

LOCAL NEWS PARTNERSHIPS



Residents in Acock Green, Birmingham, staged a protest against proposed closures to the service. Photo not for reuse.

Library cuts

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BBC Shared Data Unit, BBC Local News partnerships

shared.dataunit@bbc.co.uk

Please note this pack and accompanying dataset may be subject to edit

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What's the story?

The continuing erosion of public libraries has been described as “horrificing” by a former Children’s Laureate, in response to a new BBC investigation.

More than 180 council-run facilities have either been closed or handed over to volunteer groups over the past eight years across the UK and more than 2,000 jobs have been lost. Nearly 950 libraries have reduced their opening hours in that time too, the BBC Shared Data Unit has found.

Former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen, who has written more than 200 books including *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and is a lifelong libraries' advocate, described the cuts as a “decimation of our cultural entitlement.”

A Government spokesperson said it recognised “pressures” facing libraries and it was “committed to giving stability back to local councils so services such as these can best meet the needs of their communities”.

A [previous BBC study](#) found 8,000 library jobs had been lost and 343 venues closed between 2010 and 2016.

But the BBC Shared Data Unit's latest investigation has found services have continued to reduce around the UK since 2016 - with the most deprived areas around four times more likely to have lost a local facility than the most affluent.

“These figures lay bare the scale of the crisis facing public libraries and confirm what we have long suspected: libraries are hit hardest in the very areas that need them most,” said Isobel Hunter MBE, the chief executive of the Libraries Connected charity which has members spanning most library services in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies.

Mr Rosen was children's laureate between 2007 and 2009 and spent much of his childhood reading in Pinner Library in North London.

He said reducing people's access to libraries was an “act of cruelty”.

Most council-run libraries offer more than just book lending facilities. Some offer stay-and-play sessions for children, literacy clubs and access to computers among other things. Some are set up as warm spaces for people struggling with fuel poverty in winter.

“Every time I hear of a library being closed I find it absolutely horrifying,” Mr Rosen said.

“This seems to be like a decimation of our cultural entitlement.

The BBC also found dozens more libraries were at risk of closure in the coming year.

Louis Coiffait-Gunn, the chief executive of the library and information service, CILIP, said: “I think it’s a real shame.

“When people think about libraries, they have a slightly old-fashioned view - they think about a shelf of books in a building - and yes, those things are important, but we’re in the 21st Century.

“Actually, a lot of the digital skills and the digital services that libraries provide, they’re what’s gonna make the difference in the knowledge economy.”

What we are sharing with you:

- [This spreadsheet](#), showing how your council's library provision has changed since 2016.

It contains details of every upper-tier local authority in England and shows **how many of your libraries have been lost from the statutory provision in your area; how many have moved over to community organisations; how many staff have been lost and how many have had hours reduced. A guide to using this sheet can be found on page 8.**

- It also contains figures showing how many libraries have been lost from the statutory provision at council level in Scotland and Wales. It contains national figures for Northern Ireland.
- Key quotes from interviews with Michael Rosen, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Libraries Unlimited.
- Responses from several local authorities, the Arts Council and the government.

Background

Every council in the UK is required by law to provide [a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons](#), which can include a free book-lending facility, a mix of activities and access to wifi and computers, among other things.

This is known as their “statutory provision” of libraries. If a library is classed as being part of a council’s statutory provision, it has a duty to fund and maintain it, even if a third-party, such as a community group, runs the site.

However, with councils seeking to make savings, many have reduced their statutory provision.

Some have handed the reins of libraries over to volunteer-staffed community organisations who continue to run the premises, but outside of this provision.

Councils have no legal obligation to fund or maintain a library outside of their statutory provision, so community groups running a non-statutory library must raise or bid for their own funding.

In most cases, libraries are simply closed altogether.

This investigation takes both into account - it looks at how many libraries your councils have **ceased to run since 2016**.

Types of library

Arts Council England now defines the operation of libraries as falling into one of five broad categories.

1. Local Authority: LA

Funded, run and managed by local authority staff (can be augmented by unpaid volunteers)

2. Local authority run, but unstaffed: LAU

Funded and managed by the local authority but is unstaffed, for example a book drop.

3. Commissioned: C

Run by separate trust/organisation on behalf of the local authority, which remains accountable for the service. The organisation may be operating as a social enterprise or may be commercial and is commissioned and funded by a local authority.

4. Community Run: CR

Run by a community group or voluntary sector organisation. It will have some level of ongoing support from a local authority or commissioned service. Will work according to a joint agreement such as a Service Level Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding or contract. Staff are volunteers, but some form of support is available. It may or may not be counted as part of the statutory service.

5. Independent Community Library: ICL

Library that has been transferred outside the local authority network to the management of a non-local authority body. The body could be either a community group or third party. It will not be part of the statutory service.

What we did

Official data

Data on libraries that have closed, moved to a community organisation, or have fallen outside of a council's statutory provision since 2016 were obtained through Arts Council England's [Basic library dataset](#) for 2023. It is a comprehensive study of every known library in England, with details on its current and past operation.

From this data, we wanted to work out how many libraries formed part of local council statutory provision in 2016 and how that had changed by 2023. Column K in the image below, allowed us to filter down to libraries that were part of the statutory provision in 2016 and track their changes from there. Some new facilities were not yet open by the time of 2016; we have captured those as well.

	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	
	Address 1	Address 2	Address 3	Upper Tier Lo	Postcode	Unique prop	Type	Stat Provision	Stat Provision: 01/07/2016	Stat Provision	Stat Provision	Stat Provision	Stat Provision	Fa
rmir 2	Town Square Barking		Essex	Barking and D	IG11 7NB	100053358	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
n	Jo Richardson Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM9 4UN		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
Lib 1	Church Elm L Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM10 9QS	10023599312	Static Library	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	Barmead Road Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM9 5DX		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
Cc	arks Gate Cc Marks Gate		Essex	Barking and D	RM6 5NJ	100027163	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	CF
	Markyate Roac Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM8 2LD		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
	Rectory Road Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM10 9SA		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
is C	High Road Chadwell Heat		Essex	Barking and D	RM6 6AS	1000101901	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	CF
i	Dagenham Ro: Rush Green		Essex	Barking and D	RM7 0TL		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
mn	Thames Comm Barking		Essex	Barking and D	IG11 0LG	10034774	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
ran	Secontree Ave Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM8 3HT	100002559	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	Wantz Commu Dagenham		Essex	Barking and D	RM10 7DX		Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Ck
	Watling Avenue Edgware		Greater London	Barnet	HA8 0UB	200155264	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	320 Cricklewox London		Greater London	Barnet	NW2 2QE	200219960	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
rmk 3	Stapylton Ro Barnet		Greater London	Barnet	EN5 4QT	200107378	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
i	24 Hendon Lar London		Greater London	Barnet	N3 1SA		Static Library	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	LA
	Colindale Libra Colindale		Greater London	Barnet	NW9 5XL	10093995729	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	35 Brookhill R: East Barnet		Greater London	Barnet	EN4 8SG		Static Library	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	LA
ay	226 High Road London		Greater London	Barnet	N2 9BB	200061457	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	Hale Lane Edgware		Greater London	Barnet	HA8 8NN	200220766	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
urc 318	Regents P London		Greater London	Barnet	N3 2LN	10093302213	Static Library	Facility Not Op	Facility Not Op	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fa
et C	riern Barnet F London		Greater London	Barnet	N11 3DS	200044867	Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	ICI
urt 15	The Market London		Greater London	Barnet	NW11 6LB	200207760	Static Library	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	ICI
sen 156	Golders G London		Greater London	Barnet	NW11 8HE	200049056	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA
	The Burroughs London		Greater London	Barnet	NW4 4BQ	200222812	Static Library	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	LA

As our study concentrates on accessible, statutory public libraries, we also filtered out archive facilities and prison libraries.

From this we have worked out a “net loss” of statutory libraries for each council since 2016 rather than simply detailing how many ‘closures’ there have been.

To explain and to put this in context, around 125 libraries have physically closed in England since 2016, while a further 100 have been handed over to various types of community

organisation. However, there have been around 75 new libraries, or existing (but largely small) libraries adopted as part of the council's statutory provision since 2016. Balancing these figures gives us a net loss of around 150 in England.

Freedom of Information requests

In order to gain details on the staffing losses, proposed closures and the number of sites to have reduced hours, we made Freedom of Information requests to 221 councils responsible for library services across the UK. Around 80% of those gave a full response.

We asked councils to provide details of their library service headcounts in 2016 and 2023 so we could compare the two figures. We also asked them to state how many libraries had reduced opening hours since 2016.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

There were no equivalent Arts Council data for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Therefore, we have relied on data returned from local authorities in the three devolved nations from FOI requests. The data for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are less detailed but still contain details on the numbers of libraries lost, the numbers which have seen their opening hours reduced and the reductions in the numbers of libraries staff.

Guide to the dataset

The dataset for England is split into three colour-coded parts

Columns D-I (peach) show how your statutory library services looked in 2016

Columns J-Q (yellow) show how your statutory libraries looked in 2023

Columns R-W (blue) show how things changed between 2016 and 2023.

Libraries_to_share

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The best way to read the spreadsheet is by finding your council in column A and reading the results across the row.

For example in Bury - highlighted above - the data reads like this.

In 2016, Bury had 14 statutory libraries, all entirely operated by the council itself. By 2023 it had four remaining statutory libraries, a loss of 10 libraries overall.

Nine of those libraries closed altogether, while one moved over to a community organisation. By 2023, the council had 25 fewer employees and the remaining four libraries all reduced their hours.

Key findings

How have things changed?

Across the UK

- Since 2016, there has been a **net loss of 183 public libraries** in the UK from councils' statutory services.
- Where local authorities gave us figures for both years, the **number of library staff posts** fell from 15,103 to 12,827, a drop of 2,276, or a 15% decrease.
- Around 946 libraries, just under a third of the total, have had their **opening hours reduced**.
- Dozens more libraries were **at risk of potential closure**, according to responses to the BBC's Freedom of Information request. [Please see responses from councils near the end of this story pack](#). There are also additional closures being proposed in [Birmingham](#) and [Nottingham](#).
- At least 1.9 million items were lost, stolen or missing at libraries since 2016. In 2024 alone, Birmingham reported 130,000 and in 2023 Rochdale almost 225,000. In a typical year at a typical authority over 12,000 items go missing, are lost or stolen

England

- There has been a net loss of 146 public libraries **in England** from councils' statutory services
- Of those, 32 have moved from being entirely run by the council to being run by an independent community organisation.

Wales

- There has been a net loss of eight public libraries **in Wales** from councils' statutory services. In addition, five mobile library services have ceased to operate.

Scotland

- There has been a net loss of 29 public libraries **in Scotland** from councils' statutory services.

Northern Ireland

- There has been no net loss of public libraries **in Northern Ireland** over the same period.

What's the picture locally?

England

Loss of libraries from statutory provision

Sunderland in the North East, has lost the largest proportion of libraries from its statutory services since 2016. The council went from having 11 statutory libraries in 2016 to three in 2023, meaning it lost 73% of its statutory libraries.

The table below shows the ten councils with the highest net loss of libraries since 2016.

Reporting Library Service	Net loss (-) or gain in statutory libraries since 2016	Net loss as a proportion (%) of total in 2016
Sunderland	-8	-73%
Bury	-10	-71%
Swindon	-10	-67%
Walsall	-9	-56%
South Tyneside	-5	-56%
Bradford	-11	-48%
North Northamptonshire	-8	-47%
Calderdale	-10	-45%
West Northamptonshire	-8	-44%
Leicestershire	-11	-41%

Headcount reduction

Sunderland's reduction of council-employed library staff, from 84 in 2016 to 19 in 2023, marks the council out as having the highest proportional reduction in staff comparing the two years - a 77% reduction.

It is followed by three London councils: Bracknell Forest, Lewisham and Bexley

The table below shows the ten English councils to have reduced the largest proportion of staff since 2016.

Council	Headcount for year ending 2016	Headcount for year ending 2023	Difference in headcount between 2016 and 2023	Loss in headcount as a proportion of 2016 total
Sunderland	84	19	-65	-77%
Bracknell Forest	88	31	-57	-65%
Lewisham	119	48	-71	-60%
Bexley	120	55	-65	-54%
Walsall	126	58	-68	-54%
Croydon	128	65	-63	-49%
Stoke-on-Trent	80	42	-38	-48%
Bedford	53	31	-22	-42%
Wirral	134	79	-55	-41%
Bury	61	36	-25	-41%

Interview quotes

Former Children's Laureate and author, Michael Rosen, who has written more than 200 books including *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, said:



Photo credit: BBC

“Every time I hear of a library being closed I find it absolutely horrifying... this seems to be like a decimation of our cultural entitlement.”

“There are many children who come from families where they either don't think to buy books or can't afford to buy books... we're taking away free books. At the very moment we're saying we want everybody to read – so it seems both absurd and horrifying.”

“These are very, very important spaces, we should be treasuring them. We should feel, isn’t it wonderful that we have these? We must fight to save them and find different and new ways to make them popular.”

“I have many memories of libraries going all the way back to my own childhood... I was taken to the library by my family every weekend in the place where we lived by the London suburbs... It was absolutely wonderful, going to the library and sometimes just sitting with my friend Brian Harrison and sitting and reading books off the shelves – that was a lovely thing to do – and not borrowing them – just putting them back on the shelf and then going home...”

“If you close libraries and make them harder to find and harder to get access to, this is a terrible shame – we’re depriving people of what they’re entitled to.”

“If you take away libraries, if you take away the hours that people have access to, you are hurting people, it’s like an act of cruelty that you’re doing that, you’re inflicting that on people. Sometimes people don’t see that, people see cuts and think it’s saving money or people don’t really need it... but I see it as a form of deprivation...”

“If I was speaking now to somebody from the government who’s gonna be in charge of libraries, the first thing I’d say is go to a library, talk to librarians, talk to people using a library and do that for a day at minimum, just so that you hear about the value of libraries.”

Alex Kittow, the chief executive of Libraries Unlimited



Photo credit: Theo Moye

Alex Kittow (pictured above), (he/him) CEO of Libraries Unlimited, a charity which runs 54 libraries in Devon and Torbay, said:

[On the importance of libraries and the role they play in society]

“Obviously libraries are really important for so many reasons.

“If you care about the climate crisis, they’re about ‘buy once, use many times’ – they’re the ultimate recycle and reuse service.

“They’re very important for education; if you’re struggling at school they’ve got homework clubs and food clubs during school holidays; community fridges which are like food banks. They are a wonderful venue where that can happen without stigma.

“Libraries are really important for the longer term. They are investing in education so we can be more innovative and that helps the economy.

“Reading books allows you to travel the world and broaden your horizons. Reading is important for exposure to different authors and perspectives. I’m convinced places with libraries are kinder, healthier and better educated.

“Libraries signpost people to services as well as books, resources and data – it’s social prescribing.

“They’re bringing people together from different backgrounds so they can listen, learn and enjoy being together – that’s what society is – and together they can come up with solutions for problems. We can be better off as a society, we can better look after our elderly, we will be better informed about housing and there will be less nimbyism.

“In Devon, for example, we run lots of business support through libraries – whether it’s the bedroom to boardroom program, we help people come up with a business plan – introduce them to mentors, help with HR planning, budgeting and growth – it’s supporting entrepreneurs.

“It’s very different to the support in our work clubs. They are supporting people on benefits to find work, through to supporting refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into society and write a CV, what jobs they might apply for; how to dress and how to behave and the language to use in an interview.

“A public library is a cultural venue where activities happen: stories being read out, singing, bands, bars, bounce and rhyme, knit and natter. They’re full of noise.

“And the great thing about libraries is they are free.

“Libraries have an impact on health and wellbeing – they’re great at tackling social isolation. We did a project about grief for people and missed experiences during Covid, which involved flower press and writing songs – cultural experiences bringing people together. In Devon, we have baby-weigh stations and blood pressure checks in our libraries too.

[On the numbers of closures and the numbers now run by volunteers and concerns for the future]

“We’ve not closed libraries in Devon but I’m just sad because people are missing out and it’s the next generation that will suffer.

“I see myself as a custodian of the library service for the next generation and if a library closes it’s not likely to open again. A book swap may open but it’s not the same thing.

“I think volunteers are invaluable – we have over 500 – if a library is run by a community group or a network of volunteers that can ensure it runs for another 10 years, that’s incredible. Paid staff can be working to secure further funding, promoting events, interacting with the public – someone more like a community worker than a traditional view of what a librarian does.

“I think there are fewer volunteers across the charity and voluntary sector since Covid and in the cost of living crisis people have to work longer and are not able to volunteer. There are concerns about volunteers who aren’t part of a network and the danger is we have more telephone boxes with books in that are run down; that have donations of books that people don’t want to read, that are poor quality and it’s not a curated collection. We want to inspire reading rather than put people off reading by showing poor-quality books.”

[On the risks if closures were to continue]

“The intergenerational work libraries do for people is invaluable - the difference of ideas around politics, religion, all sorts.

“And the demand for adult social care will rise even more without libraries – not just because of isolation but mental wellbeing. We even have walking groups that have sprung up because of the library and they meet there before they set off.

“If we don’t have libraries, education will dip and it will probably become a bit more elitist – the gap between rich and poor will get wider.

“What really annoys me is the short-termism – we’re saving up pain because we won’t see the impact in 5 years but we will see it in 10 years. We’re saving up pain for the next political cycle. We need to look after our society by looking after our next generation.

“We already know children drop reading levels over summer holidays if they don’t read anything.”

[On other factors we need to consider at the moment in society when we consider the role of libraries eg cost of living]

“We have community fridges in our libraries to tackle food waste and we have the heating on when it’s cold and people can stay all day. It’s a space where everyone can go and everyone does go. If we see fewer libraries we will see a more segmented, isolated society. We will see more special interest groups ploughing more furrows – the conspiracy theorists will have more conspiracy theories and the racists will be more racist.

“Two years ago we ran 12,000 events in our libraries and last year we had twice that number – it makes me proud they really are community spaces bringing people together.

“We’re about enriching lives and building communities, books are one of many tools we use to do that”

[On lost/stolen items]

“If someone nicks a library book – if they are that poor that they need to nick a book – then they can have it.

“We generally get 40 lends out of a hardback and 25 for a paperback book.

“I would much rather people took books than have a barrier to reading.”

Louis Coiffait-Gunn (he/him), the chief executive of the library and information association CILIP

"I think it's a real shame - it tallies with what we're seeing out there in terms of public libraries. There's a range of reasons for that - so our biggest one is probably public funding has fallen, we've also had short-term funding settlements for local government, we've had the pandemic, we've got the cost of living crisis, so it's not a surprise - and it's a real worry."

"After 14 years of effective neglect, we think the new government has got a real opportunity with libraries."

"The public have a statutory right to a public library service that's efficient and comprehensive. Now the way that previous ministers have interpreted that in recent years means that actually we've seen a decline in the service, a decline in funding, I really hope that the new libraries minister is ambitious about what this network can achieve."

"Books are always going to be the heart of libraries - always have been, always will be - everyone's always saying the book is dead, it hasn't happened yet - but libraries do a range of other things... helping different people in the community and I think we need to celebrate that and invest in it."

"I think often when people think about libraries, they have a slightly old-fashioned view - they think about a shelf of books like this in a building - and yes, those things are important - but we're in the 21st Century, actually a lot of the digital skills and the digital services that libraries provide, they're what's gonna make the difference in the knowledge economy - so I want people to think about the range of things libraries do in the modern community and modern economy."

"I think both national and some local governments can share the responsibility about those closures. Local authorities have been put in an incredibly difficult position over the last 14 years, never mind just the last eight, so we don't really blame them. But I think we need the national government to take their duties to promote libraries, to develop libraries, the official language in the act, the 1956 Libraries Act, is that the minister is responsible for superintending libraries - and they have to deliver an efficient and comprehensive service. Slightly strange language, it can be interpreted in different ways, I'm hopeful that the new Libraries Minister will interpret that with ambition and with a love of libraries and see the opportunity libraries can give this government and give the people of the UK."

"Encourage people when they think of libraries and librarians to take a look at what happens now, not what they remember from when they were young perhaps, the staff in libraries help with a huge range of things and they really are helping with start-ups, they're helping with kids learning to code, they're helping with their health, with their wellbeing, they provide a huge range of services, over and above just books."

Libraries Connected, previously the Society of Chief Librarians, is a charity that supports, promotes and represents public libraries. Its membership includes almost every library service in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies.



Photo credit: Ryan Hurley

Libraries Connected chief executive Isobel Hunter MBE (pictured above) (she/her) said of the BBC Shared Data Unit's analysis:

“These figures lay bare the scale of the crisis facing public libraries and confirm what we have long suspected: libraries are hit hardest in the very areas that need them most. But as this data shows, it is not just outright closures that threaten the library network – it is also a gradual reduction in opening hours, staff numbers and operating budgets that can leave libraries unable to meet the needs of their communities. Ministers must urgently fix local government finances so that councils are funded at a level which sustains a properly resourced, staffed and supported library service in every part of the country.”

“The [outpouring of support following the destruction of Spellow Library](#) demonstrates the affection in which local libraries are held, particularly in deprived communities. Much of the social value of libraries is preventative – providing early support with employment, literacy, health and digital skills that reduces the need for more expensive interventions later on. Investing in public libraries brings huge returns for local communities and taxpayers.”

“Since January Libraries Connected has supported around 40 library services within authorities that have issued, or are on the verge of issuing, section 114 notices. It's understandable that when councils are in crisis they look for quick fixes to balance their budgets – but these short-term decisions can be catastrophic in the medium and long-term. Without urgent investment and a fair, sustainable funding settlement for local government, we risk hollowing out our public library network and storing up huge problems for the future.”

An Arts Council England spokesperson said:

“Libraries play a key role in communities across the country and provide crucial services for everyone, whatever their circumstances or background. We know that libraries are currently operating in a challenging financial environment, and that many library services are having to make difficult decisions. While Arts Council England is not the core funder of libraries, as the national development agency for creativity and culture, we are committed to supporting these vital organisations and services with regular funding of nearly £10.35 million over the next three years. This is in addition to £20.5 million which we have administered through three rounds of the Libraries Improvement Fund, and £4.96 million we have given to library projects since 2020 via National Lottery Project Grants. We are in regular contact with local authorities, who are the statutory providers of library services, and we will continue to advocate for increased funding and support.”

“Arts Council England is absolutely committed to supporting libraries of all shapes and sizes across England through project funding, advocacy, and collaboration. The evidence shows, however, that excellent cultural and creative opportunities, which are valued as a right by some people in some places, are still denied to too many in this country. Our Let’s Create strategy, which underpins our policy and decision making, wants everyone in the country, whatever their background or location, to have the opportunity to develop their own creativity and to experience high quality cultural work.”

Additional information from Arts Council England to editors:

- Arts Council England funding for libraries
 - 16 National Portfolio Organisations at £3.45 million a year (2023-26) (an increase from six libraries in the previous 2018-23 National Portfolio). We also support two Investment Programme Support Organisations with a total of £2.13 million across three years.
 - National Lottery Project Grants - £4.96 million to library projects since 2020
 - We administer the [Libraries Improvement Fund](#) (LIF) which has awarded £20.5 million across three rounds to enable library services across England to invest in a range of projects to upgrade buildings and technology so they are better placed to respond to the changing ways people are using them.
- Arts Council England role in the sector
 - As the [development agency for libraries](#) our national role means that we are well-placed to bring together key governing and funding bodies and offer support to the development of public libraries through funding and advocacy
 - Local authorities hold the statutory responsibility for libraries including funding, buildings, books and staffing
 - DCMS has a statutory duty to superintend and promote library services in England and therefore deals directly with libraries around service reviews and potential reductions.
 - Due to the mixed landscape, our work includes collaboration with a range of partners and stakeholders from across the library sector including through the English Public Libraries Stakeholder Working Group (EPL)

- The Arts Council chairs this group and its focus is to agree collaborative work streams that benefit the library sector in England.
 - Members include representatives from Arts Council England, Libraries Connected, CILIP, the British Library, LGA, Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians, Community Managed Libraries Network and Heads of library services, invited from a pool of volunteers on rotation
- Data caveats
 - The 2010 and 2016 data sets were collected by DCMS, and we're therefore unable to comment on the methodology used.
 - From 2019 onwards Arts Council England collected this data with a prepopulated table per local authority, therefore the local authority has the ability to amend, and we also cross referenced where we could.
 - Additionally, we have tried to mitigate gaps in data as explained in the notes section of our data set.
 - We only collect this data on Public Libraries in England.

Rights-of-reply

A Government spokesperson said:

"Public libraries play an important role in communities by providing spaces for people from all walks of life to access books, work and learn.

"We recognise the pressures they face, and are committed to giving stability back to local councils so services such as these can best meet the needs of their communities.

"Any significant change to library services, including closures or other reductions, must be communicated and consulted on locally by the council."

On background from the Government to editors:

- Public libraries are funded by councils and each is responsible for determining how best to meet the needs of its communities.
- We will get local government back on its feet by doing the basics right, by providing councils with more stability through multi-year funding settlements, ending competitive bidding for pots of money and reforming the local audit system.
- The data presented is a combination of sources including the 2022-23 ACE Basic Dataset and FOI requests. It is difficult for us to comment on this combination of sources without seeing the full dataset and methodology itself.
- We do not recognise the figures for 'libraries that are earmarked for closure'. Any significant change, especially closures or reductions to library service provision, must be communicated and consulted on locally. In doing so local authorities have to be satisfied that they remain able to meet their statutory obligations as required by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Equality Act 2010.
 - o With regard to potential closures in Nottingham and Birmingham, both local authorities have consulted on changes to their library provision however neither council has made a final decision.
- Some changes to library services are what is known as relocation, where a library changes physical location thereby one closes and another opens. This is often done with a view to upgrading library buildings and equipment for the long-term. Statistics should take relocations into consideration when gathering figures on closures.

What councils said

In its response to us (ref FOI-204-2024), South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture (SLLC) said: “Six (6) libraries are subject to SLLC service withdrawal in 2024/25 however work is ongoing with South Lanarkshire Council to investigate the option of offering alternative provision, in a reduced capacity, for each of them.”

David Booth, Executive Director of Community & Enterprise Resources at South Lanarkshire Council, said:

“The challenging financial landscape being faced by all Scottish local authorities has forced the council to make a number of very difficult decisions in order to bridge a budget gap of more than £20 million in the current financial year alone. That is on top of many years in which funding for the council has not risen in line with inflation and other costs, and further difficult decisions will need to be made by this and all Scottish councils in the years to come. We note other local authorities have already had to close some libraries in previous years.

“As part of the council's budget agreed for 2024-25, arrangements were put in place to work with local communities on ways to mitigate the closure of any libraries that South Lanarkshire Leisure and Culture require to withdraw from.

“A Future Libraries Fund and other funding is being targeted at reprovisioning some services in those areas where SLLC will have to withdraw from libraries. We and SLLC will continue to work with local communities to develop reprovisioning options that will be best for their areas.”

In its response to us (ref FOI/9378), Croydon told us: “There is a current public consultation which includes the proposed closure of 4 service points. There are no mobile libraries.”

A spokesperson for Croydon Council said:

“Library opening hours were reduced following the council's financial collapse in April 2020. Working with our library staff, residents and partners, we carried out a thorough review of all our library services, which included footfall, book loans, computer usage and memberships, and examining the need in different communities.

“The council is changing the library service, but the overall budget is remaining the same. We will be spending more on staff rather than library buildings, and concentrating on changing how the library service works to make it more effective.

“Library opening hours were reduced following the council’s financial collapse in April 2020, and the current library model of operating thirteen buildings which are mostly only open for two to three days a week is not working well.

“We have been listening to our communities as part of an in-depth review to look at how we can deliver a more effective library service that can better meet their needs, rather than reducing funding or resources.

“The review has considered a range of data including library usage, community demographics, levels of need and deprivation. The new proposed new model also created capacity for an outreach service which would promote the library’s services to everyone and enable us to reach more people who do not currently visit the libraries.

“The review found that the service could be more effective and efficient by closing four libraries and reinvesting these costs into improving and extending the offer in the remaining nine. This also included opening all library sites on Saturdays to ensure that people working or studying fulltime can benefit from their services around their schedule.

“The analysis on options for improvement and each of the libraries can be found online here: <https://www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/libraries-services-consultation>.

“The council ran a public consultation on these proposals earlier this year and the findings of the consultation will be discussed at a meeting of our cabinet on 25th September.

“The Council believes that libraries play an important role in supporting community cohesion, equality of opportunity, learning and skills, health and wellbeing and support for children and families. This is why we have worked on successfully adapting how the library service works to make it more effective for more of our residents and visitors, after the review found that the library service could more effectively deliver these benefits.

“This would be done by maintaining fewer libraries which are open more hours and reach more people through partnership work. This would involve redistributing the existing funding and hours across the borough to enable more of our residents and visitors to enjoy our libraries.

“The proposed model ensured that most residents would still be within a reasonable, accessible distance from a library. We also outlined how an outreach service could enable people to access a library service offer through other local venues, including events, community book collections and access to information.

“The council will work with voluntary, community and faith (VCFS) sector partners to identify alternative community usage for any buildings which are no longer managed by the library service in the new model. The library service will work with partners taking on buildings to host a library outreach offer.

“We will also continue to invest in our online services which involves e-books, e-audio, newspapers and magazines, plus online reference and learning. This service has already proven popular and made up 30% of loans in 2023/24.

“These actions will ensure that as the council changes the library service, it will continue to ensure we spend more on staff than library buildings, and change how the library service works to make it more effective. This will ensuring our residents and guests always have somewhere to enjoy the many valuable services – both social and literary – provided by the library.”

A spokesperson for Havering Council, which told us in response to our FOI (ref HAV-FOI-265717) up to four of its library service points were proposed for closure within the next year (2024), said:

“We understand the vital role libraries play in our communities and appreciate the range of social, community and wellbeing outcomes that libraries contribute to. With an outdated funding formula from central government and a budget gap of £28 million we are being forced to make further savings. The proposals to reduce the number of libraries in Havering is one of many painful decisions we will need to make until we get a better funding deal from government which accurately reflects the borough’s changing population and need.”

St Helens Borough Council said in its response under FOI that Garswood Library, Parr Library, Rainford Library, Rainhill Library were permanently closed on 26th January 2024 while Billinge Library and Peter Street Library were permanently closed on 26th January 2024, but were closed to the public at earlier dates. St Helens Borough Council Councillor Kate Groucutt, Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and Leisure, said:

“We are very proud of our Library Service offer, which with our Library Strategy 2023-2028 we are moving with the times to ensure it is fit for the future.

“We’re targeting building-based provision in areas of greatest need, open at least four days a week, supported by outreach activities in other community buildings to deliver an innovative, modern, sustainable and accessible service with opportunity and access for all.

“Early signs are positive with digital loans significantly increasing, physical loans remaining strong and visits to our remaining libraries trending upwards.

“We have been open to proposals for community-managed libraries, promoting the range of support available to interested groups, with advice on grant funding and facilitating meetings with the Community Managed Library National Peer Network.

“We do appreciate the concerns that residents have raised with us in one of the biggest and most significant consultation exercises the council has undertaken in recent years, with more than 5,500 responses.

“In response to these particular concerns, we are confident that suitable and robust alternatives are already in place for community group facilities and spaces for families with our borough-wide Children’s Centres and new Family Hubs, and support for jobseekers with our successful Ways To Work service.

“Our Refugee Resettlement Service continues to support displaced people moving to the borough, and we maintain strong links with many older residents and vulnerable people struggling to heat their homes through our affordable warmth unit, with outreach and community sessions in our libraries, children’s centres and family hubs.

“And our staff have made a concerted effort to help service users affected by closures to access our remaining libraries or digital services, and to reach older and vulnerable residents with the offer of our home delivery service. While local schools that buy into the schools’ library service still enjoy that offer, and our long-standing support of the national Summer Reading Challenge continues to engage 1,000s of children and young people during the summer break.”

Culture Perth and Kinross said in its response to us under FOI (ref FOI Response 20240412) that seven of its libraries were “saved in PKCs [the council’s] budget in March 2023 and again in March 2024. The decision in the next round of budgeting is unknown.”

A Culture Perth and Kinross spokesperson said:

“We recognise the vital role libraries play in our society, and how difficult it can be for residents to see reductions to their local service. However, the ways in which people access books, information, and other library services are changing. New technologies and lifestyle changes have led to a change in how and when people make use of services. These long-term trends, combined with nation-wide pressures on local authority budgets, mean we need to rethink how we deliver library services.

“We are working with our communities to develop new ways to deliver the library services they need and value most, and will continue to do so. Where the closure of a physical library is being considered, we are working with local people to find alternative solutions to maintain access to services.”

Press reports suggested 4 libraries were potentially at risk of closure in Nottingham:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cn0l1z63zzro>

A spokesperson for Nottingham City Council said:

“Unfortunately changes and cuts to library provisions is not just a Nottingham issue and all across the UK library provision is under continuous review as local government spending is squeezed. Derbyshire and Leicester City are similarly involved in consultations on their Library Service provision now.

“We recently carried out a 12-week public consultation around changes to our library services to try and to try and find new ways of providing our library services, as we need to

find £1.5 million in savings, which 38% of the service's current subsidy budget over the next two financial years. This saving is just part of a much wider range of savings needing to be made at the council - around £70 million. Trying to achieve these large savings quickly will not be easy and the proposals put forward for libraries was the closure of four libraries, alongside a reduction in opening hours and cuts to funds to budgets such as the book fund.

"Nottingham is aware of the impact that closures of libraries can have on communities but at this stage no decision has been made on closures and we are going to review the responses received in the consultation, as well as speaking to other organisations to look at any alternative options for library delivery.

"Our research has found that the perfect library service doesn't exist, we've looked at different ways of delivering the services, like self-serve or using volunteers, but all come with different issues and costs. We need to find a way to make sure that our services are regularly used by people, so we can keep them – and we need to look at using the best parts of other service models to provide new ways to serve are very different community needs."

Proposals by Birmingham City Council reported in the Press recommend a move away from the city's current 35 community libraries to a mixed offering which would have 25 "building-based library services" along with an expanded mobile library service, virtual library, self-service and libraries at home provision.

A spokesperson for Birmingham City Council said:

"Whilst the consultation is happening, we cannot comment on anything. For information about the final phase of the consultation please visit our [website](#), where you will find consultation papers, FAQ's and the Be Heard [survey](#)."

A spokesperson for Devon County Council said:

"We have no plans to close any libraries.

"NB – earlier this year we did cease our mobile library service (four vehicles) and I think that is what you have seen on the FOI but to reiterate we have not closed any static libraries or do we plan to."

A spokesperson for the Libraries Unlimited charity, which runs libraries in Devon and Torbay, said:

“No libraries have been closed in Devon since we took over the running of the contract in 2016. And our libraries are all operated by paid staff, with valuable additional support from volunteers. The Libraries Unlimited model of a charity running the libraries works incredibly effectively as we are able to source extra funding for the libraries.

“Libraries Unlimited took over Devon County Council’s library services in 2016, and Torbay’s in 2018. The charity library model established in Devon was seen as groundbreaking when it was set up and was promoted around the country through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Libraries Unlimited’s Board includes staff, library users, members of the community and business and independent experts.

“This structure has enabled Libraries Unlimited to continue to succeed through challenging economic times by being able to source income from beyond the statutory local authority grants from sources such as other charities, Trusts, other Government departments and private donors.”