contacting the new list of shielding residents by telephone to check their needs. It has been noted that their skill set and customer-facing experience makes them a perfect choice for this work.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications –

B&CL recovery plans are relevant to the following City key priorities (Corporate Plan 2015–2019):

To provide modern, efficient and high-quality local services, including policing, within the Square Mile for workers, residents and visitors

To provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.

It is also relevant to the following Department of Community and Children's Services strategic aims:

Priority Potential: People of all ages can achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong learning

Priority Independence, Involvement and Choice: People of all ages can live independently, play a role in their communities and exercise choice over their services

Priority Community: People of all ages feel part of, engaged with and able to shape their community

22. The vision of B&CL is to help individuals and communities live their best lives by supporting:

- reading and literacy
- health and wellbeing
- social mobility
- social interaction
- culture and creativity.

Financial implications

There are no additional financial implications arising from these exempted services.

Resource implications

There are no additional resource implications. The services will be delivered using existing, stock, equipment and staff.

Risk implications

All our services have been carefully assessed for COVID-19 safety.

Equalities implications –

These library services comply with our public Sector Equality Duty 2010 and will have a positive impact on local customers of all ages including children and the elderly. Home Delivery services especially have a positive impact on City residents who are elderly and/or disabled.

Climate implications

None

Security implications

None

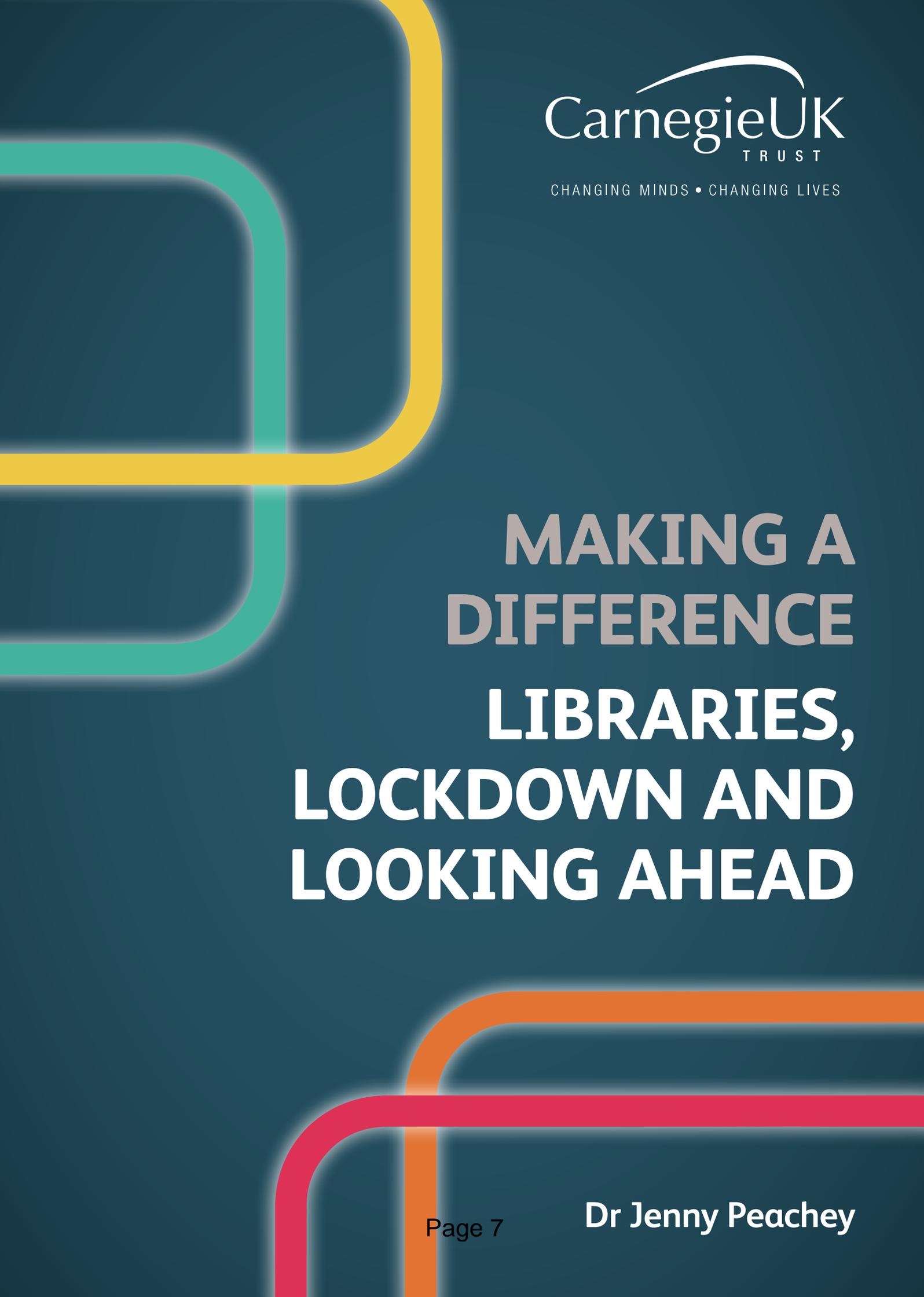
Conclusion

The City's lending libraries have quickly responded to the second lockdown and the permitted exemptions for public libraries have been swiftly implemented and well-received by customers. Nationally, UK public libraries have been recognised and praised for responding to both national lockdowns with innovation and expertise.

Report author

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A decorative graphic consisting of several thick, rounded lines in yellow, teal, orange, and pink, overlapping and curving across the page.

**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE**

**LIBRARIES,
LOCKDOWN AND
LOOKING AHEAD**



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES

ABOUT THE CARNEGIE UK TRUST

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds by influencing and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible thanks to the members of the public who participated in the poll and the 1,196 public library staff and the 22 Heads of Service who, at an extremely pressured time, made time to respond to the survey or speak with us. We are hugely grateful to everyone for their time, their openness and their willingness to engage. Heartfelt thanks also to CILIP the Library Association, Libraries Connected, Libraries NI, SLIC and the Welsh Government who kindly supported the dissemination of the survey across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, and provided their thoughts on the initial research findings and this report. Finally, thank you to Sarah Davidson, Douglas White, Katie Pekacar, Rachel Heydecker and Georgina Bowyer for their input into this draft and to Rebecca Munro, Alison Manson and Lucy Smith for their administrative support at various stages of this research.



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Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic saw the vast majority of library buildings close their doors to the UK public during lockdown.¹ Yet whilst the building is a core part of the library service offer, it is not the whole of it. This research sought to capture the role that public library services and their staff played during lockdown; the barriers faced in delivering services during lockdown; the role public library services and their staff can play in supporting individuals and communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown; and what needs to change to enable public library services to continue to deliver at their full potential in service of their communities. To gather new data on these issues we conducted public polling of 2,196 UK adults, analysed 1,196 responses to a public library staff survey and carried out in-depth interviews with 22 Heads of Service.

Four key messages and eight action areas emerged from the research. They are outlined below in more detail.

KEY MESSAGES



Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown

Around three in ten people in the UK engaged with public library services during lockdown. Whilst the doors of library buildings were closed to the public, staff worked hard to provide digital as well as physical services in order to provide as full a service to their community as possible within the restricted context. Digital services included access to e-books, e-resources and a wider range of online activities. Physical services included welfare and keeping in touch calls, home delivery services, information provision and a handful of buildings-based services. Some library services also worked hard to tackle digital exclusion during lockdown through tablet lending or distribution schemes and providing support over the phone.

Over 60% of those who engaged with public library services pointed variously to a range of benefits they derived from their engagement with it: from being provided with useful information to experiencing a positive impact on their wellbeing, from feeling more connected to their community or feeling less alone, to being supported to develop an interest or hobby.

¹ 'Lockdown' is used to reflect the various levels of lockdown measures placed across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales from the end of March 2020 to June/July 2020. This is the period in which individuals' ability to leave their homes was restricted; cafes, restaurants and non-essential shops were closed; travel was banned; workers were placed on furlough or required to work from home; and people were instructed to socially distance themselves from those living outside their immediate household.



Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response

The survey drew on the skills listed in CILIP the Library Association's Professional Skills and Knowledge Base (PKSB) framework to gauge which skills, if any, came to the fore during lockdown. The findings reveal that some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities in lockdown required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff deployed day-to-day pre-Covid-19.

Staff that were redeployed to support the local authority response to Covid-19 drew heavily on: customer service skills, learning and support skills, information and knowledge management skills, and skills relating to adaptability and working in new teams. In this way, the transferability of the core public library service skill set enabled staff working outside of the library service to support communities across the UK during an intense and challenging time.

Adaptability and innovation were also key for staff working within the library service, enabling staff to respond to need as it arose in their communities. For example, some services provided PPE for local NHS and care home staff by utilising the 3D printers in their Makerspaces, or worked with local groups to deliver new services.



Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more – but faced barriers in doing so

Despite the positive impact that public library services had on those who engaged with them, and the important contribution that library staff made to the broader response to Covid-19, it was widely felt that there were significant gaps in how library staff were able to support their communities during lockdown. The root causes of these gaps fall into the following categories: the limitations of a digital mode of delivering services; factors external to the sector; and factors internal to the sector.

The limitations of digital delivery included: digital exclusion impacting upon reach; digital formats having a negative impact on services' ability to provide quality interaction and support; and services' inability to provide access to physical resources. Of particular note is how digital versions of in-person library activities were not like-for-like replacements and did not deliver the same outcomes as the in-person offer. The loss of a civic, agenda-free space that could be entered without payment or permission, providing the potential but not the obligation for interaction and encounters, was also felt. These limitations were problematic in that they curtailed library services' ability to deliver a curated social experience and wider range of benefits to their communities.

In terms of factors external to the sector, the following items had the potential to enable or inhibit service development and delivery: finances; differing attitudes to risk within local authorities; the extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does and how it can contribute; and the extent to which the library service has a voice in local authority structures.

Factors internal to the sector included: consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown; organisational culture; effective communication and engagement with the public; preparedness and contingency planning; partnerships; and digital skills.

The impact of these various barriers meant that public library services were unable to act as a service of first resort in the way they did before lockdown: a safety net for communities, the lonely or isolated, and 'borderline' or 'hidden' vulnerable people. In some cases, it also meant that staff were unable to draw on their valuable skill set to support communities and local authorities in the most effective way.



Public library services have huge potential to support individuals and communities as they navigate the short, medium and long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic

Public library services are a vital part of social infrastructure. The best of them enable, empower and equalise. Covid-19 has not changed the strategic priorities of library services so much as sharpened their focus. It has also made staff acutely aware of the levels of need and vulnerability in communities. Looking ahead, public library services have tremendous potential to support individuals and communities across a range of local authority and government priority areas, made evermore pressing by the impact of Covid-19 and lockdown. The issues that public library services can help tackle include:



Strengthening communities



Employment and financial wellbeing



Education



Digital inclusion



Physical and Mental Health



Knowledge and information



Cultural engagement



Literacy



Equality, diversity and inclusion

It is clear that public library services have tremendous potential to support individuals and communities as the UK navigates the considerable challenges ahead. It is, however, equally clear that the sector needs to continue to adapt and innovate and requires adequate funding and support in order to fulfil its potential and deliver for individuals and communities across the UK.



Action areas: what the sector needs to fulfil its potential and deliver for the UK public

The action areas below draw on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that were identified by those who participated in the research directly, through analysis, or through the Trust's broader experience of working with the sector over the past eight years. Many of the action areas will feel familiar to the sector – albeit to lesser or greater degrees across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and across different local authorities. In many cases, work is being conducted across a range of the areas identified below. It is a matter of increasing urgency and importance that the barriers and issues highlighted in the action areas, long-standing or otherwise, are overcome in order to enable public library services to fulfil their potential and deliver for individuals and communities across the UK.

Given the differences in how governments and the library sector in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are progressing library-related agendas and the ever-shifting external environment, the items listed are broad areas and ideas that we believe should be taken into consideration by local and national governments, sector support bodies and the sector itself in developing public library services during the next period.

- Deliver a sustainable financial settlement.
- Strengthen status and voice in local authority structures.
- Value and invest in skilled and confident staff.
- Build a positive organisational culture that supports leadership at all levels.
- Recognise the digital future is here and deliver a high quality blended service.
- Resolve the longstanding, complex issues around e-books.
- Balance coherent and consistent national offers with the power of the regional and the appeal and benefits of the hyperlocal.
- Advocate effectively and powerfully.

Foreword



“Do real and permanent good in this world.”

ANDREW CARNEGIE

This report acknowledges success and offers a challenge.

It draws on a range of new evidence to make the case that public library services across the UK had a positive and supportive role to play during the Covid-19 lockdown, and illustrates the significant contribution these services can make in mitigating and overcoming the short, medium- and long-term impacts of the pandemic.

It also points to the fact that they could have done more. It challenges local and national governments, sector support bodies and the sector itself to go further to ensure that everyone in the UK has an equal opportunity to experience the enabling impact of the best public library services.

As a welcoming space at the heart of communities, free at the point of access and open to all, with a network of physical spaces and skilled staff, public library services have incredible potential as social infrastructure. Too often we refer to ‘libraries’ rather than ‘library services’, conjuring up images of buildings as static objects, rather than the dynamism, connection and potential that the combination of people, ethos and skill invokes.

Urgent conversations are happening all around us about how the state can empower individuals and communities to achieve positive change for themselves, to participate fully and to help each other. There is real potential to harness the potential of public library services as enablers in this context.

But for this potential to be realised, the sector requires a sustainable financial settlement; a stronger voice in local authority structures; an excellent blended physical and digital service – including, but not only, outstanding provision of both physical books and e-books; and investment in staff and organisational culture. To stand still is to fall behind, and there will always be a need to be constantly alert, to listen and adapt, to work with communities, and form partnerships with others in order to innovate and meet local needs. There will be further, unknown disruptive events ahead, and investment in staff and culture are as critical as funding and status in creating a resilient and flexible service to meet the demands of both today and tomorrow.

Many of the identified areas for action will feel familiar to those who know the public library sector. In light of the new ways of working that we have seen emerge during lockdown and the challenges that arise from it, this now feels a critical moment to address these issues once and for all. The context is already set by the multiple calls to action for a new settlement between central and local, for outcomes-based budget setting, and for holistic place-based approaches. It is vital that our public library network takes its place at the centre of this conversation.

Sarah Davidson
CEO, Carnegie UK Trust

Introduction

The Carnegie UK Trust has long recognised the significant and enduring contribution public library services make to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Given that the Covid-19 pandemic saw the vast majority of library buildings close their doors to the UK public during lockdown,² we were keen to understand the impact this had on the library offer at this time. The rationale for the research was two-fold. First, whilst the building is a core part of the library service offer, it is not the whole of it. Second, lockdown appeared to trigger a growing need for the type of support that public library services and their staff can provide.

The research sought to capture: the role public library services and their staff played during lockdown; the barriers faced in delivering services during lockdown; the role public library services and their staff can play in supporting individuals and communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown; and what needs to change to enable public library services to deliver at their full potential to the benefit of their communities. To gather new data on these issues we conducted public polling of 2,196 UK adults,³ analysed 1,196 responses to a public library staff survey and carried out in-depth interviews with 22 Heads of Service.

Four key messages and eight action areas emerged from the research. The report is structured around these key messages with the action areas being detailed at the end of the report. It is perhaps worth noting that many of the action areas will feel familiar to the sector – albeit to lesser or greater degrees across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and across different local authorities.

2 'Lockdown' is used to reflect the various levels of lockdown measures placed across the population in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales from the end of March 2020 to June/July 2020. This is the period in which individuals' ability to leave their homes was restricted; cafes, restaurants and non-essential shops were closed; travel was banned; workers were placed on furlough or required to work from home; and people were instructed to socially distance themselves from those living outside their immediate household.

3 This was carried out by Savanta ComRes on behalf of the Carnegie UK Trust.

KEY MESSAGES

-  Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown.
-  Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response.
-  Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more - but faced barriers in doing so.
-  Public library services have huge potential to support individuals and communities as they navigate the short, medium and long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

ACTION AREAS

Given the differences in how England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are progressing library-related agendas and the ever-shifting external environment, the items listed are broad areas and ideas that we believe should be taken into consideration by local and national governments, sector support bodies and the sector itself in developing public library services during the next period.

- Deliver a sustainable financial settlement.
- Strengthen status and voice in local authority structures.
- Value and invest in skilled and confident staff.
- Build a positive organisational culture that supports leadership at all levels.
- Recognise the digital future is here and deliver a high quality blended service.
- Resolve the longstanding, complex issues around e-books.
- Balance coherent and consistent national offers with the power of the regional and the appeal and benefits of the hyperlocal.
- Advocate effectively and powerfully.

This report, its findings and recommendations are based on new research that comes from the three methods outlined below.

1. Public poll

Savanta ComRes conducted a public poll of 2,196 UK adults aged 18+ across the UK on behalf of the Carnegie UK Trust. The poll looked at: the use of the public library service pre-lockdown and during lockdown; the level and type of interaction with the public library service during lockdown; the impact of engaging with the public library service during lockdown; and views on reopening and restarting services.

The survey was issued online between 31st July and 2nd August 2020.⁴ The sample size of the poll makes it possible to make inferences about the demographics at UK level. Data was weighted to be nationally representative of all UK adults by key demographics including gender, age, region and social grade. Research was conducted in line with British Polling Council rules.

2. Public library service staff survey

The Carnegie UK Trust issued a survey to public library staff across the UK asking questions about: the library services offered during lockdown; the potential role of public library services in the post-lockdown environment; the skills staff did (or did not) utilise during lockdown; and the experience of staff during this time.

The survey was made available on Survey Monkey for 14 days, from 19 June 2020 – 3 July 2020. It received 1,196 responses from staff across the UK. The staff survey was analysed by jurisdiction, role of respondent and whether they were redeployed, remained in the library service or were not working. Key differences in responses were pulled out against these characteristics.

An inductive, grounded-theory approach was taken to open-ended questions: responses were reviewed to derive and determine appropriate codes and then themes from these codes.

⁴ This breaks down into 103 respondents from Northern Ireland, 163 from Scotland, 129 from Wales and 1795 from England. A sample size of 100 is robust enough to make inferences from.

3. Heads of Service interviews

The Carnegie UK Trust conducted 22 in-depth interviews with Heads of Service or equivalent across the UK. One of these Heads of Service oversees two library services, meaning that 23 services were represented through the interviews.

Areas covered in interviews included: the current and anticipated impacts of Covid-19 on the library sector; how public library services contributed to individual and community wellbeing during the lockdown; what aspects of 'normal' library services have been impossible or challenging to translate successfully into the digital sphere; the success factors and inhibitors in continuing to contribute to individual/community wellbeing during lockdown; the role library services could play moving forwards; and what public library services need to enable them to fulfil this role.

The sample of participants included: all UK jurisdictions; the nine Government Office Regions (within England); a range of larger and smaller services; services that deliver for a range of geographies (ie. urban, semi-urban and rural services); and a range of governance and delivery models.

You can read the in-depth research findings, including more on the methods, from these three strands of research [here](#).



Key Message 1: Public library services had a positive impact on those who engaged with them during lockdown



“[We] launched a new ‘Libraries Direct’ service providing home delivery of books and toys, friendship calls and digital support by phone to isolated and vulnerable individuals and families.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Around one in two people in the UK are library users⁵ and three in ten engaged with public library services during lockdown. Those that used the service during this difficult period pointed to a range of benefits they derived from their engagement with it, from being provided with useful information to experiencing a positive impact on their wellbeing, from feeling more connected to their community or feeling less alone, to being supported to develop an interest or hobby.

Whilst the doors of library buildings were closed to the public during lockdown, staff worked hard to provide digital as well as physical services in order to offer as full a service to their community as possible, within

⁵ Library user is defined here as someone who engaged with or used a public library service at least once in the twelve months preceding lockdown.

the restricted context. A significant proportion of public library services adapted activities and events they would have delivered in their buildings to a digital format, to provide opportunities for learning and entertainment for children. Again, in keeping with their role at the heart of their communities, some conducted welfare or wellbeing calls to library members over 70, or supported their communities in ways they considered most appropriate such as working with a Friends Group to buy and deliver fruit and vegetable boxes to families in a deprived area. Most library services continued to provide support with accessing accurate information and some provided support with digital skills. And, of course, all public libraries provided access to reading materials – books, audio books, magazines, newspapers – through a greatly enhanced e-offer, or the delivery of physical books and audio books to people’s homes.

Here, we set out a range of offers provided by various public library services across the UK and the impact of these on those who accessed them.



“We have expanded e-Services, doubled our e-Book/e-Audio content, personally contacted all housebound and elderly customers, supplied tablets for people with no devices, set up a support for using IT, directly contacted schools and are now doing book deliveries and planning on opening our collection service from 29 June.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, SCOTLAND.

3 IN 10 engaged with public library services during lockdown



How the public library service was used during lockdown⁶

Access e-books, e-audio books or e-magazines	18%	32% used e-resources
Access resources other than e-books, e-audio books or e-magazines	16%	
Online activity for babies and toddlers aged 0-3	17%	39% engaged in online activities
Online activity for children aged 4+	15%	
Online activity for adults aged 18+	16%	
Contacted by staff	19%	30% contacted for information or support
Received books or resources ⁷	14%	
Contacted library service with a question/for information	11%	21% engaged with physical service
Contacted library service for support with digital skills	13%	
Other	1%	
Don't know	5%	

How the public library service helped people during lockdown⁸

Provided me with useful information	68%
Had a positive impact on my wellbeing in lockdown	64%
Helped me feel more connected to my community	63%
Helped me feel less alone	60%
Helped me follow/develop an interest or a hobby	64%
Helped me/my child(ren) avoid boredom	63%
Helped me in some other way	62%

The positive impact of engaging with library services was broadly consistent across all population groups, suggesting that public library services truly are for all.

⁶ Percentages relate to those who engaged with or used the service during lockdown (unweighted base 709).

⁷ Through home delivery service or indirectly via another charity or organisation.

⁸ Percentages relate to those who engaged with or used the service during lockdown (unweighted base 709).

DIGITAL OFFER: E-BOOKS, E-RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

Public library services offer the opportunity for people in their communities to engage in a range of reading-related resources and activities, with a view to educate and entertain, provide enjoyment and escape, and improve wellbeing. With many services being unable to offer physical reading materials during lockdown, public library services amplified their digital offer. All the services that engaged in this research increased availability of e-books, online newspapers, comics and magazines and e-audio books.⁹ In some cases, considerable effort was required behind the scenes to support people to access the wider digital offer. For example, work was required to enable multiple borrowing of a single e-book or to expand online services usually only available from within the library building to be offered from home. Many also provided online activities such as story and rhyme sessions, craft or Lego sessions and book groups. Support on accessing and making the most of e-resources was often provided over the phone or social media, or via video tutorials.

Almost 1/3 of people who engaged with public library services during lockdown used its digital resources. This is perhaps reflected in how lending of e-books widely increased by three figure percentages across the UK. For example, in one service, e-book loans increased by 242% and e-audio loans by 109%, in comparison with the equivalent time period in 2019.¹⁰ Again, many services also saw increases in the use of specific online offers: one library service saw use of PressReader – the software through which e-newspapers are accessed – go up by 350% whilst others reported increases in use of their online archive and family history resources as well as in their e-loans.¹¹ Whilst the usage of the e-resources by most demographic groups was broadly similar, those aged 18-24 were significantly more likely to use e-resources than others (40% versus 32%).

⁹ In England, Arts Council England provided £1,000 to every library service (£150,000 total) to purchase new e-resources as part of lockdown service delivery. In Wales, the Welsh Government invested £250,000 in the National Digital Library Service for Wales. In Northern Ireland, the government provided £800,000 of additional funding to invest in e-books and other digital stock and services at the start of the pandemic.

¹⁰ In the same time period, this service saw an increase of 197% in e-member registrations.

¹¹ Despite these very positive figures, it is important to note that in some cases this growth was from a very low base and therefore even triple digit growth could amount to a relatively small proportion of the population accessing digital resources via the library website. This is discussed more fully under Key message 3.

Viewing or taking part in an online activity was also popular, with 2 in 5 (39%) of those who engaged with public library services during lockdown participating in online activities. This reflects the experience of some services, for example one library service reported having 12,000 social media interactions per day, with each video that it posted getting thousands of views during the height of lockdown. The uptake of online resources was broadly similar across most demographic groups, but those aged 24-35 and 35-44, those with children in the household and ethnic minorities groups were significantly more likely to engage.

YouTube Channel: Denbighshire

 **“We were not doing something new, we were just doing what we were already doing”.**

Denbighshire Library Service drew on its active YouTube channel during lockdown. The channel was originally used by library development staff to promote the use of the Welsh language and provide activities for pre-school children in this predominantly rural and sparsely populated local authority. During lockdown, they increased the frequency of their rhyme times and songs on the YouTube channel and took advantage of the fact that one of their staff lives on a farm to use key points in the rural calendar, such as lambing season, as hooks for their activities. They also began Facebook Live sessions the first week after library buildings closed, which gained wide interaction and engagement from the library service’s Facebook followers.

The service had had 30,000 Facebook interactions over the first four months of lockdown in a library service area with a total population of 90,000 people. The YouTube videos had 6,000 views and there were over 22,000 Facebook engagements with those YouTube videos embedded in the Facebook page. This included both new content and the back catalogue of videos that they had previously recorded.

In some cases, there were more activities being delivered digitally than would usually be offered in a face-to-face environment. For example, one library service ran five scheduled activities a day, each for a different age group (pre-school, school-age and adults) called 'What's on today'. Delivering digitally led to new services and groups emerging, including: new online language conversation groups which hadn't been offered previously; teatime and bedtime rhyme and storytime sessions; and new home learning resources for families and teachers to access. One library service that engaged with this research created information literacy curricula for local schools. The resulting lesson content was delivered via Google Classroom as part of remote schooling provision during lockdown.

Some library services offered specific health and wellbeing offers through their digital services. For example, one service issued specific content on mental health and wellbeing, developed in partnership with mental health charities at a service-wide level, whilst staff at local branch libraries would put out content like 'wellbeing thought of the day' or 'strategies for being well'. Others invested in more e-titles aimed at supporting mental health and wellbeing for the e-library or supporting national festivals and awareness events such as 'Empathy Day' or 'Mental Health Awareness Week' by drawing attention to online collections that could support people and/or delivering facilitated online events that people could participate in.¹²

The growth in take-up of e-resources and the large audiences for social media activities suggest that there was a need for these services among the general public during lockdown and that library services stepped up and responded to that need.

¹² Other digital activities offered during lockdown include: local history story-telling, craft and drawing, online Makerspace (collaborative and creative work space) sessions, wellbeing online workshops, digitising benefit and employment guides, curating Black Lives Matters reading lists, gathering stories from the community about their experience of Covid-19 and lockdown, support with home schooling (eg. interactive homework support, help for home tutoring parents and classes for children), creating reminiscence videos to be uploaded to YouTube for care homes, multi-lingual rhyme and story times, author talks, theatre groups, poetry readings, 'virtual wanderings' (encouraging people to post photos of walks undertaken individually to prompt online group discussion about the photos, with a view to visiting the places photographed together when lockdown eased), videos of landscapes for those unable to leave their home, e-language courses and virtual support for business start-up. Whilst some of these items were mentioned a number of times, others were mentioned just once. They are shared here to illustrate the range of offers library services were able to provide during lockdown.

Make Fest: Halton Libraries and Mako Create

Halton libraries extended their existing partnership with Mako Create, a local digital media education company, to provide educational digital making activities and a Make Fest during lockdown. The focus of the activities was computer game design. The Festival was co-anchored, so the children's librarian was the face of the library service and Mako Create provided the specialist expertise in regard to digital making skills. 7,000 people engaged with Make Fest.

PHYSICAL SERVICES

Telephone support: Welfare and keeping in touch calls

 **“I’ve been involved in the [library service’s] friendship calls and I know from feedback that this has made a big difference to people. On one call, a girl with several health issues mentioned she had no electricity. She lived alone with care workers visiting at different times. I was able to pass this information to the council hub ... When I spoke with her the next day she was like a different person. She hadn’t known who to contact so the fact of this problem being sorted for her lifted her mood.”**

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

 **“We know that many of our customers have appreciated being kept in touch with and can’t wait to come back into the library.”**

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

Public library services use the space their buildings provide to connect communities and individuals. Many provide services targeted at people that are older or perhaps living on a low income, shielding or lonely. During lockdown, with a very few exceptions, public library buildings closed. As such, to continue to connect with their communities and support wellbeing, a number of public library services sought to engage with their older, vulnerable or home delivery library users through phone calls.¹³ Around 1 in 5 people who engaged with library services during lockdown were contacted by staff.¹⁴

Staff called individuals for a range of purposes: to keep in touch, provide wellbeing support, provide a befriending service and/or to check if they required support of any kind. Calls also provided the opportunity for staff to inform members about the digital offer and support them to access it, or

to register them for the home library service (where it was running). In some cases, calling members required drawing on the service’s database of members, in others it leaned on staff knowledge of their communities to identify and contact individual vulnerable residents who would benefit from contact. Even where contact lists were generated from a general database, the hyperlocal nature of library services came to the fore. For example, in one service an effort was made to arrange calls so that users spoke with members of staff who knew them and with whom they had a pre-existing relationship.

In some services a small number of calls were undertaken, but in others, thousands of individuals were identified and contacted. Some calls were one-off points of contact while others developed into regular keep-in-touch conversations. In one service interviewed for the research, 80% of those who received a call asked to be contacted again. This led to regular phone calls with people who wanted to be contacted every few days or every week.

In other services, calls were undertaken less as welfare calls and more in order to inform members about changes to the library service during lockdown or to consult them about how they would like the service to be reinstated. Nevertheless, in the process of undertaking these calls, staff often identified additional needs and placed referrals to support services. For example, in Somerset, all 500 subscribers to the home library service were contacted. Through this, library staff identified a significant proportion of people who were experiencing loneliness and who requested another call back to hear from someone, and small numbers needed signposting to services such as food and medicine collection and delivery, or even more urgent help and support. In some cases, staff identified individuals experiencing elder abuse and referred them on for support.

 **“One resident in their 70s said, ‘Bless you, it’s so nice of you to call. It’s nice to speak to someone other than the TV with all the gloom and doom. I feel the call is bringing the world together.’”**

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

13 This is different from specific shielding calls or helplines that were set up as part of local authorities’ more general response to Covid-19.

14 Whilst there is little variation by demographic group in relation to the UK average as to whether people were contacted by staff, it is worth noting that those aged 18-24 were significantly more likely to say that they were contacted and those aged 55+ were significantly less likely to say that they were contacted. This is discussed under Key message 3.

Home delivery service

Pre-Covid-19, public library services offered a home delivery service for people who did not leave the house or found it hard to get to their nearest library due to illness, mobility issues or carer responsibilities. A few library services were able to continue their home delivery service, or resume it with very little interruption, during lockdown. Others found ways of distributing books via partners. 14% of people who engaged with the library service during lockdown received books in some form from the library service. Given that reading for pleasure has been linked to reductions in symptoms of stress, depression and dementia, improved wellbeing and improved relationships with others¹⁵ it is unsurprising that those who received books from library services reported this service as having a positive impact in some way.

15 Reading Agency (2015) Literature Review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment [Online] Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/The%20Impact%20of%20Reading%20for%20Pleasure%20and%20Empowerment.pdf> [Accessed September 2020]

The library services that continued to deliver a home delivery service often expanded their service during lockdown, offering it to people who were shielding or identified as vulnerable as part of the local response to the pandemic. For example, during lockdown in Halton, thousands of books were delivered by staff and the service was extended to those that were shielding or anxious about entering public spaces. In April 2020, staff were delivering 20 books per person, to more than 100 people, per month. This number has since grown as people have continued to ask to be included in this service.

Where library services were unable to continue their regular home delivery service, some developed new temporary delivery services. For example, one service worked within an existing partnership with the council's Early Help team to improve life chances of disadvantaged families by supporting the development of home packs to support family wellbeing and informal learning during lockdown;¹⁶ Glasgow Life distributed packs of books and resources to disadvantaged families through partnerships with other agencies; and Libraries Unlimited partnered with a local community cycling charity to deliver books to a temporary homeless shelter.

16 This partnership was part of Small Steps Big Change (SSBC), a Big Lottery 10 year programme which the library service had been part of prior to Covid-19.

Book Bags to Target Families: Glasgow Life



“I see you have included sensory/ touch books, books that I can read to my daughter and easy books she can try to read herself. She is going to love each and all of them. This is so helpful to get through the summer months.”

HOME DELIVERY SERVICE USER

Glasgow Libraries worked with Education Services to deliver book bags to 3,000 target or priority families. They received funding from two major donors to provide gift books in the packs and they also provided library books on loan and activities for children. This was just a small proportion of the vulnerable families in Glasgow, but it was those who had been identified as not able to support their children’s learning from home. The service also distributed 600 Summer Reading Challenge book packs to vulnerable families.¹⁷

Ready Reads: Hampshire Library Service

Staff in Hampshire Library Service developed a book bag service called ‘Ready Reads’. They designed and built a system whereby people could request a bag of books over the phone or online and the contents of the book bags were curated for them by library staff. ‘Ready Reads’ was a hugely popular service, attracting over 4,000 subscribers in the first three weeks, with 41,500 books and other items being distributed in the first four weeks of the scheme.

Information provision

Public library services are a source of trusted information. Around 1 in 10 people who engaged with the public library service in lockdown turned to it for information. This was delivered in a variety of ways, through simply redirecting the library phone number to staff mobile numbers, or through signposting or providing an enquiry service such as the ‘Ask a Librarian’ service¹⁸ over the phone as well as virtually. Queries received from the public related to queries about the service, including how to access the digital offer and when physical services would be reintroduced, but also requests for signposting to other sources of information and support.

In terms of signposting, one library service in Wales used social media to promote information from their local authority and other trusted local partners to do a range of things from sharing information from employability partners about jobs and bridges into work schemes; citizens’ advice; drug and alcohol service; domestic abuse; and when recycling is reopening and so forth.

In some cases, these services were used by individuals seeking emergency help and support.



“A member of the public called the library because they were concerned about a friend and asked the library staff what they could do. Given the nature of the call, it was surprising that they didn’t go straight to the police, but there is something significant in terms of how a library is perceived that they were contacted first.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND.

¹⁷ Families were identified in one of two ways: Education Services data and data from the library management system. In this latter case, data was filtered by the Every Child is a Library Member category, identified ‘literacy hotspots’ and permission to contact individuals. Filtering by ‘literacy hotspot’ enabled the service to target those most in need first.

¹⁸ The Ask a Librarian service enables people to contact a librarian with any question – whether it pertains to research, homework, a library service or something else.

Building-based services

Buildings are a core part of the public library service. They provide a safe, welcoming space, open to all and free at the point of entry. As such, they act as a valuable civic resource and ‘third space’ – neither home, nor work. With a few notable exceptions, public library buildings were shut during lockdown and access to them was often difficult for library staff. However, in some cases library buildings were used in new ways to support the Covid-19 response. In one instance, the library provided a wellbeing space for care-at-home and care workers who were feeling pressured by the situation in which they were working. This use of the building made the most of public libraries as a safe ‘third’ space.

Health and Wellbeing Hubs: North Ayrshire

Five library buildings in North Ayrshire were set up as health and wellbeing hubs for care home staff and care-at-home staff. These hubs provided a bridge between work and home life, a space where staff could take time out to recharge their batteries, talk to colleagues and line managers about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on themselves and their service users and access support information on a range of health and wellbeing topics. Feedback from the carers has been very positive and they have enjoyed the light, airy and calm library spaces situated within their own locality. Library staff have been very supportive and empathetic with the carers and have seen many repeat visits – around 560 each week – with new relationships being forged. The use of the public library buildings in this way reflects the safe, non-judgmental third space that these buildings provided communities pre-lockdown.

Some other library buildings were used as a call centre for information lines or shielding calls, as a community response hub where it was possible to get mental health support and order prescriptions, and where staff took calls from the community, a vulnerable families or children’s hub – providing access and support only to this limited group, an education hub for children of key workers.

DIGITAL ENABLEMENT AND TACKLING DIGITAL EXCLUSION



“Most of our customers are vulnerable and unable to access online offers so [we’re] missing a huge part of our client base.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Many public library services work to tackle digital exclusion through supporting access to technology and skills development. Library staff were acutely aware of the impact of digital exclusion on their communities during lockdown and reported that the digital divide meant that the reach of their offers was curtailed.

Some services shifted the way in which they sought to overcome digital exclusion and worked with partners to continue to address this challenge during lockdown. Those that engaged in this area worked with partners to run tablet lending or distribution schemes to deprived and digitally excluded families or those who were shielding. For example, one service, working with colleagues in education, delivered 14,000 chrome books to vulnerable families. Another worked with health and social care partners to provide a lending library for devices, casting out WiFi to homeless accommodation and lending books to them.

Other services continued to provide digital skills support, but did so over the phone rather than in person. This enabled the service to continue to support those who had the technology, but lacked the skills to make the most of it.

Tackling Digital Exclusion: Powys Library Service

In the beginning of May, Powys entered a partnership to support those that are digitally excluded through a device loan scheme that also addressed connectivity issues. The service worked with Accessibility Powys, Supporting People, Scope and housing support agencies, considering how best to support the most vulnerable with access to technology. Working in partnership was helpful as Accessibility Powys was able to procure WiFi dongles and prepaid cards with ease, whereas council procurement would have made this more challenging for the library service. Powys library service also registered with the DevicesDotNow scheme for devices and developed a system for gifting this technology.

Two library services in England that engaged with this research managed to keep a few buildings open in order to provide access to public PCs in a safe environment for those who did not have tech at home. The impact of this cannot be underestimated; one Head of Service in Scotland noted that as their service began to reopen, they saw users coming in who were deeply stressed and anxious, having been unable to check their email for bills or important correspondence – or contact family members abroad – for a three-month period. Given that 7m people in the UK do not have access to the internet at home and 9m cannot use the internet without help,¹⁹ it is likely that many people across the UK were in a similar position.

19 Good Things Foundation (2020) Digital Nation [Online] Available at: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/research-publications/digital-nation-2020> [Accessed September 2020]

Access to PCs: Westminster and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Library Services

 “The PC offer has ... been invaluable – the heavy take-up has also underlined the need for digital inclusion resources in the borough especially at a time when voluntary and community services offering public access computers are closed.”

HEAD OF SERVICE

The Library Service offered PC access in closed buildings with strict health and safety measures in place. It was an emergency, basic offer for people with no internet access at home. Members of the public could use the PC for 45 minutes for a restricted range of services, including making contact with family and friends, banking and so forth. During lockdown, just under 400 access sessions per week were taken up across Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea.



Key Message 2: Public library staff made a valuable contribution to the Covid-19 response



“We have loaned some staff to other council essential services ... and our staff have been commended for displaying ... excellent customer service and teamwork skills.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

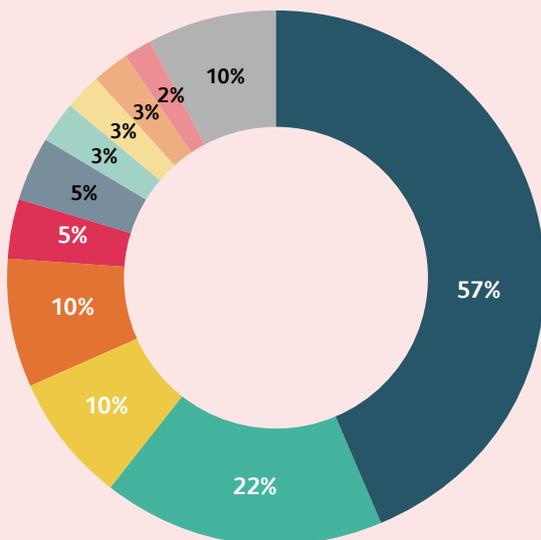
Some of the specialist outreach services implemented by local authorities in lockdown required or mirrored the core skill set that library staff utilised day-to-day pre-Covid-19. In particular, there was considerable overlap between the customer service skills, learning and support skills, information and knowledge management skills and adaptability skills that staff

previously relied upon to support their communities, and the key skills required in new hubs and centres set up during lockdown.

Almost 1 in 5 (18%) staff who responded to the staff survey were redeployed during lockdown. Those who were redeployed to roles co-ordinating or delivering phone lines to support vulnerable people; general customer service phone lines; food or other parcel distribution; care home support; or volunteer management and so forth, drew heavily on their existing skill set to contribute to wider efforts to support communities across the UK during an intense and challenging time.

Place of work during lockdown: redeployed staff

Redeployed staff worked across a wide range of service areas, with a particular focus on supporting vulnerable people and co-ordination of services.



- Phone lines supporting vulnerable individuals/shielding team
- Crematorium, mortuary, funeral and bereavement services
- Food or other parcel distribution
- Schools and Childrens Services
- General/other customer service phone lines
- Registrations
- Care homes support
- PPE distribution
- Volunteer management
- Other
- Co-ordination and monitoring of local authority Covid19 response

Q24: To which area of the council were you redeployed and what was your role?

Base: All redeployed (153)

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND LEARNING AND SUPPORT SKILLS

“You work in libraries because you’re interested in people... you want to help them... and provide information... We are able to drill down into what it is that people need... You need a real sort of sensitive ear, asking [personal questions] in as unobtrusive manner as possible.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Of those that were redeployed, over 90% of library staff drew on the core library skill sets of empathy and general customer service. Around 2/3 drew on core skills relating to identifying and supporting vulnerable people and community engagement. It came through strongly in the qualitative responses to the staff survey and interviews with Heads of Service that library staff were very well placed to handle calls on Covid-19, shielding or council support phone lines – asking sensitive questions about debt or health conditions – and often requiring little additional training for these roles.

“I spoke to one lady for one hour on the [council] COVID-19 line She thought I was a trained mental health nurse, which was really complimentary. Working in a library we are used to listening to vulnerable, lonely people.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

“One of the greatest skills library staff have is to tease out what people need: do you want a book on vases because you want to paint them, make them, or collect them?”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

“Many library staff were redeployed to the Council’s shielding response team and helpline. Their skills in talking to people, gaining their confidence and offering help and support were highly valued.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Similarly, around 7 in 10 redeployed staff drew on core library skills of supporting people to navigate services and supporting people to understand and use information, whilst almost 6 in 10 drew on the core skills of providing digital literacy support or helping people to find information.

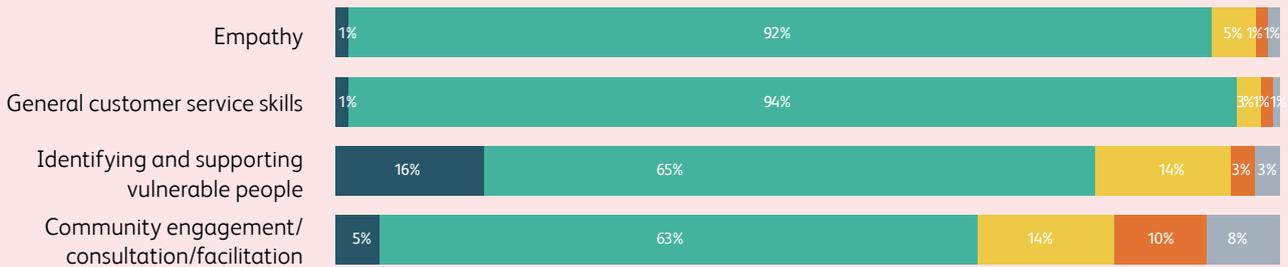
KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SKILLS

“I think that the way that library colleagues have responded to lead, shape and deliver a new service ie. food delivery and contact centres has been great. It has demonstrated staff’s ability to be adaptable and that library work has key transferable skills.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, ENGLAND

The skillset pertaining to knowledge and information management is integral to the work of public library staff. 81% of redeployed staff drew on their prior skills of organising and managing knowledge and information in their new roles, whilst 61% drew on prior skills of information governance and compliance. Meanwhile, around half of redeployed staff drew on pre-Covid-19 skills of using knowledge and information; records management; and archiving during lockdown. This reflects the work that some staff did to set up response hubs and call centres – work that included setting up databases, organising teams and rewriting scripts for calls developed by the local authority. In this way, the findings show the transferability and importance of knowledge and information management skills and the importance of core library skills in organising responses to crises.

Customer service skills: redeployed staff

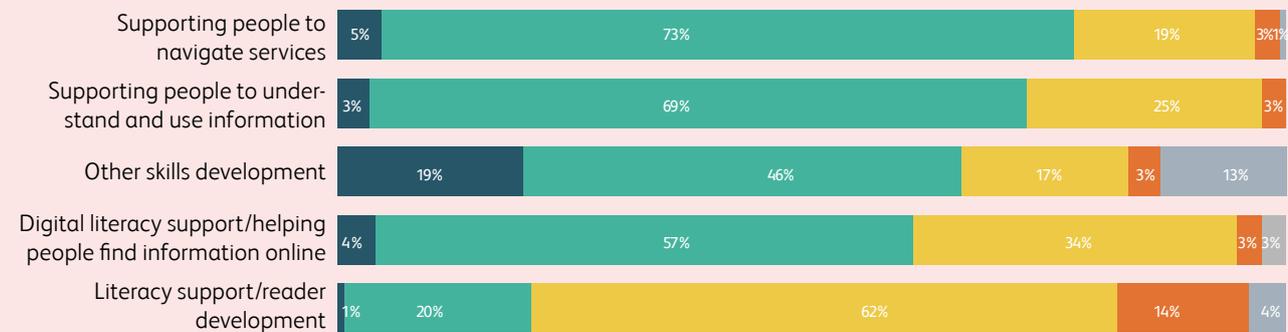


- This was a new skill that I needed to use in lockdown
- I used this skill during lockdown and I had been using it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown but I used it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown or before
- Don't know

Q26: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not. Community engagement and customer service skills

Base: All redeployed (153)

Learning and support skills: redeployed staff

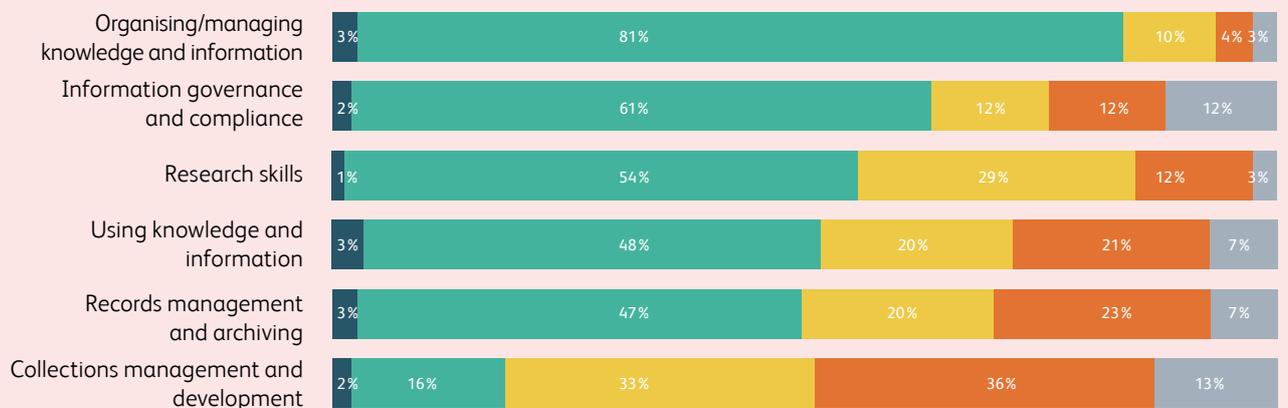


- This was a new skill that I needed to use in lockdown
- I used this skill during lockdown and I had been using it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown but I used it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown or before
- Don't know

Q28: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: learning and support skills

Base: All redeployed (153)

Knowledge and information skills: redeployed staff



- This was a new skill that I needed to use in lockdown
- I used this skill during lockdown and I had been using it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown but I used it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown or before
- Don't know

Q32: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: knowledge and information skills

Base: All redeployed (153)

Setting up the County Council Shielding Call Centre – Denbigshire



“My manager knew [we] had the skill set of talking to people and helping to solve problems.”

HEAD OF SERVICE, DENBIGSHIRE

In April 2020, Denbigshire County Council decided to develop a proactive phone call support service for those that were shielding. The County Council recognised the skill set of library staff. As such, managers were involved in the shaping and management of the new service, alongside other local authority colleagues. Work included adapting the scripts sent from Welsh Government, setting up the database and organising the teams. 85% of Denbigshire library service staff were redeployed to undertake the phone calls.

The team originally conducted 3,500 interviews with people that were shielding and went on to contact everyone in the Council area aged 70+. This equates to 8,500 people, or 10-15% of the total population.

A core team of 20-40 people from the library service were involved in delivering the service until the end of May/early June when library staff were released to develop and deliver the ‘reintroduction’ process for the library service itself.

Speaking of her staff team, the Head of Service at Denbigshire reflected that, “They were brilliant, they wanted to contribute to the Covid-19 response and support their community”.

Setting up Help Boro Hub – Middlesbrough



“Libraries were an obvious service to redeploy because they have detailed knowledge of communities.”

HEAD OF SERVICE, MIDDLESBROUGH

Middlesbrough library service was responsible for running the ‘Help Boro Hub’. This included setting up a call centre in the Central Library (and later organising working from home) and working alongside public health, and health and safety teams to manage the volume of calls. The Help Boro Hub offered delivery of shopping and prescriptions and referred residents to services such as dog walking available in their local areas. Staff both fielded calls and fulfilled requests for support. They received hundreds of calls a day, often from people with complex needs. The Hub delivered 1,900 food parcels and collected over 500 prescriptions.

ADAPTABILITY SKILLS



“Half the library service (myself included) have been working on the Covid-19 National Helpline part-time, plus I have been helping my colleague with Social Media. My line manager has been working with senior staff to co-ordinate ways in which we can help the community. This has included providing digital equipment to hubs that teach key workers’ children, supplying PPE via our 3D printer, delivering school meals and maintaining our online social media presence to advertise our services, stay in contact with customers, help customers with technical enquiries via email, social media.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

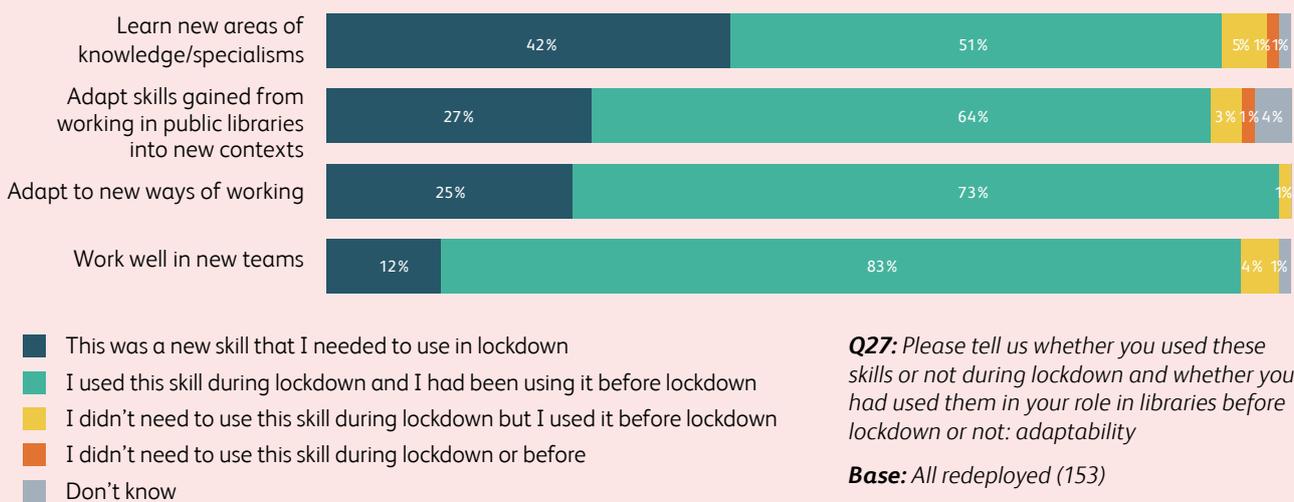
Lockdown was generally felt to be ‘unprecedented’ and ‘unfamiliar’, with decisions having to be taken at pace and in uncertain circumstances. This meant that Heads of Service and library staff were often devising a new service and delivery mode ‘on the hop’, without the ability to engage in planning and infrastructure development that would usually accompany such

significant changes both to the way the public engage with the service and the way that staff deliver it. Adaptability and flexibility were key skills for all those involved in responding to Covid-19, including library staff irrespective of whether or not those staff worked in the library service or were redeployed.

In terms of redeployed staff, working in new services and with new people was a core part of their work. It is worth noting that library staff were well suited to this with almost 3/4 of redeployed staff drawing on the core library skill of adapting to new ways of working (with the remaining 1/4 developing this skill during lockdown) and 83% drawing on their skill of working in new teams, with 12% developing this skill during lockdown.

Adaptability – and indeed innovation – were also key for staff working within the service, with some services responding to need as it arose in their communities. For example, some services provided PPE for local NHS and care home staff by utilising the 3D printers in their Makerspaces. Staff were also able to draw on their local knowledge to create new services. One example of this is how staff in a local branch library in Suffolk worked with its Friends Group to provide fruit and vegetable boxes to families in a deprived area.

Adaptability skills: redeployed staff



Producing PPE: Gateshead Library Service

Early on in lockdown, the Head of Gateshead Library Service received an email from his manager, a Director of Public Health, asking if the service could help overcome the critical shortage in PPE equipment. By the time the local authority received 1,000 visors from the UK Government, the library service had produced 5,000. The library service went on to deliver scuba mask valves to the local hospital and visors to paramedics, over 60 care homes, the Red Cross and undertakers. The library service has been depicted among the photographs selected for the Historic England national archive of ‘100 pictures representing lockdown’.

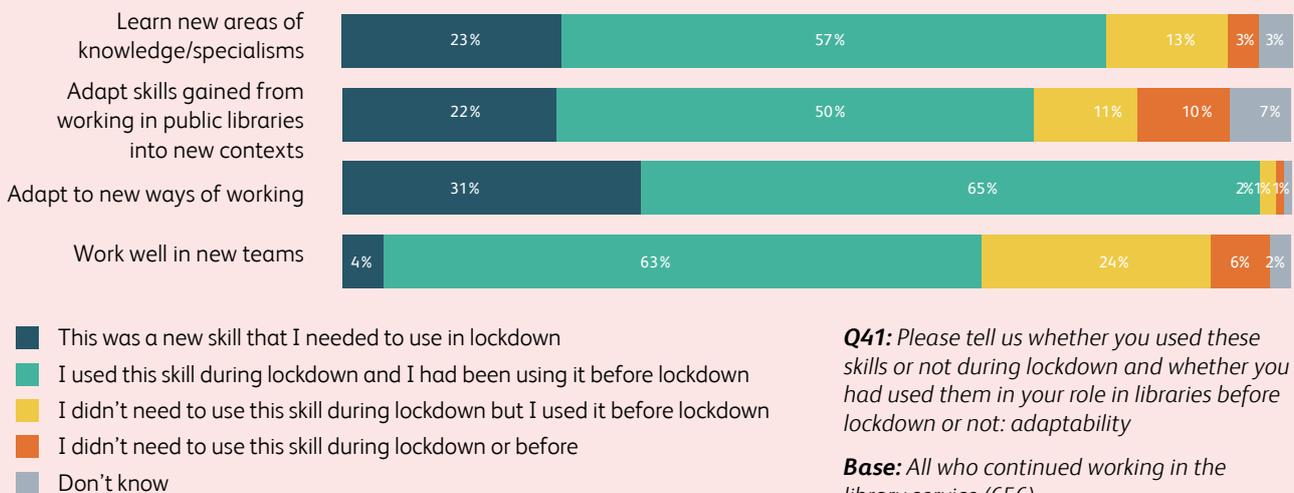
The flexibility, creativity and resilience of staff were often identified by Heads of Service in interviews as a key factor that enabled them to deliver library services during lockdown. These skills, combined with an attitude of ‘not fearing failure’ enabled services to adopt a ‘test and learn’ approach to developing services.



“People stepped up to the plate in ways that necessity required, but they were nevertheless going for it!”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Adaptability skills: staff in the library service





Key Message 3: Public library services and their staff could have delivered much more – but faced barriers in doing so

Despite the positive impact that public library services had on those who engaged with them and the important contribution that library staff made to the broader response to Covid-19, it was widely felt by library staff that there were significant gaps in their ability to support their communities during lockdown.

The root causes of these gaps fall into the following categories: the limitations of a digital mode of delivering services; factors external to the sector; and factors internal to the sector. Whilst some of these were new barriers, many were already well known and experienced within the sector – albeit to lesser or greater degrees across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Crucially, these barriers meant that public library services were unable to act as a service of first resort in the way they did before lockdown; as a safety net for communities, the lonely or isolated, and the ‘borderline’ or ‘hidden’ vulnerable. In some cases it also meant that staff were unable to draw on their valuable skill set to support their communities and local authorities in the most effective way.

THE LIMITATIONS OF DIGITAL IN DELIVERING LIBRARY SERVICES



“Ours is quite a deprived area and my contact with the community is [currently] through our Facebook page; I’m not convinced I’m seeing the same people ... I see in the library itself. Users of the library on a day-to-day basis are not simply coming for books...For those who are looking for reading material, online resources are great and we can guide people with online interaction. But this isn’t a direct equivalent to what we do in our library from day to day. I do feel overall that the readers are well

served and the online provision has been responsive and generous. However, our own community and probably others like it are unlikely to find the ‘safe space’, the human interaction and the help they often look for when they come into the branch.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

Although many library services worked hard to provide interactive services online similar to those offered in library buildings, the above quote encapsulates many of the limitations staff felt in delivering library services digitally during lockdown: reach, quality interaction and support, and access to physical resources. These limitations were felt to curtail library services’ ability to deliver a curated social experience and wider range of benefits to their communities. This was particularly felt in relation to opportunities for structured and unstructured forms of interaction and engagement. (Structured opportunities being offered through ‘doing’: providing activities, events and interest groups run by the service or its partners. In contrast, unstructured opportunities are offered through ‘being’: providing an agenda-free space that can be entered without payment or permission, that enables people to simply co-exist alongside others, providing the potential for meeting and speaking with others.)

Reach

Although 1/3 of the UK public made use of library services’ digital offer during lockdown, an overwhelming number of public library staff who responded to the staff survey expressed concern about whether they engaged a broad audience.

In particular, staff voiced concern about the effect of digital exclusion on the reach of their services. Staff were anxious that those who were poorer, more vulnerable or elderly were missing out on the digital

library offer. They described the various facets to exclusion including: those who could not access tech; those who did not have good internet/connectivity; those who lacked skills or confidence; those who simply didn't want to use, or were unfamiliar with, the social media platforms that the library service was relying on at this time (eg. Facebook or Twitter); and those who simply didn't want to use services or engage online.

It was clear from the research that some library services predominantly serve disadvantaged communities where digital exclusion is widespread. For example, in one area, the fact that there was a relatively high proportion of the population with no access to either fixed broadband or paid-for internet via their mobile phones, and a high proportion of Covid-19 cases, made it challenging for staff to develop a service with the hoped-for reach. One survey respondent from a different service lamented that the videos and resources they had created to support learning and school readiness were unlikely to reach the families who might get the most out of them.

 **“Some of our customers have no machines or phones of their own and use ours a great deal. They have been distressed at no contact with friends and family in other countries.”**
FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

 **“Many of our customers won't use digital resources so will be missing out on any kind of service we've been offering throughout lockdown. Some customers rely on our Active IT service, having no computer access at home and will potentially be very isolated.”**
FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

 **“We know we're not reaching a large part of our members and users – those who either don't use social media or aren't interested in following the library there.”**
MIDDLE MANAGER, ENGLAND

 **“I work in a community that may not connect so easily with the bulk of library output [at this time]. It's hard to know what the service could do to address this directly because it relies on being there 'in person'.”**
FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

 **“People here are not interested in a virtual world – it's an ageing population in a remote to very remote rural geography ... they want real physical contact and that's where the service can make a difference to people's lives.”**
FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

 **“There are so many people in Scotland who are not digitally enabled. The digital offer doesn't cut it for them. They are completely ignored. Not 'hard to reach' but 'easy to ignore'.”**
SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Some staff also expressed concern for those excluded from predominantly digital offers such as those with visual impairments, people with English as a second language or new arrivals who, pre-Covid-19, would be welcomed and supported in the library building. Before lockdown, these latter groups were supported with ESOL or conversation classes in the library building, but struggled to engage with these offers online.

Concerns relating to the reach of the library service during lockdown are perhaps reflected in the fact that, whilst e-loans of reading material increased substantially for all library services that participated in the interviews for this research, overall loans were much lower than like-for-like annual issues. For example, one library service recorded an average of 108% increase in e-book loans over the period April-July 2020 but an average reduction of 75% in terms of total volume of loans due to the fact that the service was not able to issue physical book stock during that time. A similar trend was observed for library service membership. For example, one service recorded an increase of 1,540% in online joiners over the same time period in the previous year. However due to the reduction in traditional library joiners, this still represents a 71% reduction in total new memberships.

The loss of the library building as a space led some staff and interviewees to express their concern about their ability to reach those that were ‘just’ coping but would have been ‘pushed over the edge’ into vulnerability by lockdown. For example, those who were lonely or isolated but not on any at-risk registers; homeless people who were not engaging with support networks; new arrivals; refugees and asylum seekers; and some vulnerable children and young people. Again, staff were also concerned about those with hidden vulnerabilities who used the library service for support or to access support groups in the library building run by partners. These were library users who were not on any official risk or vulnerability registers.

“Being vulnerable isn’t as clear cut as you think. I always explain it, like, there’s a routine that keeps people going, contact that improves wellbeing and mental health. Libraries are part of that routine and contact for many people. Libraries are a safety net that catches people before they really begin to struggle.”

SENIOR MANAGER, WALES

“Although we supported vulnerable families through the vulnerable hubs, there are several children and young people that we haven’t seen and we don’t know where they are.”

HEAD OF SERVICE, SCOTLAND

“The really vulnerable people who would call into the library just for some company [are missing out].”

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

It is perhaps worth noting that whilst, overall, nearly 3 in 10 people in the UK engaged with public library services during lockdown, those aged 45-54, 55-64 and 65+; those in social grade grouping DE; and those that were not working were significantly less likely to do so. However, as these groups were also less likely than the UK average to be library users pre-lockdown, it is unclear how far the lack of engagement of these groups stems from the digital mode of delivery.

Structured Interactions: events and activities

“Communities have missed physical libraries, we have a place in supporting our communities that cannot be filled digitally.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, SCOTLAND

“You can deliver online events but nothing beats ‘live’ events.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

Survey respondents and Heads of Service interviewees alike reflected on the difference between the physical and digital provision of rhyme and story times for children. They noted that in a physical space, this activity would enable children to engage with one another and with physical objects and books – all of which are important for early years’ development. Again, parents or carers would be able to chat with each other during and after a session, something that was regarded as important for the mental health of parents and (in particular) first time parents’ ability to build relationships and social networks.

Whilst the benefits of the in-person activity are three-fold (learning and entertainment; parent/carer wellbeing; and social interaction for early years’ development), the digital offer was seen as delivering on the first of these benefits alone. In this way, whilst the digital and physical versions of this activity appeared to be ‘the same offer’, they were not, in fact, commensurate in what they were able to deliver.

“There’s nothing like a room of under 4s...”

SENIOR MANAGER, NORTHERN IRELAND

Despite the benefits of digital, there was therefore a sense that the richness of interaction and the additional benefits brought by social interaction in a given space were compromised by the digital format. It is perhaps worth noting that in some services, the average engagement with digital appeared to be much shorter than face-to-face activities.²⁰

²⁰ A collaborative group of Scottish library services conducted analysis that showed that the average engagement time for children’s activities online (such as story or rhyme times) is five minutes, while adult activities (such as author talks and readings) averaged 17 minutes of engagement. These are both substantially shorter engagement times than in face-to-face activities.

Unstructured Interactions: a welcoming space with skilled staff as an outreach service



“It’s about community, connection – how do you translate those things?”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

As a non-judgemental space, free at the point of entry and where all are welcome, public libraries can provide ‘bumping places’ in which it is comfortable to linger, strike up conversation and interact, or simply enjoy being with others. With the buildings closed, this opportunity was shut off for those who depended on it, curtailing public library services’ ability to tackle loneliness and act as a ‘service of first resort’. There were also some concerns about the digital spaces offered not being able to replicate the neutral, welcoming ethos of the public service.

Some staff reflected on how being a safe physical space offers the opportunity for encounters and conversations that enable staff to identify someone who needs support and to offer appropriate support or else signpost them to another service. This perhaps reflects the way in which the public library building is an outreach service in itself, where staff can approach and support those who are unsure, uncertain or unwilling to approach other services for help – and that this did not adequately translate across into the digital service provided during lockdown. The fact that one in four of respondents to the staff survey that continued to work for the library service during lockdown felt they were unable to draw on their general customer service skills, and almost 3 in 10 did not draw on their skills in identifying and supporting vulnerable people, community engagement or supporting people to navigate services, would support this view.

Likewise, some interviewees and survey respondents reflected that during normal times, the offer of physical resources such as newspapers, ‘give people the excuse’ to come in and chat, or have something to hold while they enjoyed being among other people, without having to say they are lonely or that they want help. As with the rhyme and story times, the digital and physical versions of the provision of newspapers and books are, to some extent, different services.



“In theory, offering newspapers online and physically are the same thing, but in practice you are reaching different audiences... They ...are meeting two different but important needs.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Linked to these observations are staff statements that combatting loneliness and social isolation, especially among older people, did not translate well to the online context. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that, of all the age groups, those aged 55+ were the least likely to say that engagement with the service over lockdown helped them feel more connected to their community (50% compared to the UK average of 63%) or that it helped them feel less alone (48% compared to the UK average of 60%).



“There is something about reaching out and having a conversation – taking the edge off loneliness for someone who is outside the health service.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND



“[We usually help by] talking someone through something, helping them find the right resource for self-directed care or being able to encourage people to come to a group event or activity.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

As mentioned, public library services also offer spaces which allow us to be ‘alongside’ one another. One senior manager, whose service works in partnership with their local NHS Foundation Trust, relies on the effectiveness of being with, and alongside, people in order to deliver an open space mental health model that encourages living positively. This simply wasn’t possible to translate into a digital context.

Access to physical space and resources



“There has been a loss of the public realm in Covid.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

The closure of library buildings was noted by many staff survey respondents as a key reason why they were unable to fulfil community need: the lack of a space where physical resources such as books or IT equipment and the lack of a safe civic space for all that is free at the point of entry was keenly felt.

The nature of the interactions a free civic space make possible have been outlined in the previous section. However, it is worth noting that by virtue of being this type of space, the public library service is an important equaliser, providing access to computers, printers, books and other resources to all, irrespective

of someone's background. The two library services that were able to keep their public PC access running during lockdown were very much the exception. Heads of Service that were interviewed for this research reported an increase in enquiries about ICT usage. This came after the DWP announcement that people claiming Jobseekers Allowance and Universal Credit were no longer exempt from demonstrating that they are actively seeking work.

“I’m worried about supporting people around employment and claiming benefits.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Interestingly, reading groups and Lego clubs were two activities that were mentioned a few times in the staff survey as not translating well in some library services. (Although this was not universal and they appeared to work very well in some services.) Some of the other reasons given for this include how regular attendees of book clubs don't have digital access, issues with tech and copyright permissions – and that it was hard to establish a new group during lockdown itself. There is perhaps also something particularly appealing about physical books and Lego, as the following quotes suggest:

“During my time manning the Covid-line, which is to get food to shielding and vulnerable people, I’ve had them ask, ‘Where can I get books? Books are what keep me young, and my mind awake.’ These are people who DO NOT want an e-Book.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

“Though we posted a weekly [Lego club] challenge, we got very little response – which leads me to think that it’s the access to actual Lego that makes this activity popular in our physical libraries.”

SPECIALIST ROLE, ENGLAND

“E-books are good but we need to give people access to books and literacy because some parents may not be literate themselves and cannot read to their children – those children need schools and libraries to access reading and books – this should be a human right and not just for those who have access to digital resources.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

Again, some library services appeared to have struggled to engage children through e-loans and e-memberships. For example, one service noticed that fewer than 300 children were using the digital library offer in May. They improved the stock but then realised that e-books were less likely to engage children than physical books. This indicates that there is something of value in the physicality of a resource that cannot always be replicated in its digital counterpart.

It is clear that the public have missed the physical service and are looking forward to library buildings reopening. Staff reflected on how members of the public who initially embraced digital services are felt to be experiencing 'Zoom fatigue' and to be looking forward to the reintroduction of face-to-face services, whilst others are mindful of the impact of screen time on children.

“People are still engaging but asking when will this be over – I just want to talk to a human or go into the library.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

“I’ve been shouted at in Tesco – when are the libraries opening?!”

SENIOR MANAGER, WALES

“People get in touch to say they miss physically coming to the library – we are a small community and a big part of it.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

Some staff also reflected on the impossibility of replicating the neutral, welcoming space of the physical library building in an online context, with anxieties being expressed about the solutions that public library services have used to provide space for public interactions during Covid-19. Social media platforms are all owned by private, commercial companies whose business model runs on targeted advertising. The public library building offers a totally different kind of space. Given this fact, and the work public library services engage with around digital literacy and data privacy, one senior manager in England reflected, “I wonder what we're asking people to do by inviting them into that space.”

FACTORS EXTERNAL TO THE SECTOR



“It’s always easier to see things in hindsight and this is an unprecedented event and we also had to protect staff and public, so it [the nature of response] shouldn’t be seen as a failing – just a learning curve.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND.

The following items had the potential to be either enabling or inhibiting factors on service delivery during lockdown: finances; differing attitudes to risk within local authorities; the extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does; and the extent to which the library service has a voice in local authority structures.

Finances

One of the first measures that most library services took following lockdown was to improve their e-book and e-audio stock and to ensure they provided a range of magazines and newspapers online. In addition, several library services had to purchase equipment required for remote working from their own budgets and were not provided with additional resource for this by the local authority.

In England, Arts Council England provided £1,000 to every library service (£150,000 total) to purchase new e-resources as part of lockdown service delivery. In Wales, the Welsh Government invested £250,000 in the National Digital Library Service for Wales. In Northern Ireland, the government provided £800,000 of additional funding to invest in e-books and other digital stock and services at the start of the pandemic.

Several individual library services described ways in which they secured adequate investment in addition to this support, including using private endowments/bequests or discretionary funds; using capital investment to purchase IT equipment and e-book stock; and bidding into local authority Covid-19 crisis funding.

Library services that were able to invest in e-books at the beginning of the crisis reported that this had paid off in providing a much better e-book lending service experience in terms of the quantity of titles and provision.

Where library services were unable to secure enough additional funding to support the rapid service transformation they had to undertake, this made it harder for them to deliver against customer expectations and the digital transformation process could take longer.



“You promise something but can’t follow it through.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

More broadly, public library services that relied on substantial earned income or subsidy through activities offered, felt the financial impact of Covid-19 during lockdown, with the need to furlough staff and reduce staff to a skeleton team because of being motivated by cash-flow crises. As one Head of Service put it, “financially, the charity ‘fell off a cliff’”. Those services that operated as trusts or outside local authority control and had made use of the furlough scheme often felt that it had made the difference that allowed their organisation to survive during lockdown.



“Without the job retention scheme, we would be out of business or have gone through all the reserves by September.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Those services that operated as trusts and were not able to make use of the scheme due to decisions that were taken in government locally or nationally about their status as government funded services, felt that this had put them at a significant financial disadvantage.

Meanwhile, interviewees working in library services within local authority control were anticipating local authorities having to make significant budget cuts to address the costs of Covid-19, with savings potentially being made through reducing library services. Where services were already planning for significant reductions in operating budgets, there was real concern about public library services’ ability to deliver a full complement of library offers moving forward.

Moreover, some Heads of Service who participated in the research noted the financial challenges associated with restarting services as lockdown eased. These costs related to reopening buildings that have been closed for a substantial period of time (eg. electrical and water checks) and additional costs of reconfiguring spaces to ensure they are Covid-19-secure.

Differing attitudes to risk within a local authority

Whilst library services, councils and devolved and national governments assess and handle risk day to day, the pandemic posed an unprecedented type of risk for many of those who were dealing with service delivery at this time. Throughout lockdown itself, narratives around what did or did not mitigate risk were sometimes confused or unclear. Given this context, it is important to recognise that library services were in very different places in terms of how risk was interpreted and handled. What they were able or enabled to deliver differed accordingly.

Local inconsistencies in attitudes to risk around health, IT and GDPR led to patchy delivery of library services across the UK. Some library services report having their access to buildings completely denied or very limited during lockdown. This has limited the ways in which the library service has been able to support responses to Covid-19 in their local authority. Again, attitudes around whether or not it was possible or desirable to run a non-contact home delivery service often rested on how comfortable councils were in allowing library services to manage risk by supporting staff to work safely in a building, quarantining stock and ensuring non-contact delivery. There was a tangible sense of frustration among many library staff who felt they were being denied the ability to offer this type of service – despite other library services delivering books and local volunteer groups doing book drops and book shares. Where a very risk-averse attitude was adopted, it has been difficult for library services to offer any physical service at all and has delayed reopening and reintroduction of physical services.

“We have tried three to four times to get the home library service up and running but we haven’t been able to pass the risk assessments.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Inconsistency in the appetite for risk in relation to the delivery of digital services across local authorities also affected library services’ ability to deliver interactive services. For example, some library services did not have permission to use interactive platforms such as Zoom and others were unable to secure permission to use free broadcasting software.

“We were hampered by the public favouring Zoom [in delivery of digital services] but our local authority did not permit us to use this.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Yet Heads of Service also observed that some barriers to IT use came down rapidly during Covid-19, raising the question of whether the rules that were in place before were necessary.

“If you can go from having all of these rules in local government – and then the next day because of this crisis you get rid of 50% of them – does that mean you needed them? And do we need to put them back?”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Different approaches to managing risk in relation to GDPR was also an area where differing attitudes made it either possible or impossible for a service to be able to identify and contact potentially vulnerable library users over the phone.

“We were not allowed to contact vulnerable members of the community for fear of breaching GDPR. We were not allowed to offer a home delivery service for fear of contamination. All we were allowed to do was post activities and information on our Facebook pages, mostly directed at children. No effort was made to provide services for people who do not engage with us online or have no online access.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, SCOTLAND

A palpable sense of frustration and a feeling of having been restricted in being able to deliver a library service during lockdown came through a number of staff responses to the survey conducted as part of this research. Consideration about what could have been better led to a few reflections about ‘next time’, such as,

“I would...like to see plans in place for real books to be distributed...and customers visited (from a safe distance) face-to-face.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND.

Extent of understanding within a local authority of what the library service does and how it can contribute

Whether or not library services were enabled to manage and navigate risk in order to deliver a variety of physical and digital services during lockdown often related to the extent to which the council apparently understood and appreciated what the service and its staff could offer at this – or indeed any other – time.

“I think the impact libraries have on our wider community has been largely ignored. Direction of library staff and resources into more varied community roles is an option that doesn’t seem to have been considered.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

“It would have been easier if they [the council] had said what they needed and libraries could nominate staff for it ... But all the council were looking for was people that were fulltime and had council owned laptops. This was a shame as all our staff could have done welfare calls as they are so involved in the community and giving a good service. They [the council] could have just given that service to the library service ... it’s a bit frustrating knowing ... they weren’t making the best use of or skills ... These are things library staff could do perfectly.”

SENIOR MANAGER, WALES

The level of recognition of the potential contribution of public library services also appeared to be reflected in the extent to which councils supported public library staff to access remote and homeworking IT infrastructure or the council intranet, or showcased the public library offer during lockdown.

“Our IT department have been very supportive in providing staff with the ability to work from home, so we have continued to provide a service digitally.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, SCOTLAND

“I wish our local council could have supported our efforts by promoting the service and our lockdown efforts – we even had a new section built up on the council’s website – but our services are not highlighted in updates and press releases.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, SCOTLAND

“The council doesn’t really support our efforts in terms of promoting what we offer and this does make things difficult at times and continues the difficulties that the community may experience accessing information.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, ENGLAND

Extent to which the library service has a voice in local authority structures

Where Heads of Service had a good relationship with local decision makers and a voice in wider council teams during lockdown, the potential of the library service or its staff was recognised and harnessed. This led to the library service’s assets being deployed to continue to support community wellbeing during lockdown. For example, services being trusted to get on and deliver for the public in the way they thought best; library buildings being identified as key community hubs; library staff being redeployed into appropriate services which were valued by the public and senior people in the local authority; or Heads of Service being able to scope out the way in which library services could contribute to emerging council services or multi-agency working to bring added value to these services.

“My role with customer services has been very key. I wouldn’t have [had the opportunities] if I was ‘just’ libraries: I have a place at the table and also knowledge of what libraries do and can do. In a lot of authorities that’s not the case.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND.

Some Heads of Service noted that although they usually had more influence in local decision-making, during lockdown there was a 'command and control' structure from which they were excluded, which made it harder for the library service to have a voice. This was exacerbated by the fact that libraries were not designated as 'essential services'. This placed them lower in the priority list for delivery of IT support, risk assessment and reopening of services.

“It was only once the First Minister mentioned libraries in her address in May that the command and control board started to think about how library services could be delivered.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

Where Heads of Service were 'locked out' of decision-making, the skills and resources of the library service appeared not to be used in the response to Covid-19 and the library service itself was not enabled to support community wellbeing through delivering more services.

FACTORS INTERNAL TO THE SECTOR

A range of internal factors also inhibited library service provision during lockdown. These factors included: consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown; organisational culture; partnerships; effective communication and engagement with the public; digital skills; and preparedness and contingency planning.

Consistency and visibility of the library offer during lockdown

The activities and services offered by public library services during lockdown were developed or delivered on an ad-hoc basis and were not offered consistently across the UK. In terms of the digital offer, the highly localised nature of online activities raise questions about visibility and reach. In terms of welfare calls made to the over 70s, this leads to questions about the how far the library offer penetrated the UK population as a whole.

In terms of developing digital services, it appears that the majority of services had branch libraries generate their own digital content and promote these efforts. In contrast, only a few respondents mentioned that their library service reposted others' digital content. Decisions to take the second approach included a lack of resource and capacity, or awareness that others were creating digital content, thereby freeing up time to focus on creating a few high-quality video tutorials on accessing e-resources.

Each approach had pros and cons. Some respondents felt that there was a 'pull' factor for library users who wanted to see a known and friendly face of the local library staff – the 'hyperlocal' face of the library, council or public service. Indeed, a few respondents who did not create their own content felt that reposted story and rhyme times had limited uptake because they lacked the community connection a familiar face could give.

However, others questioned the quality of the hyperlocal content produced. A few respondents observed that the poor discoverability of their digital services meant that the ability of library services to reach people was compromised. As one member of staff observed,

“The e-library was not marketed effectively – only if you happened to go onto Facebook or the council website page would you have known [it was there].”

FRONTLINE STAFF, WALES

Similarly, some pointed to the need to advertise and advocate for the service beyond their own social media channels. Another respondent noted that social media was 'swamped' over lockdown with a plethora of appealing content from a range of organisations, including storytimes with celebrities, and what the library produced got a little lost in this.

A few respondents noted that it was hard to benchmark what constituted 'good uptake' of electronic resources and activities and a few also noted that some video content didn't have good uptake. As one survey respondent from Scotland put it, "feedback has been great but uptake disappointing in some areas." Others noted that there had initially been a huge appetite for digital but that this had begun to wane.

In terms of staff experience of creating digital content, some appreciated the level of autonomy that they were given to create, whilst others would have liked more guidance on what was required and what 'good' looked like to ensure a more consistent and ordered approach.

In terms of moving ahead with the digital offer, one survey respondent summed up the situation as follows:

“There is balance to be had between efficiencies of scale and ensuring quality through national initiatives and maintaining the digital offer as a local offer.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

In terms of the welfare calls, just under half (46%) of survey respondents worked for a service that offered welfare calls to the over 70s and some services made in the region of 8,000 calls. However, only 1% of over 55s who engaged with the public library service over lockdown stated that they had been contacted by staff.²¹ As such, whilst the welfare calls may have had a high penetration rate in a given locality and had a beneficial impact on those who received them (remembering that local authority areas serve very different populations), as a UK offer it had limited reach.

Organisational culture

“Culture is absolutely key ... It's about trust in every colleague to do this... to communicate that 'you've got this', and 'we're doing this all together'.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Some public library services took a collaborative approach to designing services in order to adapt rapidly. In these environments, senior managers ensured staff at all levels had the opportunity and ability to shape the library service. Staff who worked in services which enabled 'leadership at all levels' felt that this had given them an advantage in terms of rapidly developing new services and supporting staff to adapt to the new scenario.

“Everyone says there are leaders at every level and this has really shone through at this time.”

SENIOR MANAGER, NORTHERN IRELAND

“The idea of doing welfare calls to our older users came from a member of Frontline staff. We took it on and made around 8,000 calls.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, ENGLAND

One service created a short-term delivery strategy and small agile teams of frontline and development staff to test and learn across ten different projects. These included projects on reopening, staff wellbeing, extending the home library service and a social media project focused on how to teach/engage with the public via digital technology. This way of working encouraged cross-role team-working at a time when staff could otherwise have been isolated from one another, and it played a critical role in creating a culture of delivery and accountability.

In these types of services, senior management teams would also ensure staff were informed, engaged and connected with one another. For example, keeping staff informed about changes, such as furlough and the reopening processes, in particular explaining the reasons why decisions had been made; ensuring team-wide meetings and regular check-ins; and gauging how staff were feeling through conducting staff engagement surveys at key moments, such as when they were adapting to lockdown and prior to reopening, and responding to feedback.

“When we consulted about the reopening processes, some staff stuck their head above the parapet about the process suggested, so senior management rewrote it.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

One library service reported that some redeployed staff recorded video diaries of their working day which were shared and celebrated with library teams both as a way of ensuring redeployed staff felt part of the wider team and for others to learn from their experience.

²¹ Between 17%-26% of other age groups said that they received such a service.

“I think it’s been eye opening for staff ... in terms of seeing some of the hardship some of the citizens are living in. That will hopefully help shape some of the services we are able to offer [in the future and] more holistically over the council.”

However, where this inclusive approach was absent, staff who responded to the survey saw working culture as impacting negatively on the quality and impact of the services delivered, as well as staff morale and wellbeing.

“I hoped that as everything changed [with lockdown] my ideas for adapting the service would be considered seriously and my managers would present many of their own ideas which I

could feed into. Unfortunately, lockdown just seemed to magnify the existing culture in my organisation of saying that we don’t have time to do anything and that we cannot [do things].”

SPECIALIST STAFF, ENGLAND

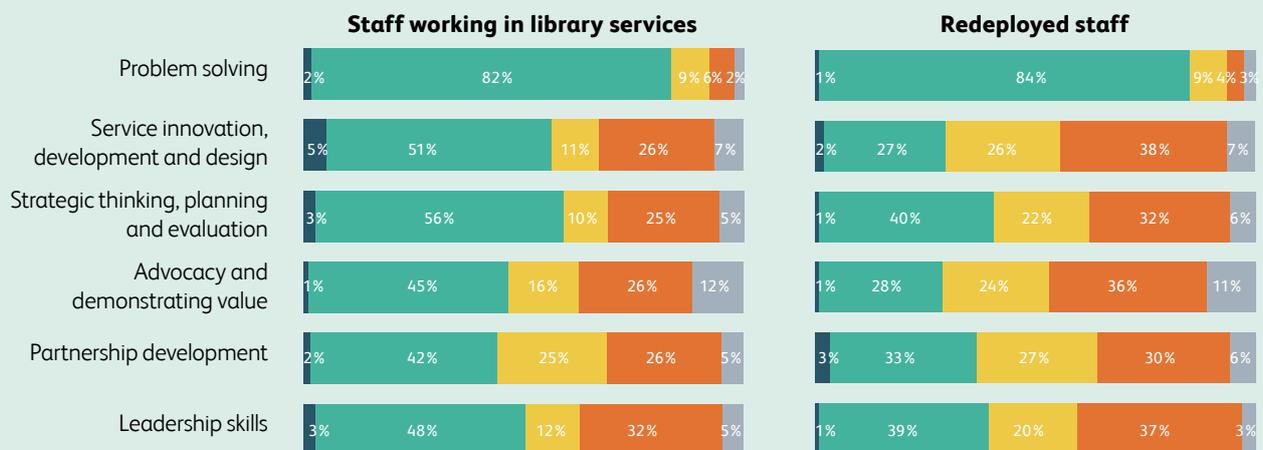
“Some frontline staff members contacted vulnerable customers off their own initiative. Not endorsed or recognised by management.”

FRONTLINE STAFF, ENGLAND

“I have felt limited by the library service I work for – there is little understanding or support for use of social media.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, ENGLAND

Strategic leadership and service development skills



- This was a new skill that I needed to use in lockdown
- I used this skill during lockdown and I had been using it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown but I used it before lockdown
- I didn't need to use this skill during lockdown or before
- Don't know

Q45: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: strategic leadership and service development skills.

Base: All who continued working in the library service (656)

Q31: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: strategic leadership and service development skills

Base: All redeployed (153)

Interestingly, at least a quarter of staff reported not using skills relating to strategic planning and thinking, advocacy and demonstrating value, partnership development and leadership either during lockdown or before it.

Whilst this does, of course, relate to role it perhaps also points to a working culture that doesn't enable leadership at all levels, or encourage a sense that advocacy, innovation or partnership development are collectively owned and jointly-held responsibilities – or it may reveal a workforce that lacks confidence in those areas.

Partnerships

Some library services reported that they were able to maintain and even extend their partnerships with external organisations during the Covid-19 lockdown. This enabled them to maintain contact with vulnerable groups of library users and find new ways to meet needs during lockdown. For example, one service in Scotland capitalised on an existing partnership with the Red Cross. This enabled the library service to deliver library books via the hot meals delivery service the Red Cross was providing for vulnerable older people. In another service in Scotland, pre-existing relationships with health and social care teams enabled library services to be 'on the map' when it came to establishing health and wellbeing hubs, of which there are only five and all of which are in library buildings.

Other library services felt that their involvement in redeployment and the local Covid-19 response had helped them to build new partnerships which they would be able to develop in the future.



“We were working together with others in ways we had never done before. The situation reduced the bureaucracy and hurdles that had been in our way in the past and the level of co-operation was unprecedented... It was a remarkable period for inter-organisational co-operation and I hope it has laid the foundation for future working.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

However, some library services found it difficult to reach and work with partners during lockdown. They noted that without buildings as venues for local groups to meet, it had been difficult to deliver and maintain partnership relationships. This meant that services and support they had previously offered to residents were not available.

Effective communication and engagement with the public

Overall, staff who responded to the survey felt their service had sought to understand what their community needed during lockdown. They gave an average score for effort made of 7.2/10 (0 being poor effort and 10 being substantial effort).

Staff who responded to the survey pointed to how their service worked with the community or with community partners, volunteer and community groups or the council to understand what was needed in their communities. Others mentioned how the service was guided by the uptake of offers, customer requests, or from feedback gained from phone calls. A couple of responses pointed to senior management working hard to understand need or having an intuitive sense of what communities want, having worked with and for them for so long. Heads of Service who were interviewed pointed to the importance of effective communication channels with the general public so that they were informed about what services are available.

Those that were less sure that their library service had worked to understand need fed back that there had been limited or no engagement with communities about what services they would like or want during lockdown. Some reflected that it was hard to get a sense of what people really want over the phone; whilst others noted that uptake of services at this time was not properly measured, making it hard to know where appetite and need was. Others, understandably, reflected that it was difficult to communicate with customers during lockdown; that the speed of change made it hard to gauge what was needed; and that gathering views from a representative sample of the local population would have been very challenging. Heads of Service reflected that the development of services on an ad-hoc basis rather than in response to established need or consultation with the general public led to some concern about how far the digital service was able to respond to the needs of the broad range of the public who use libraries.

It emerged from interviews conducted that library services that adopted a multi-channel approach to engaging with the public felt most confident that they have been able to keep their population informed. Again, those services that consulted with the public prior to reopening had greater confidence that their service was meeting public needs than those who did not.

Digital skills

The use of ICT skills among those who continued to work in library services during lockdown was high, with 93% of survey respondents reporting that they had used this skill prior to lockdown and during lockdown.

However, it is worth noting that in terms of online communication and facilitation skills, 60% of staff working in the service did not have prior experience of drawing on this skill, with only 31% developing this skill in lockdown. Some of the qualitative responses reflected that the lack of staff capacity or staff skills in relation to digital was an issue during lockdown,

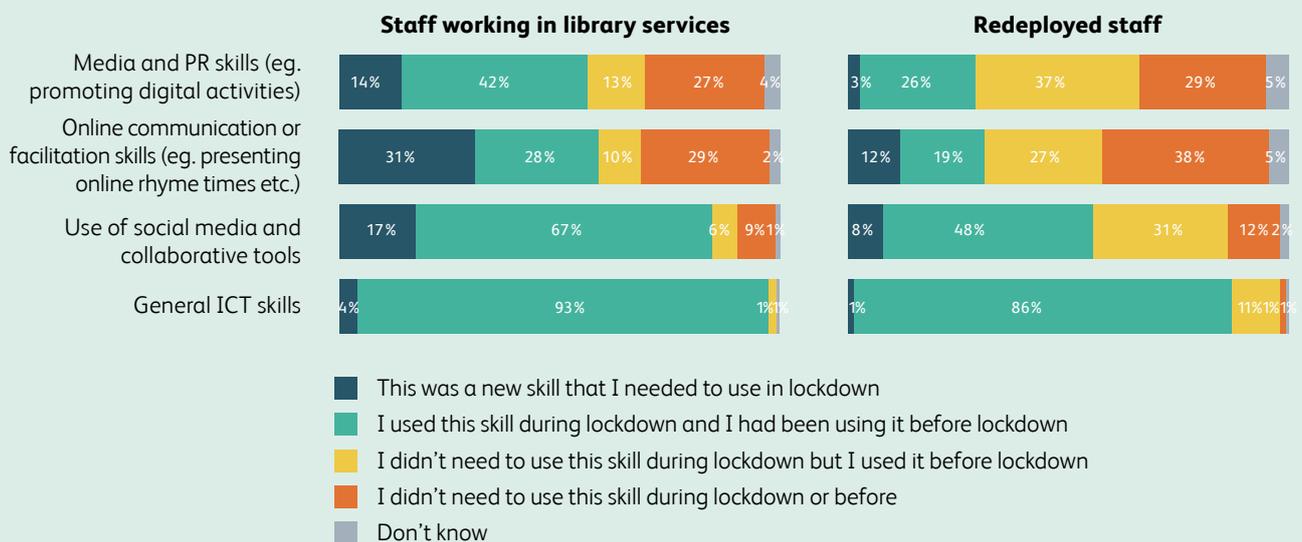
having a negative impact on the speed at which some services could pivot and on the range and quality of what could be offered digitally. For example, some survey respondents noted that engagement was often broadcast rather than two-way in its nature.

Preparedness and contingency planning

Whilst experts had been warning us of a pandemic for some time, the outbreak of Covid-19 and lockdown were nevertheless ‘unexpected’ events for most concerned. The pre-Covid-19 environment, quality of business continuity plans, and time spent planning at the start of the pandemic were identified by Heads of Service as impacting library services’ ability to adapt during lockdown or in relation to reopening.

In terms of the pre-Covid-19 environment, one Head of Service who was interviewed for the research led a library service that was operating in an area that was already facing significant recession and hardship. Here, local services were already on a crisis footing

Digital communication and ICT skills



Q42: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: digital communication and ICT skills

Base: All who continued working in the library service (656)

Q28: Please tell us whether you used these skills or not during lockdown and whether you had used them in your role in libraries before lockdown or not: digital communication and ICT skills

Base: All redeployed (153)

and support systems such as food banks were already up and running. As a result, they felt the service was actually better placed to respond to Covid-19 as they were already connected to established and relevant agencies and partners.

In terms of business continuity, one interviewee noted that their plans enabled a smooth closure but did not envisage a prolonged closure. The lack of planning for prolonged closure impacted on preparedness, both in terms of outward facing provision and support and planning in relation to significant and prolonged home working for frontline staff.

Two services that engaged with this research spent considerable time at the outset in intensive planning to enable public PC access. This involved considering the physical layout of the environment, PPE and a plan for how to use the space safely. This planning

not only made it possible to open the building and offer PC access during lockdown, but made reopening reasonably quick as much of the thinking around safety and staff consultation had been completed.

In terms of preparedness in a more general sense, there may be something here that relates to the relatively low use of strategic thinking, planning and innovation, and service design skills by staff at different levels across the library service before and during lockdown. This finding perhaps reflects a wider organisational culture that does not value horizon scanning. Given the uncertain and shifting territory ahead – not to mention the anticipation of further, extreme events including the climate crisis, horizon scanning and being prepared to adapt services and be more resilient will be key for the service moving forward.



Key Message 4: Public library services have huge potential to support individuals and communities as they navigate the short, medium and long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic



“It would be great if the message can be put forward more strongly with governments and public bodies about how central a role libraries can and do play in mental and economic health.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, SCOTLAND

The best public library services and their staff enable, empower and equalise. They enable citizens to fulfil their potential and live fuller lives, empower them to make informed decisions, and equalise, through supporting citizens, irrespective of their background. Meanwhile, the space that library buildings provide mean that the service can operate as ‘preventative’ service; a ‘service of first resort’ and safety net for communities. As such, good public library services are anchor institutions: a vital part of the social infrastructure that support communities and enable local authorities to deliver on their priorities and policy goals. It is worth noting that 7 in 10 people think it is important that library buildings reopen.

Covid-19 will continue to impact on family and social relationships, health and mental health, education, employment and the economy, and continue to deepen the existing fault lines in our society. It has also placed primary services under considerable strain. Given what public library services do, it is unsurprising that staff at all levels in the library service saw their service as having an increasingly important role in supporting communities – and the need for the service to continue to adapt and develop in order to deliver at its best.

Covid-19 has not changed the strategic priorities of library services so much as sharpened their focus. It has also made staff acutely aware of the levels of need and vulnerability in their communities. The table below outlines: the most commonly mentioned areas that staff saw themselves and their service contributing to their communities moving forward; the challenges the UK is facing in relation to this area, especially in relation to the impact of Covid-19; and the way in which public library services were already supporting – and can continue to support – people in relation to that area.



Strengthening communities

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Loneliness and isolation are real challenges for the UK. Around 46% of adults in England experience loneliness;²² in Scotland one in five adults (21%) felt lonely some or most of the time the week before being surveyed,²³ 66% of people in Wales feel lonely at least sometimes;²⁴ 35.2% of people in Northern Ireland feel ‘more often lonely’ than not.²⁵ It is worth noting that loneliness affects people of all ages, with 40% of younger people (age 16-24) saying they feel lonely often or very often – more than any other adult age group.²⁶</p> <p>During lockdown, almost half of adults across Great Britain (48.4%) said they felt lonely at least sometimes or occasionally.²⁷</p>	<p>Many library services offer a range of activities to engage and connect individuals and communities. These include community groups such as reading, knit and natter, early years or reminiscence groups; coffee mornings; outreach services to disadvantaged families, linguistic minorities, or care homes; activities and services for those with special or additional needs. It is worth noting that 84% of those who engaged in reading groups said they felt more connected to others as a result of the activity.²⁸</p> <p>As a non-judgemental space, free at the point of entry and where all are welcome, public library buildings also provide ‘bumping places’ in which it is comfortable to linger, strike up conversation and interact, or simply enjoy being present with others.</p> <p>The public library building is an outreach service in itself, enabling staff to approach and support those who are unsure, uncertain or unwilling to approach staff or other services for help.</p> <p>Public library services’ capacity to know and engage with their communities at a hyperlocal level, their role in hosting local collections and facilitating connections, and the role both historic and new buildings can play as icons or in revitalising areas also mean they play a part in strengthening communities through place-making.</p>

- 22 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2019) Community life survey 2018-19 [Online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/820610/Community_Life_Survey_2018-19_report.pdf [Accessed August 2020]
- 23 Scottish Government (2019) Scottish Household Survey 2018 [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2018-scottish-household-survey/> [Accessed August 2020]
- 24 Welsh Government (2020) National Survey for Wales [Online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/national-survey-wales-results-viewer> [Accessed August 2020]
- 25 NISRA (2020) Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey 2018/19 [Online] Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Loneliness%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202018-19%20report%20PDF.pdf> [Accessed August 2020]
- 26 BBC Media Centre (2018) ‘16-24 year olds are the loneliest age group according to new BBC Radio 4 Survey’ [Online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/loneliest-age-group-radio-4> [Accessed August 2020]
- 27 ONS (2020) Coronavirus and Loneliness [Online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandloneliness> [Accessed August 2020] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/coronavirusandloneliness>
- 28 Reading Agency (2020) New survey reveals reading groups offer insight into different cultures [Online] Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/new-survey-reveals-reading-groups-offer-insight-into-different-cultures.html> [Accessed August 2020]



Employment and financial wellbeing

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Unemployment is expected to rise significantly by the end of 2020 due to the economic crisis triggered by Covid-19, with the Office for Budgetary Responsibility predicting that unemployment will have risen to around 12% by the end of 2020.²⁹ Those most at risk of serious financial difficulty are households with earned income from part-time work, self-employment or the gig economy. People with disabilities that limit their daily activities were at high risk, as were families with dependent children.³⁰</p> <p>In terms of small businesses, 41% of small business owners fear their business is at risk of permanently closing due to the pandemic, and 4% said they had already closed permanently because of the pandemic – an estimated 234,400 closures across the UK.³¹</p> <p>The number of those claiming benefits has already risen due to a combination of factors³², but this is partly seen as an indication of levels of employment and household incomes already dropping. People with disabilities that limit their daily activities will also be at high risk, as will families with dependent children.³³</p>	<p>Public library services can help jobseekers find opportunities and prepare themselves for interview. For example, many provide support in job-searching online, CV writing, basic adult and community courses and training, job clubs, access to computers and resources to aid the drafting of tailored job applications.³⁴ One service that engaged in the research is part of a wider heritage employability scheme where working in the library service is part of a path for young people seeking work in the heritage sector.</p> <p>Some public library services provide advice and support for the development of small businesses, including support around protecting intellectual property. Between 2016 and 2018, the British Library Business and IP Centre National Network supported the creation of 12,288 businesses: 22% in the most deprived areas and 47% in the Northern Powerhouse area. The Network also created an estimated 7,843 net additional FTE jobs.³⁵</p> <p>Public library services also provide essential support to people applying for welfare benefits. 87% of frontline library staff report providing digital assistance on an ad-hoc basis (for example, setting up an email account or logging into the Universal Credit website).³⁶</p>

29 Office for Budgetary Responsibility (2020) Coronavirus Analysis [Online] Available at: <https://obr.uk/coronavirus-analysis/> [Accessed August 2020]

30 Standard Life Foundation (2020) Coronavirus Financial Impact Tracker [Online] Available at: https://www.standardlifefoundation.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/61120/SLF-JUNE-2020-COVID-19-Tracker.pdf [Accessed August 2020]

31 Simply Business (2020) Article *New Survey: the impact of coronavirus on UK small business is set to exceed £69 billion* <https://www.simplybusiness.co.uk/knowledge/articles/2020/05/new-coronavirus-survey-69-billion-cost-for-small-businesses/> [Accessed August 2020]

32 Resolution Foundation (2020) *The Truth Will Out* [Online] Available at: <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-truth-will-out/> [Accessed August 2020]

33 Standard Life Foundation (2020) Coronavirus Financial Impact Tracker [Online] Available at: https://www.standardlifefoundation.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/61120/SLF-JUNE-2020-COVID-19-Tracker.pdf [Accessed August 2020]

34 For example, in Battersea, 3 in 10 used the PCs for job seeking and over 50% of library users are from less well-off postcodes. See ACE (2020) *Libraries: Helping local communities find work* <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-libraries/libraries-helping-local-communities-find-work> [Accessed September 2020]

35 ACE (2019) *Democratising Entrepreneurship* [Online] Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/democratising-entrepreneurship> [Accessed September 2020]

36 Research conducted by CILIP in partnership with CPAG, referenced in article ACE (2020) *Libraries: Helping local communities find work* <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-libraries/libraries-helping-local-communities-find-work> [Accessed September 2020]

 Education

The challenge

School provision varied significantly during lockdown, with children’s opportunity to learn being unequally impacted. 1 in 5 pupils did no schoolwork or managed less than an hour during lockdown³⁷ and children in private schools were twice as likely than those in state schools to be taking part in online lessons every day.³⁸ 15% of teachers in the most deprived schools reported that over a third of their pupils did not have adequate access to an electronic device for learning and 12% said over a third did not have internet access.³⁹ Meanwhile, while some children and parents will be affected by ongoing ‘vulnerabilities’ without access to their usual support; others will have had new challenges such as the requirement to work from home with no childcare. There has been speculation that the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their ‘better-off’ peers could widen by 75%.⁴⁰

How public library services can contribute

Public library services provide access to a range of IT and information resources and learning activities. They can also provide a supportive environment for children after school. Through class visits the service works with schools to offer learning beyond the classroom.

Some examples of some relevant library offers include: homework clubs, STEM and code clubs, and Makerspaces.

Public library services also engage children in national learning events such as National Numeracy Day, British Science Week, Summer Reading Challenge and World Book Day. It is worth noting that almost 2 in 5 library users on free school meals said they used their library because it was a friendly space and supported them to do better at school.⁴¹

Library services also provide life-long learning opportunities for adults. As a socially inclusive service, the library service fills a gap in formal educational structures. Courses provided can range from digital and employability skills to flower arranging, from ESOL to visual arts.

- 37 Green, F. (2020) Schoolwork in lockdown: new evidence on the epidemic of educational poverty [Online] Available at: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/publications/526190> [Accessed August 2020]
- 38 The Sutton Trust (2020) Covid-19 Impacts: School Shutdown [Online] Available at: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/> [Accessed August 2020]
- 39 Bailey, G. (2020) *Out of sight: how do we protect children in lockdown?* [Online] Available at: <https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/out-of-sight-how-do-you-protect-children-in-a-crisis> [Accessed August 2020]
- 40 Whittaker, F. and S. Booth (2020) *Coronavirus: attainment gap could widen by 75%, DfE official warns* [Online] Available at: <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/coronavirus-attainment-gap-could-widen-by-75-dfe-official-warns/> [Accessed August 2020]
- 41 Research by National Literacy Trust, referenced in Libraries Connected (2020) Libraries: An essential part of local recovery [Online] Available at: <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/libraries-essential-part-local-recovery> [Accessed September 2020]



Digital inclusion

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Lockdown has brought into sharp focus the fact that 7m people in the UK do not have access to the internet at home and 9m cannot use the internet without help.⁴² There are up to 559,000 children who do not have internet access at home; up to 913,000 children who have smartphone only access; and up to 1,777,000 children who do not have home access to a laptop or a desktop or a tablet.⁴³ There is also the challenge of ongoing affordability of connectivity – particularly as the economic crisis deepens. Yet 2 in 3 occupations in the UK require digital skills.⁴⁴</p>	<p>Public library services support digital inclusion through providing: access to tech, support with skills development and by building motivation and confidence to engage online. In terms of access to tech, public library services provide around 26 million hours of supported internet access each year⁴⁵ and access to free wifi. For example, many services provide courses and support for all in relation to a range of devices and software. Public library staff can be adept at finding the ‘hook’ that motivates someone to get online.</p>



Physical and mental health

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>In terms of mental health, in any given week pre-lockdown, 1 in 6 adults in England experienced a ‘common mental disorder’;⁴⁶ 1 in 3 adults in Scotland are affected by mental illness in any one year;⁴⁷ 1 in 4 adults in Wales experience mental health problems or illness at some point during their lifetime;⁴⁸ and 1 in 5 in Northern Ireland show signs of possible mental health problems.⁴⁹</p> <p>The Mental Health Foundation Coronavirus Study involving adults across the UK found that as lockdown eased: almost 1 in 5 felt hopeless; over ¼ of unemployed felt hopeless; almost 1/3 of 18-24 year olds felt hopeless; and almost 1/3 of people with pre-existing mental health conditions felt hopeless.⁵⁰</p>	<p>People’s health and wellbeing is determined by a range of factors. Public library services provide a range of activities and groups that are part of social prescribing, supporting those with long-term conditions or who are lonely or isolated, or have complex social needs.</p> <p>Many public library services work in partnership with organisations such as Macmillan, Alzheimer’s Society and Dementia UK to provide support for health conditions.</p> <p>Reading is a key way to support health: bibliotherapy is a therapeutic approach to use literature to support good mental health; books on prescription provides self-help reading for several common mental and physical health problems; and reading for pleasure can reduce symptoms of depression and improve wellbeing throughout life.⁵¹</p> <p>It is worth noting that public library services, through the building and the services they offer, also provide the potential for escape and entertainment. This can have a positive impact on wellbeing.</p>

42 Good Things Foundation (2020) Digital Nation [Online] Available at: <https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org/research-publications/digital-nation-2020> [Accessed September 2020]

43 Digital Access for All (2020) *Ofcom Technology Tracker 2020* [Online] Available at: <https://digitalaccessforall.co.uk/the-numbers> [Accessed August 2020]

44 DCMS (2019) No Longer Optional: Employer demand for digital skills [Online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/807830/No_Longer_Optional_Employer_Demand_for_Digital_Skills.pdf [Accessed August 2020]

45 Libraries Connected (2020) Libraries: An essential part of local recovery [Online] Available at: <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/resource/libraries-essential-part-local-recovery> [Accessed September 2020]

46 House of Commons Library (2020) Mental Health Statistics for England: prevalence, services and funding [Online] Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06988/SN06988.pdf> [Accessed August 2020] Please note figure quoted is from 2014. A survey of adult mental health in England has been carried out every seven years. The most recent Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey was carried out in 2014.

47 Scottish Government (2020) Mental Health <https://www.gov.scot/policies/mental-health/> [Accessed August 2020]

48 Welsh Government (2012) Together for Mental Health: A strategy for mental health and wellbeing in Wales [Online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/together-for-mental-health-a-strategy-for-mental-health-and-wellbeing-in-wales.pdf> [Accessed August 2020]

49 Information Analysis Directorate (2020) Health Survey NI First Results 2018/19 [Online] Available at: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hsni-first-results-18-19_1.pdf [Accessed August 2020]

50 Mental Health Foundation (2020) Millions still feeling hopeless as lockdown eases: new briefing from the mental health foundation [Online] Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/research/coronavirus-mental-health-panic-and-epidemic> [Accessed August 2020]

51 Reading Agency (2015) Literature Review: The Impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment [Online] Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/The%20Impact%20of%20Reading%20for%20Pleasure%20and%20Empowerment.pdf> [Accessed September 2020]

 Knowledge and information	
The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Fake news, fake images and fake numbers have proliferated during Covid-19.⁵² This has shone a light on the extent to which people are unable to critically assess information and its sources, and to differentiate between misinformation and disinformation⁵³ and the potentially harmful consequences of this.</p>	<p>Public library services are for many people the trusted starting point for finding general information and information about local services. Library services provide access to resources and information as well as information about local and national issues and services. In this way, library services enable people to make informed decisions to improve their lives – to support people to find the answers to their own questions rather than provide them with the answer.</p> <p>Public library buildings can also be spaces for creating and sharing information and exploring ideas more widely. In relation to this, it is worth noting that the pandemic has also created space for people across the UK to reflect on what matters to us personally, to our communities and to society. There is widespread appetite for change, with only 12% of people wanting life to be ‘exactly as it was before’⁵⁴ and 6 out of 10 of us wanting to prioritise health and wellbeing above economic growth when/if the pandemic subsides.⁵⁵</p> <p>As such, there is a potential role for the public library service, as a neutral civic space for all, to be a space in which to hold debates and discussions for what communities want for themselves and what they would like the UK to look like. Here, there is the potential for the public library service to build bridges and encourage participation, enabling citizens to engage and discuss ideas with a view to support understanding, empathy and tolerance.</p>

 Cultural engagement	
The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Creative industries are likely to be significantly impacted by Covid-19 with a £77bn turnover loss in 2020 compared to 2019 and job losses of up to 409,000.⁵⁶ But these industries are important as culture, creativity and the arts help us understand ourselves, others and the human world around us.⁵⁷</p>	<p>Public library services enrich the lives of individuals and communities through providing local access points to art and culture. Some services provide creative writing and support for self-publishing, access to music and can act as a venue for live music, film clubs, exhibitions, art, theatre and dance. Public library services also provide access to local history and heritage resources.</p>

52 WHO (2020) Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) advice for the public: mythbusters [Online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters> [Accessed September 2020]

53 Greenhough, J. (2020) Covid-19: searching for truth in post truth times [Online] Available at <https://jconlineresources.org/blog/covid-19-searching-for-truth-in-post-truth-times/> [Accessed September 2020]

54 Britain Thinks (2020) Coronavirus Diaries: 10 insights from lockdown [Online] Available at: https://britainthinks.com/pdfs/Coronavirus-Diaries_Summary-report_weeks-1-to-12.pdf [Accessed August 2020]

55 Research conducted by YouGov on behalf of Positive Money Dewhirst, H. A (2020) A Majority Agree: public health before economic growth [online] Available at: <https://positivemoney.org/2020/05/a-majority-agree-public-health-before-economic-growth/> [Accessed August 2020]

56 Oxford Economics (2020) The Projected Economic Impact of Covid-19 on the UK Creative Industries [Online] Available at: https://www.creativeindustriesfederation.com/sites/default/files/inline-images/20200716_OE_Slides_new%20ACE%20data%20-%20Clean%20-%20with%20NEMO%20caveat.pdf [Accessed September 2020]

57 SHAPE (2020) What is Shape? Available at: <https://thisishape.org.uk/> [Accessed September 2020] and ACE (2020) Let’s Create [Online] Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/introduction> [Accessed September 2020]



Literacy

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>1 in 6 adults in England have very poor literacy skills; 1 in 4 adults in Scotland experience challenges due to lack of literacy skills; 1 in 8 adults in Wales lack basic literacy skills; and 1 in 5 adults in Northern Ireland have very poor literacy skills.⁵⁸ Literacy is essential for being able to read a food nutritional label, bank statement or medicine label; fill out a loan or job application; analyse messages in the media and advertising; and communicate with others. Poor literacy levels can lead to being locked out of the job market or being unable to support a child’s learning. Literacy is the building block of all other learning.</p> <p>Research conducted in 2015 found that around 1 in 5 15 year olds across the UK do not have a minimum level of literacy proficiency and that insufficient reading skills by the middle of primary school impacts on pupil’s ability to learn other curricula.⁵⁹</p> <p>The cost of functional illiteracy in the UK has been estimated as £24.8bn in relation to welfare, unemployment and social programs. The social costs of functional illiteracy include welfare dependency, poor health outcomes, higher levels of crime and a lack of self-worth.⁶⁰</p>	<p>Through providing access to books and a range of book-related activities, public library services provide a non-threatening environment through which to tackle illiteracy and encourage reading for pleasure.</p>



Equality, diversity and inclusion

The challenge	How public library services can contribute
<p>Covid-19 and lockdown has had a disproportionate impact on those in poverty, women and ethnic minorities. Those whose livelihoods look most at risk during the COVID-19 crisis already tended to have relatively low incomes, and were relatively likely to be in poverty, prior to the onset of the crisis.⁶¹ Again, it is clear from the preceding sections on learning in schools that the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged is growing.</p>	<p>As a non-judgemental welcoming space that is free at the point of access, public library services truly are a service for all. Through offering the range of services outlined in the preceding sections in relation to stronger communities, economic wellbeing, learning, digital inclusion, information and decision making and cultural engagement, public library services both create opportunities and seek to make opportunity more equal, meaning they are well positioned to tackle disadvantage.</p>

58 National Literacy Trust, Adult Literacy [Online] Available at: <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/> [Accessed September 2020]

59 Reading Agency, Reading Facts [Online] Available at: <https://readingagency.org.uk/about/impact/002-reading-facts-1/#:-:text=Statistics%20from%202014%20show%20that,by%20the%20age%20of%2011.&text=Further%20research%2C%20conducted%20in%202015,Ireland%20and%2021%25%20in%20Wales> [Accessed September 2020]

60 World Literacy Foundation (2019) The Economic and Social Cost of Illiteracy [Online] Available at: <https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TheEconomicSocialCostofIlliteracy-2.pdf> [Accessed September 2020]

61 IFS (2020) Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020 [Online] Available at: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14901> [Accessed August 2020]



Action Areas: What the sector needs to fulfil its potential and deliver for the UK public



“Do you run a smaller, poorer version of what you have – or change?”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND



“It’s [our] job to problem solve, so let’s ... think about the value of the service for communities rather than just ‘riding out a storm’ that doesn’t really have an end date; you could be riding out a storm forever and end up back in it ... It’s about how we work creatively to constantly be thinking about contingency ... and spark[ing] a bit of joy.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND



“It is in times of economic recession that libraries are cut, and that is when they are needed most.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND

It is clear that public library services have tremendous potential to support individuals and communities as the UK navigates the considerable challenges ahead. The vast majority of staff, irrespective of role, expressed ambition both for what the service can deliver and for their own development in order to help create responsive offers that better serve their communities over the years ahead.

It is equally clear that library service offers, as conceived and delivered during lockdown, did not deliver the full range of benefits seen pre-Covid-19. Moreover, the context for service delivery will continue

to change due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic, how the impact of the pandemic on the UK will continue to unfold and the fact that there will be future disruptive events such as Brexit and the climate crisis. It is clear that the service needs to continue to adapt and innovate in how it delivers, and requires adequate funding and support if it seeks to deliver similar benefits as before.

The action areas below draw on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that were identified by those who participated in the research directly, through analysis, or through the Trust’s broader experience of working with the sector over the past eight years. Many of the action areas will feel familiar to the sector – albeit to lesser or greater degrees across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and across different local authorities. In many cases, work is being conducted across a range of the areas identified below. It is a matter of increasing urgency and importance that the barriers and issues highlighted in the action areas, long standing or otherwise, are overcome in order to enable public library services to fulfil their potential and deliver for individuals and communities across the UK.

Given the differences in how governments and the library sector in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are progressing library-related agendas and the ever-shifting external environment, the following section sets out broad areas and ideas that we believe should be taken into consideration in developing public library services during the next period.



1. Deliver a sustainable financial settlement



“What worries me now is we’ll be back in austerity and we’ll be fighting to keep what little we’ve got rather than developing the service.”

SENIOR MANAGER, WALES



“We only have the capacity to do the basics and support pre-existing digital offers. All our recent changes and reductions will make coming out of lockdown or developing new approaches harder.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, ENGLAND

Good public library services are anchor institutions: a vital part of the social infrastructure that supports communities and enables local authorities to deliver on their priorities and policy goals. They strengthen communities and support individuals and communities in terms of employment and financial wellbeing; education; digital inclusion; physical and mental health; knowledge and information; cultural engagement; literacy; and equality, diversity and inclusion. Given the way in which Covid-19 and lockdown have exacerbated existing fault lines and inequalities in society, there is arguably a greater need for these types of services.

Yet public library services have been experiencing increasing financial pressure for over a decade. This has been compounded by lockdown. Many services were already planning for significant reductions in operating budgets pre-Covid-19. The costs of reopening and staffing the service as lockdown has eased have exacerbated their financial challenges.

With local authorities facing what one Head of Service described as a ‘financial black hole’ following the Covid-19 response, public library services clearly face very significant risks, given

that the vast majority of services in the UK (with the particular exception of Northern Ireland) are funded almost entirely through local authority budgets. It is now essential for the UK, devolved and local governments to give serious consideration to a sustainable long-term funding model for public libraries. A continued chipping away at library services is unsustainable and a financial model for this service that relies on a single stream of public funding feels increasingly untenable.

One option could be for sector bodies to explore ways of diversifying funding for public library services from a range of public bodies. Library services contribute to the outcomes being pursued by many government departments and agencies – including health, education, culture and employment. There is an argument that this cross-policy delivery should be matched by cross-policy funding, with public libraries being provided with funds from a range of government departments or public bodies, alongside local government investment.⁶²

Clearly, any change in funding model would present complex issues around governance, transparency and accountability; and serious and thoughtful consideration is required to explore the benefits, drawbacks and potential unintended consequences. But it is increasingly clear that, unless there is a significant rise in local authority budgets in the coming years, the current arrangements do not offer a secure future for library services, and action is needed now before further irreversible retrenchment occurs.

⁶² There is a broader point here in relation to the need for a more fundamental shift in how we think about budgeting: an approach that focuses on outcomes sought rather than categories of services.



2. Strengthen status and voice in local authority structures



“Most of the time very senior council staff do not see the potential for libraries to help deliver their agenda at a reduced cost, which will help the communities we all serve.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND

Strong relationships with local decision makers and a voice within wider council teams during lockdown led to the potential of some library services and their staff to be recognised and harnessed. This maximized the outcomes for citizens, with library services being able to contribute to emerging council services or multi-agency working to bring added value to these services, or library staff being redeployed into appropriate services which were valued by the public and senior people in the local authority.

The experience of lockdown has also shone a light on the ways in which public library services can be restricted and inhibited in their delivery of a full and impactful service by a lack of recognition or prioritisation within their local authority.

Whilst local authorities were under immense pressure over lockdown, for a number of library

services it appears that the barriers they experienced during that period, relating to understanding, trust, autonomy and IT predate the Covid-19 crisis. It is essential that levels of status, priority, trust and permission are recalibrated to enable public library services to deliver a high quality offer that meets the needs and wants of its communities, and helps local authorities to meet their wider agenda for local outcomes.

The challenge for council leaders and officers is to engage with Heads of Service to assess how public library services contribute across the aims and priorities of the local authority and how public library services could work more closely with other services to deliver maximum benefit to communities in a cost-effective way. A related challenge is to reassess where Heads of Service are positioned within council and decision making structures; the level of autonomy Heads of Service have to make decisions and balance risk (including in relation to the type of services to be delivered during future lockdowns); the quality of IT, tech and access to systems to which library staff have access; and the comms support that public library services have from core council teams.



3. Value and invest in skilled and confident staff



“Libraries need to embrace civic mobilisation and work with neighbourhood officers to expand their roles as places of social engagement at the heart of communities.”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND



“If we can get the partnership right with those care homes, sheltered housing, some of our community organisations that organise the transport, once we get to the stage of bringing people back we can really be at the heart of the planning of the organisations that support communities. And really have the library as a hub for that. So I see that as an element of real growth.”

SENIOR MANAGER, SCOTLAND



“We need the equivalent of the ‘Use your head, teach’ adverts that we had in the nineties to attract high quality candidates to the sector ...”

SENIOR MANAGER, ENGLAND.

Public library staff are an integral part of library services and arguably its most vital asset. They embody the values and ethos of the service. The development and delivery of the library service depends on their skills, values and attitude. The research identified both key strengths and areas of weakness in relation to staff skills. Investment in building on or growing certain skills is required in order to ensure future-fit services that are vibrant and relevant to their communities.

Areas for focus include:

- adaptability, flexibility and resilience;
- digital skills, including online facilitation skills;
- strategic thinking, planning and evaluation;
- service innovation, development and design;
- partnership development;
- community engagement; and
- advocacy and demonstrating value.

There is a real opportunity to capitalise on the appetite for skills development among staff⁶³ and the learning from redeployed staff in relation to the levels of need and vulnerability in the community.

Ensuring staff have the right skills for services can be addressed in relation to formal librarianship courses at universities, on-the-job training for those working in services and recruitment criteria and practices.

Some possible ways forward for sector support organisations could include: developing nationally co-ordinated workforce development programmes to ensure a future-ready workforce; working with HE departments to ensure trainees entering the sector have the appropriate skill set; working with HE, free-lancers and other organisations to support appropriate skills development opportunities for those working in the sector at present; and supporting Heads of Service to share best practice and learning in relation to recruitment and ways of working.

⁶³ 2/5 of staff respondents who answered questions about skill sets were keen to develop skill sets in relation to adapting to new ways of working (42%) and service innovation, development and design (39%) and just under 2/5 were keen to develop skills in relation to working with vulnerable people (38%) and community engagement and consultation skills (37%). See Staff Survey Background Report for more detail.



4. Build positive organisational culture that supports leadership at all levels

Public library services with an enabling and collaborative working culture were at an advantage during lockdown. An inclusive and positive culture that valued the insight and contribution of staff at all levels and sought to communicate with and inform staff appeared to result in stronger relationships, better morale and a more resilient service, in which new offers were developed and staff were supported to adapt to lockdown. Yet this type of working culture was not an experience that was shared universally across the sector.

More broadly, the research suggests that recognising and supporting the responsibilities listed below as shared or collective responsibilities was particularly important for supporting stronger relationships and creating an enabling organisational culture, ultimately contributing to a higher quality of service for citizens:

- leadership;
- strategic thinking, planning and evaluation;
- innovative thinking;
- advocacy and demonstrating value; and
- partnership development.

The challenge for Heads of Service is to review and assess the working culture in their organisation and develop plans to continually nurture and improve it. For sector support organisations, the challenge is perhaps to assess whether developing guidelines and frameworks to support this process of review and renewal would be welcome and to actively think about how to provide advice and support to public library services across the skills areas listed above.



5. Recognise the digital future is here and deliver a high quality blended service

Lockdown stimulated innovation and skills development and heightened awareness within public library services of the type of offers they could provide their communities online. A plethora of engaging activities were developed. Lockdown also revealed how some of these offers, in their current formulation, fall short.

Much more can be done in terms of both the quality and quantity of the digital offer, and there is a real need to consider digital platforms that better enable the two-way engagement that staff seek to have in their physical buildings. The Single Digital Presence seeks to improve every library's digital presence and grow the profile of public library services in the process. The experience of lockdown has illuminated the urgency and importance of this work in terms of its ability to unify the offer and enhance digital presence.

But digital cannot be the only solution. Lockdown also showed the limitations of digital provision in meeting the needs of library users. It has also highlighted what those library services, who had the requisite permission, were able to deliver differently in the physical realm – be that access to PCs, home delivery book services, outreach services or request and collect type services. These services were essential in enabling people to enhance their wellbeing through reading and there is also potential to utilise these mechanisms to provide wider services in partnership with others.

Developing a high quality blended digital and physical service will mean recognising the strengths and weaknesses of both modes of delivery – and developing standards – for a hybrid model of delivery, where the two modes complement and enhance each other.

This may feel challenging in a context where at present, many services feel they have been reduced

to transactional services in light of social distancing and minimal time allowed in the physical building. However, there is the opportunity to harness learning from digital offers and different types of physical services such as request and collect services. Likewise, there is the opportunity for branch libraries to learn from other services and community organisations delivering at a hyperlocal level in terms of how they engaged with communities and responded to need during this time. There is also the possibility of harnessing the relationships built with others during lockdown (community organisations or council departments) to develop more aligned or integrated services to enhance what is delivered and the most effective way of doing so. Finally, the way in which library services are being delivered require staff to think creatively about how to make their service available to people and it might be that new or better ways of doing things could be uncovered as a result of this (eg. Ready Reads). In this way, there is the potential to keep learning from good practice that has emerged, what is different about new initiatives or processes and what makes them work, with a view to building a better service overall.

The challenges for sector support organisations and Heads of Service include setting out a framework or standard for blended delivery; supporting best practice and learning around innovation in service delivery; and supporting the work conducted on the single digital presence to capitalise on the learning evolved during lockdown.

Given the challenging times ahead, the expectation, demand and need for a rich service that empowers, enables and acts as an equaliser will only increase, so it is important to acknowledge that there is no 'going back' to the way things were pre-Covid-19 and that work is required now to envisage and develop the models of delivery that will work most effectively for library users in the future.



6. Resolve the longstanding, complex issues around e-books

Investment made in the e-lending offer during lockdown enabled public library services to expand their reading offer and provide escape, entertainment and educational content that met people where they were: at home. However, it came with the recognition that delivering a more comprehensive e-lending offer that comes closer to the physical lending offer and meets public expectation and demand will require substantial work.

The current e-lending eco-system poses considerable challenges to library services in relation to choice, cost and licensing conditions. There is a real role for UK Government to support sector bodies to navigate the deeply complex set of issues that is likely to require considerable cross-sector and international collaboration.



7. Balance coherent and consistent national offers with the power of the regional and the appeal and benefits of the hyperlocal

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown have revealed the appeal and benefits of a hyperlocal service: a familiar, friendly face, in-depth knowledge of communities, a 'safe' entry point to wider systems of support and an ability to respond to localised need. However, the crisis has also pointed to a need for stronger national co-ordination of public library services: the need for members of the public to have equal access to services and a consistent library offer, and the need for library services' digital and physical offers to be more visible and maybe a more coherent brand. Whilst it did not emerge from the research, it may also prove valuable to consider what a regional perspective can bring and how it can bridge national and local or hyperlocal.⁶⁴

The challenge for sector support organisations and the sector is how to strike the balance between the hyperlocal, local, regional and national. Specifically, how to balance the various strategic, operational and delivery functions that are required in order

to enable library services to offer a consistently excellent and recognisable service across the UK whilst retaining flexibility to respond to the shape of local need. An additional challenge for sector support bodies and local authorities is to agree how best to optimise the marketing and advocacy of library services in a way that is clear, simple and consistent across any given jurisdiction, but which also reflects the hyperlocal, community-based nature of the service.

Areas to consider could include supporting the development of nationally organised and funded infrastructure and creative programmes; revising nationally co-ordinated monitoring and evaluation in relation to a hybrid service; sharing guidelines and best practice on the delivery of new or emerging services; exploring the potential of the regional; setting out the pros and cons of certain functions sitting at national, regional, local and hyperlocal levels; and exploring the potential of a national body to co-ordinate e-book licensing and lending.

⁶⁴ The rise in the number of consortia seeking to address issues in relation to purchasing power and advocacy and the effectiveness of regional approaches is starting to be recognised and is perhaps an area for constructive exploitation.



8. Advocate effectively and powerfully



“It would be great if the message can be put forward more strongly with governments and public bodies about how central a role libraries can and do play in mental and economic health.”

SPECIALIST STAFF, SCOTLAND



“We still need to promote our services more than ever – but we need to focus on why and not what we do.”

MIDDLE MANAGER, SCOTLAND

The research has evidenced what public library services and their staff offered during lockdown (Key Messages 1 and 2) and identified areas that they have capacity to deliver on moving forward (Key Message 3). It is worth noting that these are areas that public library services were already delivering on pre-lockdown. Yet not all members of the public or decision makers are aware of the breadth and depth of library services' offer.

There is a real need for effective advocacy to shift outdated perceptions of what public library services are, and to promote understanding among decision makers of the multiple contributions public library services make and the outcomes against which they deliver. A key challenge for the government departments that oversee public library services, sector support organisations and Heads of Service is to identify the levers for change and build relationships with the change makers that are not currently within their purview. Ensuing challenges may include demonstrating the way in which public library services are key anchor institutions⁶⁵ and ensuring public library services are represented on

⁶⁵ For example, the role of the library building as well as digital services in meeting community needs, tackling joblessness, poor mental health and isolation, ensuring fewer acute cases further down the line.

a range of policy agendas and relevant working groups. A core part of this will involve engaging effectively with national and local elected representatives and government and council officers to help them better understand the outcomes public library services deliver for communities and the UK.

Whilst there may be a distinct role for sector support bodies and senior managers in relation to particular audiences, staff at all levels have the capacity to advocate effectively for their service in their communities. For example, ensuring what their service does and offers people is clearly visible inside or outside the physical building; through communicating with the community and their library users; through seeking opportunities to market what they do; and through embodying the values and attitudes of the service in their interactions with partners and members of the community alike.

In terms of shifting wider public mindset, the challenge for sector bodies is to support marketing campaigns aimed at changing popular perception of what public library services do and the outcomes they seek; and to attract fresh talent to the sector.

It is worth noting that advocacy is not limited to 'doing' (describing, explaining or campaigning) but by 'being' a relevant service to local authority staff and decision makers themselves. Heads of Service should consider the type of health, wellbeing or other support they can provide local authority staff as a way of advocating for their service and bringing it to the awareness of council officers. The wellbeing hubs for care and care-at-home workers described under Key Message 1 is one example of this approach.

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

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**Libraries
Connected**

Libraries in lockdown:

Connecting Communities in
Crisis

October 2020



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Introduction from Carol Stump, President, Libraries Connected

When buildings shut in March, libraries did not stop supporting their communities. Online lending surged, with 3.5 million¹ more ebooks loaned by the end of July, library staff made thousands of calls to check up on vulnerable residents, clubbed together with charities to get books out to families, and were redeployed across local services responding to the crisis.

The experience of lockdown has highlighted the role of libraries and their staff in keeping communities connected and supporting the most vulnerable in our society. It has also demonstrated their skills, empathy and flexibility to meet the immediate and long-term changes in what their community needs, for example:

- Ongoing engagement with people at risk of isolation: Suffolk Libraries alone made 7,000 phone calls to library users while the building has been closed.
- Growth in digital offering: including rhyming and reading sessions for young children, instruction sessions to access online services, author led events, school readiness programmes, jobs and art clubs. These events averaged at around 1,000 views each, with some reaching over 20,000².
- Redeployment of library buildings and staff into community support hubs providing services such as volunteer support, coordination and delivery of shielding operations, arranging food deliveries, and contact centres for health and social care.
- Demonstrating innovation and creativity: Gateshead Libraries used their 3D printers to create visors and other PPE for local care homes and health centres.

The role of libraries will be crucial as we begin to see the longer-term impact of Coronavirus on our health, our economy and our society. The Libraries in Lockdown report demonstrates the amazing achievements of libraries during lockdown as well as some the challenges they faced, and continue to face, as they begin to reopen their buildings.

At Libraries Connected, we plan to focus our efforts on ensuring that we build a strong advocacy campaign, with key sector partners, to emphasise the vital role library services and buildings will play in community rebuilding after the pandemic. We will gather and share accurate information about the sector and its evolving needs to the key decisionmakers in central and local government.

We're all very concerned that the major risk for library services may come in the next few months and years, when local and national government budgets will be tight, and savings will have to be made. We need to begin to prepare now to meet these challenges.

Public libraries help people to access employment and job seeking skills; create support networks and local interventions for families, people at risk of isolation and people with chronic health needs; and engage children with reading and learning. We offer incredible value for money given all that we deliver.

¹ *Libraries Connected analysis of Digital Content Aggregator Data*

² *Libraries Connected Evaluation of Libraries from Home activities*



When I became President in June, I pledged to do all that I could to ensure that libraries are seen as part of the solution to recovery. We are uniquely placed, in the heart of our communities, to support a return to whatever the new normal looks like and we are determined to position libraries as a place to rebuild and reconnect. I'm excited that the learning from this report will enable us to position libraries to play an even greater role in shaping a more positive future for everyone.



Carol Stump,
President, Libraries Connected



Key findings

Library membership and usage during lockdown

- Despite library buildings being closed for four months, library services managed to increase membership by up to 32%, while total library membership remained stable during this period
- Membership to access digital resources increased by 27% with some library services more than doubling the number of those signing up for these services
- Data collection about the demographic profile of new members is patchy and compounded by restrictions on collecting data from third-party platforms which libraries used to broadcast digital content
- Library services are concerned most about the impact of libraries being closed on those without internet access, people living alone and jobseekers.

#LibrariesfromHome – a dynamic response

- Digital lending increased significantly during lockdown. Ebook use increased by 146%. These increases were largely sustained as libraries re-opened.
- Despite the significant increases in digital lending, its scale is still small compared to lending of physical material.
- The increased investment in digital lending by library services may double its costs in this calendar year, which is unlikely to be sustainable.
- Over 75% of library services delivered #librariesfromhome events. More than half 56% increased their audience for events during lockdown, despite 63% saying they had limited experience in delivering events online. Many staff developed new skills and confidence in delivering online events.
- The impact of this digital engagement was beneficial for families and individuals in lockdown but may have exacerbated existing digital divides.
- Some library services were restricted in their digital engagement, particularly in the first weeks of lockdown by corporate policies, IT systems and lack of equipment.
- Even services with the strongest online offer recognise that the usability and interactivity of the digital public library offer still require huge improvement to match the most popular commercial retail and streaming services.

‘We reached new audiences who had previously thought digital was not for them including one 94-year-old who signed up for digital audio. An additional 2,160 residents joined online during lockdown so they could access digital offer, and we offered telephone digital support which was really successful. Elected members and senior officers realised the range of our digital offer. Staff learnt new digital skills very quickly. We realised we could do things we hadn't tried before, and I was reminded how creative, adaptable and capable our library staff are in a crisis!’



Remote library services – opportunity knocks

- Library staff demonstrated essential skills and capabilities, which were highly valued by councils in responding to the pandemic, particularly customer service and communication and for their flexible and collaborative approach to working with colleagues and partners
- 60% of services managed to continue delivering a Home Library Service, providing vital comfort and books to very vulnerable users
- Almost one in five library services operated an ‘enhanced’ Home Library Service open to more people, with additional support to help combat loneliness and improving digital skills
- The availability of older volunteers was a significant factor for many services in whether they could deliver a Home Library Service during lockdown
- Keep-in-touch (KIT) calls were a major intervention reaching 100,000s of people nationally, and showcasing library services and staff skills and knowledge to council colleagues
- Remote services will continue to be an important vehicle for creating a ‘blended’ or ‘hybrid’ service marrying the digital and physical offer to reach those who need library services most.

‘Many thanks to the member of library staff who very kindly delivered books to my mother. Like many older people, my mother loves her reading and being without books is a great loss in her life as they keep her mentally agile and helps her wellbeing. I know you are all working in very difficult circumstances so taking the time to get a good collection of books together and deliver them was really appreciated. Thank you’

How library staff supported the local pandemic response

- Redeployed library staff provided vital capacity to deliver the local pandemic response.
- Redeployment often generated a beneficial (two-way) integration of library staff with other council departments/services for supporting vulnerable people which will continue to produce value for councils in the future.
- Library staff were often singled out for praise by elected members and senior managers. Large volumes of calls and deliveries were made to residents although data collection varied.
- Opportunities were missed to use library staff skills more in some local authorities.

‘I want to pay tribute to my staff - they were superb. They came forward wanting to know what they could do. They saw the fact that they were serving their communities. It brought out staff skills not fully used previously. Some of them are real community leaders.’

Re-opening and recovery – learning from lockdown

- Regular users have welcomed re-opening and footfall is comparable to wider high-street patterns.
- Many library services have built up their offer gradually and are now offering browsing in addition to click-and-collect and PC access by appointment. However, there is a wide divergence between library service recovery strategies and services on offer, which may be confusing for the public.



- 'Blended' or 'hybrid' models of provision are emerging to meet the challenges of ongoing distancing conditions which offer exciting opportunities. However, these have resource implications which will entail planning and prioritisation especially if local lockdowns continue for the foreseeable future.
- The pandemic has inevitably increased the pressure on local authority funding and this poses a significant risk to library services.

'My concern coming out of this is that... we are about to enter a brutal round of public finances - I cannot expand due to capacity and organisational reasons, the public expect us to, and I know what's likely to come... I also am personally struggling with the fact that the entire job now is about risk management and safety... it is extremely challenging and draining to be where I am and it isn't sustainable long term. I feel really conflicted that I now actively stop people using the service I have given my entire career to.'



1. New frontiers for public libraries?

Context

Public libraries have the broadest reach and usage of any cultural sector in the UK. Although public debate about the state of public libraries often focuses on the decline in usage, closures and claims of a crisis of identity for libraries, this reach is still significant, with 3,583 libraries and 226m visits over the last year (CIPFA 2019), a third of the population visiting a library at least once, with a user base which broadly reflects the UK population (DCMS Taking Part 2019).

The evidence from our research shows that during lockdown the majority of library services responded to the shuttering of library buildings by innovating online, upskilling staff and reaching out to their communities in ways which had a profound impact for communities, genuinely saving lives in many cases.

Yet the Institute for Fiscal Studies have now warned of a council funding shortfall as big as £2bn in the current financial year alone, due to the increased costs of services such as social care and a decrease in income.³ The LGA estimates that the funding gap may be as large as £9.8 billion by 2023/24.⁴ Another study suggests that 131 English councils face bankruptcy or cuts because of the pandemic.⁵

Libraries' experience of lockdown therefore presents a particularly acute set of challenges and important questions about digital and in-person services. With social distancing restrictions now in place until at least Spring 2021 and likely beyond, significant change is the emerging trend in our research, but different scenarios could emerge for public libraries which need to be considered.

Libraries' experience during lockdown points to a potential renaissance, in which the huge contribution made towards supporting communities during this unprecedented crisis puts them front-and-centre of communities' social and economic recovery. Opportunities for extending digital engagement are married with library staff's strengths in supporting wellbeing for individuals, combatting isolation and bringing people together, while potentially reinventing how the library offer is delivered physically as well as digitally.

Such an outcome is obviously not a given. As well as pressure on budgets, the library sector is not alone in wondering to what extent customer habits may be changed permanently by the pandemic, similar to discussions raised in other cultural sectors like cinema and theatre.

The evidence in this report is encouraging but charting a course towards a more positive future for libraries will continue to require the considerable leadership and collaboration within the sector that it demonstrated during lockdown. It will also require a commitment to funding, investment and partnership from government, to ensure that the benefits of the strongest library services become the standard which the public can expect wherever they live.

³ <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14977>

⁴ <https://www.local.gov.uk/re-thinking-public-finances>

⁵ <https://www.progressive-policy.net/publications/why-the-government-needs-to-pay-up-before-levelling-up>



The lockdown timeline for public libraries

The timeline affecting UK library services was complex, with the English, Welsh and Northern Irish governments issuing separate guidelines at different times. Table 1.1 provides some of the key milestones which set the context for these nuances which we refer to during the report but have not been explored in detail.

Table 1.1: Public libraries timeline during lockdown

Date	Key events
w/c 9 March	Public libraries begin to restrict services, reduce hours and close some branches.
20 March	Northern Ireland libraries begin to close.
23 March	English public libraries required to close under Government announcement of national lockdowns.
1 April	Announcement of additional funds for digital resources in Wales by Welsh Government.
7 April	Libraries Connected launches #LibrariesfromHome website.
23 April	Announcement of additional funds for digital resources in England by ACE.
8 May	First Minister Mark Drakeford announces that Libraries in Wales can begin to plan to re-open.
11 May	Welsh Government Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) amended to allow libraries to reopen.
Early June	First library services reopen in Torfaen and Cardiff. Other Welsh libraries begin opening over the course of the month.
29 June	Libraries Connected publishes Service Recovery Toolkit.
4 July	English libraries permitted to re-open under UK Government roadmap.
13 July	Welsh Government publishes guidance on re-opening cultural sector including libraries.
16 July	Joint DCMS/LGA letter to Councils on public library service recovery (see Appendix iv).
20 July	Northern Ireland libraries start to re-open.



Purpose of the report

This research report explores the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown on public library services across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. Our findings reveal the scale and scope of libraries' support for communities during the lockdown despite physical libraries being entirely closed. They also highlight some of the challenges and barriers which library staff experienced in trying to do more for their communities.

Our recommendations are intended to inform policymaking about service recovery; gaps in provision and support for vulnerable groups; and strategic policymaking as government and councils address the likely funding crisis and requirements to reconfigure local services. It also complements other research underway within the sector during the second half of 2020, including LGA case studies and the Carnegie Trust workforce and public attitudes survey.⁶

Background to the report

The research aims to address questions about the services which libraries were able to continue online, and what factors acted as enablers or barriers. It also explores how public library staff were redeployed by councils to support the pandemic response, and what skills and experience were most valued by councils. Our research questions focused on:

- The extent of digital engagement and use of digital library services during the lockdown
- What lessons can be learned from gaps in provision, particularly among vulnerable groups
- How redeployed staff were used to deliver other services during the lockdown.

Structure of the report

Each section of the report follows a consistent structure:

- **Key findings** summarising our interpretation of the data
- **Detailed analysis** of the data from our survey, interviews and other datasets
- **Short 'postcards'** from heads of service, illustrating the key findings and the range of experience across the country and feedback from colleagues and users
- **Seven case studies** across the report telling a fuller picture of the major stories and successes which emerge from the research
- **Recommendations** for national and local governments, sector bodies, and library services.

⁶ *Making a Difference: Libraries, lockdown and looking ahead, Carnegie UK Trust, Oct 2020.*



2. Methodology

Research plan

In investigating how libraries were able to support their communities during lockdown we framed our approach through the following research questions:

- What particular benefits did libraries deliver and what public health risks did they help to mitigate?
- What lessons can be learned from gaps in provision, particularly among vulnerable groups?
- What does their contribution tell us about the potential role of libraries in lockdown and recovery?

We particularly asked:

- How did the lockdown audience compare to the usual audience?
- Who missed out or was left behind?
- What skills and assets enabled services to continue?
- What barriers did services meet in trying to deliver services?
- What partnerships were paused?
- What skills and capacities were valued in library staff?

We structured our research around three key areas:

- The extent of digital engagement and use of digital library services during the lockdown
- Libraries' efforts to continue delivering services to their users
- How redeployed staff were used to contribute to the local pandemic response.

Our research plan comprised a mixed methodology including a survey of all heads of service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, interviews with a sample of heads of service and an analysis of available provider data about digital resource usage during lockdown.

Survey

Heads of library services were asked to complete a 30-minute online survey exploring the impact of libraries during the lockdown.

The response data generated has provided vital quantitative and qualitative evidence to help with future strategic planning. It is also intended to be used to help positively inform national stakeholders, and assist Libraries Connected in ensuring library services can access the best possible support and advice in the future.

The survey questions explored audience engagement, the services that were able to be provided during lockdown, staff redeployment and advice, and the perceptions of the support on offer to help heads of service manage library services during the lockdown.

A PDF copy of the survey is available from the Activist website: <https://www.activistgroup.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/LC.pdf>.

The survey attracted 132 responses (see Appendix i for a summary of the survey responses by region). Survey responses covered all governance models: local authority in-house services, commissioned services (both charitable and private sector), arms-length bodies and shared services. A summary of the survey responses, split by governance model, is shown in Appendix ii.



Interviews

Video interviews were conducted with 18 individual heads of service (or managers with libraries within a wider portfolio). We also gathered data from many other Heads of Services informally, who shared their thoughts and experiences in confidence. For the full list, please see Appendix iii.

Libraries Connected and Activist Group would like to thank all Heads of Service and library staff who offered us their valuable time, energy and thoughtful contributions towards the findings and recommendations made in this research report, while working at such a challenging time.

Provider data

RBdigital kindly supplied Libraries Connected with usage data for the lockdown period. While not fully reflecting the entire market's data, this data from one of the sector's main providers offers valuable insight into library users' behaviours and trends in usage during lockdown.



3. Library membership and usage during lockdown

Introduction

While library buildings were closed, people were only able to join online to access many library resources, although much of the guidance and information libraries provide online is available without needing to sign up. Library membership is counted in different ways, with 'active membership' being calculated on a rolling basis year-on-year, while digital memberships are registered separately to access licensed services like ebooks. In this section we focus on how libraries signed up new members for digital services.

Key findings

- Despite library buildings being closed for four months, library services managed to increase membership by up to 32%, while total library membership remained stable during this period
- Membership to access digital resources increased by 27% with some library services more than doubling the number of those signing up for these services
- Data collection about the demographic profile of new members is patchy and compounded by restrictions on collecting data from third-party platforms which libraries used to broadcast digital content
- Library services are most concerned about the impact of libraries being closed on those without internet access, people living alone and jobseekers.

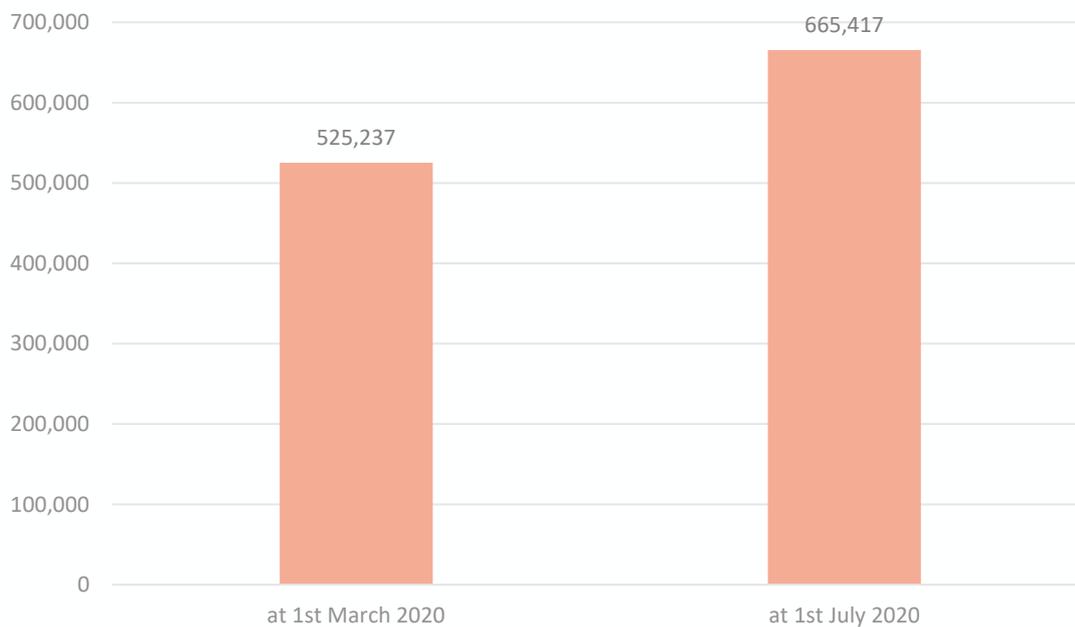
Library membership

Overall library membership held fairly steady during the lockdown, considering physical services were closed for four months. Of 92 services who provided figures, total membership declined by 1% between 1 March and 1 July. Across the country, this picture masks a significant range between those services whose membership increased significantly (by up to 32%), and those whose membership fell (by up to 24%). The decreases were often due to special factors, such as services taking the opportunity in the lockdown to cleanse their membership database. See appendix v for a summary of the differences in membership levels between authorities.



Library members signing up for digital resources

Figure 3.1: Increase in digital sign-ups after the national lockdown in 2020



User demographics and library data collection

Of 110 respondents, 70 (64%) said they collected no data about new members who signed up online during the lockdown. 40 (36%) said they did collect demographic data for these members.

Of those who did collect demographic data only age and gender were being collected by most services. Ethnicity was being monitored by 35%, sexuality by 16% and employment status by 2%.

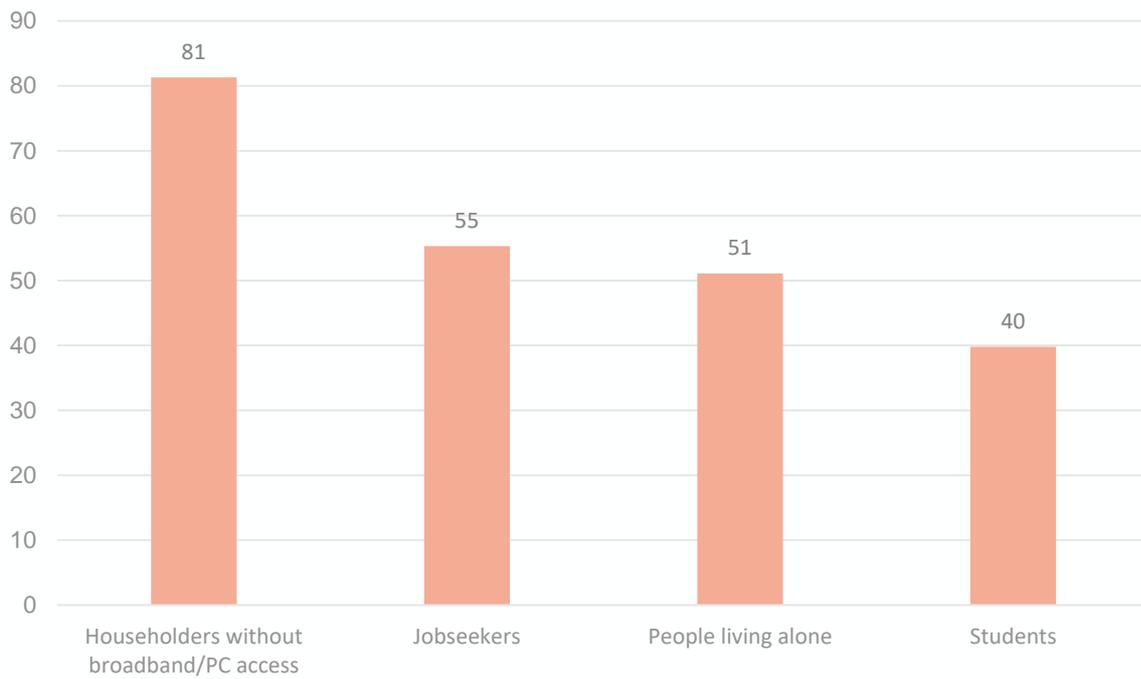
An even smaller number of services (24) were able to estimate the change in membership levels among different demographic groups, underlining a potential gap in data and intelligence about users.

Generally, respondents said that the impact on their ability to reach most groups was neither positive nor negative, with small minorities reporting both 'very positive' for some groups (e.g. older people (13%)) and very negative (older people (12%)).

In contrast, respondents were clear that the impact of a lack of physical library services on many groups was high (rated 5), particularly for people living alone (51%), jobseekers (55%) and households without internet/computer access (81%). Lowest impact (rated 1-2) were for local businesses (38%), freelance workers (28%) and rural communities (23%)



Figure 3.2: User groups experiencing most impact due to lack of access to services



These figures point to a significant challenge for library services. Many have taken the positive decision, either as general policy, or a response to the lockdown, to make sign-up as easy as possible, with as few barriers as possible. However, the absence of demographic data about users will impact on libraries' ability to target services according to need and monitor the impact of service changes on particular groups within the community. Clearly a balance needs to be struck between these two priorities, now that the immediate crisis is receding.

Furthermore, while data aggregators are providing increasingly useful local data on usage, third-party platforms which took off as part of the digital offer, such as Facebook and YouTube, present challenges in monitoring and analysing audiences in a way that would help library services tailor their offer.



4. #LibrariesfromHome – a dynamic response

Introduction

As in other areas of cultural consumption and community services during the lockdown, public libraries expanded their digital services to support users in a number of ways, which demonstrate the impact and potential of the digital offer, while also underlining how much physical services were missed by many people.

The market for online resources, particularly ebooks has developed significantly in recent years, although there the costs and licensing models for online publications are considerably higher.

Equally important to the library offer, many services moved physical events online, often exploring digital meeting and broadcasting platforms for the first time. In this section we explore evidence of the scale and impacts of these trends during the lockdown, and their implication for the future direction of library services.

Key findings

- Digital lending increased significantly during lockdown. Ebook use increased by 146%. These increases were largely sustained as libraries re-opened.
- Despite the significant increases in digital lending, its scale is still small compared to lending of physical material.
- The increased investment in digital lending by library services may double its costs in this calendar year, which is unlikely to be sustainable.
- Over 75% of library services delivered #librariesfromhome events. More than half 56% increased their audience for events during lockdown, despite 63% saying they had limited experience in delivering events online. Many staff developed new skills and confidence in delivering online events.
- The impact of this digital engagement was beneficial for families and individuals in lockdown but may have exacerbated existing digital divides.
- Some library services were restricted in their digital engagement, particularly in the first weeks of lockdown by corporate policies, IT systems and lack of equipment.
- Even services with the strongest online offer recognise that the usability and interactivity of the digital public library offer still requires significant improvement to match popular commercial retail and streaming services.

Digital lending patterns

Lockdown saw significant increases in digital lending by public libraries. This was evident very early in the lockdown and widely reported in the media.⁷ In England, ACE provided £150,000 to expand ebook collections. The Welsh Government provided an additional £250,000 for ebooks in Welsh library services. In March 2020, Libraries NI invested an additional £783,540 in ebooks. Many other services invested additional resources from their own budgets to increase availability of the most popular titles.⁸

Our survey asked public libraries to provide figures on checkouts of online resources in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period last year. The following section details the total percentage for each of these and the range across all library services who provided figures. Important factors influencing the performance of some library services include when they started offering new online resources.

⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-52368191>.

⁸ *In Wales a single consortium operates for ebook licences via Borrowbox.*

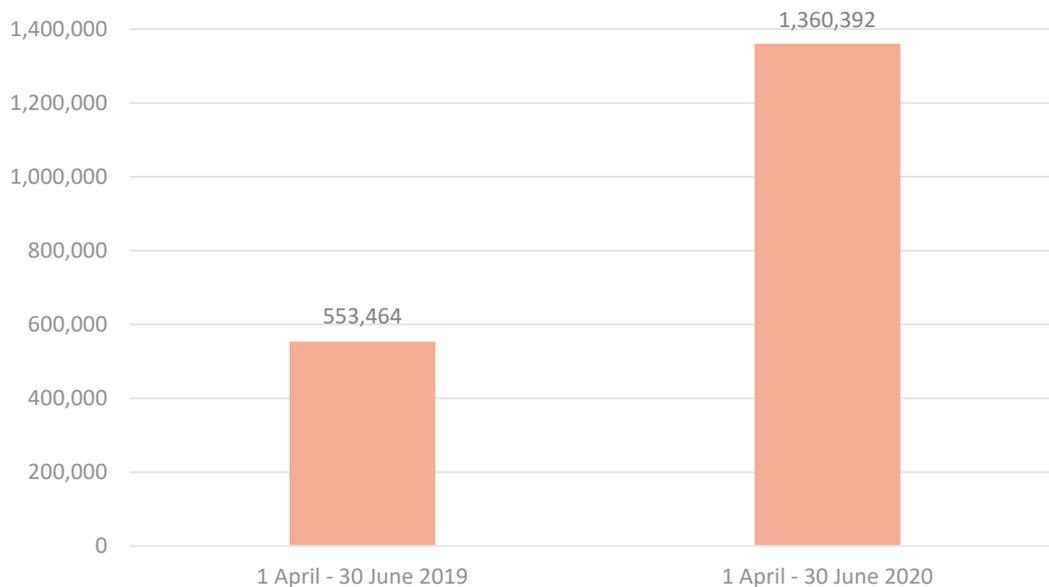


Many services are now investigating how they can tackle the evident problem of digital exclusion among residents who are most in need and isolated, providing equipment and training to help them access the digital offer.

Ebook checkouts

Based on our survey, among the 100 services which provided data, ebook usage increased by 146%. Increases in individual services ranged between 38% and 714% (see Appendix v for more on the variations between authorities).

Figure 4.1: Increase in ebook checkouts during lockdown



Bolinda (one of the UK market's main online resource providers) reported a 110% increase in total loans compared to the same period in 2019.⁹

Figures provided by RBdigital (with around 25% of the UK market) reveal the pattern of lending week by week during the lockdown. This shows that ebook and audiobook checkouts increased rapidly during the first weeks of lockdown until the week beginning 10 April when they reached a peak. These increases were sustained until early May, and have, since libraries started to re-open, seen only a modest decrease to stand at 10,791 active ebook users and 15,928 active audiobook users in the week commencing 14 August.

⁹ <https://gov.wales/libraries-introduce-click-and-collect-service>



Table 4.1: Snapshot of active users supplied by RBdigital¹⁰

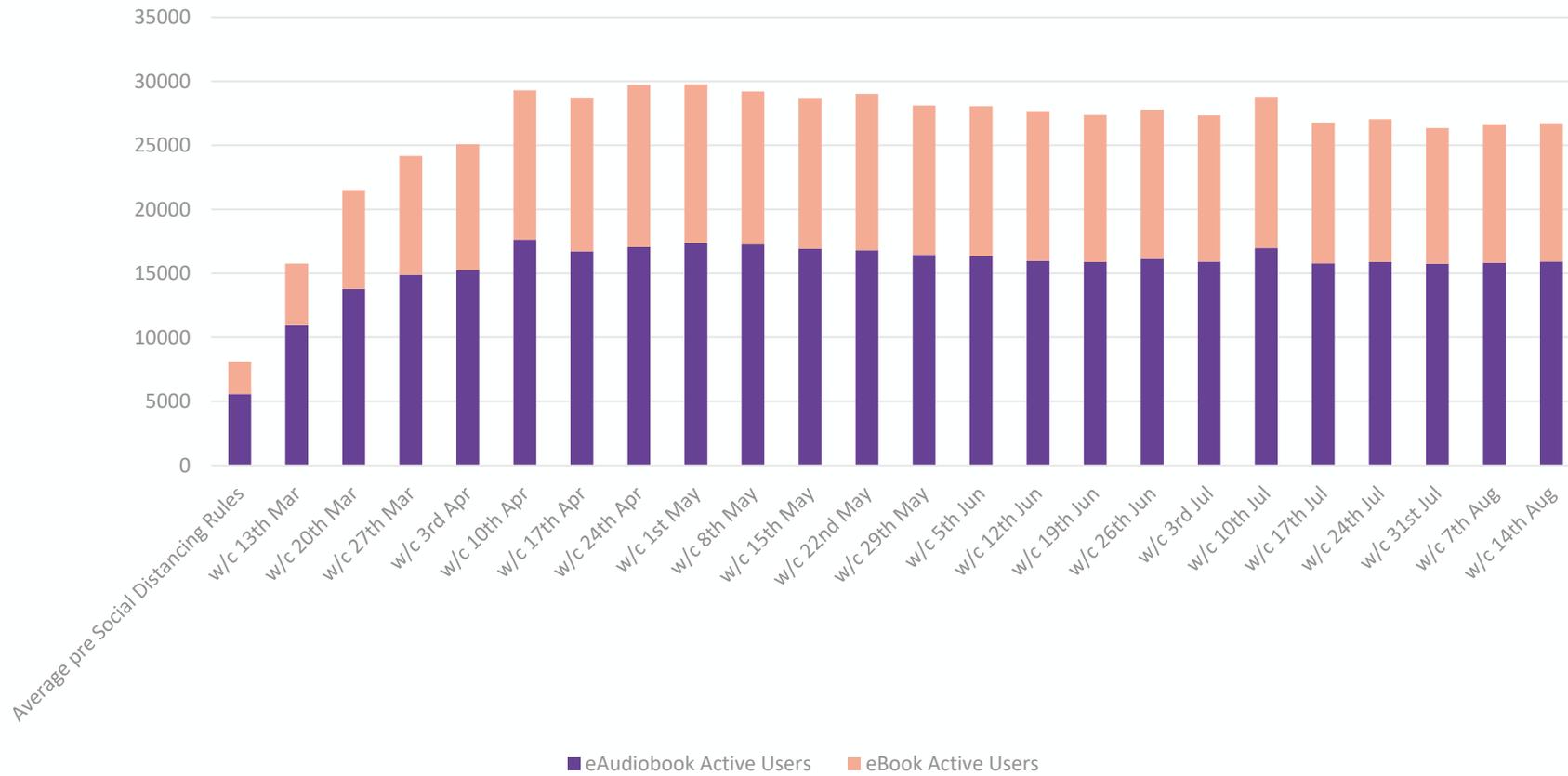
Product	Average pre social distancing rules	w/c 13 Mar	w/c 14 Aug	Increase ¹¹
Audiobook active users	5,566	10,942	15,928	+186%
Ebook active users	2,544	4,833	10,791	+324%
Magazine active users	66,857	68,790	85,243	+28%
Comic active users	247	324	647	+162%
Total	75,213	84,889	112,609	+50%

¹⁰ Source: 'RBdigital COVID-19 analysis 27.08.2020', shared with Libraries Connected.

¹¹ Percentage increase from pre-social distancing average to w/c 14 Aug.



Figure 4.2: RBdigital data on active book users from March to August 2020¹²

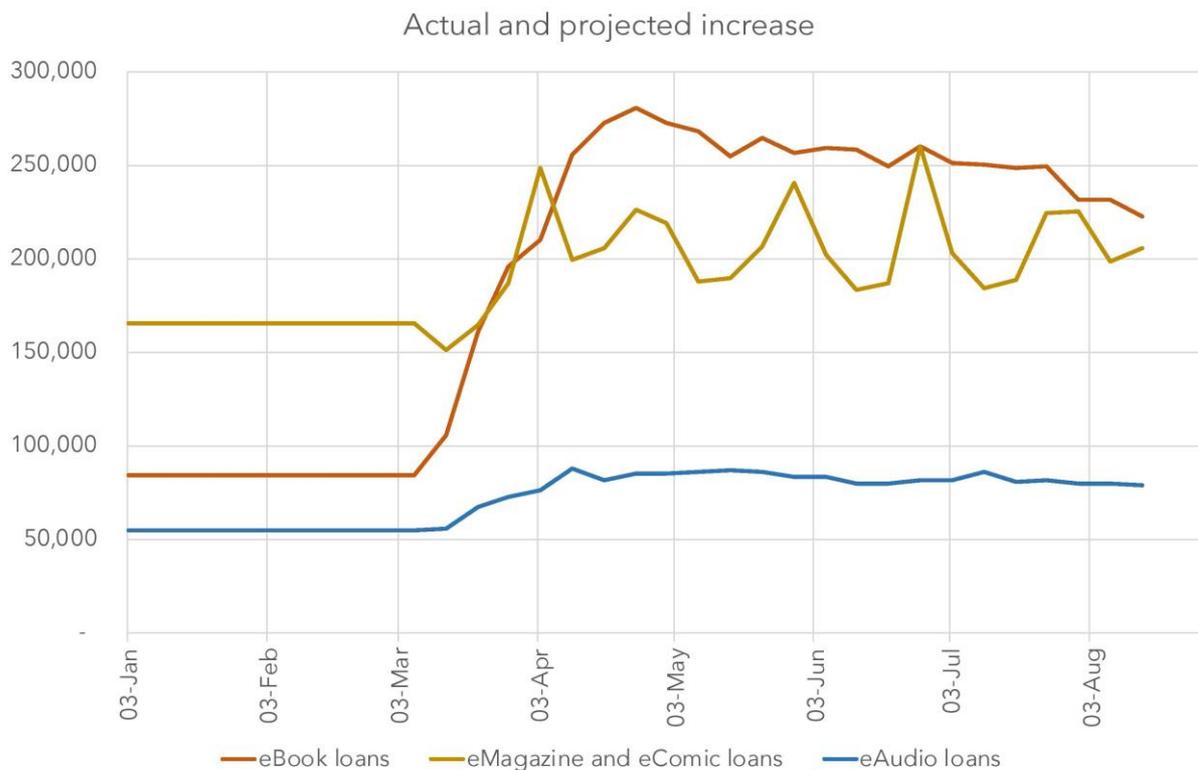


¹² Source: 'RBdigital COVID-19 analysis 27.08.2020', shared with Libraries Connected.



Using the available data, Libraries Connected estimated that levels of borrowing continued to remain at or above the levels of 10 April for ebooks and around the same level for audiobooks – see Figure 4.3 below.

Figure 4.3: Libraries Connected analysis of RBdigital data – August 2020



Libraries Connected’s initial analysis identified and developed a model showing the projected need and use in lockdown, assuming a level plateau at 10 April. This continued until the start of July, before tapering back to the previous level, with additional increases of 25%-50% to factor in an expected permanent change in service users’ reading habits.

This suggests that digital borrowing was not just a ‘fad’ at the start of lockdown. After experiencing an initial surge, the higher level of demand has been sustained.

These patterns are broadly consistent with other research on digital cultural consumption during lockdown, for example TV, film and performing arts streaming and purchasing (see for example CIPEC, Digital Culture: consumption in lockdown, August 2020).

Libraries Connected’s analysis suggests the increased cost of providing this unprecedented access to online lending could exceed current annual spending of £4m on online resources. Heads of library services are therefore concerned that this additional investment may not be sustainable, particularly as budgets come under pressure. As the current licensing model continues to operate restrictively for public libraries, public expectation of availability increases may outstrip supply. This is particularly the case for children’s ebooks where traditionally the demand for these has been lower than for adult titles.

Lending of other online resources also saw large increases in checkouts during lockdown. The survey revealed:

- Audiobook checkouts during lockdown increased by 113%
- Magazine checkouts increased by 80%

- Newspaper checkouts increased by 223%
- Comic checkouts increased by 497%.

Again there were substantial variations between authorities (see appendix v). While the increases were often from a low base, some other authorities already had a mature digital platform and user base from which they could expand rapidly.

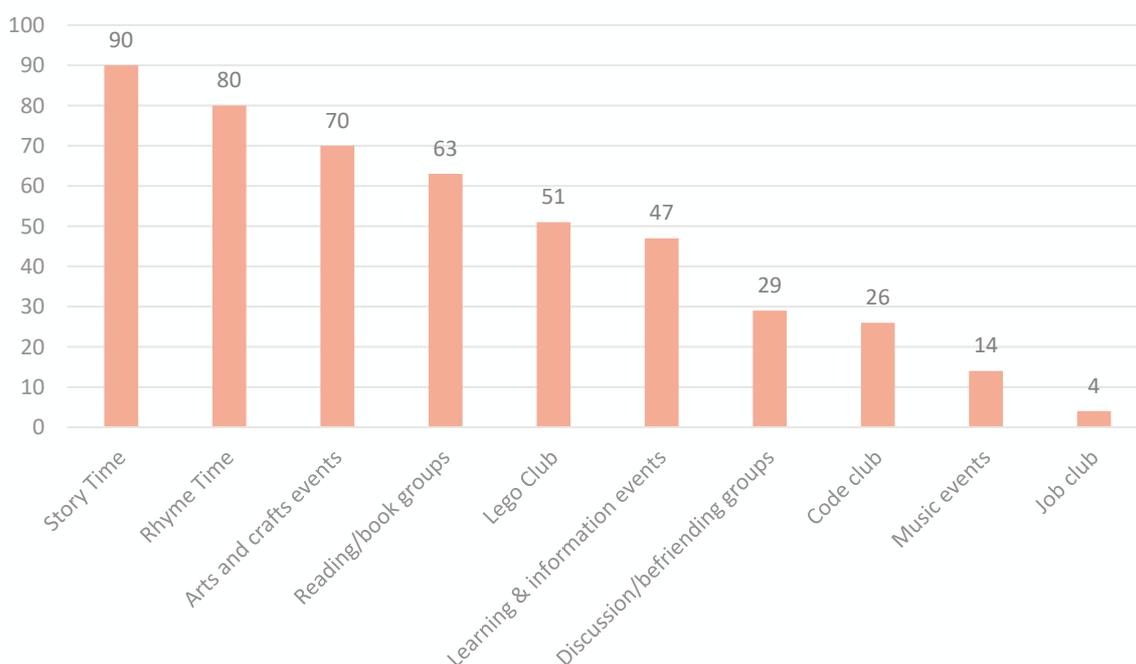
#LibrariesfromHome events online

Week-in and week-out, physical events in public libraries span an enormous range of activities, from book-based groups to arts, crafts, hacking and coding and support for health and wellbeing and employment. Delivering events online during lockdown enabled many library services to keep in touch with users and reach new audiences.

This was a major innovation for most services which revealed untapped staff skills and resourcefulness, but also presented many challenges, which we explore in this section. Some of these activities, for example online storytimes, were only possible because Libraries Connected and individual library services were able to negotiate relaxed copyright restrictions with publishers.

Over 75% of library services (104 of 132 respondents) were delivering #LibrariesfromHome events during lockdown. Storytimes, rhymetimes, arts and crafts, reading/book groups and Lego clubs were the activities programmed by the most library services (over 50% of 104 total respondents).

Figure 4.4: the number of authorities delivering #LibrariesfromHome events



Slightly more than half of library services (56%) managed to increase their event audience online compared to their physical programme while 44% reached fewer people.

A number of factors influenced the quantity and quality of online events that libraries were able to deliver. A good social media presence (80%), strong staff digital skills (77%) and strong senior management/political support (68%) were most important.

The survey asked for free text responses about the types of impacts they had seen from delivering #LibrariesfromHome events, some of which we quote below. Common examples were:



- Online events raised the profile and reputation of the library service with elected members and senior officers, specifically as an asset or exemplar service during the pandemic
- They raised the library service's profile within the community as a different channel of communication and support
- They brought staff together, helped them develop new skills, and supported their own wellbeing
- They highlighted gaps in digital capacity and skills, and low levels of online resources and licences in some places
- The audience for online events was often significantly different to physical events, for example more women participating, or engaging with people who might not usually have come to a library building
- Many services are now re-thinking options for digital provision in the future to build on the lockdown experience and address the reality of the digital divide.

'The new, expanded digital offer by the library service was seen by senior council officers and the Chief Executive as 'exemplar'. It was regularly referenced in internal communications as a good example of how the library service was proactive in using digital as a means of interacting with citizens and providing much needed support and service delivery during these difficult times.'

'Staff gained a lot of digital skills and confidence. Some staff had never been on social media and loved the new world presented to them and accessed far beyond work. This helped combat social isolation of staff and we were able to get devices to staff to engage online if we felt they were particularly digitally isolated.'

Impacts for the community of #LibrariesfromHome events included the following:

- Strong positive feedback from users for online library services, and anecdotal evidence of profound benefits for individual and family wellbeing
- Clear and widespread reporting of concern about the impact of poor digital access, including connectivity, equipment, skills and motivation within the community, making digital library services 'niche' even if use has increased
- The potential for the public to become more involved in running library events.

'I think [online Code Club is] a great success. My two 10-year-olds thoroughly enjoyed the projects and on completion happily searched for more to do that were more complex once they had gained their confidence.'

'[Rhymetime online is] Great! My daughter grumbles every time we pass our library as she misses wriggles so much!'

'This is brilliant we will be watching every week'



'I introduced my elderly auntie to Borrowbox who, being registered blind and mostly housebound, is a real boon for her. Thanks everyone involved in this service that helps avoid mental health issues!'

'My life became even more difficult when I had a stroke which badly affected my eyesight. I couldn't read at all! Thanks to your audiobook service, I was able to distract myself from the worry and stress and keep myself on an even keel. So you can see how your wonderful Library Service helps one person to feel human in adversity!'

'Joining this [online reading] group is the best thing I have done for me for years. It has made the world of difference to me, even more so in the present circumstances. I just love it.'

Library services received particularly strong feedback from parents and families that online resources, #LibrariesfromHome events, and newsletters and other communication from library staff, made an enormous contribution to supporting learning and home schooling during the lockdown.

'Thank you for the amazing online library resources which you have built up at no additional costs to the user. It's so good to be able to offer this to the school community at a time when I think [they] will be appreciated possibly for the first time by many families.' [Feedback from a schoolteacher]

'Feedback tells us it helped parents home-schooling children, seeing staff provided a touch of normality, the activities and econtent gave people something productive to do'

'The service supported the delivery of laptops to a large number of vulnerable children to support online learning.'

'Parents posted that their children were learning new language and skills by watching and participating in Singing Bears, and that seeing familiar faces and hearing familiar rhymes gave a slice of 'normality' to the children who would usually visit the library.'

The #LibrariesfromHome experience required staff to adapt quickly and learn new skills. The first weeks of the lockdown were often challenging, with staff trying to overcome barriers to making content, getting it online and reaching audiences. A number of key barriers were cited by heads of service, 'limited experience in delivering events online' (66%), 'inflexible IT systems' (47%) and 'staff redeployment' (37%) were the most frequently cited.

'My council had a complete comms lockdown. We weren't allowed to do marketing or use social media unless it was signed off centrally. So we weren't able to communicate the digital offer for about three weeks. I learned that as long as you didn't mention COVID or a change of service you could do things. Gradually we found some work-arounds but it was frustrating when I saw what other library services were able to do to build an online audience.'

'People without means to digital have been impacted really negatively - They were not able to borrow books for nearly four months, they did not have access to our virtual services nor could they keep in touch with families or apply for jobs. Many children from low income families were unable to take part in the activities that we moved online or get support to participate in Summer Reading Challenge. We were also unable to run our fit, fed, read programme,



which would have ensured children from low income families would also be provided with food to support their health and well-being.'



Case study 1: Suffolk Libraries - lockdown as a platform for a digital revolution in libraries

Summary

Suffolk Libraries entered lockdown with a strong digital service and were able to deliver significant online content during lockdown which is now at the heart of a new recovery strategy for a layered approach to meeting local needs at a granular level.

Scope

Lockdown meant losing the most powerful part of what Suffolk Libraries provide beyond book lending - a programme of 15,000 physical events annually across 44 sites with over 200,000 attendances, meeting very specific local needs particularly in health and wellbeing. During lockdown they reached over 2,300 people through Facebook Live events every day for three months online.

They began by asking what staff could contribute in terms of online content, conducting a skills audit, deploying those who were ready and offering skills training to others. All libraries already had their own Facebook pages and could therefore create content to engage their local communities. They created a total of just over 2,500 live streamed sessions between March and June engaging nearly 100,000 people.

They also considered what they could do for those unable to access digital content, particularly vulnerable and elderly people. Between March and June they made over 6,700 targeted calls to those they knew would benefit most, recording call details using Google forms. They described it as 'the most impactful thing we did during lockdown'. The calls have continued and to date staff have made more than 8,000.

What's unique

Having invested in a strong digital offer as the first library spin-out Suffolk could take advantage of their independence from the Council's website. Following lockdown their own website was transformed in a matter of days to reflect the new digital offer. Yet Bruce Leeke is far from complacent. 'Our public facing site is good, but it's still not good enough or totally reflective of the breadth of our offer. In lockdown more than ever we were competing with Netflix and YouTube.'

Suffolk understands that data continues to be a huge challenge. Just one branch library, Southwold, reached an average of 500 people per event with users coming from as far as Australia. But getting valuable user data for marketing beyond this is difficult through third party platforms.

Results

Now this approach is at the heart of the service's new strategic plan, which is a 'layered' offer aiming to join up services to meet user needs rather than a reaction to an emergency situation. As Bruce says, 'If you're an older vulnerable person - what is your route into the library now? What tech do you need? Can we support that process from our IT team? In this uncertain new world what could we be doing to offer new services to local people?'

Key learning point

'We've got to make sure that we look at staff skills in a completely different way to deliver a layered service and be as adaptable and flexible as possible. Our aim is to continue to keep people happy, healthy and together.'



5. Remote library services – opportunity knocks

Introduction

In this section we look at responses from library services about the remote services they were still able to deliver during the lockdown, principally home library services (HLS), school library services (SLS), and keep-in-touch calls (KIT calls). Remote library services were important for maintaining contact with users, particularly vulnerable people during the lockdown. They also presented opportunities to support those without digital access.

Key findings

- Library staff demonstrated essential skills and capabilities, which were highly valued by councils in responding to the pandemic, particularly customer service and communication and for their flexible and collaborative approach to working with colleagues and partners
- 60% of services managed to continue delivering a Home Library Service, providing vital comfort and books to very vulnerable users
- Almost one in five library services operated an ‘enhanced’ Home Library Service open to more people, with additional support to help combat loneliness and improving digital skills
- The availability of older volunteers was a significant factor for many services in whether they could deliver a Home Library Service during lockdown
- Keep-in-touch (KIT) calls were a major intervention reaching 100,000s of people nationally, and showcasing library services and staff skills and knowledge to council colleagues
- Remote services will continue to be an important vehicle for creating a ‘blended’ or ‘hybrid’ service marrying the digital and physical offer to reach those who need library services most.

Keep-in-touch (KIT) or ‘befriending’ calls

KIT calls were widely used by councils and voluntary organisations to offer support and comfort to shielding, isolated and vulnerable citizens during the lockdown. Many library services delivered these calls either directly within the library service structure, or while redeployed to other council teams.

The impact for communities and staff was profound, with many instances of vital interventions to combat isolation and mental health problems, and ensure people were able to access essential services. These were often challenging situations for staff but enabled many to build on existing skills and see the contribution of the library service to the community in a new light.

From 72 survey respondents who were able to give figures for the number of KIT calls they made, a total of 131,425 calls were made in the period between 1 March and 30 June, reaching 83,427 individuals. Several services made over 10,000 calls.

The key skills and assets which libraries said helped them deliver KIT calls were ‘strong communication skills (84%), ‘availability of skilled staff’ (82%) and strong senior management/political support (55%). The main barriers they experienced were ‘staff redeployed to urgent COVID activity’ (40%), ‘staff absence’ (30%) and ‘restrictive corporate policies’ (13%).

‘One lady died and her quite elderly son who lived with her was bereft. We made daily calls to help him through his grief as he needed to talk to someone he knew but could not go out and had no one to speak to.’



'People really appreciated that someone cared enough to ring and check on them. It lifted spirits and made vulnerable residents feel supported. Many made use of our digital offer and now want to meet those library staff who phoned them and will visit the library.'



Case study 2: Barnsley Libraries - the empathy and resilience of library staff

Summary

During lockdown the majority of library staff supported the pandemic response by taking on keep-in-touch calls. The experience was often emotional and stressful but staff are already bringing the learning back to their work now libraries have reopened.

Scope

Initially library staff made befriending calls to people identified as wanting support. Over three months they spoke to 70 people, sometimes daily, building up a relationship with them, often being the only person they would speak to. Calls were scheduled, and followed up if not answered, staff even visiting to check if residents were safe.

Library staff were then asked to take on a wider set of calls of vulnerable people on behalf of the council and NHS. Library staff treated each call as an individual offer of help and assisted many people to resolve their problems and access services. They provided links to other support networks including food banks and primary care. 20,000 calls were made to nearly 12,000 households, of which 8323 were reached, making 356 referrals to help access vital support. A further 816 people who they couldn't reach received a visit from other teams. Outcomes were automatically sent to GPs for shielding patients, and staff were able to flag those requiring further support from primary care. As library staff returned to normal duties, anyone who still needed support was referred to other services to continue with the befriending calls.

What's unique

Library staff were valued because of their customer contact skills. The experience gave staff more confidence but it was emotionally challenging, helping people who were feeling suicidal or in one case a lady entitled to food help who hadn't eaten for three days. One member of staff recalled: 'I've just been talking to an amazing lady - she's a care worker managing to juggle looking after her clients, but doing so from home as she cares for her dad who's dying of cancer. I'm taking a break after that.'

Positive feedback on the calls often left staff feeling overwhelmed. This work has done a lot for the profile of the library service in the Council and the team were put forward for a recognition award. It has brought staff closer together. They also learned more about technology having been thrown in at the deep-end working from home at the beginning of the lockdown. Kathryn Green, Head of Library Services, says 'We've never taken on such a big project with these partners, and it's shown what library service staff could achieve for the NHS and CCG.'

Results

Crucially, Barnsley now have an individual level picture of who has been contacted, when they were contacted, and what their outcomes were. Now that Barnsley libraries have reopened staff are bringing back this experience to enhance their customer service role having seen its impact in such close focus.

Key learning point

Kathryn says 'As we welcome people back gradually, we're caught between wanting to do more and doing things safely, starting with the foundations. When we start up more with events we can show we're ready to take things on as a partner who can deliver for health and social care.'

For further information

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/libraries/>

School library services

There are currently 69 school library services (SLS) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the majority of which are provided by public library services. For many library services these are seen as essential and operate as a paid-for offer to schools. With most schools operating online lessons only, except for



children of key workers and vulnerable pupils, opportunities to continue delivering an SLS during lockdown were limited. Of 28 survey respondents who are SLS providers, 19 offered a restricted or no service during lockdown, and nine provided a standard or enhanced service.

Among those who managed to offer a 'standard' or 'enhanced' service, examples were cited of increased use of their online resources, use of social media to contact school staff, and the importance of maintaining engagement with schools. Others offered book boxes to schools as an alternative.

Services which delivered an SLS during lockdown cited 'availability of skilled staff' (62%), 'strong commitment from schools' (41%) and 'strong senior management/political support' (35%) (34 responses). 'Lack of access to premises' (61%), 'corporate policies' (39%), and 'school commitment issues' (35%) were cited as key barriers by those trying to deliver an SLS during lockdown.

'We managed to post a huge increase in the usage of our SLS ebook/ eaudio offer, and our online news resources. We launched a new private Facebook page was to connect school staff and SLS staff, signposting online educational resources and author readings. Maintaining engagement with schools was so important for us.'

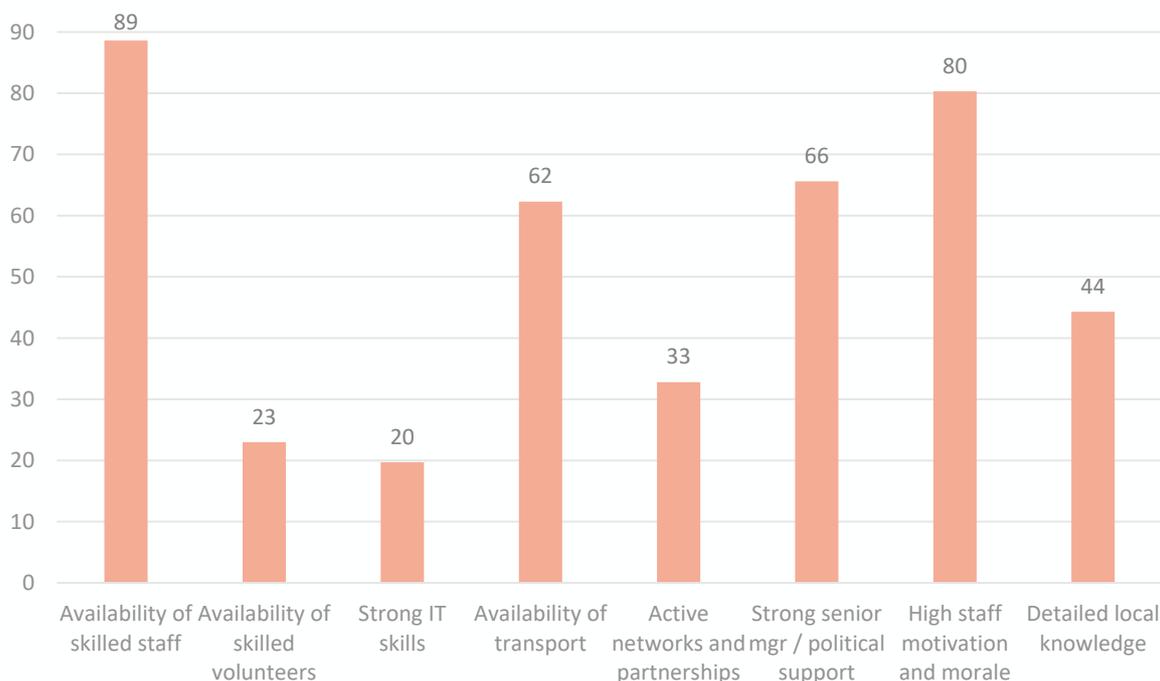
Home library services (HLS)

Home library services are normally run by most library services in the country but have a small client base of vulnerable users who cannot use in-person services. Some are delivered by volunteers, often in partnership with voluntary sector organisations. During lockdown, clearly the number of people self-isolating or shielding was many times greater and some library services widened their criteria for receiving home library services or relaxed them altogether so anyone could self-refer.

However, this was only possible for a minority of library services. Out of 107 responses, 20 said they provided an 'enhanced service' and 12 a 'standard service'. Only six services reported an increase in deliveries and eleven services reported an increase in users reached. Among respondents, the skills and resources most frequently cited as helping them deliver the HLS was the 'availability of skilled staff' (89%), 'high staff motivation and morale' (80%), 'strong senior management/political support' (66%), and 'availability of transport' (62%).



Figure 5.1: Skills and resources enabling provision of a home library service during lockdown



Thirty-two services provided a ‘restricted service’, and 41 ‘no service at all’. Key barriers cited were a lack of volunteers (51%), staff absence (sickness/shielding) (31%), staff redeployment (25%).

A major difference between the two groups was the ability to access volunteers as some voluntary sector provider volunteers were shielding.

Services which expanded targeted older library users to expand their existing HLS client base. Some services are now also looking to develop their HLS as a more integrated part of the library offer, or working with adult social care for example.

‘One Home Library Service user told me that when I first phoned her on the 21 April (as part of library service calls to potentially vulnerable customers) she was so overwhelmed that the library service had made the effort to contact her that she just cried with relief after she had put the phone down.’



Case study 3: Bracknell Forest home library service: going above and beyond

Summary

From 23 March to 20 July, Bracknell Forest took the rare step of expanding their home library service (HLS) during lockdown, extending their offer to anyone who was self-isolating, aged over 70, or vulnerable and in need.

Scope

HLS normally operates with one dedicated full-time Supervisor / Driver, supported by a 0.15 fte of a full-time Senior Library Assistant's workload. During lockdown, they both worked full-time on the extended service, along with a number of branch staff. While expanding its offer, HLS had to contend with staff and volunteer absence (mostly due to sickness/shielding).

Stock was quarantined at Bracknell Central Library for 72 hours before being reissued, with all deliveries double-bagged up to 48 hours in advance by staff using PPE. The bagging enables residents to put the items to one side and leave sealed if they want to.

What's unique

Many library staff were moved across to HLS activities, helping customers, plus expanding the offer to the wider community and signing them up. 'Staff discussed with residents where to leave the deliveries (e.g. on doorsteps or in a designated area).

We also did a quick welfare check on the wellbeing of our residents - we didn't just dump and run like a courier!'. Conscious of the forthcoming demand, Bracknell Forest also purchased additional book licences – 'we invested in £10,000 of additional ebook titles for our residents'.

Results

HLS delivered significant increases, moving from 429 deliveries to 75 users in Apr-Jun 2019, to 1,964 deliveries to 1,044 users in Apr-Jun 2020 - 'we still have new people joining us now'.

Staff have been busy but are very positive about the work they are undertaking. 'We conducted check-in calls with the over-70s in Bracknell Forest, to see if they were OK during lockdown. Quite a few residents have joined this way - many of them do not use ICT, so they didn't know about HLS'.

HLS has received a lot of positive feedback. 'It has been a big success. Our most prolific readers can call to arrange a delivery. We offered an almost tailor-made service, free of charge, during lockdown, so residents were very happy - HLS is so well received!'.

Key learning points

'Our residents were very appreciative of the support they received throughout lockdown. We received so many positive comments and letters, saying that HLS had meant such a lot and, in some cases, saved people's lives just by seeing a friendly face and having a weekly chat'.

For further information

To find out more about Bracknell Forest library service's lockdown experiences, and how library staff adopted non-traditional roles, click here to watch a short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAxPlxwa3Hk>



6. How library staff supported the local pandemic response

Introduction

Like other teams within local council services which were closed during lockdown, many library staff were redeployed to support the local pandemic response. From the 86 services which gave data, the equivalent of 1,718 full time staff were redeployed at some point during the lockdown, an average of 26% of the staff in these authorities. For some library services, this involved most or all staff being redeployed, while elsewhere very few were used in this way.

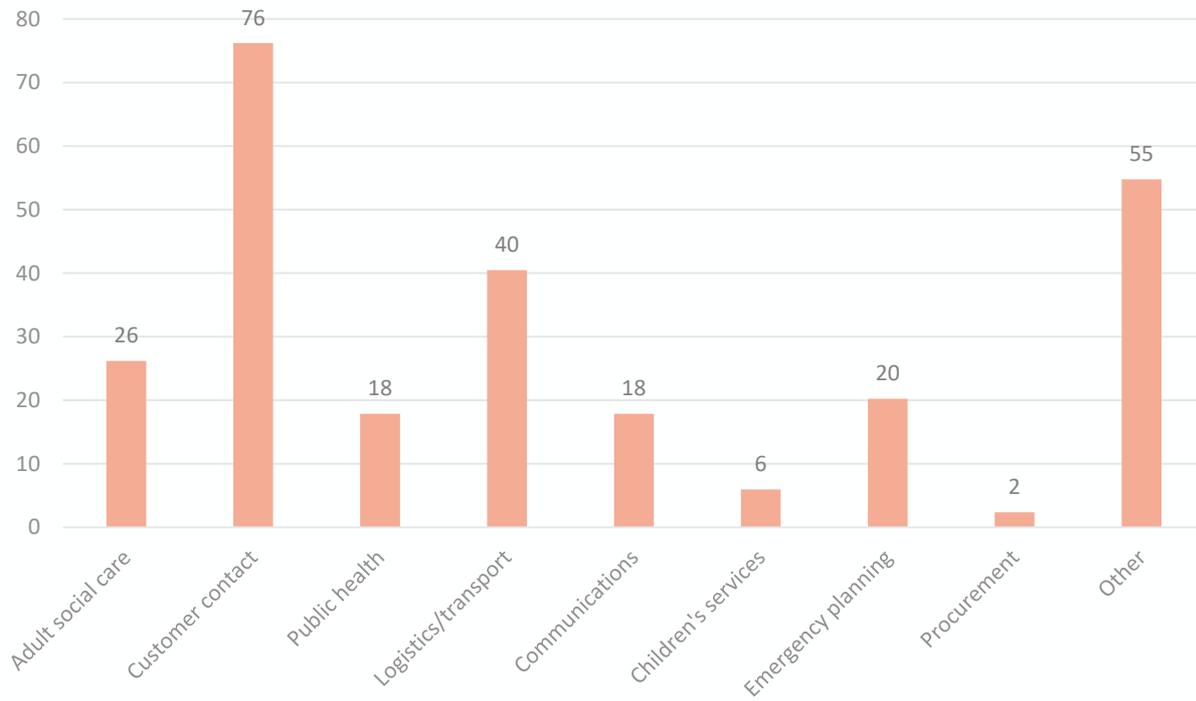
Key findings

- Redeployed library staff provided vital capacity to deliver the local pandemic response.
- Redeployment often generated a beneficial (two-way) integration of library staff with other council departments/services for supporting vulnerable people which will continue to produce value for councils in the future.
- Library staff were often singled out for praise by elected members and senior managers. Large volumes of calls and deliveries were made to residents although data collection is patchy.
- Opportunities were missed to use library staff skills more in some local authorities.

Redeployment

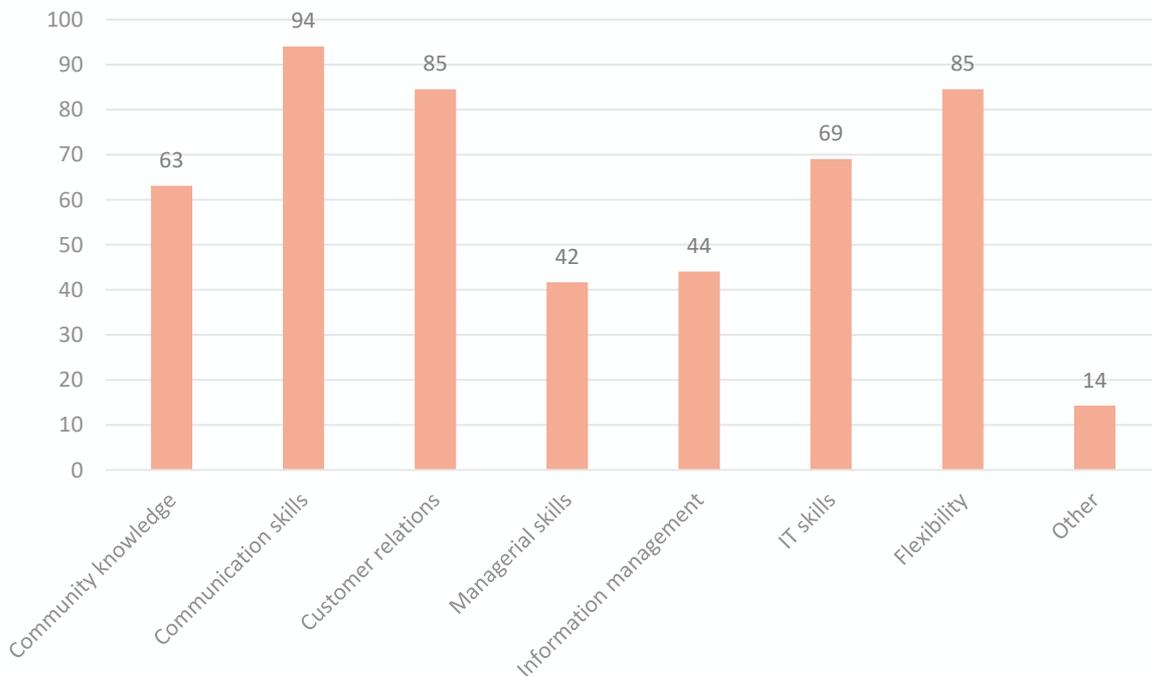
Library staff were redeployed into a wide range of roles during lockdown. Of the services responding to this question, 76% redeployed them into customer contact roles; 40% into logistics and transport; 26% into adult social care, and 20% into emergency planning.

Figure 6.1: Percentage of authorities that redeployed library staff into these roles during lockdown¹³



The skills most valued in these staff were communication skills (94%), customer relations (85%) and flexibility (85%).

Figure 6.2: Skills and capabilities required by redeployed library staff (%)



¹³ There were 84 respondents to this survey question.



The redeployment process did not allocate opportunities to all staff which they could have. Lack of IT equipment, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown restricted what staff could do, particularly working from home, though often some of these barriers were gradually overcome.

Many heads of service reported that library staff skills, particularly for digital communication, social media, and communication could have been better used by councils, particularly to support the digitally-excluded and isolated people.

‘One woman we helped was down to her last 50p, because of an error with her benefit payment and was reduced to walking into shops to ask for work, as she had no other way to find a job. Our staff were able to put her in contact with relevant charities quickly, so she could feed herself and get accommodation.’



Case study 4: Awen Cultural Trust (Bridgend BC) – re-opening safely in Wales

Summary

Awen's home delivery service was one of the first services it re-started in early June. The service is now exploring how Welsh Government grant funding (in the shape of the Culture Service Fund) can best be used to help reconfigure its future service offer.

Scope

Once lockdown came into effect, all of the trust's library staff were furloughed (except one managing the ICT systems). As lockdown eased, reopening the service was a considered and phased process. Helen Pridham, Head of Service, says 'We were going into buildings that hadn't been used for months. Following detailed risk assessments, the decision was made to unfurlough small teams, whose numbers would grow as the service expanded'.

Awen successfully reopened its first, most spacious, library with an order & collect service in early June, whilst also relaunching its housebound delivery service which had been paused during lockdown. 'We were able to do things at a safe pace. We agreed a phased reopening with our Partnership Manager at the Council, beginning work from mid-May. Our immediate priorities were staff and customer safety'.

What's unique

Every Welsh library service received £5K from the Welsh Government, with Awen focusing on PPE, developing its order & collect service and boxes for home deliveries. 'As a Trust, we had to source screens, gloves, sanitiser gel etc. We've spent about £10K on this so far. We can also bid for up to an extra £100K from Welsh Government, administered by Culture and Sport (prev. MALD). Several of our libraries have difficult access, so we'll be applying to reconfigure our reception areas, more self-service, hygienic chairs, and a website refresh'.

Results

Members have supported reopening, with all six main libraries now open. Two community libraries are also in the process but have shared usage: 'there have been hurdles for us all to work through first. We are gradually increasing our usual hours, and there has been no complaints or extra pressure. Next, we will try to open Saturdays to reach younger users'.

On return from furlough, staff contacted users to signpost them to the refreshed home delivery service - 'every user contacted wanted the service to return ASAP'. By introducing minor changes around drop-off and delivery, the service was extended - 'Users are delighted we are back! It's not quite the same service but we have been told that taking time to have a little chat on the doorstep with people is really being appreciated'.

Key learning points

'As a cultural trust, the loss of income from theatres and our trading arm will have a huge impact on us. We have a strong relationship with the Council and they've been part of our journey during lockdown. We've been very lucky so far but we know we will need to be extremely careful in the future. Working in staff bubbles has allowed us to isolate teams as required, but we do face resourcing challenges - our Council has had to enforce local lockdowns due to the rising number of COVID cases. Our staff have been incredible so far. We have a comprehensive employee support programme that has helped ensure everyone is in a good place mentally'.

For further information

To find out more about Awen Trust's library service, visit <http://www.awen-libraries.com/>



7. Re-opening and recovery – learning from lockdown

Introduction

Libraries' experience of planning for re-opening and recovery has varied enormously, due to many factors. These include how staff were deployed during the lockdown, their governance structure (whether in-house or independent), the decision-making structure and risk appetite of their local authority, and the scale and space limitations within their library estate.

Before the lockdown library services were focused on maximising visitor numbers, dwell times and space usage, so re-opening represents a wholesale re-think of their approach to managing risk, reassuring the public and protecting staff.

Key findings

- Regular users have welcomed re-opening and footfall is comparable to wider high-street patterns.
- Many library services have built up their offer gradually and are now offering browsing in addition to click-and-collect and PC access by appointment. However, there is a wide divergence between library service recovery strategies and what services are on offer, which may be confusing for the public.
- 'Blended' or 'hybrid' models of provision are emerging to meet the challenges of ongoing distancing conditions which offer exciting opportunities. However, these have resource implications which will entail planning and prioritisation to ensure value for money.
- The pandemic has inevitably increased the pressure on local authority funding and this poses a significant risk to library services.

Most library services initially prioritised reopening a limited number of sites and operating a click-and-collect style service. PC usage by appointment was the other major priority to address concerns about lack of digital access during the lockdown. By September, many had also added limited browsing, though sadly physical events were still out of scope across the country.

Re-opening library buildings to comply with government COVID guidelines inevitably limits capacity and absorbs more staff time than previously. This has a knock-on effect on budgets and the ability to reach those who are still shielding or who are wary of coming back to high streets.

Different assessments of risk and interpretation of government guidelines means there is a divergence between library services open in different authorities, often in neighbouring councils. This presents a potentially confusing offer for the public.

Many library services would like to continue elements of the additional support they offered to communities through lockdown, often on a 1-2-1 basis to help residents get online, use digital library resources or access other services. However, with the additional costs of restoring physical services, and increased expenditure on ebooks and other resources, it is clear that current capacity cannot support everything.

Creating a 'blended' or 'hybrid' offer will therefore require considerable creativity and planning by library services and sector bodies, as well as some hard choices for councils.

Case study 5: Buckinghamshire – re-opening strategy

Summary

Buckinghamshire's pragmatic and compassionate approach to reopening ensured they were one of the first services in England to do so, during a period of uncertainty about 'what the right thing to do' was within the sector.

Scope

During lockdown, Buckinghamshire strongly promoted their online offer, expanding their digital resources, supported by a refreshed marketing campaign. Staff returned to library buildings on 8 June. Ahead of this, David Jones, Head of Service, sensed 'the winds of change', with various new Council Boards convening. 'We pitched ASAP our plans for a phased reopening with appropriate safety measures. We carved our own path to get the green light – I'm so glad we did'.

What's unique

Individual staff induction meetings took place to explain the new arrangements, deliver training and discuss fears and concerns. 'We wanted to get them into the building; but also needed to understand their recent home life and support needs - what had their life been like during lockdown? We wanted to get people used to each other again'.

David's team engaged with their community library partners to share guidance and identify the support needed to restore services. 'The levels of staff fear were a challenge. We couldn't guarantee our decisions were 100% safe, but we couldn't tiptoe around. We had to take a risk-based approach based on the best possible advice available to us that day' - e.g. following WHO's 72 hours advice on quarantining items.

Results

Buckinghamshire has re-opened all of its 29 libraries but with reduced opening hours. 'It has been a massive test for our community library partnerships. We don't aim to control or manage them; we've built mutual trust up and use specific language in our shared approach together'. A lot of David's time has been spent addressing staff concerns. 'We didn't believe that library-specific conditions had been considered in the government's advice. The worst-case scenario is that I've spent money on safety equipment that wasn't officially deemed necessary in order to support and reassure my staff'.

Key learning points

David says: 'The single most important issue for me was ensuring that arrangements and supplies to reassure people were in place. The government's advice at times lacked clarity so a lot of time was spent reconciling guidance with anxieties to help us reopen safely and quickly. We've opened everything now, but the next steps will be in getting our opening hours up, restoring the full service, but we are up on our feet and working'.

Looking to the future, Buckinghamshire's vision for libraries is clear. 'We have to demonstrate and evidence our libraries' impact during calamity and crisis, as well as the opportunities our library services offer to our organisations. Given that the full financial consequences of the lockdown haven't even begun to be measured or felt yet, we must show how we are going to be an essential service contributing to the recovery'.

For further information

To find out more about Buckinghamshire library service's lockdown experiences, and how library staff adopted non-traditional roles, click here to watch a short video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf-NhvCDGeo>



Case study 6: St Helens - opening a new library during pandemic recovery

Summary

During lockdown, St Helens Library Service delivered an expanded Home Delivery Library Service and #librariesfromhome online events. While re-opening existing libraries cautiously, they have now opened the new St Helens Library in the town centre.

Scope

With few exceptions, St Helens' library staff were not redeployed during lockdown. It took a couple of weeks to mobilise and some time to get IT equipment to all staff, but they realised that both the Schools Library Service and Home Delivery Library Service needed to continue, which were back up and running in mid-April. Having staff available also meant they could begin cleaning and preparing libraries for re-opening from 27 July.

Four existing libraries re-opened at the end of July and a new St Helens Library opened in September in the World of Glass building, a voluntary sector-run museum in the canal-side regeneration area. The building work associated with opening the new library was a complex process as World of Glass staff remain furloughed. While it was easier for contractors to work in an empty building, the library service needed all appropriate certification from the charity for opening in a COVID-safe way.

What's unique

The Home Delivery Library Service was opened to anyone shielding or vulnerable and tripled its users during lockdown. Recognising the compounded isolation for people that don't engage or communicate online, the Arts and Libraries teams decided to develop 'Our Correspondence' which involved sending hand-written letters in stamped addressed envelopes to residents registered with their Home Delivery Library Service.

Written by Library Assistant, Emma Graney, the letters were sent out to approximately 180 people. Recipients were invited to respond by reflecting on their own experiences, how their lives have changed, and hopes for the future. One 86-year-old correspondent replied:

'Thank you for giving me the chance to write a letter to someone. I used to love writing and receiving responses, especially from family. I love reading, I have been so pleased to have my books delivered to my door. I want to take this opportunity to thank those people involved in this service, I love books, I love covers, I love the feel of a book in my hands.'

Results

Re-opened libraries were initially offering only browsing and loans, with PC access beginning with the new library. Previously 30% of their business was PC usage, but they will be tracking demand to see how cautious people are feeling.

Social distancing requirements mean reduced capacity for PCs but a lot of demand is for good Wi-Fi. They are looking forward to returning to physical events in their libraries as soon as conditions allow.

Key learning points

Kathryn Boothroyd, Library Services Manager, says: 'It's been incredibly challenging, a steep learning curve. You have to be patient and understand the real concerns from public health partners, and giving the general public reassurance that libraries are COVID-safe spaces.'

For further information

<https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/libraries/>

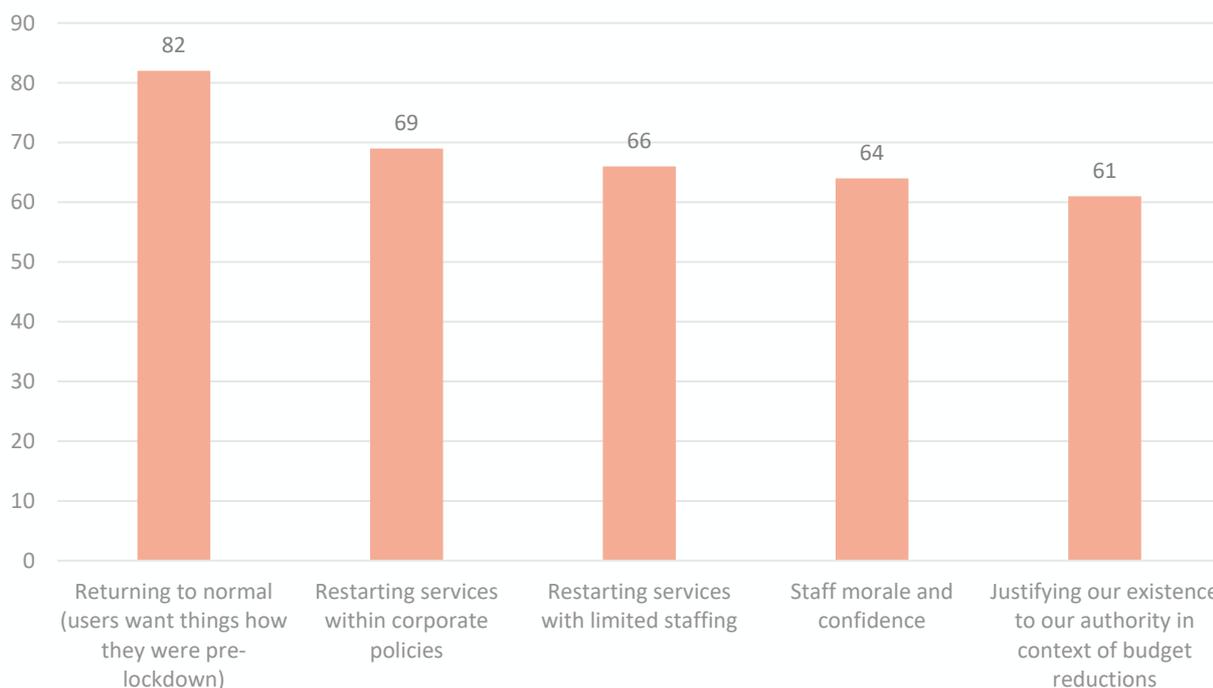
Of 100 responses received, the main challenges Heads of Service said they are now facing were:

- Returning to normal (our users want things exactly how they were pre-lockdown), with 82% identifying it as a severe or moderate challenge

- Restarting services within corporate policies for pandemic recovery (69%)
- Restarting services with limited staffing due to H&S and continued staff shielding (66%); staff morale and confidence (64%)
- Justifying our service's existence to our authority in the context of budget reductions (61%).

‘A very strong line from the directors to use the pandemic as an opportunity to significantly reduce the physical library estate.’

Figure 7.1: Percentage of authorities reporting challenges as services emerge from lockdown



Several heads of service articulated the nature of the funding threat. Success in delivering digital and remote services could be viewed, erroneously, as a substitute for a physical offer, or adequate as a definition of a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service under the Libraries Act.

‘Some of our directors may say we should shift entirely to ebooks, but so many of our residents do still want a physical book. Our success at running an expanded Home Library Service during lockdown is now haunting us. It is clearly being regarded by some as a possible way to replace static libraries’

‘This has been the most challenging period facing public libraries in living memory. Covid-19 affected the core role of the Library, a safe space for people to spend time and reflect. The subsequent shift to a digital offer raised concerns regarding senior directors’ [support for] a changed service that was not as focused on Library buildings. This has now impacted the next serious challenge - how to find savings for the next budget cycles when services have already consolidated for years due to austerity.’

Despite these concerns, many library services are using recovery to accelerate existing plans to put libraries at



the heart of local strategies. These approaches taken different forms including collaboration, commissioning, co-location and integration with other council services.

Based on the positive experience of library staff working more closely with colleagues in public health and other community services during the lockdown opportunities are presenting themselves for libraries to become a core delivery partner across the country.

‘Our CEO said that our agile experience of working with colleagues on community support during redeployment has furthered plans for a greater role for libraries in Council customer services’

Changes in footfall and working patterns are leading many library services to consider a more radical re-configuration of spaces and library locations, which up-end previous assumptions about how libraries target limited resources and earn income. For example, many services had growing income streams or targets based on room hire and events which are clearly no longer viable, but there may be an increased demand for work-hub space for homeworkers near local branch libraries.

‘We need to restart and recover services, but also create the space to rethink what we need to offer as we move into the next stage of the pandemic. Physical distancing, sitting restrictions and limitations on group sizes is a fundamental blow to the strategy of 'social librarianship' we were working towards, which was blending access to resources with active learning and cultural opportunities. I suspect we are at a hinge point where a fresh approach is required, rather than an attempt to reanimate where we were in March.’



Case study 7: Barking & Dagenham - resident conversations - saving lives in libraries

Summary

Barking and Dagenham Library staff were redeployed during lockdown to the Council's Homes and Money Hub and Adult Intake Team, making nearly 20,000 calls and interventions. The impact of this was profound for the council's ability to help people during the pandemic.

Now the library service is re-opening gradually, it is seizing the opportunity to re-configure its offer and give staff the opportunity to work in a new way that supports vulnerable people.

Scope

50 library staff were redeployed to the Council's Homes and Money Hub and Adult Intake Team during the lockdown. Meanwhile, the Home Library Service was opened up to anyone who needed it so library services could still be accessed. Redeployed staff have been recognised by the Council for their professionalism and efforts in helping vulnerable people.

The Homes and Money Hub Manager nominated Library Assistant, Heather Pope, as employee of the month. Heather managed to help an 85-year-old woman being displaced from her house to move into sheltered accommodation. Heather was initially unsure if this role would suit her, but now says 'it feels like I'm saving lives!'

What's unique

The Council has recognised the benefits of this new way of working. Zoinul Abidin, Head of Library Service, is now developing a new Residents Conversation team, with roles shared across the library service and Homes and Money Hub and Adult Intake.

Better use of self-service will enable staff to spend more time supporting users' needs more intensively. Library space will need to be used in a better way, particularly with demand for study space so high and the challenges of social distancing.

Results

As Zoinul explains: 'We need solutions, otherwise only the people good at organising and booking online will be able to access services. It's against all my own instincts and what I've been preaching my whole career because we normally want to let everyone in. It's hard, but I know I'm doing the right thing, when we see how we're helping people with debt, isolation, employment and housing.'

Key learning points

'It's really put library staff up there. People don't normally talk about libraries corporately. Now they are and we're seeing how we can make library spaces work for communities in a new way.'

'There has been a myth that library buildings can offer something for everyone - sadly we don't have the resources for that. However, we can help get people online who need to, and support others with unique needs in a more tailored way.'

For further information

<https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/libraries-and-local-history>



Support and advice for library services

Support and advice for library services played an important part during the lockdown. Our survey asked Heads of Service what types of support they accessed and valued or were unable to find. Of the 99 responses received, the main sources cited were Libraries Connected resources, particularly Basecamp, the regional networks, and the service recovery toolkit, the Welsh government/MALD and SCL Cymru advice, and internal corporate communications, health and safety, public health and property teams.

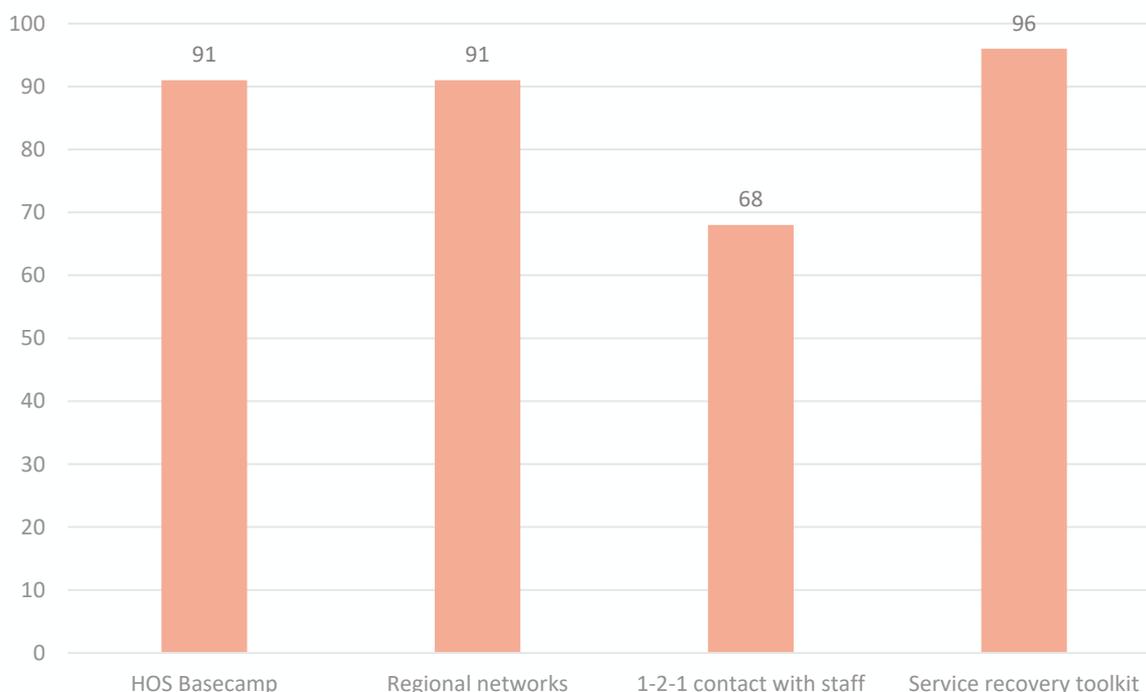
‘The support offered by Libraries Connected, and its members, was invaluable, and I can't praise it enough. I honestly don't know how we would have managed without Basecamp and associated resources.’

‘The Heads of service Basecamp was invaluable, being able to get a national picture of what was happening helped when briefing senior managers and Councillors about a way forward. It also was supportive when you were struggling with a particular aspect of mobilisation, providing a platform to gain answers but also share any learning you'd acquired.’

Libraries Connected resources were very highly rated with over 90% satisfaction for most channels of support. 1-2-1 contact with staff, with 68% satisfaction, may reflect limited capacity within the Libraries Connected team and suggests the collaborative forums were more productive. However, services that were struggling during the lockdown may benefit from more targeted 1-2-1 support in the future.

‘More support and advice is needed for library services facing cuts or closures following lockdown, as many councils will attempt to keep libraries closed by stealth.’

Figure 7.2: Satisfaction with the support provided by Libraries Connected (%)



The survey also asked what support or advice Heads of Service felt they were unable to access. The main responses included:

- Access to council decision-makers, and getting beyond a 'silo mentality'
- Delays and slowness in official advice at every level
- Lack of forward-thinking about library and cultural strategy for renewal rather than just re-opening
- Support to challenge the threat of keeping libraries closed by stealth.

'My line manager is the Director of Public Health. I was receiving detailed information first-hand and could test scenarios for recovery with this professional advice. It was sometimes noticeable when liaising with colleagues in other LAs that I had information long before they did.'



8. Libraries are saving lives and offering hope: recommendations

Local councils and government agencies should recognise that public libraries are an essential service during recovery from the pandemic, uniquely equipped to offer hope and enrichment to the broadest range of people. Libraries are not just partners but are core agencies that regularly provide direct services, preventing the escalation of issues such as deprivation and loneliness. Below we set out our high-level recommendations for local authorities and national governments, for library services, and for Libraries Connected working with the other sector governing bodies.

1. Valuing quality and value for money in staff and physical services

- Councils should recognise the evidence that digital and remote services provide mitigation for isolation and lack of social contact, but that communities also need and want social spaces with the values and reach of public libraries
- Library services should continue to embrace models of collaboration with other council services and partners which offer a personalised and holistic service, to prevent future cost burdens to welfare, education, health and social care
- Library services should absorb the potential implications of changes in footfall, working patterns and space requirements when thinking how library spaces could be best used and located in the future
- Councils and library services should build on the way staff have demonstrated and developed skills during lockdown to deliver a workforce ready to respond to future customer needs and to advocate for their services.

2. Digital must work for everyone, everywhere

- Councils should use the skills and expertise of library staff to ensure all residents have access to digital services, particularly young people and those facing isolation as social distancing continues
- Councils need to remove barriers which prevent libraries from delivering a high-quality digital offer including corporate limitations on web platforms and use of social media
- Library services should prioritise investment in digital capacity to offer an improved user experience online that meets consumer expectations of a modern digital service
- Library sector bodies and government should accelerate negotiations with publishers to improve the terms of digital lending and online broadcast licensing to increase availability and affordability for public libraries.

3. Recognising and facing the funding threat

- The sector governing bodies need to meet head-on any suggestion that digital and remote services could replace physical spaces as a comprehensive and efficient service, given the relatively limited reach of the current digital offer, and the risk of excluding those most in need.
- Councils should value and leverage their libraries' reach, assets and trusted brand to enhance their preventative strategies. They should consider libraries first when commissioning, rather than viewing libraries as a source of short-term savings.
- Libraries should take the opportunity to develop their funding and income generation strategies



to align them with the emerging needs of community resilience and regeneration and support their communities to respond to changing employment and working patterns.

- The library sector needs to improve their evidence gathering to create a standardised and comparable dataset so they can more clearly monitor and track their impact and present evidence which is compelling for councils and other funders.



Appendices

Appendix i: Summary of survey responses, split by region

Table i.1: summary of survey responses, split by region

Region	Proportion	Number
England – North West	13.64%	18
England – North East	7.58%	10
England – Yorkshire & Humberside	9.85%	13
England – East of England	6.82%	9
England – West Midlands	9.09%	12
England – East Midlands	5.30%	7
England – London	12.88%	17
England – South West	12.88%	17
England – South East	14.39%	19
Jersey	0.76%	1
Guernsey	0.00%	0
Wales	6.06%	8
Northern Ireland	0.76%	1
Total	100%	132



Appendix ii: Summary of survey responses, split by governance model

Table ii.1: summary of survey responses, split by governance model

Governance model type	Proportion	Number
Arms-length body	2.29%	3
Local authority (in-house service)	86.26%	113
Shared service	1.53%	2
Commissioned – charitable	9.16%	12
Commissioned - private	0.76%	1
Total	100%	131



Appendix iii: Summary of interviewees

Table iii.1: summary of interviewees

Library service	Interviewee
Awen Cultural Trust	Helen Pridham
Barking & Dagenham	Zoinul Abidin
Barnsley	Kathryn Green
Bolton	Samantha Elliott
Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole	Medi Bernard
Bracknell Forest	Fiona Atkinson
Buckinghamshire	David Jones
Hampshire	Emma Noyce
Libraries Northern Ireland	Helen Osborn
Libraries Unlimited	Martin Parkes
Merton	Anthony Hopkins
Newham	Caroline Rae
Newport	Alun Prescott
Rotherham	Zoe Oxley
Suffolk	Bruce Leeke
Peterborough	Pete Aldridge & Firzana Shaheen
Westminster / Kensington & Chelsea	Mike Clarke





Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport



INT2020/12843/DC
16 July 2020

Dear Leaders and Chief Executives,

COVID-19 Public Library Service Restoration in England

We both fully recognise that this has been and continues to be a challenging time for public library services. We are also aware and appreciative of their positive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the Prime Minister's announcement on 23 March that physical library locations must close, library services have continued to deliver. They reacted quickly to the surge in demand for their online services and developed innovative and exciting digital ways to provide a number of their other services. The consummate skills, empathy and knowledge of local community needs that library staff possess has also been a huge asset where they have been redeployed to support wider council COVID response services, such as shielding services and other community support. Our thanks go out to them for all the brilliant work they have done, both within and beyond the library service.

With the opening of physical library buildings now permitted, councils need to continue to be creative as they look to reopen their doors and restore their library services. Public libraries are a local service and the overall process of restoration of public library services across England is likely to vary from council to council. It is also likely that this will take place through a phased approach, following your careful assessment of when it is safe to do so and in light of government and public health guidelines.

This is an unprecedented period for public libraries and delivery of the statutory service is currently challenging. That's why DCMS has posted the following message on the GOV.UK pages dealing with the guidance document, '[Libraries as a statutory service](#)':

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will currently interpret compliance with this duty in light of the applicable [legislation](#) and the [government guidelines](#) published on 15 May (and subsequently updated) covering the reopening of other businesses and public places (including libraries). The Government announced that libraries may reopen their doors from 4 July, subject to following Covid-secure guidelines.



The Libraries Connected Service Recovery Toolkit published on 29 June provides a set of resources to support Heads of service and their teams in planning for service recovery as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. It is designed to be used alongside other government guidance in England. We recognise that restoration of services will take place in a phased way, varying according to local needs and circumstances. This interpretation will apply until such time as the government announces further relaxation of social distancing and other restrictions affecting access to library locations and library services.

While we recognise the exceptional circumstances and challenges of delivering library services during the COVID-19 pandemic, you will be aware that the Secretary of State has a statutory duty to superintend, and promote the improvement of, the public library service provided by local authorities in England, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities by or under this Act. To assist the Secretary of State to carry out his statutory duty, DCMS is keen to understand the plans each library authority in England has for restoration of its services.

We would therefore both be grateful if you could share your plans on how you intend to go about this. For instance, it would be useful to have some early information where there is no immediate plan to reopen some branches in the short-term (e.g. where this is impossible within social distancing rules) or to restore certain elements of library services, and your planned mitigations where this is the case; or about when different service streams will be restored across the local network, such as events, computer access, printing and photocopying.

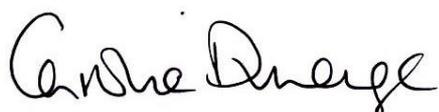
We both believe that libraries have the potential to play a key role in future recovery and renewal efforts across the country. DCMS officials will be looking for opportunities and examples of how this can happen locally to help make that case with colleagues across government; and LGA is planning to provide support for portfolio holders in understanding the contribution that public libraries can make to local renewal, and helping them to be better equipped to provide personal leadership during this period.

If you have not already done so you may wish to consider publishing the Council's plans for the restoration of the library service on the Council website.

It would be helpful if you could share your plans for restoration of your library services with the DCMS Libraries Team by 7 August 2020. Please send them by email to: libraries@dcms.go.uk.

Many thanks, and best wishes from both of us for a safe and smooth process of library service restoration.

Yours sincerely



Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister for Digital and Culture
Culture, Tourism and Sport Board



Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson
Chair of the Local Government Association

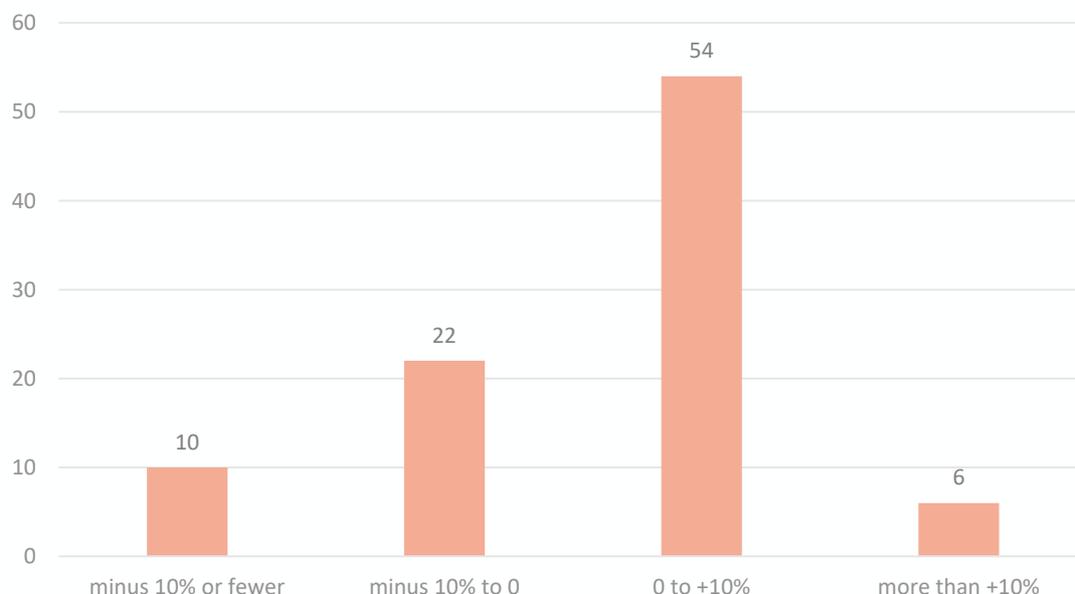


Appendix v: Detailed distribution of changes in library membership and use of online resources

In this appendix, we summarise the differences and variations between authorities in the changes described in sections three and four above.

Library membership

Figure v.1: Distribution of changes in services' membership levels from March to July 2020



These changes were influenced by a number of factors, including the process of signing up online, the web presence of the library service and the offer available during lockdown.

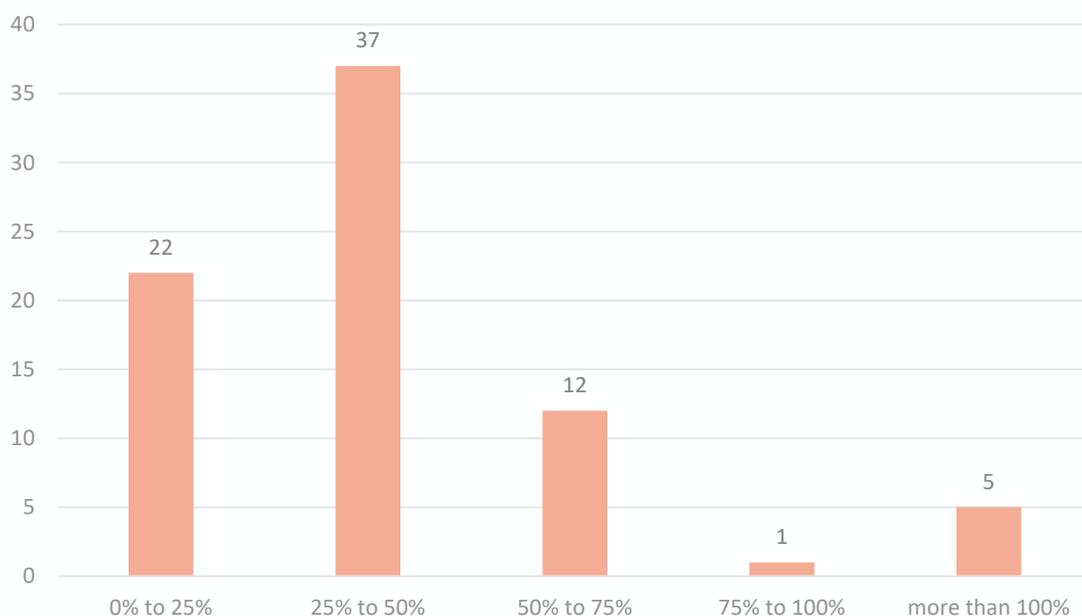
A further significant factor was the quality of the membership data library services held at the beginning of lockdown. Some services took the opportunity to clean databases during the lockdown. Others had performed similar data cleaning before lockdown, for example when migrating to a new Library Management System.

Library members signing up for digital resources

Library services usually require members to sign-up separately to access digital resources and licensed material. Among the 77 services which provided figures, these memberships increased between 1 March and 1 July by 27%. Again, across the country the range of increases was significant, ranging from 1% to 253%. It should be noted that some of those recording the largest increases were starting from a low base.



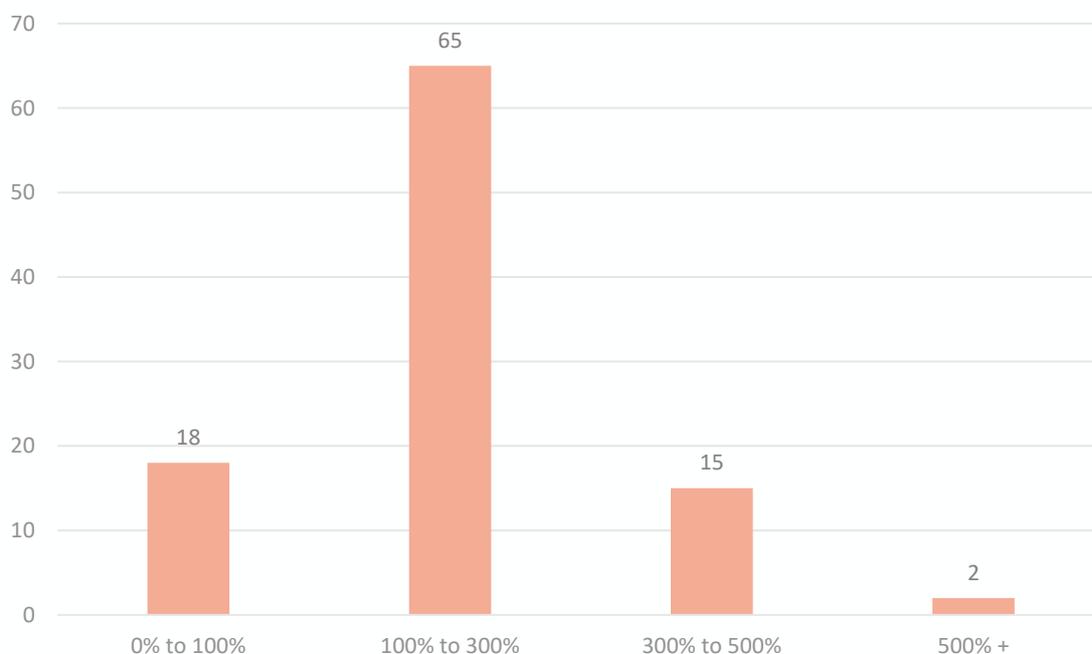
Figure v.2: Distribution of changes in services' digital sign-ups from March to July 2020



Ebook checkouts

Looking back at usage over the whole period of the lockdown we can trace distinct patterns. Based on our survey, among the 100 services which provided data, ebook usage increased by 146%. Increases in individual services ranged between 38% and 714%.

Figure v.3: Numbers of authorities reporting increases in ebook checkouts during lockdown¹⁴



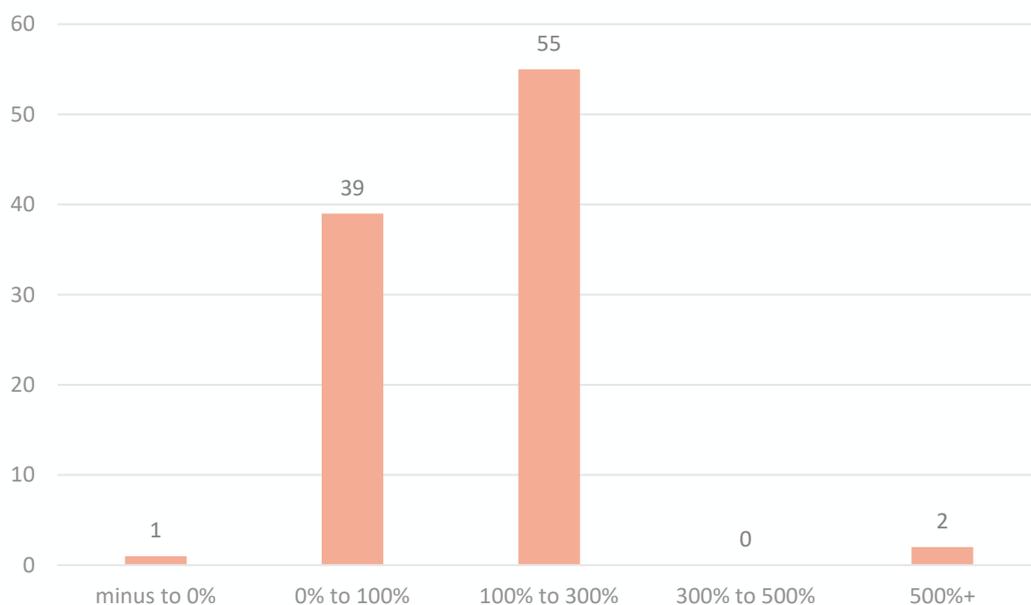
¹⁴ The percentage changes measure the increase in issues from the period Apr-Jun 2019 to Apr-Jun 2020



Audiobooks

Among the 97 services which provided data, total audiobook checkouts during lockdown saw a similar increase in our survey of 113%, with a range between -2.9% and +581%.

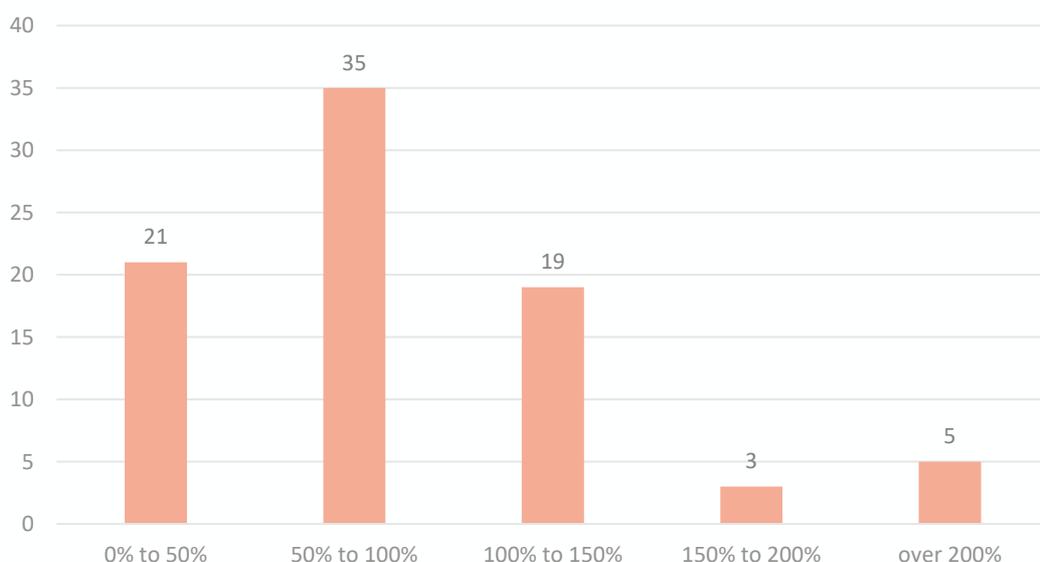
Figure v.4: Authorities reporting changes in audiobook checkouts during lockdown¹⁵



Magazines

Among the 83 services which provided data, total magazine checkouts increased by 80% among respondents, with a range between 0.5% and 745%.

Figure v.5: Authorities reporting increases in magazine checkouts during lockdown¹⁶



¹⁵ The percentage changes measure the change in issues from the period Apr-Jun 2019 to Apr-Jun 2020

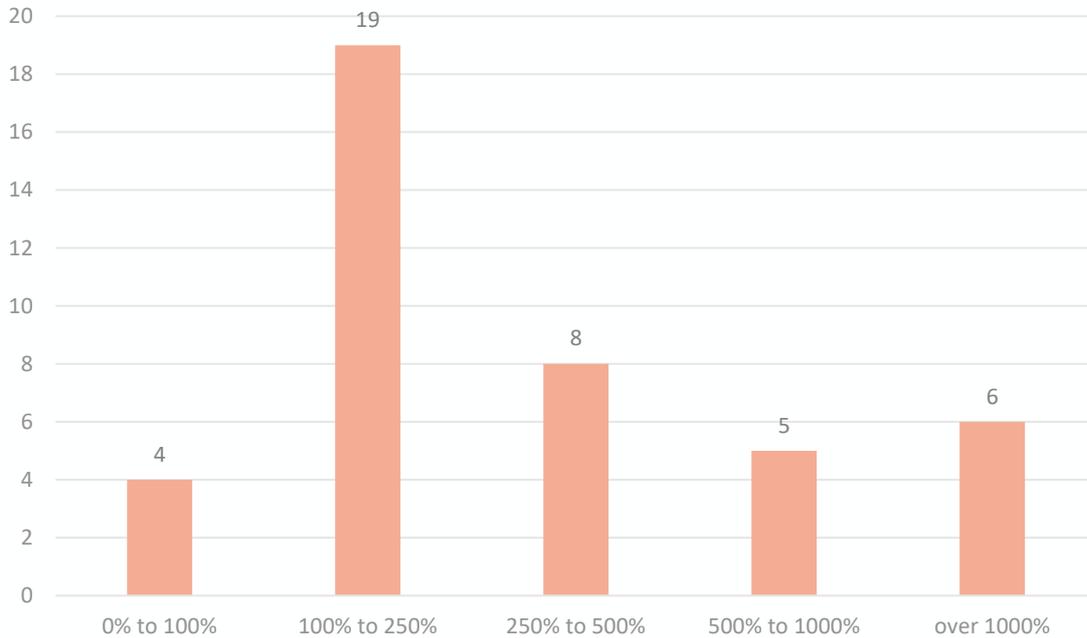
¹⁶ The percentage changes measure the increase in issues from the period Apr-Jun 2019 to Apr-Jun 2020



Newspapers

Total newspaper checkouts from the 42 services which provided data increased by 223% among our respondents, with a range between 53% and 3787%.

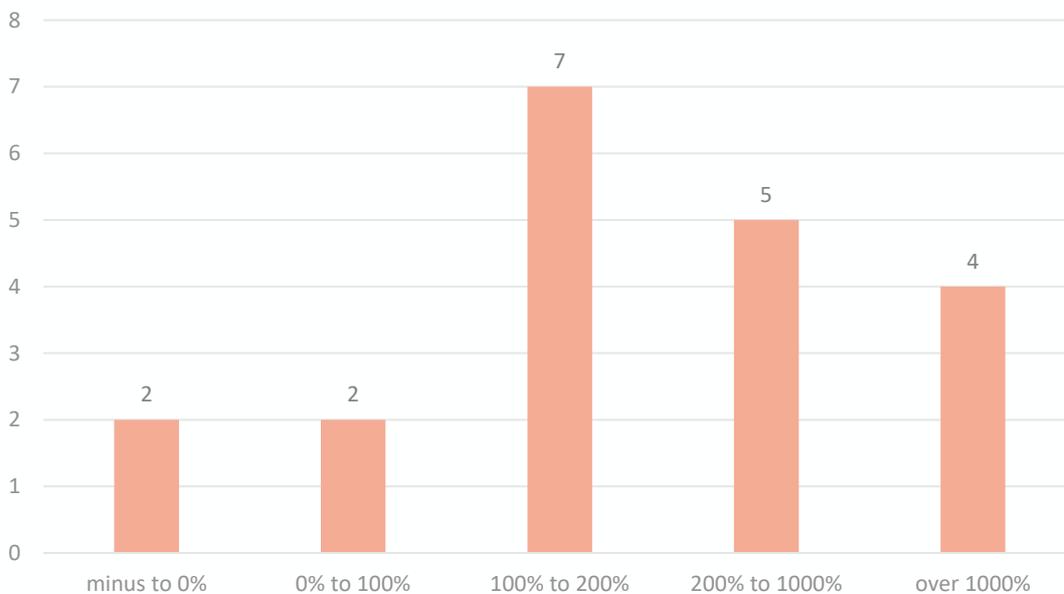
Figure v.6: Authorities reporting increases in newspaper checkouts during lockdown¹⁷



Comics

Among the 20 services which provided data, total comics checkouts increased by 497% with a range between -58% and +4900%.

Figure v.7: authorities reporting changes in comic checkouts during lockdown¹⁸



¹⁷ The percentage changes measure the increase in issues from the period Apr-Jun 2019 to Apr-Jun 2020

¹⁸ The percentage changes measure the change in issues from the period Apr-Jun 2019 to Apr-Jun 2020



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