

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24



 London
Libraries



**Libraries
Connected**

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CHAIR'S WELCOME

It's with great pleasure I share with you the annual report for London Libraries – a partnership involving all 33 library services in London. As Chair of this esteemed and powerful library network, I am honoured to reflect on the last twelve months to share our impact and our achievements.

In a city as diverse and dynamic as London, our libraries play a crucial role in promoting literacy, education, and cultural enrichment for all residents. Through our collaborative efforts and shared commitment to excellence, we have continued to expand access to knowledge, resources, and opportunities for Londoners of all ages and backgrounds.

Although it's been another difficult year with further budget cuts and a cost-of-living crisis, I am proud to say that London's Libraries have risen to the occasion with resilience, creativity, and innovation. Our dedicated staff, volunteers, and partners have worked tirelessly to ensure that our libraries remain safe, welcoming, and accessible to all who seek their services.

As we look ahead to this year, I am confident that library services across the Capital will continue to be a beacon of innovation and inspiration. Our shared vision of a city where every individual has access to the transformative power of libraries will drive us forward and guide our efforts towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to our success over the last year whether through their time, expertise, funding, or unwavering support. I am particularly thankful to all our funders, partners and colleagues on the Executive team who volunteer their time on top of already busy day jobs.

My thanks also to all the inspirational London library leaders and staff who are running the best libraries in the world, in the best city in the world! Their dedication and passion continue to be the foundation for the success of this regional network.

I hope you enjoy reading about our accomplishments and our priorities for the year ahead.

With warm regards

Anita Luby
Chair

ABOUT US

London Libraries is the regional group for Libraries Connected. We represent all 32 London Boroughs and the City of London.

We work collaboratively to deliver joint projects, showcase the work of our members and to advocate for London's public libraries.

As a region, we support Libraries Connected vision to help members to provide inclusive, modern, innovative, sustainable and high-quality library services. We do this through promoting the value of public libraries, building partnerships with key stakeholders, sharing best practise, driving innovation, and providing support to each other through the more challenging times.

London has the largest public library network of any major world city. Over 8,000,000 Londoners have access to a network of over 325 public libraries.

Wherever you are in London you are never far from a public library!



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS



Physical Visitors

31,843,604

(based on data set of 33 libraries)



Borrowing

32,693,009

(based on data set of 33 libraries)



Volunteers

4,441

(based on data set of 28 libraries)



PC & WIFI

2,133,066

(based on data set of 28 libraries)



Active Users

1,163,563

(based on data set of 33 libraries)

PROJECTS

Staff Seminar

Our annual staff conference, held at Swiss Cottage library brought together staff working in public libraries to share best practice and their inspirational projects.

The day was an opportunity for colleagues to network and hear about national initiatives from speakers from CILIP, The British Library and Arts Council England.

Read On

London Libraries were successful in applying for over £25,000 from the Library On funding programme to develop a groundbreaking reading app for London, called Read ON.

This innovative tool, created in partnership with Novellic, aims to inspire and encourage Londoners to connect with their local libraries and to read more! Being billed as a Couch to 5k for reading, the app is scheduled to be publicly launched in Summer 2024.

Visual Impairment Ambassadors

Working in partnership with the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind) each library service now has a Visual Impairment Ambassador who is responsible for supporting their library service to be more inclusive to blind and partially sighted customers. The network of ambassadors meet quarterly to share best practise and to develop projects in support of Hi-Vis week and other national campaigns.



PROJECTS

Supporting London Libraries Programme

The Supporting London Libraries program, funded by Arts Council England has been instrumental in identifying the challenges and aspirations of each London library service.

The project also included 23 site visits by space activation specialists – Disentangle, to support 24 library services to reimagine and activate unused spaces within their libraries. A further strand of the project included a peer mentoring pilot between Merton and Croydon libraries yielding invaluable learning for library staff and fostering collaboration between the two library services.

Prison Libraries Project

GLL, Croydon, Newham and Lambeth libraries in partnership with HMP Brixton, Belmarsh and Isis prison services, are involved in a study funded by Arts Council England to explore ways to raise the profile of London prison libraries and the feasibility of creating through-the-gate volunteering to employment opportunities in Croydon and Newham libraries, both of which are ACE Priority Boroughs. The study coincides with the prison service's Ofsted report, subsequent evaluation of reading in prisons and resulting reading strategies being rolled out across prisons. GLL libraries will use learning from the programme to support their prison libraries strategy.



PROJECTS

Health Ambassadors Pilot Programme

Libraries Connected is working in partnership with the national NHS Knowledge and library services team at NHS England, CILIP (the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and Arts Council England to improve health and digital literacy in local communities.

Through a Health Ambassadors pilot project, 124 staff from Barking and Dagenham; Bexley; Camden; Croydon; Ealing; Greenwich; Hackney; Havering; Hounslow; Islington; Newham; Redbridge; Richmond; Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest took part in training to help them to develop their health and digital literacy offer to local communities.

The pilot project aims to test the impact on public library services and their wider region of having Health Ambassadors and staff who are trained in health literacy awareness.

Due to the success of the pilot, training will be cascaded to the rest of London in Autumn 2024.



PROJECTS

Get Online London

Get Online London is a digital inclusion service which gives Londoners access to refurbished devices, free mobile connectivity and digital skills training. All of London's public libraries play a vital role in supporting Londoners to be digitally included in all aspects of their lives.

89 libraries, across 21 London boroughs are now also part of the national databank, providing free sim cards to library users to enable them to access the internet.

Get Online London is supported by the Mayor of London and the London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI) and is delivered by the Good Things Foundation.

The contribution of libraries in helping more Londoners to be digitally included was also recognised by LOTI and Good Things Foundation at their annual Get Online London conference where we were invited to speak about digital inclusion work in libraries.



SUCCESS

Library Improvement Fund

Libraries in Barnet, Brent, Bromley, Camden, Croydon, Kingston, Hackney, Islington, Merton and Redbridge were successful in securing funding in rounds 2 and 3 of the library improvement fund which is a strand of the Government's Cultural Investment Fund, administered by Arts Council England - the national development agency for creativity and culture.

Over £2.5 million was secured for London. This will help the successful boroughs to transform their services through building upgrades and improvements to digital infrastructure, ensuring they are better placed to respond to the changing ways people are using them.



SUCCESS

Library On

The Library On grants programme funds public libraries in England to improve their online presence and discoverability.

11 projects involving London Library authorities have received a total investment of £309,374 through 2 rounds of the grants programme. The successful boroughs include Bromley, Camden, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hillingdon, Greenwich, Lambeth, Merton, Newham, Redbridge and a consortium bid by London Libraries, involving all 33 boroughs for the Read On app and another consortium bid for the 'Ask a Librarian' project involving Hackney and Kingston.

The successful projects include upgrades to existing websites or creating new ones, digital marketing activities, app development, virtual tours, enhancements to library management systems and the purchase of new software.



Supported using public funding by

**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

AWARDS

Libraries Connected Awards

The Libraries Connected Awards celebrate the achievements of library teams and individuals working in public libraries. The awards are a recognition of best practise and excellence.

The innovation, creativity and passion of London's library staff was recognised at these annual awards in June 2023 and congratulations is given to the following teams:

Redbridge - Winner of the Information and Digital Category

The following services in London were shortlisted in the following categories:

- Waltham Forest** – Children's
- Barking & Dagenham** – Culture and Creativity
- Merton** – Health and Well-Being
- Southwark** – Information and Digital
- Barking & Dagenham** – Vision and Print
- Impaired People's Promise



PRIORITIES FOR 24/25

We are committed to developing and delivering the following projects for London in the coming year:

- Seek funding to support a roll out of training for the Homeless project in partnership with Homeless Link.
- Develop phase 3 of City of Stories in partnership with Spread the Word.
- Launch and further develop the Read On App in partnership with Novellic and Libraries Connected.
- Launch new London Libraries website.
- Submit a place partnership bid to Arts Council England.
- Roll out health literacy training to staff.
- Whole day staff conference.



OUR TEAM

Our Executive team is made up of Heads of service who are responsible for 14 London library authorities between them.

They meet 4 times a year to set the strategic direction for the network, ensuring libraries in London are aware of and participating in national initiatives and benefitting from joint programmes.

The general membership meets 4 times a year.

Executive Officers

Anita Luby - Chair (Redbridge)
Fiona Tarn - Vice Chair (Camden)
Hannah Richens - Secretary (Barnet)
Caroline Rae - Treasurer (Newham)

Committee Members

Anthony Hopkins - (Merton)
Claire Powell - (Hounslow)
Claire Robe - (Kingston)
Daniel Waller - (Hammersmith & Fulham)
Joan Redding - (Croydon)
Rachel Levy - (City of London)
Rebecca Gediking - (GLL-Bromely, Greenwich & Wandsworth)
Susanna Barnes - (Lambeth)

Universal Offer Leads

The following officers are the regional Universal Offer leads

Books and Reading

Daniel Waller

Culture and Creativity

Claire Robe and Rebecca Gediking

Digital & Information

Caroline Rae and Susanna Barnes

Health

Claire Powell

FUNDERS & PARTNERS

We are grateful to the following organisations for their support

- Libraries Connected
- Arts Council England
- Library On / British Library
- Novellic
- Royal National Institute of Blind People
- Good Things Foundation
- London Office of Technology and Innovation (LOTI)



ACCOUNTS

Our finances are maintained by Libraries Connected and are audited by an independent auditor as part of their annual audit.

| Financial Year 2023-4 | | Income | Expenditure |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|-------------|
| Opening Balance | 41,442.95 | | |
| | | | |
| Subscriptions | | 6532.92 | |
| | | | |
| Activist - Homeless Project | | | 4715.20 |
| Web services | | | 240.27 |
| | | | |
| Total | | 6532.92 | 4955.47 |
| Less Aged Debt | 1615.28 | | |
| Closing Balance | 41,405.12 | | |

Grants Received on behalf of London Libraries

ACE - City of Stories

£80,368.78 held by the London Borough of Newham has been paid to Spread the Word. The project was underspent, and funds will be returned to Arts Council by Newham on submission of the final report by Spread the Word.

Library On – Read On App

£25,800. Held by the City of London.

Supporting London Libraries

ACE grant of £27,500 held by Merton.

Prison Libraries

ACE grant of £28,000 held by GLL. This runs from January 2024 and continues into the next financial year.