

The numbers

Libraries are free

34 million people a year visit
public libraries in the UK

In 2009, book borrowing
increased by 1.3%

Libraries cost on average just
5p per person per day to run

The Society of Chief Librarians is a local government association made up of the chief librarian of each library authority in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We advocate for continuous improvement of the public library service, maximising efficiency and quality. We represent the people who are developing and delivering the library service for the future, and this is our manifesto.

Our aim is to ensure that the next Government understands and acts on the priorities of a vibrant, effective and people-led public library service.

Core Purpose of the Public Library

Libraries are a place where you can share the experience of reading and learning; where knowledge is free; and where you know that the advice and support available to help you is expert, and independent of any vested interest.

The most successful library services work in close partnership with local councils and local people to tailor their services to meet local needs.¹ The range and variety of services offered by libraries across the UK varies to reflect local community priorities, but all public libraries are focussed around a common purpose.

1.

Reading and Literacy

Public libraries help people develop and enhance their literacy skills, as well as reading for fun, by fostering a love of reading from infancy. Without the support of public libraries, poor literacy costs to the UK economy, currently up to £2.5bn every year, would be even higher.²

- ◇ Libraries offer free access to the world's knowledge and ideas by providing collections of books for people to read for enquiry, learning, inspiration and recreation.
- ◇ Today, the world's knowledge is available in many more ways than when public libraries first opened their doors. We will embrace new formats and technologies that allow us to widen access to knowledge and reading, including e-books, e-audio books, and web-based content and social media. These new channels will continue to be supported by our unique collections of books.

1. One good example of this is Platt Bridge Community Library in Wigan. Opened as part of a LIFT project to regenerate public services in Platt Bridge and includes a new primary school, a Sure Start children's centre with wrap around nursery care, family support centre, community health centre and a housing office. The school contributes to the library's stock of books, the library acts as a reception for the school.

2. KPMG Foundation research on literacy



2.

Digital Inclusion and Fluency

Public Libraries help people develop digital and information skills to become active citizens.

In the UK less than half of households have broadband, resulting in economic and educational disadvantage. Every public library authority provides on average 760 hours of free or low cost internet access a week and skilled support to help people use it.

- ◇ Direct access to a vast range of information is now available via the Internet. Public libraries have embraced this change, understanding that with this explosion of available information comes a need to help people find information they can trust.
- ◇ We will ensure that everyone has access to the world's knowledge and ideas.³
- ◇ In taking up new channels we will continue to proactively seek out people who feel disenfranchised or disengaged, and encourage them to develop their skills and life chances through access to timely and accurate information.

- ◇ We will develop and enhance our information services by providing public access to high speed internet access in libraries, and expert guidance from information experts, often offered 24/7, to ensure that people have the information they need.

3.

Learning and Skills

“The Learning Revolution” recognised the vital role that public libraries play in the informal learning environment: “...people in this country have a passion for learning. This informal adult learning makes a huge contribution to the well-being of the nation.”⁴ Public libraries support learning through access to knowledge and content, and space and support to learn.

- ◇ Public libraries offer safe, non-threatening gateways to more formal learning for those who wish to take this route.
- ◇ Libraries are a point of continuity for each and every citizen throughout their lives.

³ “The number one benefit of information technology is that it empowers people to do what they want to do. It lets people be creative. It lets people be productive. It lets people learn things they didn’t think they could learn before, and so in a sense it is all about potential.”
Steve Ballmer, Chief Executive, Microsoft

⁴ The Learning Revolution, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, Cm 5999, published March 2009



Continued investment in the public library service is critical to the future of public libraries. SCL advocates for investment in library service leaders, today's and tomorrow's, and constantly explores new options for service delivery that will both improve quality and maximise efficiency.

It is essential that, under a new Government, investment in libraries continues in order to enable public libraries to keep innovating and exploring new models of delivery.

4.

Business and Innovation

Libraries support businesses and entrepreneurs and contribute to the sustainability and regeneration of their local communities. Many public libraries offer free business support and advice.

- ◇ Libraries continue to work in partnership with public and private sector organisations to improve the library service.
- ◇ Free business support and advice offered in public libraries helps thousands of entrepreneurs create thriving businesses.
- ◇ In libraries, people access the information they need to improve basic skills and find jobs.

5.

Community Anchors

Underpinning all the other roles, libraries are welcoming, neutral and safe places for communities to come together and develop the ties that are essential for local wellbeing and quality of life. People share this space

with others of all ages, backgrounds and interests, many quite unlike themselves. In so doing they develop an understanding of others that supports community cohesion. Such spaces have never been more critical to the health of society.

- ◇ Libraries are an important source of cultural resources.
- ◇ Public libraries are storehouses of the world's knowledge and a place for individual study.
- ◇ We develop and enhance the experiences we offer through activities and events, and by encouraging people to use our spaces to come together in groups to share their love of reading.
- ◇ We embrace new technologies and communication channels to extend this offer to virtual community space, hosted and monitored by library staff, offering an alternative safe and welcoming environment to those who prefer to access our services online.
- ◇ Local studies pursued in libraries create a unique record of every localities cultural history and identity.