



Libraries Connected

ANNUAL REPORT
2021



CONTENTS

P4: Foreword by Carol Stump, President

P5: Introduction from Isobel Hunter, Chief Executive

P6-7: Advocacy and impact

P8-9: Service recovery

P10-11: Libraries from home

P12-13: Major projects

P14-15: Universal Library Offers

P16: SCL Cymru/Libraries NI

P17: Key achievements

P18-19: Accounts

P20: Acknowledgements



FOREWORD CAROL STUMP, PRESIDENT



My first year as President of Libraries Connected was definitely not what I expected. I think I will be forever known as the 'Lockdown President'!

However, it has still been an immensely rewarding experience. I am extremely proud of the staff across all library services for their resilience, flexibility, passion and commitment to providing a high-quality offer in such difficult and confusing times.

Whether it was on the frontlines of the community response, getting food and medicine out to the most vulnerable, making those much-appreciated welfare calls, or moving the library service online, our staff have proven that their skills and knowledge are invaluable to individuals and communities.

This will surely stand us in good stead for the future, as funders and decision makers recognise the importance of libraries in supporting the local economy and the health and wellbeing of residents.

I have to thank the amazing Libraries Connected staff, led so well by Isobel, and also the trustees for their support to me over my first term as President. They were quick to adapt to the virtual world, moving meetings, programmes and projects online. Our webinars have been particularly well received, allowing us to

reach more library staff and volunteers than ever before. I know the support we've given to Heads of Service through multiple lockdowns and reopenings has been vital.

Personally, I'm hoping the next year will see more face-to-face meetings and more physical events, and I hope to visit many more libraries before my term ends. I am also determined to make sure that the recognition and appreciation that libraries gained during the pandemic is not lost but that they continue to be valued services at the heart of our communities.

This report outlines the many fantastic achievements of the past year and looks forward to many more, as we open up our libraries with a renewed vision and purpose to help communities to recover and thrive as we emerge from the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION ISOBEL HUNTER, CHIEF EXECUTIVE



This has been a tumultuous year for all of us, both personally and professionally, as we were plunged into a global pandemic. As ever, libraries around the country rose to meet the challenge by redesigning their services to support their communities through lockdown.

Libraries Connected stepped up to make sure that libraries received the information and support they needed to deliver their services to local communities, during lockdown and beyond. Like everyone, we had to rapidly amend our plans as we worked with libraries to get through the pandemic, leveraging the power of our network of members to share concerns, advice and ideas.

We strengthened our partnership with DCMS to ensure that libraries could reopen safely, in line with the latest guidance from Public Health England. We provided a vital channel for libraries to communicate their concerns and issues to central government. We are delighted that libraries' efforts were recognised by government when they declared library staff as key workers during the pandemic; an important step towards ensuring that the many services that libraries deliver to communities is better understood and valued.

We also helped to promote the amazing online activities that libraries created through our Libraries from Home pages as well as ensuring that they had the skills

and information they needed to develop their digital offer. Our thanks also go to Arts Council England who provided every library service in England with a grant to fund their purchase of eBooks to help meet the increased demand.

We're now working hard to ensure that we build on this growing appreciation for the many ways that libraries can support their communities as they work to recover from the impact of the pandemic. We know that local budgets will be even tighter. With more than one in four libraries managing cuts of between 5% and 20% this year, we are advocating for libraries in the latest spending review.

Further, libraries are facing significant and ongoing extra costs for digital stock and so we are working with publishers to help libraries to buy any published eBook, at a similar price to physical books.

The past year has proven to us how resilient, determined and ambitious libraries are in the face of multiple challenges. However, we must not take them for granted. Library spaces, centred in their communities, are an essential part of local renewal.

ADVOCACY AND IMPACT

In April, we put in a bid to DCMS for £1,417,238 funding to increase public libraries' supply of eBooks and eAudio during lockdown. While the bid was ultimately unsuccessful, it created new relationships for us with the aggregators who supply eBooks to libraries and produced a wealth of data on eBook use and costs that informed our work throughout the year.

Libraries: An essential part of local recovery

Through the Service Recovery Group, made up of Heads of Library Services, we identified five key areas where libraries play a central role in meeting the needs of individuals and communities who may struggle to overcome the effects of the pandemic. These are:

- Economic recovery with help and training for job seekers and entrepreneurs
- Education support for students who struggled to learn at home
- Isolation mitigation for vulnerable groups, helping people to reconnect
- Digital inclusion for residents who lack IT skills or have no Internet access
- Cultural partnership to help local artists to continue their work.

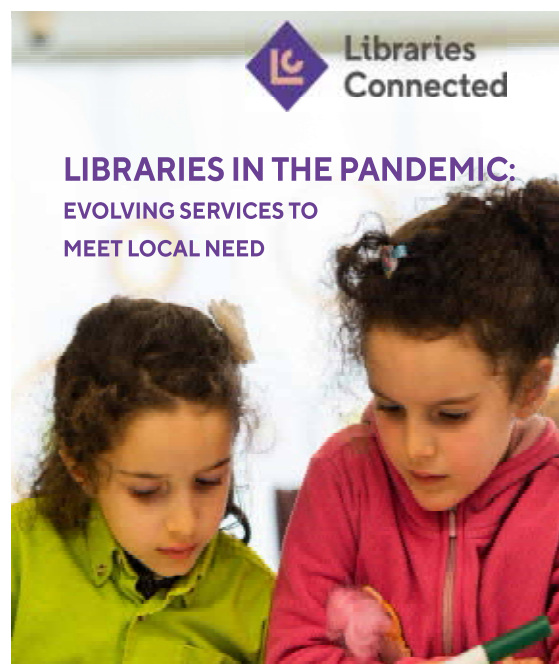
These areas were outlined with statistics and case studies in our advocacy report, *Libraries: An essential part of local recovery*, that we published in July.

Lockdown surveys of libraries

In the autumn, we surveyed our members to try and increase our understanding of how Covid-19 had impacted on library budgets and what the consequences may be in the future. Over 100 library services responded to the survey, which revealed that the strain of the pandemic on local budgets meant the one in four library services face a reduction in their local authority funding for 2021/22.

Libraries in Lockdown report

Our research report, *Libraries in Lockdown*, published in October, showed how libraries and their staff kept communities connected, and supported the most vulnerable through the pandemic. During lockdown, libraries grew their digital offer, engaged with people at risk of isolation and went the extra mile to support the local response to the pandemic. However, our evidence also showed that the leaders who were given the freedom to shape and adapt their services were better able to respond to the specific needs of their communities.



Case study: Libraries in the pandemic with Carnegie UK Trust

In December, we pulled together the findings from our *Libraries in Lockdown* report that surveyed library staff with user evidence from the Carnegie UK Trust's report, *Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead*, and other data to produce *Libraries in the Pandemic*, a summary of evidence about all that libraries achieved during lockdown. Key findings include:

- Over 75% of libraries delivered online events during lockdown
Around three in 10 adults in the UK engaged with public library services during lockdown – that's 15 million people
- Online lending surged, with 3.5 million more eBooks loaned by mid-August
- 2.9 million people were proactively contacted by libraries and library teams made over 130,000 calls to local people who were shielding or vulnerable
- A quarter of library staff were redeployed within their local authority, delivering vital capacity to the local pandemic response.



SERVICE RECOVERY

Service Recovery Group

We developed a range of responses to help libraries reopen safely. We recruited a Service Recovery Group of 10 Heads of Service as the key sounding board to inform our work in this area. The group helped identify ways to deliver library services in line with emerging guidance, and considered meeting the needs of their staff, different types of library users and volunteers.

Service Recovery Toolkit

These priority areas formed the basis of our service recovery toolkit, which became government guidance, published in June. The toolkit was written and revised in liaison with the DCMS libraries team, with advice and legal review from experts at Public Health England, Health and Safety Executive, DCMS Covid Hub and their legal team. It was updated every time the government regulations changed, or when new information became available.

This new working relationship with DCMS was invaluable. It opened up a new communications channel from Heads of Service into government at a time when the situation was changing rapidly.

Webinar series

To support the toolkit, we hosted a series of 12 webinars for library staff and partners between June and November. These covered topics such as supporting staff back into the library, hosting events and activities safely and an international perspective on reopening libraries. These webinars were attended by more than 2,600 library staff and partners.

Architect's guide

We worked in partnership with architects IF_DO and CILIP to create a free guide on how to organise library buildings to keep staff and the public safe while ensuring these spaces remain welcoming environments for everyone to use.

Reopening surveys

Information and insight sharing have been vital to helping library services to respond to the rapidly changing environment and restrictions. We established reopening surveys at critical points, to share what was being offered in different areas, and a regular activity survey to share levels of access across the sector.

Future Funding workshops

Recognising the need for extra support to recover income and generate new funds, we added new workshops to our Future Funding programme. These included: Income generation in society; Mapping out an income strategy; Partnerships; Commissioning and the Levelling Up Fund.

Case study: Digital Bootcamp with Kingston Libraries

Marion Tessier from Kingston Libraries worked with us to develop the Libraries Digital Bootcamp to help library staff to learn new techniques and skills, find out how other library services have delivered online activity and gain new ideas to use in their own service.

Almost 500 library staff and volunteers joined this event in November, where our members from across the country spoke about creating podcasts and videos, building an online escape room, Minecraft in libraries and more.

Wigan Libraries also spoke about TechMates, where they work with local volunteers to deliver digital mentoring and support.



LIBRARIES FROM HOME

We quickly realised that libraries would have to shift to deliver their services online and remotely during lockdown. We promoted libraries' existing digital services and helped them to develop new ones by creating two new areas of our website: Libraries from Home and Responding to Covid.

Libraries from Home

This web area focused on promoting libraries' digital offer to the public. This included the standard offer of eBooks, audio books, films, music, etc. as well as newly created online events and activities. The site featured resources from partners such as Bookstart, CILIP, The Reading Agency, BBC Arts and The British Library.

We gathered a group of 13 people working in libraries around the country to review and recommend the best online storytimes, rhymetimes and other activities aimed at children and to curate lists of online reading clubs, book podcasts as well as learning, reading, health and information resources.

We also updated the page daily with high profile events from libraries around the country and curated a range of special features for key calendar points such as Libraries Week, Summer Reading Challenge, Black and LGBT History Months, and VE Day.

Since publication, the Libraries from Home page has had 34,858 page views and was responsible for over 9% of the total traffic to the Libraries Connected website between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Responding to Covid

This area of the website focused on providing information and guidance to libraries during the pandemic. It aimed to help them deliver their services safely and give them the skills they needed to deliver services online.

We contacted 20 children's publishers to negotiate licencing rights to allow libraries to deliver story and rhymetimes online and kept these updated throughout lockdown.

Our team of 13 library staff created a series of 'how to' resources on social media, Facebook Live and Groups, creating a YouTube channel, podcasts, as well as guidance for safeguarding online and running digital events for adults. We also published a list of online and distance learning resources for library staff.

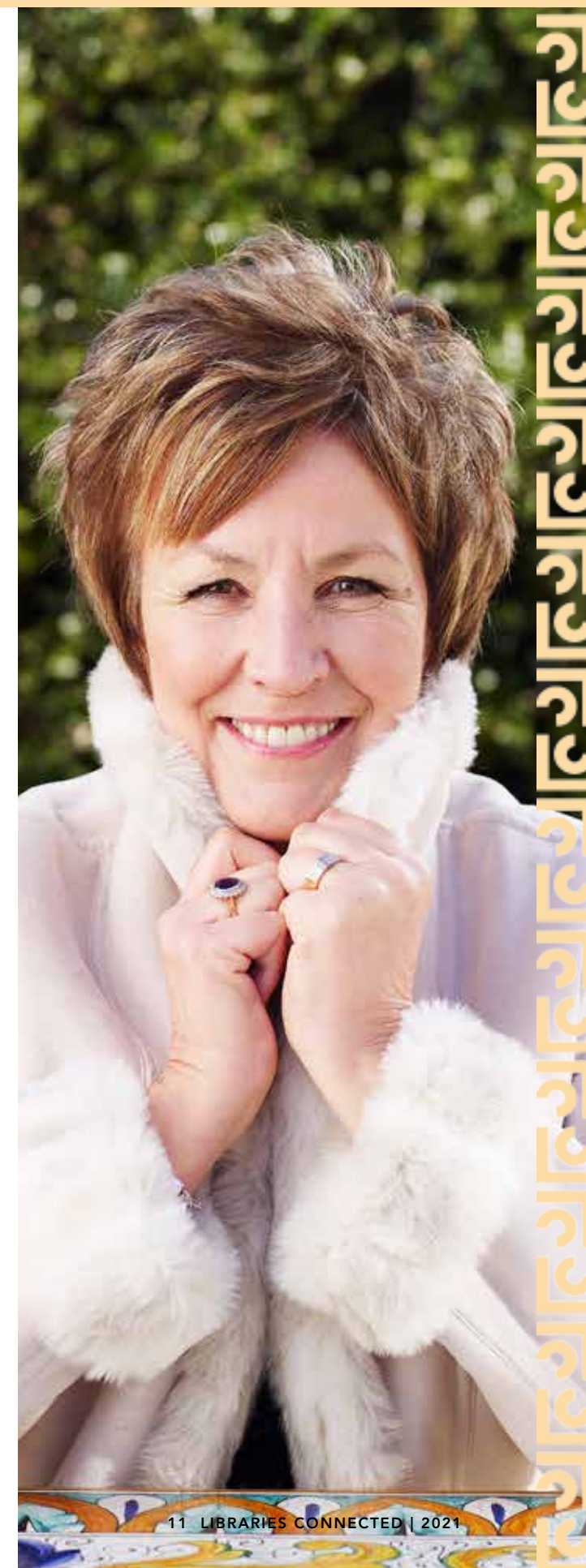
Since publication, the Responding to Covid-19 page has had 22,543 page views and was responsible for over 5% of the total traffic to the Libraries Connected website between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021.

Case study: Lesley Pearse tour with Michael Joseph Books

Bestselling author Lesley Pearse featured in a digital library tour in October called 'Love Libraries' in partnership with Libraries Connected and Michael Joseph Books.

Pearse, author of 28 global bestsellers appeared in six libraries around the country to promote her new novel *Suspects*, about a young couple dealing with the fallout of a murder in their community.

The tour began in Bristol, then moved on to Shropshire, West Sussex, Vale of Glamorgan and Bury before ending in Manchester.



MAJOR PROJECTS

As part of our ambition to help shape the environment in which libraries operate, we continued to deliver our series of major projects:

Leading Libraries

The Transforming Leadership: Leading Libraries Programme funded by Arts Council England aims to support the next generation of diverse library leaders. The programme was redesigned, with the Leadership Institute at The University of Birmingham, as a fully online experience.

As well as taught sessions, the group from 15 library services have been working in smaller teams to share coaching sessions and to develop strategic challenges in their local service. The taught element of the project will come to an end in July 2021 and the project will conclude with a conference in March 2022.

Accreditation for Libraries

Our accreditation project, funded by Arts Council England, aims to clearly define what a high-quality library service looks like. The work to develop and deliver an authoritative, sector-led scheme to help libraries in England to meet the needs of their local communities, is now being piloted. We published an interim report outlining the key findings from the consultation in November.

The project is overseen by a board that includes partners from CILIP, Arts Council England, National Archives, The Local Government Association and the British Library. It is also informed by a group of our members and the conversation from a public webinar which explored 'What does quality mean for a modern library service?' This was attended by more than 100 library users.

Future Funding

We are delivering a programme to support the development of income generation skills across the library sector. While this is funded by Arts Council England, we are making activities available across our membership, where possible.

The first strand is to develop and deliver a core commercial skills programme for those with budget responsibility within libraries. The second is to develop networks and opportunities for sharing learning. The Income Generation Network launched in November and now has over 120 budget holders and library service leaders. The third strand shares learning from regional and national projects and the fourth is the delivery and securing of national services.

Regional Support

With funding from Arts Council England and the Libraries Taskforce, we commissioned work with five regional networks and three library services to pilot:

- A regional network support to help libraries to build their capacity, work as peer networks and to deliver strategic collaborations
- An Expert Bank where three consultants were commissioned to work with individual library services to tackle a specific challenge. We ran a series of three free webinars on these projects, attended by 250 library staff.

BBC Novels that Shaped our World

BBC Novels that Shaped Our World library campaign, funded by Arts Council England, saw libraries around the country create an exciting range of activities and events in response to the list of novels from BBC Arts. By the end of the project, 54 library services will have taken part in over 200 events.

Ten extra libraries were also awarded £1,000 funding to put on an event between January and March 2021 that responded to one of the novels on the list, or one of its themes. We also hosted a digital tour with author Natalie Haynes of Trafford, Bristol, Northumberland and Leeds library services in November.



UNIVERSAL LIBRARY OFFERS

Building and deepening our Universal Library Offer partnerships

In April 2020 we launched our new Universal Library Offers. While we had to reshape our plans, the offers actively responded to the pandemic by moving to online delivery, building and consolidating partnerships, supporting workforce development and preparing for a post-Covid world.

Reading

- We contributed to World Book Night in April 2021. This was the first fully online national book event after lockdown so it was a great opportunity to learn about delivering online events
- We supported the Novels Programme as it moved to digital delivery
- We developed our partnership with National Poetry Day.

Health and Wellbeing

- We worked with ASCEL to deliver a webinar focusing on children's health and wellbeing during the pandemic with speakers from NHS, a school academy and The Anna Freud Centre.
- We created a new children's mental health resource pack for libraries.
- Over 100 library authorities across England were involved in the DCMS-funded Reading Friends programme. All library authorities have received Reading Well book collections, with over 300,000 books distributed.

Culture and Creativity

- We worked with Creative Arts East to create a new Culture and Creativity online learning module, that launched in December
- With Darren Henley, CEO of Arts Council England, we ran a webinar with the Bridge Network and The Mighty to explore the potential for partnership and good practice between Local Cultural Education Partnerships and libraries.
- We worked with St Helens Arts in Libraries on a webinar about their commissioned research into arts engagement and lockdown.

Information and Digital

- We are supporting the DCMS Open Data project and the British Library's work on the Single Digital Presence
- We supported libraries to shift to digital delivery and we shaped webinars on digital creativity and a digital bootcamp, engaging the skills of the library workforce
- We are working with ACE's Digital Cultural Network on a programme of webinars to build specific digital skills.

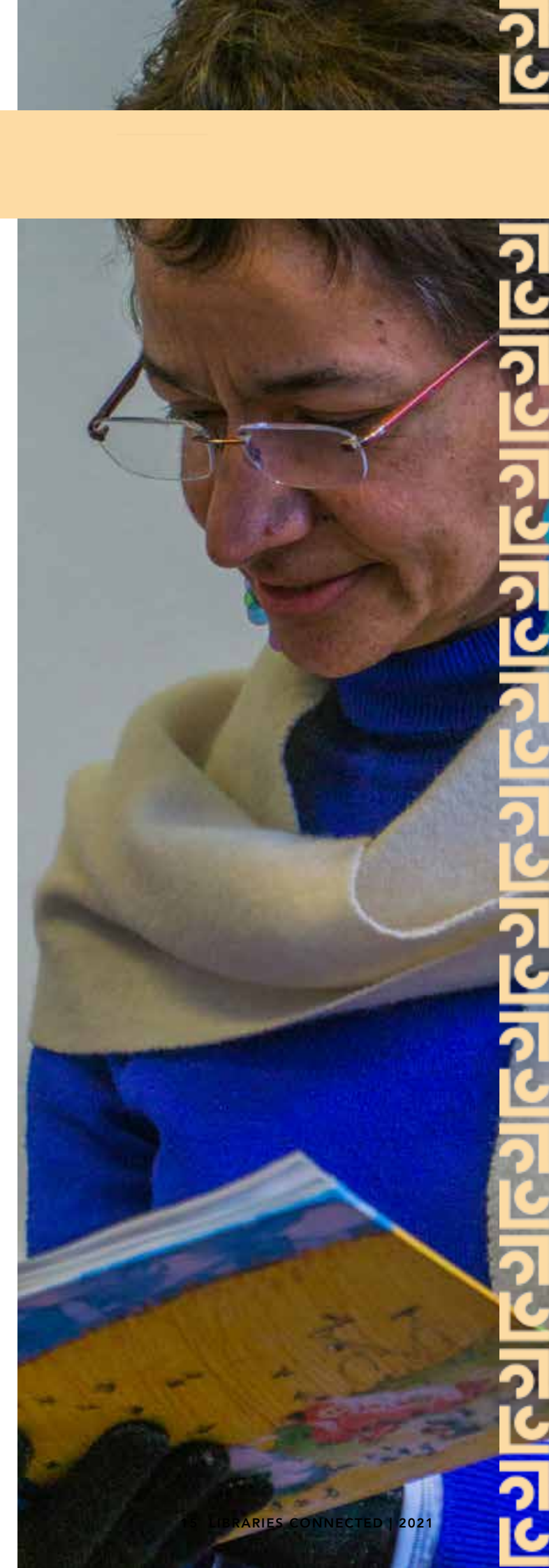
Children's Promise

- ASCEL's conference 'A Brave New World' went online in 2020 with speakers including Geoff Barton from the Association of School and College Leaders, Achievement for All, Fair Education Alliance and The Black Curriculum
- ASCEL and the NSPCC worked together to create a series of online safety information posters, funded by Libraries Connected.
- During the summer, Authors Aloud worked with ASCEL to offer a series of virtual author visits to support the Summer Reading Challenge in libraries.

Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise

Share the Vision have agreed a three-year strategic partnership with The Ulverscroft Foundation to help libraries be more accessible to visually impaired people by:

- Increasing library staff understanding of the needs of blind and vision-impaired people, and the challenges they face in accessing library services
- Improving awareness among blind and vision-impaired people about the range of library services on offer
- Supporting the development and accessibility of these services and increasing their take-up.



SCL Cymru

We are carrying out a detailed study of the Library Management System shared by twenty Welsh local authorities. Aligned with this is the focus that Welsh Government are placing on the digital journey for customers. The Welsh Local Government Association is supporting research into this area.

Welsh public libraries have worked more closely than ever during the pandemic, with library leads meeting together and with Welsh Government officials regularly to collaborate on challenges and capitalise on opportunities. This has been key to developing new services such as Click and Collect and a digital Summer Reading Challenge platform. We have been supported by Cultural Recovery funding which has been used locally but also for the Estyn Allan Project, which developed the skills and confidence of library staff in creating digital library activities and provided equipment for digital events.

A review of the Welsh Public Library Standards will begin shortly with the aim of implementing a transformative Seventh Performance Framework. SCL Cymru have identified key priorities for public library services in Wales: The economy; health and wellbeing; information and digital; reading and literacy; and Welsh language and culture. We will be working to ensure that Welsh public libraries can capitalise on future opportunities to develop and promote services.

Libraries NI

The public library service for Northern Ireland introduced new services, e-newspapers, Book and Collect, BookBox, Print and Collect and moved its programming online which enabled customers to continue to access library resources during lockdown.

Funding through the Covid-19 Culture, Languages, Arts and Heritage support programming delivered 26 online Heritage at Home lectures, 118 Happiness Lab sessions, 21 OCN level 1 and 2 Storytelling courses and created 20 Storytelling video recordings reflecting diversity and featuring local and international storytellers. Additionally, an image archive was created to capture Belfast and Derry during the pandemic. Ten films were recorded showcasing NI authors advocating libraries, books and reading. Historical photographs from our collections were also digitised.

The fifth annual Libraries NI and BBC BookWeek NI celebrated stories and storytelling with a specially commissioned TV programme 'Read all About It' and online activities including a conversation with renowned crime writer, Ann Cleeves.

Good Relations Week 2020 celebrated people and communities, tackling racism and promoting cultural diversity with the theme 'Celebrating Our Journey, Embracing Our Future'. Online library activities included craft videos, Makaton rhymes, creative writing and book recommendations around the theme. The Armstrong Storytelling Trust which funds our storytelling residency recorded stories to celebrate diversity and these were broadcast via social media. Libraries NI Storyteller in Residence with new and emerging storytellers delivered 270 events to over 6500 participants.

Annual seminar

The 2020 seminar took place as a virtual event in December. Library leaders heard from a range of speakers who discussed how libraries can evidence and communicate their impact to secure support and funding. Over 350 people attended the event from 60 different library services and partners.

50% of those responding to the survey had not been to a Libraries Connected Seminar before.

Equal opportunities

We rewrote our Equality and Diversity Strategy and plan and developed a series of three Black Stories Matter webinars on Promoting Diverse Content, Talking about Race and Managing Collections. These helped identify specific diversity issues for libraries and suggested the support we can develop for the sector.

Almost 800 people registered to attend the event series

Innovation network

Membership of the Innovation Network on Basecamp has increased from 577 in April 2020 to 887 in March 2021. The messages that generated the most interest this year were about digital buddies and reopening libraries. The annual gathering was cancelled due to Covid and the network continues to operate online.

96% of those responding to the survey would recommend the network to a colleague

Learning Pool

We offer e-learning via Learning Pool and this year saw a huge surge in use when libraries closed. We launched a new course on Culture and Creativity and for the first time members in Wales and Northern Ireland were able to use the platform.

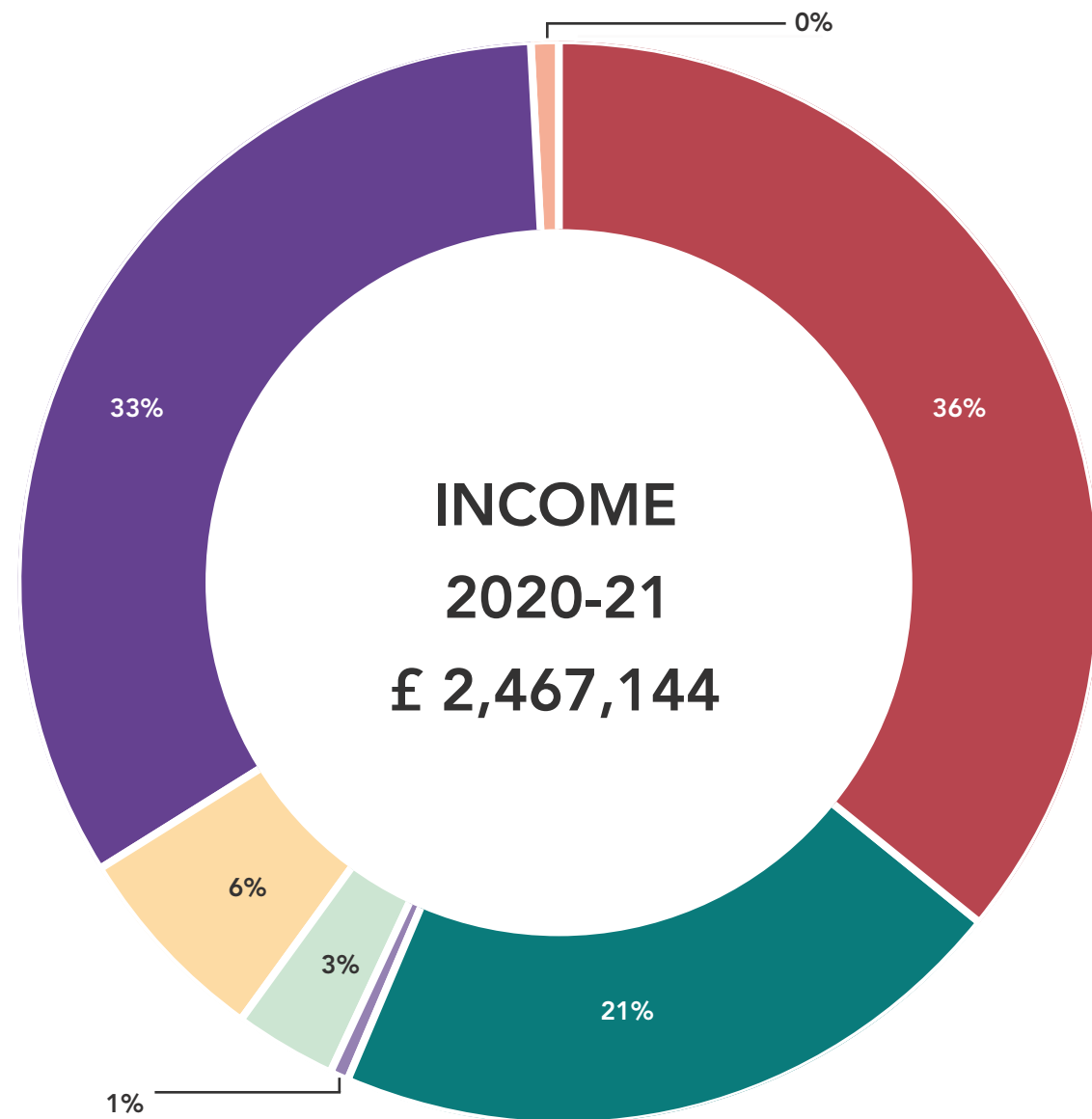
16,863 learning modules have been completed from April 2020 to March 2021

Heads of Service network

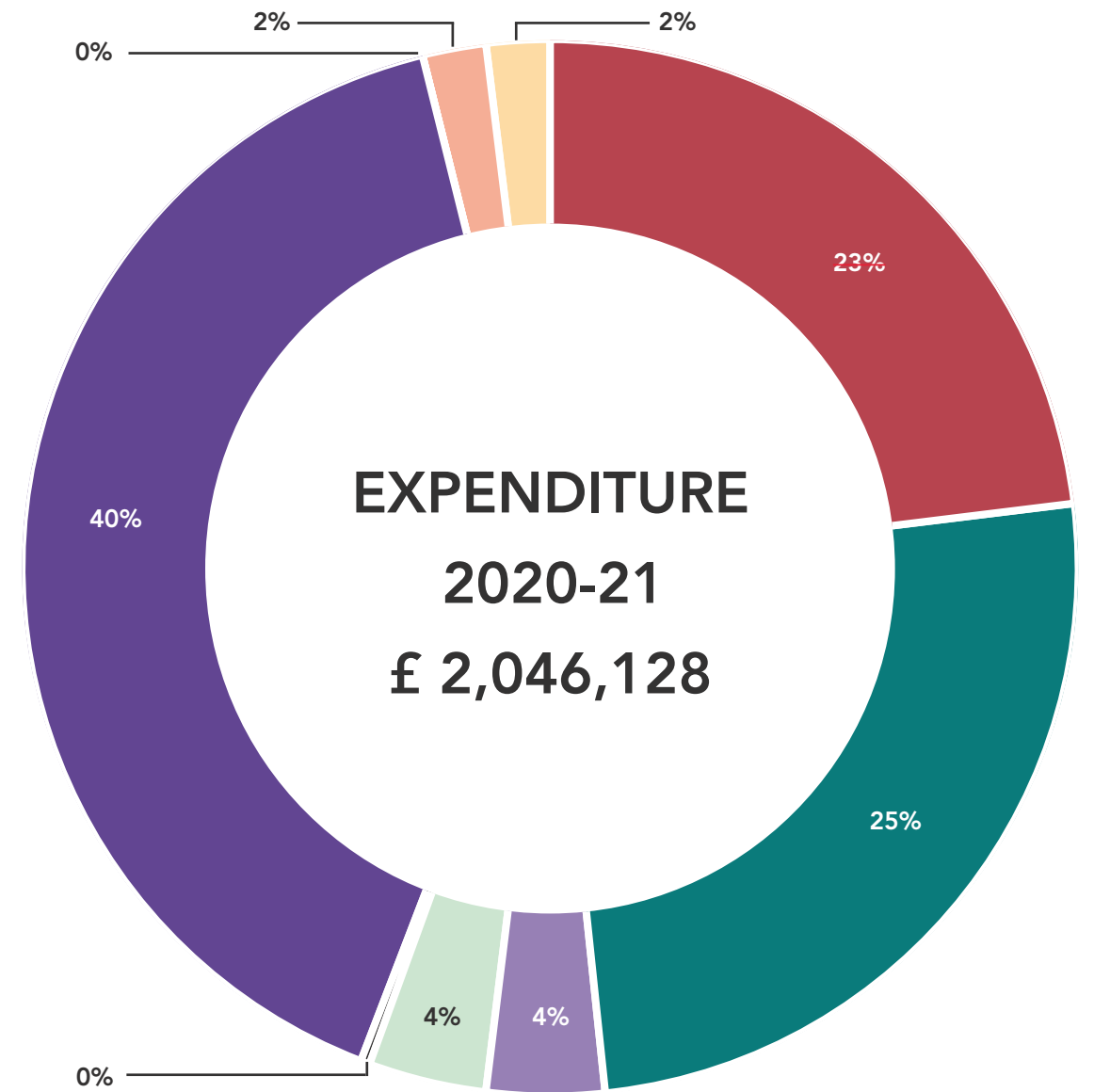
The Heads of Service Network has allowed our members to connect and support one another through lockdown. It has also kept us well informed about the challenges they were facing, helped us to adapt our support to meet their needs and to better represent library services to DCMS and other partners.

165 library services are now on the network.

ACCOUNTS



- Arts Council England project grants, £884,751
- Regional membership fees, £148,306
- Arts Council England core grant, £509,200
- UK Visa & Immigration, £820,265
- Conferences & seminars, £17,015
- Other income, £14,891
- National membership fees, £72,716



- Staff costs, £516,603
- UK visa fees to libraries, £820,265
- Programmes & activities, £516,603
- Seminar & events, £2,727
- Universal Library Offers, £74,603
- Workforce development, £36,006
- Office & administration, £73,195
- Regional expenditure, £39,687
- Governance, £10,487

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We could not have accomplished all that we have this year without the efforts and expertise of so many organisations and individuals. We would like to thank the following partners for their support this year:

- Arts Council England
- Arts Council England
- The Association of Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL)
- BBC
- Booksellers Association
- Booktrust
- The British Library
- Carnegie UK Trust
- CILIP
- The Local Government Association
- The Reading Agency
- Share the Vision

We would like to thank our Advisory Board for their dedication and expert guidance this year:

- Adrienne Adair, Libraries NI
- Sue Ball, Staffordshire County Council
- Dawn Beaumont, Birmingham City Council
- Medi Bernard, Bournemouth and Poole Libraries
- Lindy Elliott, Portsmouth Libraries
- Jane Everiss, Gloucestershire County Council
- Peter Gaw, Inspire Culture, Learning & Libraries
- Subnum Hariff-Khan, Oldham Libraries
- Jan Holden, Norfolk Library and Information Service
- Ed Jewell, Jersey Libraries
- Sean Kelly, Arts Council England
- Michael Lewis, Shropshire Libraries
- Dave Lloyd, Coventry City Council
- Liz MacMillan, Slough Libraries
- Mark McCree, Blackpool Libraries
- Catherine Mann, Staffordshire County Council
- Michelle Murphy, Hertfordshire Libraries
- Helen Osborn, Libraries NI
- James Pearson, Kent County Council
- Alun Prescott, Newport City Council
- Caroline Rae, London Borough of Newham
- Hannah Richens, London Borough of Barnet
- Claire Robe, Arts Council England
- Julia Robinson, South Tyneside Council
- Fiona Williams, Explore York

We would like to thank our Board of Trustees for their strong and committed leadership:

- Martin Burton
- Jane Ellison
- Julie Griffiths
- Kathryn Harrison
- Anthony Hopkins
- Ayub Khan
- Ilona Kish
- Neil MacInnes
- Emma Noyce
- Vera Owen
- Liz White

We would also like to thank:

- Our colleagues in Northern Ireland and Wales, who generously share their own experiences of developing library services
- Member local authorities and library services for their co-operation in releasing officers to carry out work on our behalf.

Finally, huge thanks go to our President Carol Stump, our Past President Mark Freeman and our Honorary Treasurer Ayub Khan for the vast amount of time and effort that they've dedicated to Libraries Connected. We would also like to thank Lesley Sim who retired from our board this year.