

Public Libraries briefing

Key facts about public libraries

- 322 million visits are made to UK public libraries each year
- More people use public libraries than attend premier league football matches
- 78% of 5-10 year olds use libraries
- Children's book borrowing has risen year on year for six years
- There are currently 4,064 UK library buildings and 548 mobile libraries in the UK

Threats to public libraries

The Chartered Institute of Library & Information Professionals currently estimates that over 600 libraries in England could close, especially if communities don't come forward to manage local libraries. CILIP has grave concerns about the level and extent of proposed cuts to public library services across England. The front-loading of savings to local government grants mean that radical proposals have been implemented quickly and often without proper preparation and consultation.

The cost of illiteracy

Around 16%, or 5.2 million adults in England, are "functionally illiterate". They have literacy levels at or below those expected of an 11-year-old. Poor literacy skills impact on people's education, health, employability, wealth and well-being. Public libraries help address these literacy problems, research from the National Literacy Trust shows that children and young people that use public libraries are twice as likely to be above average readers.

Why have public libraries?

Good libraries change lives and help transform communities. A good library should be accessible with suitable opening hours; well-resourced with materials that are regularly refreshed; and employ knowledgeable staff. Good libraries should reach out to local communities, especially those who are unable or unwilling to visit, and provide programmes of activities and events.

Public libraries are much more than just a room with books and computers. They:

- Provide public access to the knowledge and information of the world
- Promote reading and literature to all ages and the whole of society
- Enable learning and literacy from cradle to grave
- Serve local people as a community hub to deliver essential services and activities:
 - By providing information for everyday living
 - As a gateway to local events and organisations
 - As a local meeting space and resource centre
 - Through exhibitions, author events and other activities
 - Help users find and interpret information through their skilled staff
- Act as a cost-saver for society by combating ignorance, alienation, isolation, division and the lack of aspiration
- Not only do libraries make a valuable contribution to our society, they stand for important values in our society including intellectual freedom, equality of opportunity, engaged citizenship, informed democracy, and a society in which people have the chance to achieve their potential.

CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers. CILIP's vision is a fair and economically prosperous society underpinned by literacy, access to information and the transfer of knowledge. CILIP is a registered charity, no. 313014. Visit www.cilip.org.uk for more information.