

Nationally powered, *locally driven:*

The next chapter in library digital development

A look at the LibraryOn grants programme
and its outcomes.



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Front cover photo courtesy of BIPC Bristol, at Bristol Central Library

The programme at a glance

Number of library services reached (including consortium members)



of library services in England applied



of English public library branches were reached

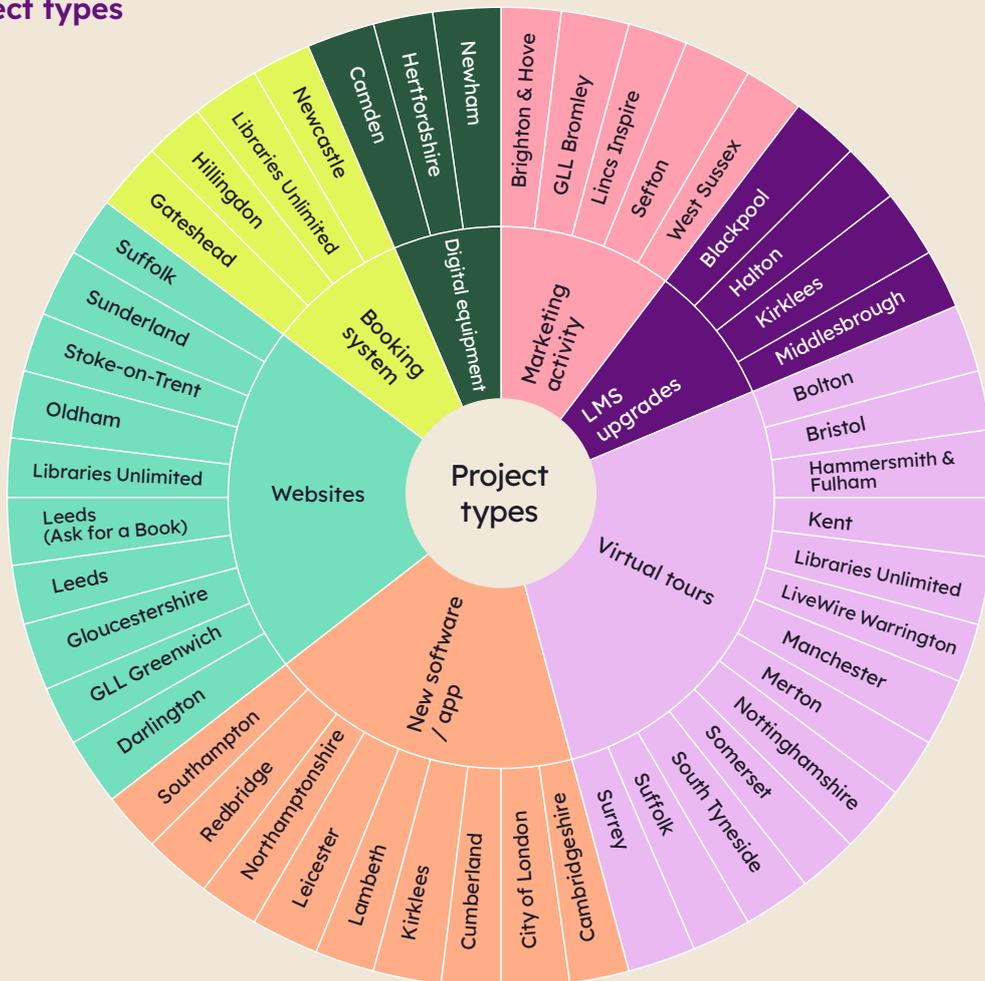


of library services in England received grants



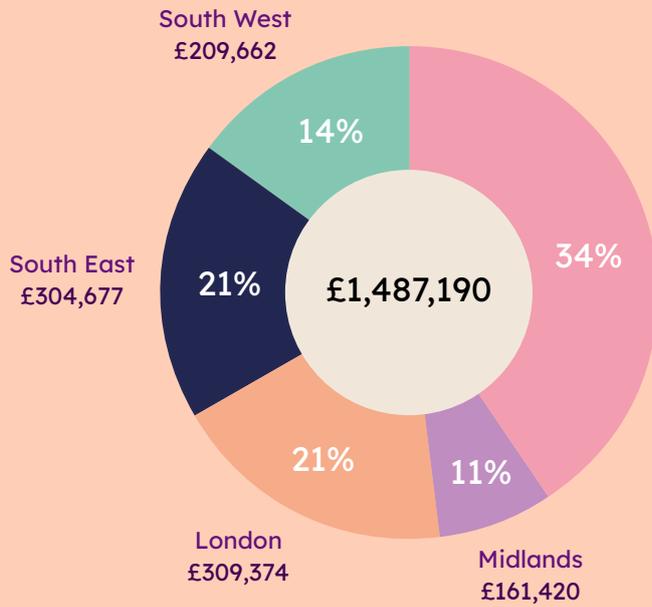
of former LUCP and ACE Priority Places represented by grantees

Project types

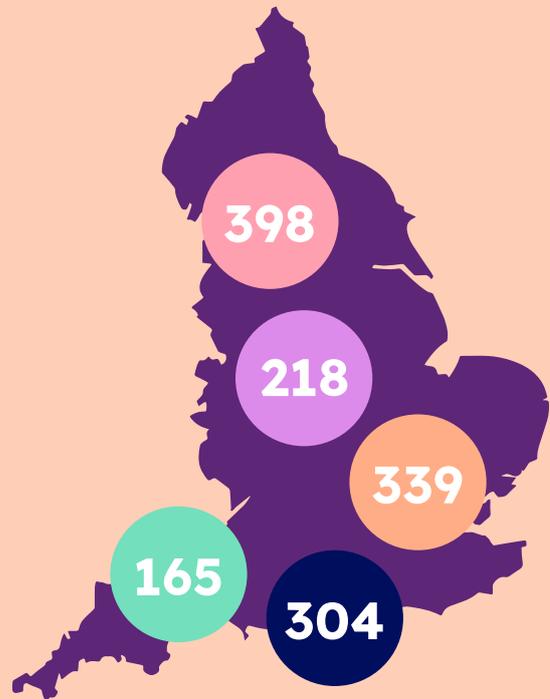


Combined round one and round two awards by area

Including consortia



Total library branches reached



1. Executive summary

A look at the headlines

The LibraryOn digital grants programme was part of the wider LibraryOn project, formerly known as the Single Digital Presence. Funded by **Arts Council England** [\[4\]](#), the grants programme was originally allocated £1.1m, with a second round offering an additional £500,000. In total, following panel decisions just under £1.5m was awarded across both rounds. Its strategic purpose was to increase access and usage by enhancing the online presence of public libraries through improvements and increasing discoverability to make it easier for people to digitally access services provided by libraries.

The library sector was closely involved in shaping the programme to ensure it met their needs and delivered on their priorities for digital resources. Services were regularly consulted, and their ideas and feedback woven into the process. This created a streamlined programme, addressing digital gaps, which was easy for libraries to access via an online application.

There was strong sector representation on the decision-making panels. This included **Arts Council England** [\[4\]](#), **CILIP** [\[4\]](#), **Coventry Library Service** [\[4\]](#), **Good Things Foundation** [\[4\]](#), **GLL** [\[4\]](#), **Libraries Connected** [\[4\]](#) and a former Service Manager from **North Yorkshire Libraries** [\[4\]](#). Library professionals were an integral part in deciding what was funded and why. This resulted in a solid set of decisions informed by professionals reflecting a varied range of activity and good geographic spread.

1.2 Key successes in the delivery and reach of the programme

- A total of £1,487,190 was awarded across both rounds.
- 75% of library services applied across both rounds including those part of consortia.
- 81 services or 53% of all English public libraries, including those part of consortia, received funding.
- Across both rounds, **grant projects reached 1,524 individual library branches** – over 51% of public library branches in England. This breaks down as:

- **North** – 398
- **Midlands** – 218
- **London** – 339
- **South East** – 404
- **South West** – 165



- **Arts Council England’s Priority Places** [↗](#) received significant investment, with 50% of grantees based in these areas (including areas part of the previous Levelling Up for Culture Places (LUCP) agenda). Of all Priority Places/ LUCP, 35% are home to services that were awarded funding. Within London, all five Priority Places benefitted from investment. One service received an individual grant, and four were part of a consortia application.
- The programme was effectively run by a dedicated team and closely shaped by the sector.
- The Community of Practice has created a network that enables libraries to learn from one another, share ideas and circulate opportunities.
- Expert sessions chosen by the sector have enhanced and increased libraries’ digital knowledge and practical know-how.
- Press Play, a conference shaped by services and designed to showcase digital ideas relevant to the library sector, was a success. In total, 192 people were part of the day both online and in-person.

1.3 Impact on services

- Many services have seen a significant increase in digital user engagement.

“In just under four months, from December 2023 to March 2024, the library website has experienced a remarkable surge in traffic, totalling 89,000 visits. This significant increase far surpasses the average annual total of 44,831 visits recorded between 2018 and 2022. Furthermore, virtual tours have garnered an impressive 53,933 views since their launch in September, reaching audiences as far away as Australia.”

Suzy Hill, Library Manager, Darlington Libraries [↗](#)

“Since launching the films in October 2023, West Sussex has seen:

- An overall 76% increase in traffic to all activity webpages
- 1,100% increase in hits to the digital volunteer activity page
- 994% increase to the sensory Story Magic activity page.
- 2,439 film views on the library YouTube playlist
- 83,684 users viewing the paid-for social media marketing campaign on Facebook and Instagram and 4,311 clicking through to find out more information
- A 14% increase in attendance at sensory Story Magic sessions
- Interview on local radio with listenership of 200,000 people.”

Jo Steele, Principal Librarian – Customers and Partners, West Sussex Libraries [↗](#)

“In the first month of launching the new site, the number of unique visitors doubled as did the number of views when compared with the averages of previous months.”

Jacqueline Widdowson, Senior Library Officer, Oldham Libraries [↗](#)

“The digital content, strategically deployed across GLL’s website, has become a powerful tool for connection resulting in a discernible uptick in engagement statistics, with page views across the Better Libraries website increasing almost 300% since launch in December 2023.”

Georgina Carr, Marketing Programme Owner – Libraries, GLL [↗](#)

- Increased discoverability for services, making it easier for users to engage with and explore their library online.

“The CWF Libraries app and virtual tours will significantly enhance our digital capabilities... These advancements will help us meet the evolving needs of our users in the digital era and contribute to the advancement of our library services in the digital age.”

Catherine Hinson, Library Outreach Project Officer, Cumberland Libraries [↗](#)

- Most services reported they have built on existing partnerships or created new ones because of project activity.
- Relationships between libraries and local authorities have been strengthened.

“Internal processes within a local authority can sometimes seem bureaucratic, however they are necessary to account for public spending and security. Such robust practises involve speaking to lots of different colleagues from different departments, and collaborating with them is of great use, not just for this project, but for any potential future developments.”

Matthew Cadger, Digital Development Manager, Newcastle Libraries [↗](#)

- Digital improvements have enabled staff’s time to be freed up.

“The booking platform has greatly streamlined processes, freeing up staff time spent with admin functions.”

Carlos Montecino, Operations and Resources Manager, Hillingdon Libraries [↗](#)

- People who work in libraries have increased their digital knowledge and learnt new skills.
- Digitised room hire and event booking functions have or will in the future support income generation.

1.4 Impact on the sector

- Investment has enabled the sector’s digital capability to take a leap forward.

“Our libraries digital offer is more modern and ambitious than it was prior and this view is shared by library peers and colleagues within the council.”

Suzy Hill, Library Manager, Darlington Libraries [↗](#)

- Participating services and the wider sector have a forum to share digital ideas and learning.

“The community of practice set up as part of the funding has been greatly appreciated - wonderful to be able to connect to other library colleagues across the country.”

Anonymous grant recipient

- Confidence has grown across services in using digital tools and equipment.

“Every single member of staff has benefitted from this project. Many have learnt new training skills, developed design skills and have embraced the new technology and the improvement it has made to the service.”

Vicky Clarke, Head of Libraries, Blackpool Libraries [↗](#)

- Digital marketing has enhanced the online profile of services and showcased the many things libraries offer.

“The new assets will allow us to have a consistent identity and voice across the entirety of our service, allowing all of our events and regular offers to fall under one umbrella thus presenting ourselves as a united and digestible service to the community at large.”

Lesley Davies, Senior Development Manager, Sefton Library Service [↗](#)

- The programme has raised awareness with key stakeholders about the uneven digital provision between services.

1.5 Impact on users

- People have a better understanding of what happens in a library before visiting.

“The project has succeeded in presenting libraries in a more favourable light, showcasing them as vibrant community spaces that are vital to their communities. The content is not merely visual but extends to a qualitative improvement in the perception of the libraries themselves, and staff have commented that it encapsulates exactly why they do what they do.”

Georgina Carr, Marketing Programme Owner – Libraries, GLL [↗](#)

- People have a better understanding of the range of digital offers available in their library.

“The promotional film has been instrumental in enhancing online discoverability and access for users through various initiatives and outreach. By showcasing the library’s resources and accessibility, the film [↗](#) has simplified the process for both current and potential users to find, access, and engage with the library, ultimately strengthening its presence in the community.”

**Lisa Mustoe, Library Service Manager,
Merton Library and Heritage Service** [↗](#)

- Several projects have helped libraries become more accessible to neurodiverse users and those with disabilities.

“We aim to make our libraries more accessible in general and increase visits from those whose anxiety is a barrier, be it neurodivergent people or those with physical disabilities, who may benefit from visualising the physical layout of each venue in advance. The virtual tours of all our libraries will help address this.”

**Neil MacInnes OBE, Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth,
Play and Participation Services, Manchester Libraries** [↗](#)

- Users’ digital experience has been enhanced and user journeys have been streamlined.

“We now have a much-improved website, which is easier for customers (both new and existing) to navigate. The layout of the website is clearer meaning customers are able to find the information they are looking for quicker.”

Vicky Embrey, Library Services Manager, Stoke-on-Trent Library Service [↗](#)

- Libraries have boosted their digital marketing to better showcase the range of activity in their spaces.

1.6 What's next?

The grants programme has made a significant impact on libraries' digital offers. There are several ways in which this legacy could be continued and expanded upon.

- Further investment to enable more services to benefit. This could be through another dedicated funding round and/or signposting to existing programmes such as Arts Council England's **National Lottery Project Grants** [↗](#). Areas of focus could include:
 - **Digital tools such as room hire and virtual tours**
 - **Support for digital marketing assets to help showcase all the things libraries offer and enhance digital discoverability**
 - **Equipment such as devices to support digital accessibility within libraries**
 - **User research and testing to enable services to investigate further what users and non-users want from a digital library offer.**
- LibraryOn has shared the accomplishments from grantees through several forums such as sector Drop-ins, Basecamp and at Press Play. These forums provided inspiration for libraries and enable them to avoid duplication of effort when devising and implementing similar work. Continuing to provide a mechanism for ongoing learning and information sharing is essential.
- There is a need for continued digital skills development for people who work in libraries. This includes areas such as digital marketing, creation of digital assets, delivering projects and collecting and using data. There is a lot of support available through **Libraries Connected** [↗](#), **CILIP** [↗](#), **Living Knowledge Network** [↗](#) and the **Digital Culture Network** [↗](#) already. A continuation of the expert sessions run through LibraryOn's Community of Practice programme to compliment this, would help that learning to continue.

The relationship between libraries and local authorities is a crucial one. For services that are part of a local authority, projects have really benefitted from working more closely with council colleagues and vice versa. Libraries have drawn upon the expertise of colleagues and learnt the value of involving them in the early stages of a project. Services have raised awareness within their local authority of all the brilliant things libraries do and the strategic value they bring. Against a backdrop of stretched resources and limited budgets, there still is scope to join forces more often and maximise the reach of libraries.

2. Introduction to the programme

How it started, the approach and how it ran

2.1 Background

The concept of the Single Digital Presence came from a series of independent reports dating back to 2014, which identified the need for a unified digital presence for libraries. Over time, this evolved into the current research and development programme focusing on the website, national brand, user engagement and a time limited grants programme.

There are various other initiatives to support the digital capacity of libraries. For example, Libraries Connected is delivering an **eLicensing project** [↗](#) to investigate affordable and accessible e-licensing business models. Arts Council England commissioned a discovery project looking at the potential for a national data platform for libraries.

Now known as LibraryOn, the programme is delivered by a team based at the British Library. It includes creation of a national brand for libraries, a dedicated team, a website, content creation, marketing activity, user research and a now completed grant giving programme. This is focused on increasing physical and digital visits to libraries by unifying the online presence of libraries, improving user journeys and enhancing interoperability of systems.

The purpose of the grants programme was to support public library services to improve their online presence and increase discoverability for new and existing library users. The programme was a strategic intervention to enhance the varied levels of libraries' digital capabilities.

The first round was launched on 1 March 2023 and closed for Expression of Interests on 29 March 2023. The second round launched on 4 October 2023 and closed for applications on 1 November 2023.

This evaluation focuses on the grants programme.

2.2 Funding parameters

The funding agreement with Arts Council stated the programme should be for capital grants only. This meant money could only be awarded for assets or equipment such as hardware, content creation, digital equipment and resources needed to create the capital asset such as internal staff or professional services.

The time scale to deliver projects was up to six months for the first round and up to four months for the second round. This time scale was due to the original timescales for the funding agreement with Arts Council.

2.3 Consultation with the sector

To ensure the fund was truly useful to services, the library sector was consulted to discover what they would like capital funding for. This included sending out a survey, a questionnaire as part of the LibraryOn regular drop-in sessions and hosting two online open sessions for services to feed into the process and ask questions.

The first-round applications were used as a guide to what services might apply for in the subsequent round.

2.4 Overview of aims and programme purpose

The overall purpose of the grant programme was to enhance the online presence of libraries through digital improvements and increasing online discoverability. The aims, as they appeared in the guidance for round one, are as follows:

- To increase the online discoverability of libraries to existing and new users
- To enable library services to improve their digital presence making it easier for customers to discover, engage and access services online
- To support the wider digital transformation of the public library sector
- To make it easier for library services to engage with LibraryOn and to develop seamless user journeys between it and local websites.

The second-round aims were similar, although had been honed to account for the reduced delivery period.

- To improve the online presence of libraries through improvements made to their digital infrastructure
- To improve the digital capability of libraries, making it easier for them to engage with their users

- To enhance online discoverability by making it easier for existing or new customers to find, access, and engage with libraries
- To support library services to make improvements to their digital presence by investing in one of the following areas:
 - Library apps
 - Online registration
 - Virtual tours
 - Upgrades or improvements to Library Management Systems (LMS).

Applications were reviewed against these criteria, and successful projects provided reporting against these.

For both rounds, the intention was to support the overall digital capacity of services. A Community of Practice was created so applicants and the wider library sector could share learning and best practice to support digital skill building and enhance collective knowledge.

2.5 Grants criteria

To be eligible to apply, applicants had to either be a local authority operated service or a trust, mutual or charity commissioned by a local authority. Consortia were eligible to apply, as were archives that were part of a statutory library service. Applicants could submit up to two applications as well as being part of a consortium bid.

Activity had to be capitalisable on the applying organisation's balance sheet, due to our own grant agreement with Arts Council.

The programme was able to cover 100% of project costs with no requirement for match funding. However, applicants were able to provide match to deliver non-capital elements of a project. Other sources of funding had to be confirmed at the application stage.

For round one there was £1.09m available to support projects. The funding agreement with Arts Council stipulated that between 20 and 50 local authorities should receive funding. Services could apply for between £10,000 and £70,000. Activities that could be applied for included new websites, website upgrades, upgraded software to improve customer experience, new digital ideas to attract new users, creation of online material and purchasing of digital equipment.

For round two there was £500,000 available that was expected to support between 15 and 20 projects. Applicants could apply for between £10,000 and £30,000. The types of activity included library apps, online registration platforms, virtual tours and upgrades or improvements to Library Management Systems (LMS). In total across both rounds, just under £1.5m was awarded to applicants.

2.6 Decision making

The decision-making criteria were published in the application guidance. This was based on the questions asked in the application form.

The criteria matched the aims of the programme. Panel members were asked to score criteria as either low, medium or high and provide a comment against their score along with details on the feasibility to deliver the project.

Other balancing factors were considered such as geographic spread of services, type of library authority and mix of urban and rural libraries. The aim was to fund a range of projects across the country that would maximise benefit to libraries and their users and ensure an even spread of investment.

In the first round, there was an Expression of Interest (EOI) stage followed by a Full Application stage.

It was important to ensure that there was a strong sector representation on the panel. For the EOI stage the following panellists were invited:

- **James Urquhart**, Senior Manager, Libraries and Literature, Arts Council England [✉](#)
- **Dave Lloyd**, Service Development Manager from Coventry Libraries and lead for Libraries Connected Information and Digital Universal Offer [✉](#)
- **Tiina Hill**, Head of Delivery, LibraryOn
- **Jill Brown**, Digital Grants Manager, LibraryOn

Following these decisions, invited applicants had four weeks to submit a full application.

Panel members were chosen for their knowledge and expertise in the library or digital sectors or both:

- **Sue Williamson**, former Director, Libraries at Arts Council England [✉](#) and current CILIP president [✉](#)
- **Chrys Mellor**, former General Manager, North Yorkshire Libraries [✉](#)
- **Jo Cornish**, Chief Development Officer, CILIP [✉](#)
- **Emma Stone**, Director of Evidence and Engagement, Good Things Foundation [✉](#)
- **Liz White**, Director of Library Partnerships, British Library [✉](#)
- **Tiina Hill**, Head of Delivery, LibraryOn
- **Jill Brown**, Digital Grants Manager, LibraryOn
- The panel was observed by **Luke Burton**, Director, Libraries, Arts Council England [✉](#)

In the second round, there wasn't an EOI stage due to the reduced timeframe to administer and deliver the grants and the smaller amounts for which services could apply. The panellists for the second round were:

- **Georgina Carr**, Marketing Programme Owner - Libraries, GLL [↗](#)
- **Luke Burton**, Director, Libraries, Arts Council England [↗](#)
- **Tiina Hill**, Head of Delivery, LibraryOn
- **Jill Brown**, Digital Grants Manager, LibraryOn

Unsuccessful applicants at EOI stage (for the first round) and at Full Application received a feedback statement related to eligibility and meeting the aims of the fund.

2.7 The approach and principles

The approach to the grants programme was intentionally kept simple. Time and resources are sometimes in short supply for library services so applying to the programme had to be straightforward. The application questions were simple and the method of applying uncomplicated.

The capitalisation requirement needed to be easy to grasp. Services submitted a form signed by their finance team to confirm that spending could be capitalised, with the intention of minimising queries later in the process and to help build connections with library finance teams. FAQs were created that included information about capitalisation and addressed other queries related to applications and project delivery.

The programme was widely advertised using sector channels such as Libraries Connected Basecamp, sector specific newsletters, through Arts Council's comms team and Relationship Managers. The details were also shared in LibraryOn's newsletter and sector drop-ins.

Applications were processed via **WizeHive's** [↗](#) grant administration platform Zengine. This is a cloud-based system enabling applicants to set up a profile and log in to create, view, edit and submit applications. Decision panel members were also able to use the review portal function to read and comment on applications.

By publishing details on how EOIs and applications would be assessed the aim was to keep the process transparent and share how decisions were reached to demonstrate a fair and even process.

3. Round one

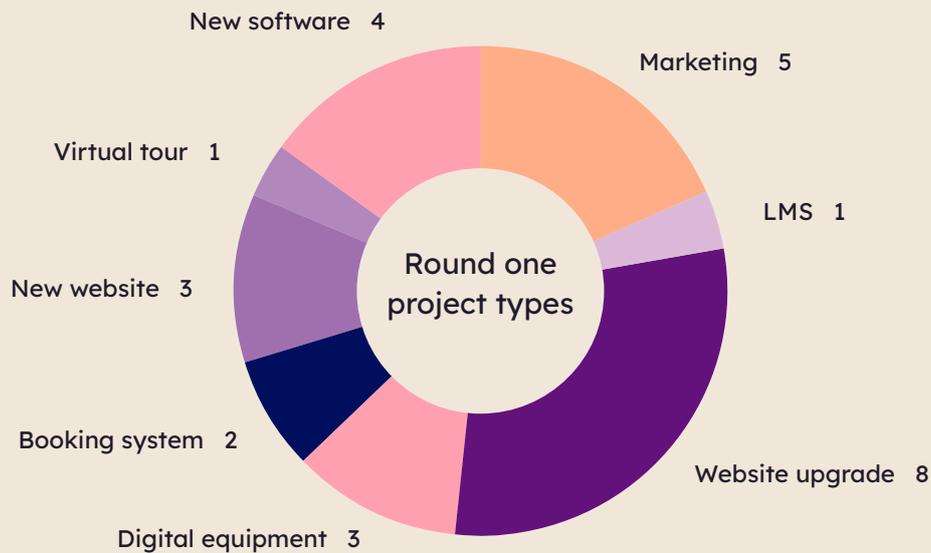
The stats and project themes

3.1 Introduction and narrative around the themes

In round one, services were invited to apply for projects that focused on improving existing digital offers or developing something new. Ideas included:

- Creating a new standalone website to increase online visibility of a service
- Upgrading an existing website to better promote services and to increase user traffic
- Improving online presence through upgrading technology, software or user experience resulting in better or more accessible service provision for library customers
- Testing out a new digital idea or initiative that will help to unlock library resources and attract new users
- Commissioning an external provider to create online material and/or resources to showcase what the library offers
- Purchasing digital equipment to expand and transform digital access to a service.

The project types breakdown shows services applied for a range of activity in round one. 41% of the total awards were for new websites and upgrades, making them the most awarded. New websites and upgrades made up 30% of the overall applications received. Given that many services operate through local authority sites, the need to develop either an independent, but complementary site, or improve the existing offer is important in defining the library's identity.



Marketing activity received the second highest number of awards. There remains a need for marketing assets and increased online profiling of the many strands of activity libraries offer. Other strands of LibraryOn’s work have also indicated demand for marketing activity.

There were several reasons applicants gave as to why they were applying. These included:

- The fund became available when they were already considering a digital upgrade
- There weren’t other funding programmes suitable for what they wanted to apply for
- The need to make libraries more digitally accessible
- Promotion of the library online to create images/ films showcasing activities and services that happen in the spaces
- Provide support to neurodiverse users by showing what the space looks like before visiting
- To streamline services previously existing on separate platforms e.g. room bookings and event bookings
- The introduction of something not previously offered digitally e.g. printing apps.

3.2 How the applications broke down

The EOI stage was open for one month, during which time the fund was widely advertised through sector channels and through LibraryOn comms. There were 67 submissions received which included 61 applications from single services and six from consortia. There was clear demand for the fund, evidenced through 54% of the library sector applying either as a single service or as part of a consortium.

Some projects contained more than one type of activity, although project types were categorised according to the most dominant element and/or that which had the most expenditure allocated to it.

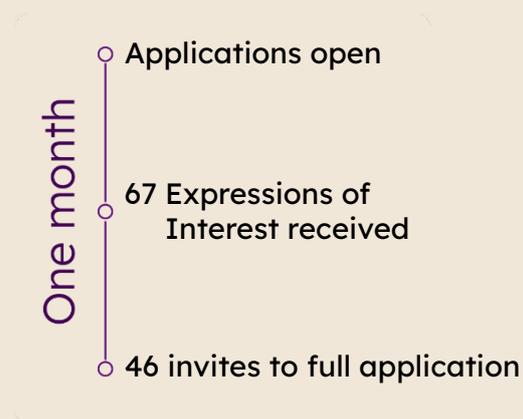
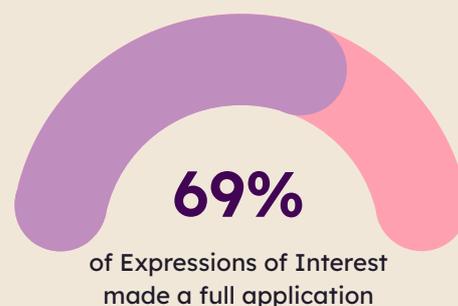
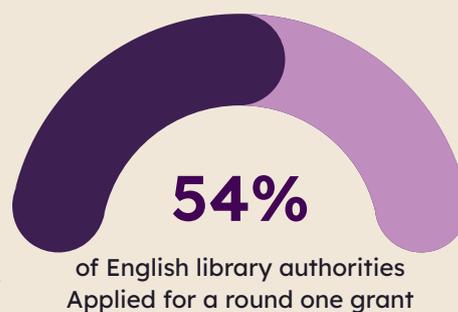
46 applicants were invited to submit a full application. Of those, four didn't complete the process, citing lack of capacity, the short deadline to deliver the project and/or being unable to capitalise spend. Of the 42 remaining, funding was awarded to 27 projects, a 64% success rate.

The 19 that weren't invited to apply received one of two feedback statements.

12 (63%) received this statement:
There was limited detail on how your project will meet the aims of LibraryOn, specifically on how it will increase discoverability to new users.

Seven (37%) received this statement:
There was limited detail on how your project will meet the aims of LibraryOn, specifically on how it will increase discoverability to new users and link to the [LibraryOn site](#).

Some applications focused on device purchases such as Hublets and tablets. Whilst these would undoubtedly be useful for services, the case as to how they would drive online discoverability or increase users was limited.



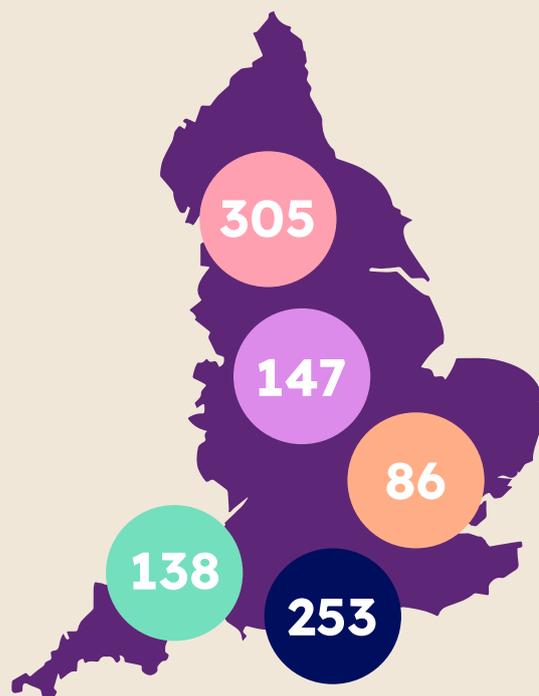
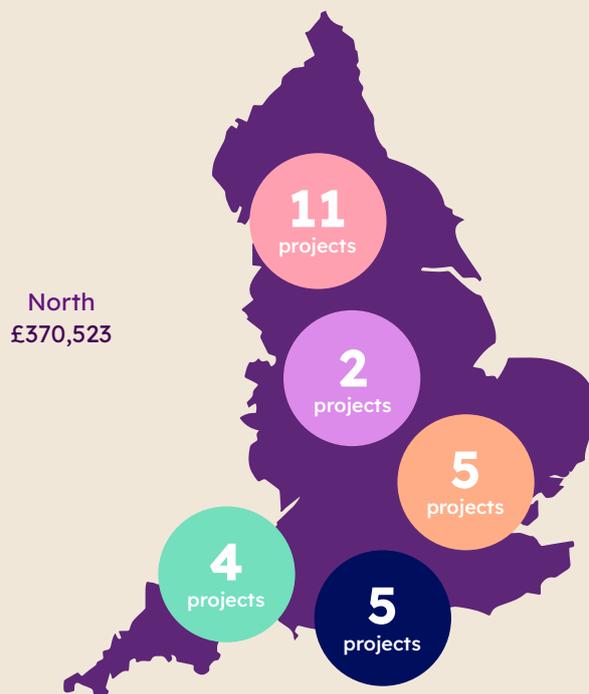
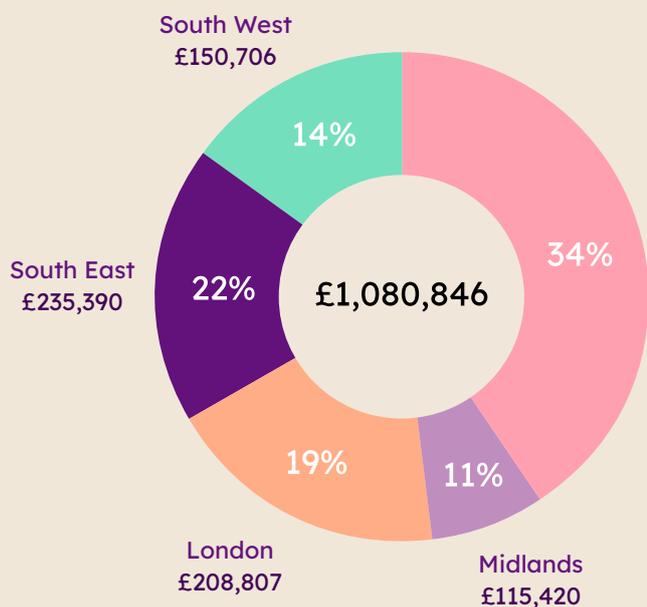
3.3 How the awards broke down

Funding was awarded to 27 projects, which included one consortium – **Leeds Libraries** representing **Ask for a Book** with 15 partner services and two applications from GLL who represent five local authorities.

In total, **£1,080,846** was awarded.

In round one projects reached **929 branches**.

Round one by awards area including consortia





Courtesy of Darlington Libraries

3.4 Case study – Darlington Libraries

Awarded £30,000

Creation of virtual tours, videography and a self-led library tour featuring augmented reality

Darlington Library was preparing to reopen after a meticulous restoration and refurbishment and sought improvements to digital discoverability in a bid to re-engage previous customers and attract new audiences.

Addressing public feedback, which called for enhanced digital services and positioning the library as a trailblazer in digital use, Darlington's project included three key components:

- 1. Virtual tour:** Collaborating with local firm **Photoworks Imagery**, they captured a 360° virtual tour of the newly refurbished library. This tour was expertly crafted to provide an engaging and comprehensive exploration opportunity for potential visitors available online via their website. Users can navigate through the tour either by a guided walkthrough or by exploring freely, improving psychological accessibility and allowing them to appreciate the library's architectural features and offerings.
- 2. Videography:** To complement the virtual tour, Darlington engaged **XL Creative Media** to produce high-quality informational videos. Scripted in-house, these videos feature friendly and knowledgeable presenters discussing various aspects of the library, including lending services, study spaces, historical significance, and the new digital hub, known as The Hive. These videos are seamlessly integrated into the virtual tour, aiding visitors in understanding library services and enhancing their overall experience.

- 3. Augmented reality:** Recognising the influx of visitors expected for the bicentennial celebrations of the railways, Darlington partnered with Northeast Company **Fuzzy Logic** to incorporate augmented reality (AR) technology into a self-led tour booklet. This AR experience, accessible via QR codes within the booklet, allows users to explore the library's spaces and unveil historical images overlaying present-day views, offering a glimpse into the town's rich heritage. The booklet encourages customers to explore the Centre for Local Studies for deeper insights into Darlington's history and heritage.

Fuzzy Logic also developed an AR experience aimed at engaging young audiences in STEM subjects. Displayed in the vibrant wall mural are QR codes where users can interact with 3D models of notable local inventions including Darlington's pioneering Locomotion No 1 engine, fostering curiosity and learning.

Through these initiatives, Darlington aimed to not only improve accessibility to the library but also provide engaging and educational experiences that resonate with its diverse community and attract new audiences, positioning Darlington Library as a hub for both traditional and innovative learning and exploration.

"The outcome of the Virtual Tour, featuring integrated videos, is remarkable. The spaces are beautifully illuminated, showcasing every angle, including our intricate ceilings. Users have the option to play a guided tour that seamlessly navigates through the library from start to finish, or they can freely explore the various angles using their mouse, immersing themselves in the experience."

Suzy Hill, Library Manager

In just under four months, from December 2023 to March 2024, the library website has experienced a remarkable surge in traffic, totalling 89,000 visits. This significant increase far surpasses the average annual total of 44,831 visits recorded between 2018 and 2022. Furthermore, virtual tours have garnered an impressive 53,933 views since their launch in September, reaching audiences as far away as Australia.

Attendance at Darlington Library has risen since its reopening. In January 2024, the library recorded 29,534 visits, a significant increase from the 15,386 visits in January 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Round two

The stats

4.1 Introduction and narrative around the themes

Round two consisted of a one stage application process, as awards were smaller at £10,000 to £30,000

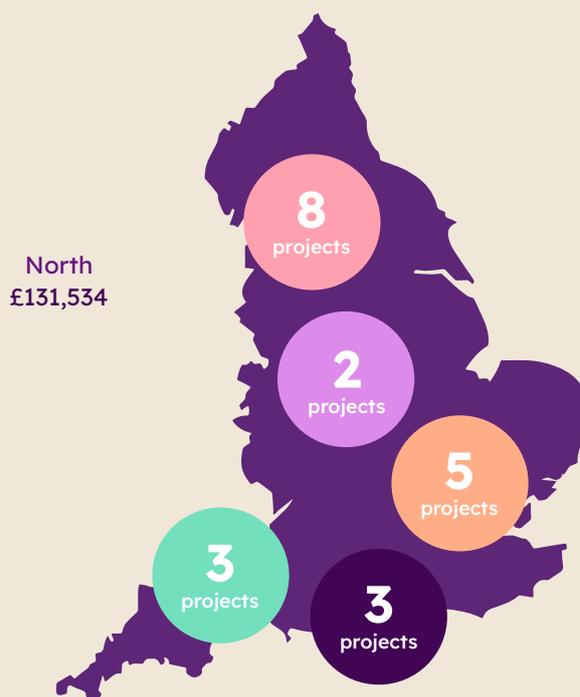
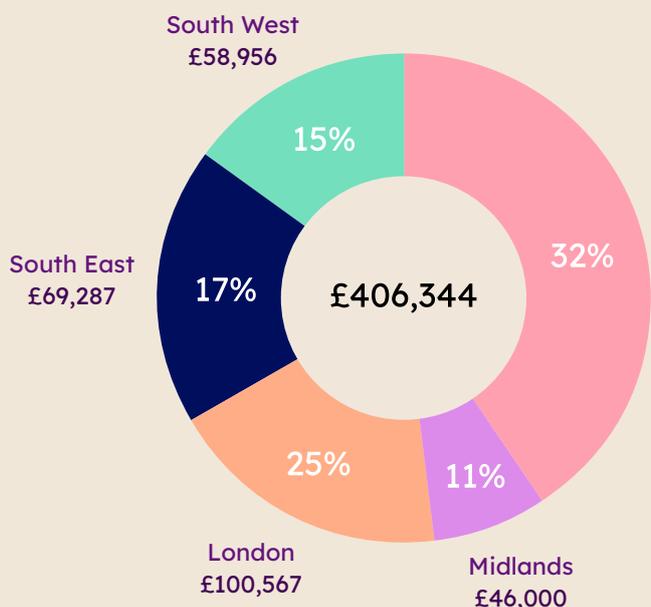
The types of projects applicants could apply for were based on round one themes taking into consideration what could be delivered within the timescale:

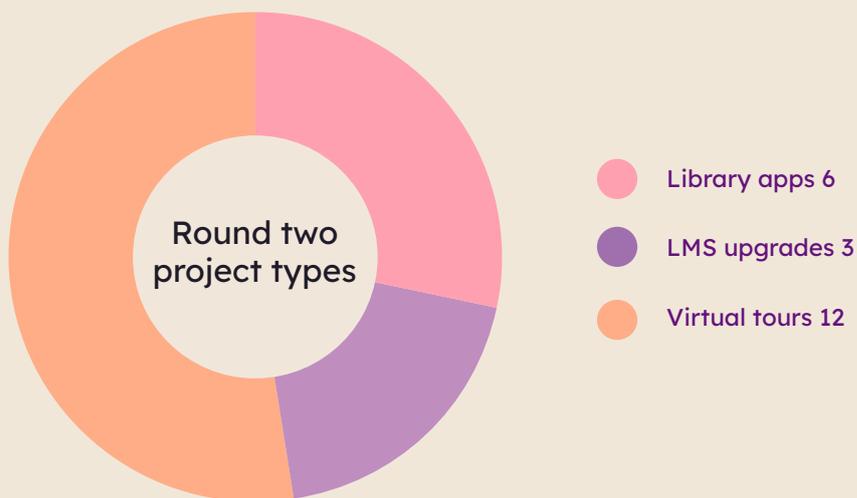
- Library apps
- Online registration
- Virtual tours
- Upgrades or improvements to Library Management Systems (LMS)

4.2 How the awards broke down

In total, £406,344 was awarded to 21 projects including one consortium.

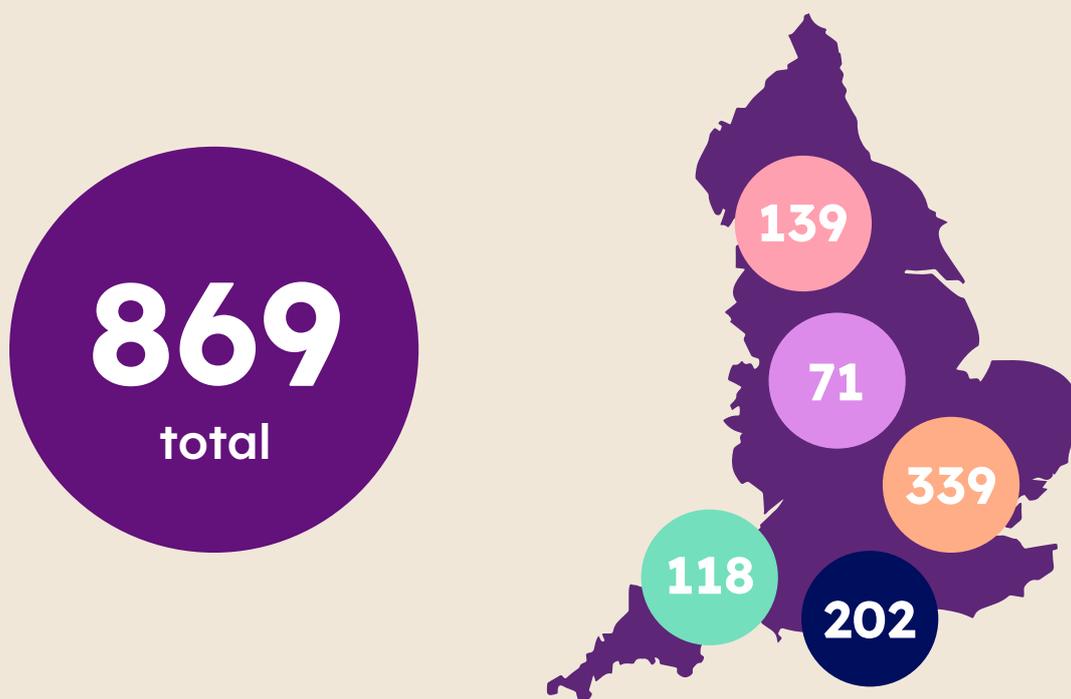
Investment into individual areas including the consortia project was:





Number of library branches benefiting from round two funding projects including consortia

In round two, projects reached 869 branches.





Courtesy of Blackpool Council

4.3 Case study – Blackpool Library Service

Awarded £27,400

LMS upgrade to new cloud hosted system

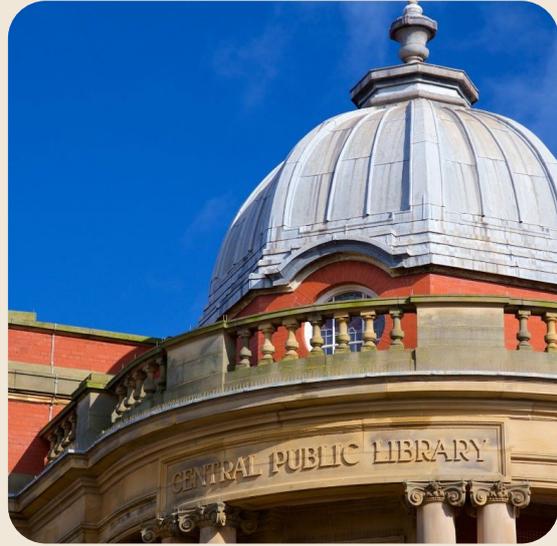
Blackpool Library Service [☑](#) had used the same LMS (Library Management System) for 20 years. It was time for a change, so they decided to apply for funding to upgrade the system.

Implementing a new LMS can be a complicated process. There were several stages involved in the project:

- Procurement process
- Data retrieval and transfer
- Training for staff
- Building confidence with the team to use the system
- Keeping customers in the loop.

Blackpool worked with [Civica](#) [☑](#) and the council ICT team to deliver the project. They developed excellent partnerships with both that were an important part of the successful delivery.

The end result is a modern, new LMS, fit for a 21st-century library service. Working on this project has improved their IT skills and knowledge and boosted their confidence.



Blackpool worked closely with staff, building great rapport and understanding of frontline services.

The grant award demonstrated to senior leaders in the council they could deliver projects using external funding. It has led to successfully bidding for more capital funding to put in place a new self-service solution.

“The new and improved OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue) means that customers can interact with us on a more reactive and pro-active basis. They can do so much more in our OPAC, its now user friendly and attractive. We can communicate better with customers and use the new system to show what we offer and how customers can engage with us.”

Vicky Clarke, Head of Libraries

5. Conclusions from both rounds

5.1 Overall sector reach

In total, **£1,487,190** was awarded (£1,080,846 in round one and £406,344 in round two), with 48 projects being supported.

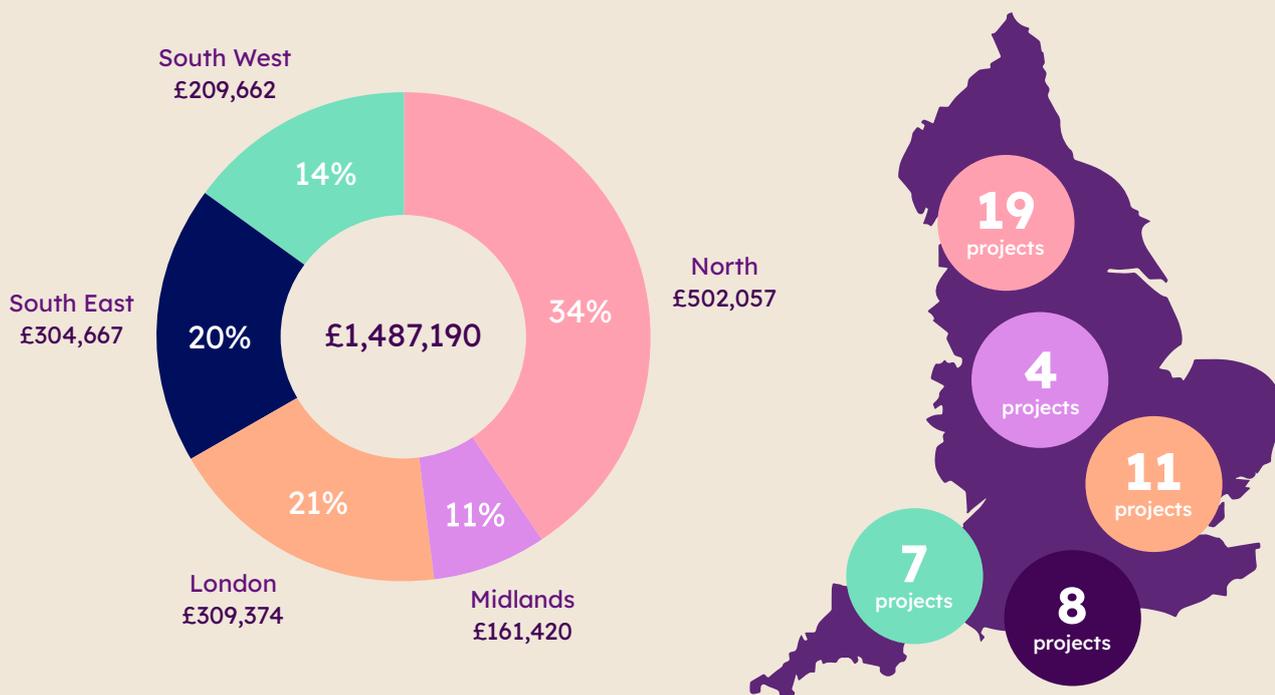
Over both rounds and including consortium members, **75% of library services in England** have either applied for a LibraryOn grant or been part of an application.

Combining both rounds, grant projects reached **1,524 individual library branches** – over 51% of eligible public library branches in England.

81 library services, including consortium members, across both rounds received grants, representing **53% of library services in England**.

Across both rounds, 42 **Arts Council England Priority Places** and areas formerly known as **Levelling Up for Culture Places** and are represented by awarded projects.

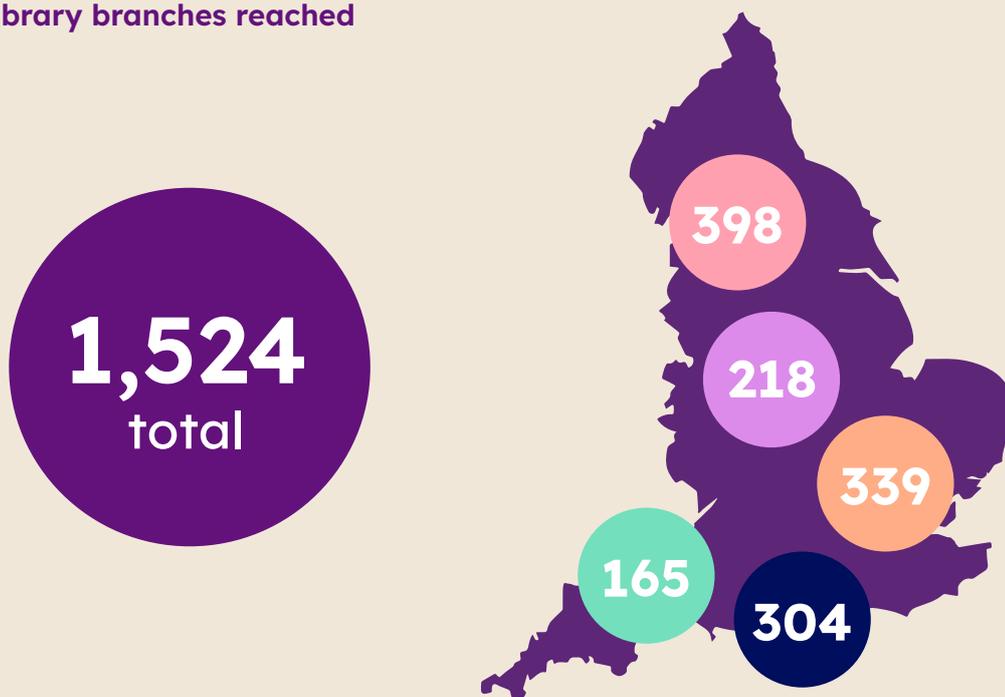
Combined Awards by Area including consortia



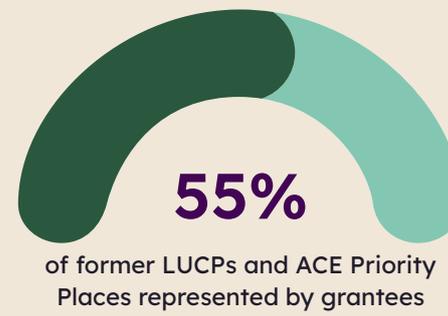
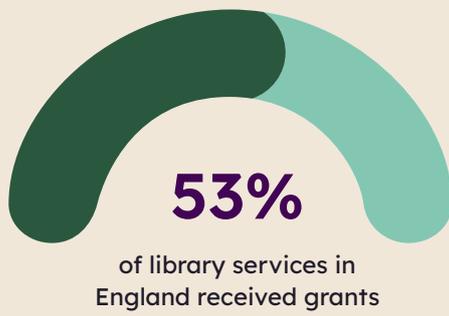
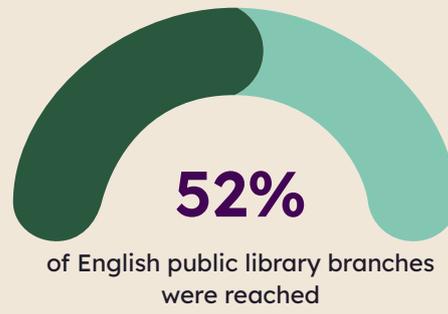
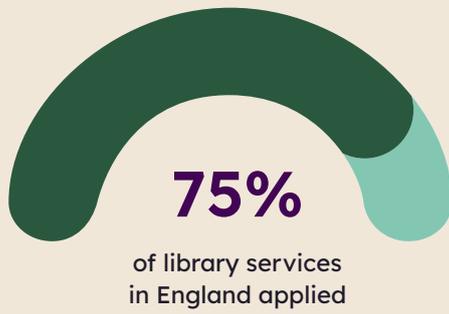
Project types



Total library branches reached



**Reach figures
(including consortium members)**



Screenshot from virtual tour created by Libraries Unlimited with their LibraryOn grant

5.2 Project successes

Many of the projects have involved all the people who work in a service, either directly creating the asset or being trained on how to use the digital resources.

“Every single member of staff has benefitted from this project. Many have learnt new training skills, developed design skills and have embraced the new technology and the improvement it has made to the service. Our internal teams such as ICT and Comms are now more aware of what we can do in our service and senior leadership have a better understanding of the service.”

Vicky Clarke, Head of Libraries Blackpool Libraries [↗](#)

Staff have been significantly upskilled through developing and delivering digital projects.

“The project has majorly upskilled our project team and wider library workforce. Some project officers worked with external stakeholders for the first time and spent a lot of time considering how the look and feel of our libraries needed to be presented.”

Annalisa Timbrell, Commissioning and Projects Lead, Surrey Library Service [↗](#)

Projects have helped to bolster and develop new relationships between libraries and their local authority.

“Internal processes within a local authority can sometimes seem bureaucratic, however they are necessary to account for public spending and security. Such robust practises involve speaking to lots of different colleagues from different departments, and collaborating with them is of great use, not just for this project, but for any potential future developments.”

Matthew Cadger, Digital Development Manager, Newcastle Libraries [↗](#)

Many services have strengthened existing partnerships or developed new ones. Projects supported relationships with local authorities to deepen and extend understanding of how the library operates and vice versa. Many services reported enhanced relationships with their LMS provider. New partnerships have been formed with suppliers and design agencies through creating projects together.

“We have developed an excellent partnership working with internal ICT team and external provider. Relationships with internal ICT teams are sometimes difficult but this project has shown how a great partnership benefits all sides.”

Vicky Clarke, Head of Libraries, Blackpool Libraries [↗](#)



Courtesy of West Sussex Libraries

5.3 Case study – West Sussex Libraries

Awarded £30,000

Photography and films creation

West Sussex Libraries created seven professional films and a suite of photographs for their website to help reach out to new audiences. The aim was to showcase what is meant by Rhymetime, Knit and Natter and other library events so people hearing about them for the first time can see what happens in their local library and know what to expect.

They wanted the **films** to include testimonies that demonstrated the impact their services have on existing users' lives. To make sure West Sussex reached people with these new assets, part of the money was allocated to a marketing campaign launched to coincide with national Libraries Week.

West Sussex created storyboards to plan the sequence for each scene. They filmed library activities including Rhymetime, sensory Story Magic, a reading group, digital volunteer session, Home Library Direct Delivery and Knit and Natter. Intros and outros were agreed to ensure consistency across the films. Once the filming was complete, library staff were invited to a premiere of the completed films.

Since launching the films in October 2023, West Sussex has seen:

- An overall 76% increase in traffic to all activity webpages
- 1,100% increase in hits to the digital volunteer activity page
- 994% increase to the sensory Story Magic activity page
- 2,439 film views on the library YouTube playlist

- 83,684 users viewing the paid-for social media marketing campaign on Facebook and Instagram and 4,311 clicking through to find out more information
- A 14% increase in attendance at sensory Story Magic sessions
- Interview on local radio with listenership of 200,000 people
- Libraries Connected used the project as part of their Get Online Week marketing
- Use of photographs by LibraryOn on the national website.

“The grant money has allowed us for the first time to produce professional films to promote our activities and which also use the power of our customers’ own voices. They are already proving invaluable in our advocacy work, and we can now direct people to the website to ‘show’ what we do. One thing we did not anticipate was the overwhelmingly positive response from library staff. We’ve received messages to say the films made staff smile and feel incredibly proud. One staff member emailed to say: ‘Sometimes we forget how important these sessions can be for our customers... So thank you for making me rethink what I do every week and feel so much more positive about what we offer.’”

Jo Steele, Principal Librarian – Customers and Partners

West Sussex worked with local partners to share the new films, including [Shoreham Food Bank](#), [Age UK West Sussex](#), the wider [county council](#) and through local councillors.

The films and photos are on West Sussex website, and they are taking every opportunity to use them to advocate for libraries. Their aim is to share the films whenever they can to make new connections in communities whether that is through local councils, churches, charities or community organisations. The assets will be reused and repurposed in the library newsletter, on social media and in their partnership work. The intention is also to use the successful project in the next library strategy document and social value reporting.

5.4 Needs, problems and issues surfaced

- There were several Expressions of Interest asking for **funding for digital equipment** such as Hubble, laptops and VR headsets exclusively. Whilst libraries want to ensure they have appropriate technology to support users, these requests didn't express clearly how they met the aims of the fund – to demonstrate digital discoverability and how these devices would enhance libraries online presence. But clearly there is a desire for new or upgraded equipment in some services.
- **Digitisation projects.** It was difficult to support these without a clear case as to how they would increase digital discoverability; the requests didn't articulate clearly enough how more users would access the collections. LibraryOn is developing a **special collections strand**, with the aim of raising awareness and the profile of what libraries hold in their collections.
- The fund was unable to support **non-capital expenditure items**. There were several budgets that included staff and training costs not covered by other sources; unless staff were creating an asset directly, then these costs were impermissible. This demonstrated libraries wanted staff to benefit by increasing capacity and maximising their learning. This was addressed in other ways, such as the Community of Practice and the Press Play conference. The ongoing need for understanding and investment in digital services is under discussion with sector colleagues in the hope of further development in future phases.
- **Time constraints** to deliver projects were a recurring theme. Many services found the delivery period challenging. Allowing enough time to plan, deliver and evaluate a project is crucial to its success.
- **Being able to capitalise activity** was in some cases difficult. Some services were not always able to deliver everything they hoped to and had to amend activity. Having a mixture of capital and non-capital funding would be the ideal scenario for these kinds of projects.
- Not having sufficient **staff resource** to deliver projects was a challenge for some projects. Any project, where possible, should try to build in funding for extra resources and staff time.
- Many projects developed **new or existing relationships** across their local authority. However, a reoccurring theme in just under a third of projects was that they experienced some level of difficulty in working with them. This included navigating procurement processes, adhering to council protocols and technical barriers, which sometimes meant projects couldn't move at the pace they needed to. However, it often resulted in services reflecting on the need to involve local authority colleagues at the beginning of projects and to learn more about local authority processes.

- Two projects found that people still did not know about the breadth of their service's offer.
- One project had a major issue with an LMS provider that was creating an app. This meant project delivery was delayed for nearly seven months while it was ironed out.
- Two grantees experienced cyber-attacks during project delivery. This meant they were unable to submit project monitoring on time due to disruption across the entire service.

5.5 Impact of the awards on individual services and the sector as a whole

A total of 58% of projects are based in Priority Places and areas formerly known as Levelling Up for Culture Places (LUCPs).

Arts Council England's five London Priority Places all benefitted from investment. One service received an individual grant, and four were part of consortia.

Areas formerly known as LUCPs were well represented. 55% of all LUCPs received investment across both rounds, a total of 60 places. Regionally, this breaks down as:

- **North** - 25
- **Midlands** - 16
- **South East** - 13
- **South West** - 6

Investment has gone into areas where there may be fewer opportunities to engage in cultural activities. Libraries provide a direct route into cultural offers and can help to support community cohesion; grant awards have helped to increase access to libraries and enhance their role as welcoming spaces that are open to the whole community.

ACE Priority Places and places formerly known as LUCPs*

*Levelling Up for Culture Places

65 ACE Priority Places and former LUCPs represented across both rounds of funding



Projects have contributed to increasing the digital knowledge of the library sector, drawing on the expertise of library staff.

People who work in libraries have been part of projects in the following ways:

- Procurement
- Creating video content
- Appearing in content
- Designing websites
- Liaising with external providers
- Creating social media campaigns
- Received training in the new offer
- User testing
- Undertaking change management with customers.

“All library staff have been engaged with and interacted with the virtual tours, and many of them have already started sharing them with local community groups and potential hirers of spaces.”

Annalisa Timbrell, Commissioning and Projects Lead, Surrey Libraries [↗](#)

“Six team members have been directly involved in training and administration of the room bookings site. Each has developed new digital skills and developed their confidence and knowledge through learning a new system. They have offered peer support to each other and have also been involved in provided training to the wider library team on how to access and use the system.”

Matthew Cadger, Digital Development Manager, Newcastle Libraries [↗](#)

Staff time has been freed up

Projects like room booking, LMS upgrades and websites have helped to save staff time. By streamlining processes and upgrading systems, staff have more time to focus on other work.

“The ease of maintaining the system allows for changes to be made quickly and effortlessly compared to the previous OPAC (Online Public Access Catalogue). For example, we have been able to communicate the arrangements around the refurbishment of our Central Library, alter opening hours and implement other changes in the system easily. Changes within Aspen and publishing new pages is much easier in comparison to the previous OPAC which will generate savings in staff time around maintaining/publishing content.”

David Harrington, Project Manager – Digital Lead, Middlesbrough Library Service [↗](#)

New income generation

New room hire and event booking assets can help libraries increase income. By bringing the service in-house, ticket income can often be fully recouped and services won't pay external providers an annual fee.

“We have just launched our first chargeable event on the system which can be paid for online or in library and seamlessly paid into library accounts with no overhead to Eventbrite – so a definite economy.”

**Elizabeth Whale, Information, Skills and Area Manager,
Southampton Libraries** [↗](#)

Digital capability has increased

Projects have given services the tools they need to increase digital capability.

“The CWF Libraries app and virtual tours will significantly enhance our digital capabilities by increasing access to resources, promoting digital literacy, offering personalised experiences, gathering valuable insights, facilitating virtual events, and effectively showcasing digital collections. These advancements will help us meet the evolving needs of our users in the digital era and contribute to the advancement of our library services in the digital age.”

Catherine Hinson, Library Outreach Project Officer, Cumberland Libraries [↗](#)

Libraries branding has improved

Some services reported their online branding is now more consistent. Websites and marketing projects have helped to create a clearer identity for their libraries.

“The new assets will allow us to have a consistent identity and voice across the entirety of our service, allowing all of our events and regular offers to fall under one umbrella thus presenting ourselves as a united and digestible service to the community at large.”

Lesley Davies, Senior Development Manager, Sefton Library Service [↗](#)

Observations from a smaller group of grantees

Some services commented they are using the new digital asset as an advocacy tool. This includes raising awareness across their local authority and with external stakeholders at conferences and events.

5.6 Impact of the outcomes on the general public

Enhanced user experience

Assets are being used to create an improved user experience. Website and app projects, in particular, are showcasing the full spectrum of what libraries offer. Content is more accessible and users are discovering more online.

“Customers have commented positively on the new web design and also the easy availability of events information for their local library:

‘I love that I can plan ahead of time what activities I can take my toddler to, being able to see activities taking place a month in advance is great!’

‘The new website looks so much nicer.’”

Dean Wilson, Digital Development Officer, Southampton Libraries [↗](#)

User journeys have been simplified

Customers can find what they are looking for more easily, which may lead to someone spending longer online or discovering what else their service offers.

“We now have a much-improved website, which is easier for customers (both new and existing) to navigate. The layout of the website is clearer meaning customers are able to find the information they are looking for quicker.”

Vicky Embrey, Library Services Manager, Stoke-on-Trent Library Service [↗](#)

Users can now see what happens in library spaces rather than just reading a description of activities

An aim of new and improved digital assets is to increase physical visits to libraries. This offers a better understanding of what an activity comprises of and what to expect when taking part. Film, video and marketing activities show libraries as modern and relevant and how they are an essential part of the community.

“The project has succeeded in presenting libraries in a more favourable light, showcasing them as vibrant community spaces that are vital to their communities. The content is not merely visual but extends to a qualitative improvement in the perception of the libraries themselves, and staff have commented that it encapsulates exactly why they do what they do.”

Georgina Carr, Marketing Programme Owner – Libraries, GLL [↗](#)

Project activity has helped to make libraries more accessible for neurodiverse users, those with dementia and SEN

Virtual tours have had an impact in supporting those who feel less confident in visiting a library or want to know what to expect before they arrive. Services have worked with external partners such as charities and support agencies to ensure the resource is appropriate and responds to the needs of different groups.

“We aim to make our libraries more accessible in general and increase visits from those whose anxiety is a barrier, be it neuro-divergent people or those with physical disabilities, who may benefit from visualising the physical layout of each venue in advance. The virtual tours of all our libraries will help address this.”

Neil MacInnes OBE, Head of Libraries, Galleries, Culture and Youth, Play and Participation Services, Manchester Libraries [✉](#)

“Partnerships have been strengthened with support agencies such as Age UK, MIND, Somerset Dementia Care and other organisations as they all understand the benefits of accessing the tours and content for the people they support.”

John Carter, Senior Development Officer, Somerset Libraries [✉](#)

Some projects have widened digital access for disabled users

Camden Libraries’ partnership with the **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)** supplied 200 Envoy Connect reading devices enabling blind and partially sighted users to borrow audiobooks. The project also included an accessible public PC in each of Camden’s nine libraries, including a large print high contrast keyboard and video magnifiers.

Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries collaborated with users to co-design accessibility videos. This ensured their voices and experiences were at the heart of the process and demonstrated that library spaces are inclusive spaces for all users.

“This project has potentially life changing opportunities for people with sight loss. It will give them the ability to be more in control of their books. This means getting them when they want, as opposed to waiting for books in the post or otherwise. It also provides confidence in way-finding, connecting with others in libraries and will open up new ways to become part of the local community.”

Lara Marshall, Libraries Engagement Manager, RNIB [✉](#)

“The most significant achievement was our close collaboration with residents to co-design accessibility videos, ensuring their active leadership throughout. We prioritized involving residents with accessibility needs in the video creation process, emphasizing a user-centric perspective. Our resident group includes individuals with various disabilities, such as wheelchair users, partially deaf individuals, autistic individuals, partially blind individuals, and those with Asperger’s and ADHD.”

**Daniel Waller, Libraries and Archives Service Manager,
Hammersmith and Fulham Libraries** [✉](#)

Observations from a smaller group of grantees

Some grantees were able to report an increase in website and online visits, but not all projects had enough time between their completion and submitting their reporting to collect sufficient data. However, some services said they would be happy to provide follow up data. In which case a survey that tracks and measures engagement after project implementation would help further demonstrate the impact of LibraryOn investment.

Most services collect stats on online engagement; how this compares to the wider sector isn’t known. It’s interesting to note that not every service collects and uses online data.

One grantee reported their project is attracting more children into the library.

One grantee reported that their entire stock is available online for the first time which has increased borrowing.

Images courtesy of Lincs Inspire



5.7 Top tips from the project themes

Using information gathered from projects, here are some collated top tips from services that have delivered projects under the following themes:

Virtual tours

Across both rounds, virtual tours were the most popular project type making up 25% of applications.

- Combine virtual tours with a marketing push or room booking system upgrade to maximise their impact
- Anticipate possible disruptions. Build a schedule to work around bad weather and branch opening times
- Scrutinise potential suppliers. There's lots of potential virtual tour producers. Use this in your favour to negotiate lower quotes, but don't skimp on quality!
- Build in opportunities for future iteration. It's good to get contracts from producers which include future maintenance to account for branch refurbishments
- Accessibility should be at the heart of everything. Make sure the tours themselves are accessible, and work with partners from neurodiversity charities and organisations to make sure the tours work for everyone.

Apps

Activity for this theme included an online booking platform, cloud printing solution and a library app.

- Expect learning curves and bugs in new systems
- Respect local authorities' procurement and legal processes, building them into planning
- Embrace project management and analytics to implement upgrades with greater efficacy and efficiency
- Supplier-side issues are beyond the control of the project. Try to build flexibility into partner management.

Library Management Systems

Five projects included LMS upgrades.

- Use existing partnerships with providers and within the local authority
- Consider local authority branding requirements and how they might match up with the LMS provider's platform
- Continue the transformation. Build space for future iteration into the project.

Booking systems

Most booking system projects were for room hire. Some also incorporated virtual tours.

- Consider complementing an upgrade with producing virtual tours of spaces
- Use a beta testing phase or limited initial release to identify and iron out unforeseen problems
- Articulate benefits of the upgrade to people who work in the library, bearing in mind that some benefits may not be immediately apparent in the short term
- Inputting recurring events may be an intensive activity. Look for an automated option and, if not possible, make sure to spread the workload.

Marketing activity

Activity included creating online assets including photography, videography and marketing campaigns.

- Get people who work in the library involved! A great way of building confidence in the project and unlocking creativity within the people who know the service best
- Focus on interactivity: explore virtual reality, augmented reality and other innovative or outside the box ways of getting audiences interested
- User generated content can turn customers into advocates. Amplify the voices of people who use the service and harness public goodwill
- Use the creation of marketing materials as an opportunity to build relationships with local businesses, organisations and creatives
- External partners, such as creative agencies, need to be managed to make sure they understand expectations, but they can also bring new ways of working to the service – embrace them!
- LibraryOn is in the process of setting up a Marketing Community of Practice for library staff directly involved in creating assets and managing social channels. The programme is also developing a marketing pack that can be adapted by each service. **Get in touch to find out more.**

Digital equipment procurement

Equipment included cameras, hardware and bits of kit.

- Gain an understanding of the local authority's procurement policies and processes before beginning the project
- Partner and vendor management is key. Keep lines of communication open and articulate expectations
- People who work in the library may need to be trained to use new equipment. Use training to build confidence and recruit internal advocates
- Accessibility should always be considered. Talk to partner organisations to gain an understanding of diverse needs and how the equipment can work for users with those needs.



Images courtesy of Darlington Libraries

Website upgrades

New websites and website upgrades were the second most popular projects applied for.

- Get people who work in the library on board. Gaining buy-in amongst frontline workers will allow them to advocate for the product with users
- Expect some negotiating between the demands of the local authority, external partners and project expectations
- Be both flexible and focused. Build flexibility into the budget, timetable and expectations, but maintain a strong focus on the project's planned outcomes. Remember that development takes time and capacity
- Accommodate room for future iteration. Websites are constantly evolving – the project is just a stage in an on-going process of change and improvement
- Go green! Consider auditing the new site's digital carbon footprint and looking into green hosting options.

Oldham Libraries

Libraries in Oldham have books, online resources, co-working space, kids activities, writing and reading groups and much more!



Libraries
Find & Renew Books
Local Libraries
Join the Library
Library Resources
Business Resources
Digital Offer
Library Charges

Oldham Libraries
Follow us and join the conversation

5.8 Case study – Oldham Libraries

Awarded £42,150

Creation of new green-hosted website

In 2023 Oldham Libraries merged to become Oldham Heritage Libraries and Arts. They wanted to develop a new website that showcased and brought together all the brilliant things their libraries offer as part of a new integrated service with heritage and arts. The aim was also to create a green hosted website.

Oldham put in place some key steps to make their project work.

- An inter-departmental and inter-organisational project team was assembled well in advance. The process was constantly informed by people at all levels within the organisation to keep it on track, which included updating the marketing and advocacy team.
- Ensuring the site had good online visibility by maintaining the .gov.uk address so established customers didn't get lost in the change to the new site and to continue to benefit from Search Engine Optimisation provided by this recognised and trusted domain. The project worked with Koios, an organisation that applies for and manages Google ads grants on behalf of non-profit organisations, improving the new website's discoverability and to make sure it was mapped with additional promotion through Google ads. They also collaborated with local authority content developers and the comms team to build and promote the site effectively.

Screenshot of website courtesy of Oldham Libraries

- A smooth integration across all functions of the service. The aim was to create a seamless user experience that utilises different specialist platforms but feels like a unified web activity. Early on, they mapped out everything that would need to be built into the site including what was needed from specialists such as the online catalogue provider.
- A focus on sustainability. A standard gov.uk website already has high standards of accessibility and green credentials, but they are low on images and tend to have light touch structural designs. For the new website, there was a need to balance the creation of an engaging, visual and exciting site with high environmental standards. The first thing they looked at was green hosting, choosing **Krystal Hosting** [\[4\]](#), and a green audit revealed the size of their images were too large to be classed as sustainable. However, after using **Squoosh** [\[5\]](#) to optimise their images this vastly improved. Now, whenever they use an image it is optimised.

The new site is complete and has a dedicated page that spreads awareness of Oldham's green credentials. It has vibrant panels that encourage people to explore the space and stay on the site. There is an interactive map that contextualises content and events within the geography of the area. The events programme is front and centre with image led content which draws from the events management platform. There is a dedicated shop page linked to **Art UK** [\[6\]](#).

In the first month of launching the new site, the number of unique visitors doubled as did the number of views when compared with the averages of previous months.

6. National vs local

How does the grants programme fit into LibraryOn?

6.1 How the national and the local fit together

Delivering the grants programme was part of the activity to build a Single Digital Presence for public libraries. It was designed to help upgrade services' local digital presence, strengthen and update infrastructure and support the national impact of the overall project.

In round one, one of the aims was to make it easier for library services to engage with LibraryOn and to develop seamless user journeys between it and local websites. This was easier to demonstrate for some projects more than others, and applications showed a variety of ways that their project could connect with LibraryOn. The idea was to foster engagement with the library sector and encourage applicants to think about how they could link with the site through their project and into the future.

The round one grant programme launched and closed for EOIs just before the LibraryOn website went live, meaning applicants couldn't see any content or understand visually how their project might link with the national offer. However, there was a variety of ways that the sector could keep in touch and find out more about what the project offered and its aspirations for championing the library sector. These included drop-ins, a sector-facing newsletter, posting on the Libraries Connected Basecamp and by attending sector conferences, as well as reaching out to individual services.

Having a Community of Practice hosted on Basecamp and open to the wider library sector has been helpful to share opportunities, call outs and information about the wider project. Examples include advertising the drop-in sessions, asking for input on different strands of work and calling out for content suggestions.

The awarded projects have formed the basis for further research into what could be scaled up to a national level, such as investigating a central room booking system to highlight spaces available to hire in public libraries. Initial research has shown systems operate differently in each service, ranging from phoning the library to book a space through to fully automated systems. There are also ongoing conversations about [ReadOn](#) and whether this could be something further supported by LibraryOn.

The grants programme and the Community of Practice informed the approach to the Press Play event. Programming was inspired by activity delivered by grants and topics were selected by the library sector. Grantees were invited to be speakers and also added topics where there were opportunities for further learning such as accessibility, data, inclusion and engagement.

New relationships with services have been developed which have benefitted the wider project such as the catalogue integration work and room booking research.

Grant projects have featured in our marketing campaigns, spotlighting the many different things libraries offer. It has helped to raise awareness of services as well as the LibraryOn brand.

Photography from the grants projects has been used on the LibraryOn website, showcasing funded activity.

6.2 How could the two be better integrated?

Ideally the website would have been further developed before the grants programme was launched. This would have enabled applicants to give a more informed response as to how their project linked to the site and vice versa. There were time constraints due to the overall project delivery being delayed which impacted on how the two might be integrated.

The LibraryOn team is investigating which projects might be scaled up to deliver digital solutions on a national scale. So far this has included research into booking systems, reading recommendations and library apps. Case studies included within this report, shared in LibraryOn drop-ins and through the Community of Practice may serve to inspire other services to enhance their digital offer. Whilst there aren't currently any plans to offer another round of LibraryOn funding, there are other avenues available to libraries such as [Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants](#).

6.3 Was this a good investment?

It's clear from the impact the awards have had at a local level, that this has been a good investment. Almost without exception libraries have reported on the positive result funding has had on their service and its digital offer. The award has enabled them to significantly upgrade their digital resources and many have seen an increase in users as a result.

“Our libraries digital offer is more modern and ambitious than it was prior and this view is shared by library peers and colleagues within the council.”

Suzy Hill, Library Manager, Darlington Libraries [↗](#)

“The digital content, strategically deployed across GLL’s website, has become a powerful tool for connection resulting in a discernible uptick in engagement statistics, with page views across the Better Libraries website increasing almost 300% since launch in December 2023.”

Georgina Carr, Marketing Programme Owner – Libraries, GLL [↗](#)

Without a doubt more funding could have been allocated to the grants programme. Given adequate lead in time and an appropriate delivery period, more services could benefit from capital funding for digital upgrades. There have been enquiries about future funding and further investment could certainly benefit the remaining 47% of libraries who either didn’t apply or were unsuccessful in the first two rounds.

The investment has revealed more strategic support for digital activities in libraries is needed.

7. Sector digital development

7.1 Focusing on the digital needs of libraries

The grant awards have helped services to develop different aspects of their digital offer. There has been a clear impact for all grant recipients evidenced in the monitoring forms and through services sharing what they've learnt in different ways.

There are several areas in which the grants programme could inform future digital development.

Digital skills for staff

Many services said their staff gained new digital skills. These included:

- Delivering digital projects
- Using digital kit
- How to do digital marketing
- Learning new software
- Digital methodologies

“Staff working on the project have also learnt a lot about utilisation of the acquired kit as well as filming practicalities, including the logistical challenges of filming within libraries, fitting in with their schedules, receiving consent from customers, and getting staff on board.”

**Rebekah Nicolas, Service Development Manager – Projects,
Hertfordshire Libraries** 

The awards have clearly helped to develop digital capacity. Staff knowledge has improved which will help to support future digital initiatives.

Given this was a common theme among grantees, there is likely a need to support more services to develop their digital skills. More training in digital marketing, creating and developing content, using software and supporting digital accessibility would all be useful. Attendance at the expert sessions has also demonstrated an ongoing need for digital development tailored to the library sector. LibraryOn is continuing to run expert sessions through the Community of Practice, as well as creating a new marketing focused group. The intention is to share good practice and provide a space to swap ideas and build collaborations between services.

Easier engagement with users

Many libraries are part of local authority websites that include information about all council services. It can be tricky to navigate to library pages; sometimes these just look like another element of the local authority and don't define the library's unique identity.

As a result of funding, projects stated users can now find library services more easily online, which was one of the core objectives. Virtual tours, websites and marketing activity allows visitors to explore what the library offers: they can see what spaces look like and understand what to expect when visiting in person. Interestingly, some projects highlighted that non-library users don't know what a modern library offers. Activity has played a part in opening up libraries to a wider audience and showing what is possible.

“The promotional film has been instrumental in enhancing online discoverability and access for users through various initiatives and outreach. By showcasing the library's resources and accessibility, the film has simplified the process for both current and potential users to find, access, and engage with the library, ultimately strengthening its presence in the community.”

**Lisa Mustoe, Library Service Manager,
Merton Library and Heritage Service** 

There is still a need to expand on what libraries offer. The projects have helped libraries to become more discoverable online; however, there remains some way to go to share their many offers, especially with people who don't currently use their service.

Greater use of digital tools to save time and capacity

By digitising some functions, libraries have saved time and capacity. For example, booking system projects have helped to streamline processes that may have involved the input of several staff members. Virtual tours mean staff don't always need to show people around spaces before they book them. Apps have helped with creating shortcuts to library functions such as printing and space hire. LibraryOn has undertaken research into room booking and events systems. These are functions that can be supported on a national level and delivered locally that help save precious resources and streamline processes. LibraryOn has developed an events part of the site that pulls library listings into one place and directs people to book. Starting with Eventbrite, the idea is to widen this out to other platforms.

“It reduces the need for our Business Development Manager to visit sites and provide tours for potential renters, cutting down on time and streamlining the process. This has already occurred, where one potential hirer couldn’t make a date in person, and they had a look at the virtual tour instead.”

Emily Hicks, Fundraising Officer, Libraries Unlimited [↗](#)

“The booking platform has greatly streamlined processes, freeing up staff time spent with admin functions.”

Carlos Montecino, Operations and Resources Manager, Hillingdon Libraries [↗](#)

“We are now able to engage non-members quickly and easily with low impact on staff time and costs. i.e. previously tourists or visiting professionals would require membership sign up and lengthy process for some straightforward printing access. This allows us to spend more time on deeper interactions and focus staff resource on returning custom.”

**Andrew Stoter, Library Support Services Manager,
Cambridgeshire Libraries** [↗](#)

Creative digital collaboration

Projects have supported creative digital engagement with users and developed new ways to collaborate. Examples include:

- Working with children to create animations using augmented reality
- An interactive digital installation enabling users to express what their library means to them
- Developing an app to encourage reading through goals, challenges and quizzes
- Creating digital games and challenges to enhance a reading and literacy app.

“It has recently become well established that reading for pleasure is a vital part of a child’s educational journey - not just to support literacy, but fundamental to wellbeing. We know that children engage in digital activities and this project is helping us attract more children to use their library service more often.”

Emily Hicks, Fundraising Officer, Libraries Unlimited [↗](#)

This has been really successful in creating interesting and innovative ways for users to engage. Projects have also developed new partnerships with creative organisations which will benefit them beyond the funded activity.

Using creative digital methods to engage users has shown how it can be an important way of connecting with existing and new library users.

Using data

The awards, the Community of Practice sessions and Press Play show how data is collected and used by services varies enormously. Some services can collect, analyse and interpret data with dexterity, using this to tell stories and structure engagement and marketing around what they find. Some services have limited control in what they collect because it is part of the local authority role. A limited few don't collect data.

Supporting services with their data collection and use is something that many libraries would benefit from. This could be information about who is accessing their services online, the profile of users or anything which could be used to enhance library offers or tell stories.

As the national development agency for libraries, **Arts Council England** [\[1\]](#) commissioned a discovery project to scope the potential for a national data platform which built on the **Independent Library Review 2014** [\[2\]](#), Libraries Taskforce's **Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016- 2021** [\[3\]](#) and Baroness Sanderson's **2024 Library Review** [\[4\]](#).

The Arts Council is working with other sector bodies on the recommendations and investigating possible future funding. A national data platform, specifically for and with libraries, will help demonstrate the value and impact library services have on their communities.

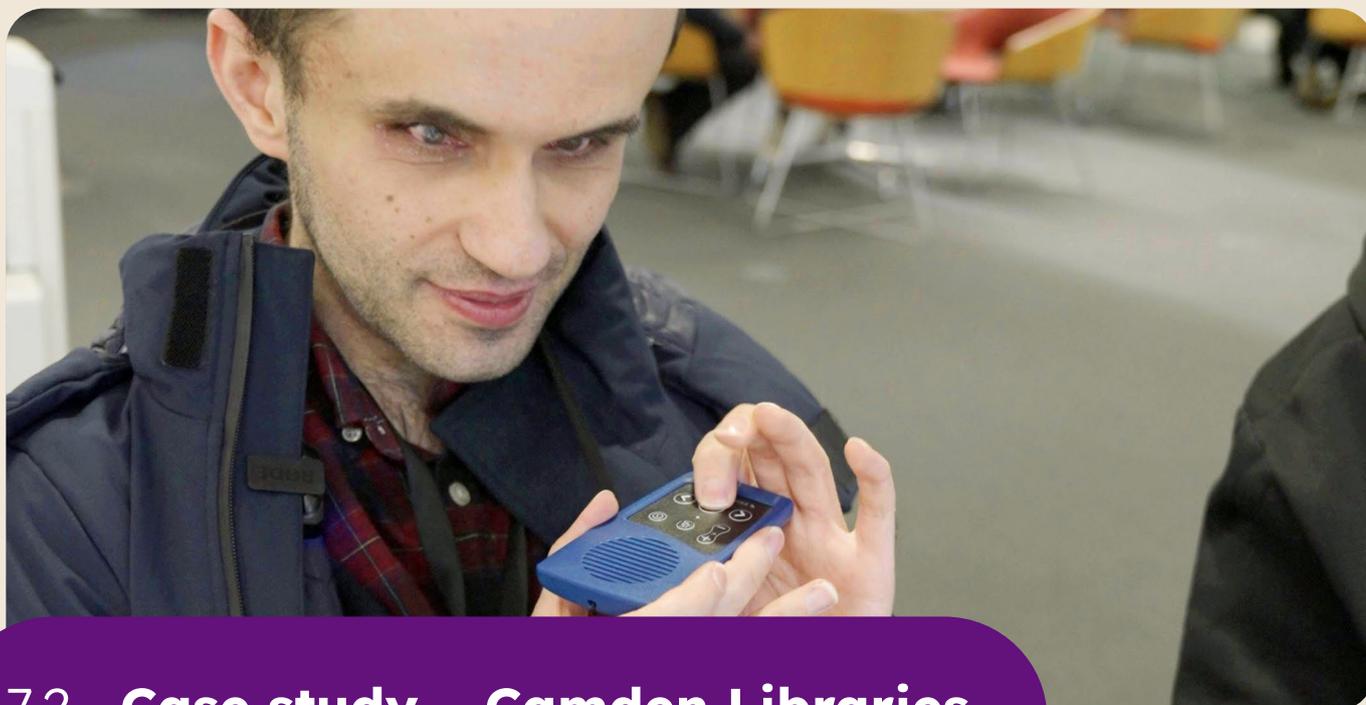


Image courtesy of LibraryOn team

7.2 Case study – Camden Libraries

Awarded £41,200

Making e-books more accessible to blind and partially sighted library users

This project partnered [Camden Libraries](#) with the [Royal National Institute of Blind People \(RNIB\)](#). The aim was to connect with blind and partially sighted users in Camden to make listening to digital books more accessible. RNIB identified through research that blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be digitally excluded than the general population.

The project was awarded £41,200 with spending allocated to:

- **Magnification software for library PCs**
- **Software development costs**
- **Staff costs related to creating the project and training.**

RNIB supplied the [Envoy Connect devices](#). These are simple to use audiobook players that can hold up to 50 books. It is designed for people who can't use a smart product. Books are downloaded to the Envoy via a USB cable from the [Borrowbox](#) and [Libby App](#) on a PC. This uses [iKiosk](#) software on the device which connects directly to RNIB online reading services without having to log-in.

As a result of the project, all Camden libraries now have the right software and hardware to make computers accessible to blind and visually impaired users.

The library teams have also been trained in how to use it. The training means they can help someone download e-audiobooks on the Envoy Connect device. People who work in Camden libraries now feel much more confident to support users

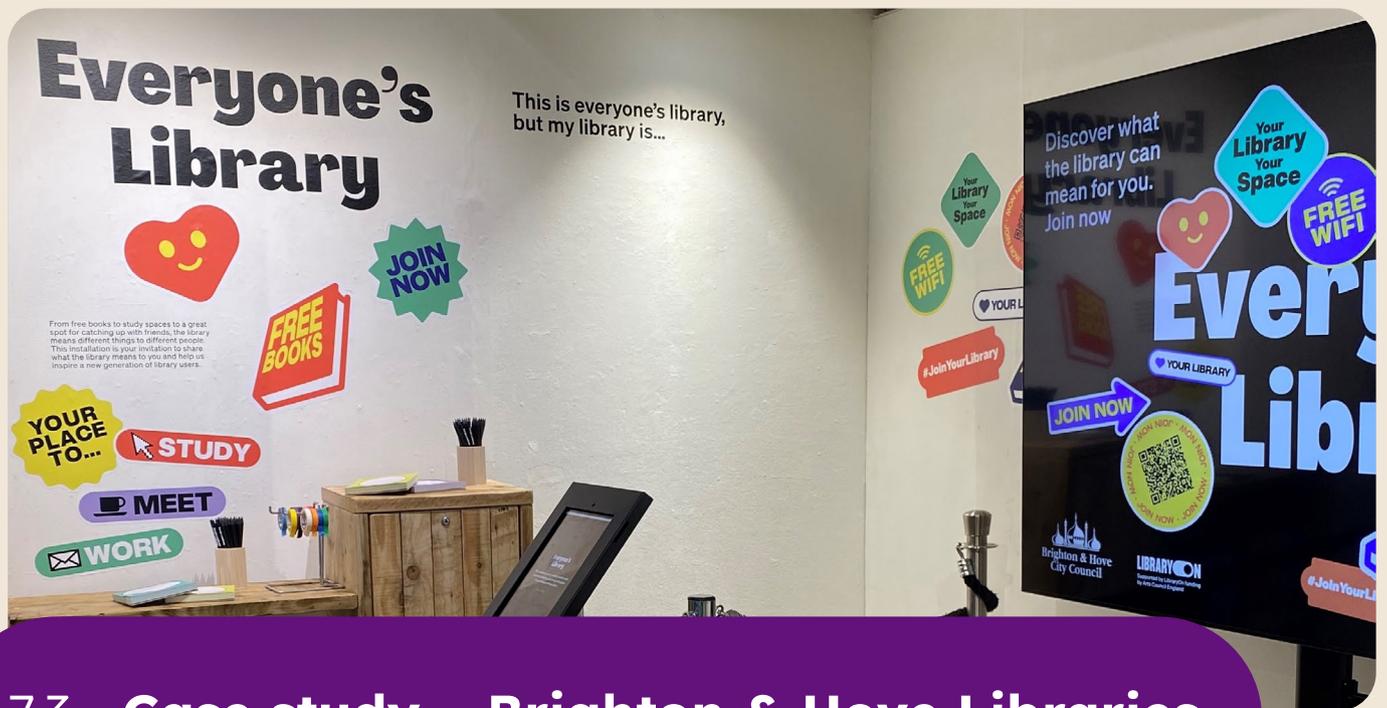
with a visual impairment. They also have learnt how to make the service more accessible for the visually impaired.

There have been some challenges with encouraging people into the library who had received the Envoy Connect. However, the team at Camden is working on ways to build confidence and make it easy for users to come in. There were also a few challenges with the software and ensuring the kit in libraries was up to scratch.

Generally, the activity has been a huge success in digitally opening out the library to blind and partially sighted users. The partnership with the RNIB is continuing with Camden wanting to set up a shared reading group for the visually impaired. They have also planned to purchase video magnifying readers for all libraries. This will make text more accessible to visually impaired and will be another great addition to the library offer.

“This project has potentially life changing opportunities for people with sight loss. It will give them the ability to be more in control of their books. This means getting them when they want, as opposed to waiting for books in the post or otherwise. It also provides confidence in way-finding, connecting with others in libraries and will open up new ways to become part of the local community.”

Lara Marshall, Libraries Engagement Manager, RNIB [✉](#)



7.3 Case study – Brighton & Hove Libraries

Awarded £52,994

Digital marketing campaign

Brighton & Hove applied to create a digital marketing campaign. The idea was to rebrand as a modern library service to reach and connect with targeted community groups whose footfall in libraries both digitally and physically is low. Two groups were identified to focus on: young people aged 13–19 and culturally engaged people in the city who were not interacting with the library’s cultural offer. They also wanted to make new and old customers aware of the digital offer, connect with local college students to inform the campaign and create a digital installation at Jubilee Library to launch the campaign and connect with customers.

Working with local design studio Boyle & Perks the plan was to:

- Create a strategy for messaging and distributing their identified messages
- Research where audiences are and how to market to those spaces
- Create a structure for marketing to include brand guidelines, asset template packs and staff workshops and training to take forward beyond the initial delivery
- Include guides on how to adjust or evolve the marketing for future groups.



The library and Boyle & Perks surveyed Brighton & Hove residents on how they currently engage with libraries. They also ran three Shaping the Future of Our Libraries workshops. These helped to identify messages and hooks that would encourage people to engage with libraries, think about activities the target groups might like to do there and shape how a campaign or advert series might be created to appeal to someone like them.

Key findings included:

- Silence and quiet space is valued
- Favoured communication channels Instagram
- People aren't fully aware of all the things they can access such as the digital offer and 'Libraries Extra' which gives out of hours access.

Challenges included:

- Communicating with the digitally savvy Generation Z (13–19) audiences and finding out what would engage them
- Limited advertising budget
- Making live events list more visible.

With Boyle & Perks and colleagues across the service, they developed the concept for the campaign 'Everyone's Library'. This explores the idea that the library means different things to different people. The campaign looks at multiple perspectives through a lively multi-image collage. The six lines it uses to speak to the target audiences are:

- Your study social
- Your culture hotspot
- Your alternative to buying
- Your LGBTQIA+ literature discovery
- Your catch ups over coffee
- Your place to watch the world go by.

Marketing assets were created to show these messages. They included:

- Printed assets for different size posters
- Assets for social media and screens in libraries
- A sticker set.



Images courtesy of Brighton & Hove Libraries

The installation in Jubilee Library rounded up the project and helped to advertise it in situ. With Boyle & Perks, they designed the installation and local software developer **Hardcoded**  created it. The installation asked users ‘What does the library mean to you?’ There were just under 800 individual responses that will be used to inspire future library users. The campaign has had brilliant reach on social media. New online memberships have increased, including those in the target group of 13-19-year-olds. Future activity includes creating a follow up survey, delivering a staff workshop, engaging with schools and touring the installation.

“We now have a range of marketing assets to draw customers into our libraries but also to our online services via the call to action to join using our online joining page. There is a lot we have learnt that I hope we can transfer to our services. We have a clearer idea of the process for developing specific software for projects and how this could be used elsewhere (budget allowing).

It’s possible to deliver innovative projects within short timeframes if the budget is available and you’re working with the right people. Working with Boyle & Perks has been a revelation – their willingness, responsiveness, communication and creativity has been a breath of fresh air. It has shown that other ways of working are possible – a more dynamic, friendly, responsive, innovative approach. Local businesses are able and willing to go the extra mile to help their local library service – it reiterates the high esteem people hold us in.”

Jake Smith, Library Service Manager

8. Community of Practice

8.1 What it does and how it supports libraries

The Community of Practice (CoP) was established in July 2023. The aim was to bring together LibraryOn's grant recipients. This would:

- Provide a space to share ideas, learn from one another's experiences and inspire future digital projects
- Curate a series of bespoke, audience-driven webinars which could spread that learning across the wider library sector
- Create an online platform for collaboration between library services undertaking digital projects that could potentially live beyond the span of the grants programme.

Originally, the CoP consisted of representatives from the 27 projects awarded LibraryOn grants in round one. This core group was later expanded to include the 21 projects awarded in round two. Grantees were encouraged to invite their colleagues.

From the outset there was a desire to extend the CoP's membership beyond service heads and to include digital project leads, administrative staff and frontline librarians: people who might otherwise have had fewer opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from across the sector. The CoP, as a result, garnered a membership with varying levels of expertise and areas of interest.

The group was engaged through two communication channels. The first was Basecamp, a project management platform / online bulletin board where the aim was to foster discussion, spotlight resources and signpost upcoming learning opportunities. The second was via a series of roughly monthly remote meetings. Three so far have been 'sharing sessions', attended by grantees and guest speakers only. Four have been 'expert sessions', attended by grantees and colleagues from across the sector.

Both channels were complemented by regular email correspondence.

8.2 Basecamp

There was clearly a need for a sector-specific online platform to support the CoP. This needed to facilitate communication between library services undertaking digital projects. Analysis was taken from pre-existing [research](#) and a survey of the original CoP members to identify the best platform. This found that 19 out of 20 respondents wanted ‘an online platform for sharing digital knowledge’.

As of September 2024, the CoP Basecamp has 101 users, of which just under 15% have interacted on the platform. Usage has been spread across 47 discussion boards.

The process for joining the Basecamp is entirely manual. People who want to join, having heard about it from a colleague, on a LibraryOn drop-in or in one of our CoP webinars, must email LibraryOn and then receive an invite via email.

Basecamp has become a useful tool for consulting with the sector.

It has been used to:

- Crowdfund for marketing content and socials
- Advertise webinars
- Collect questions for the expert session speakers, often in conjunction with the survey tool Slido
- Share sector call outs and opportunities.

It was great to see a discussion between CoP members in which they shared tips and tricks about creating virtual tours, kick started after a chat had with a grantee.

Overall, however, it was hoped that Basecamp would encourage more engagement of this type. The platform does not easily facilitate agile discussion as it lacks a chat or like/reaction function. Messages are emailed to all members of the workspace, unless opted out of, which may cause reticence from ‘shyer’ users. There are different engagement formats to try out in the future such as Ask Me Anything (AMA) sessions with different grantees.

8.3 Summary of CoP sessions

As of September 2024, there have been nine CoP remote meetings. The programme has been split into two session types: sharing sessions and expert sessions.

Three of the meetings were sharing sessions for grantees, as well as some guest speakers and members of the LibraryOn team. These sessions aimed to facilitate the sharing of updates, learnings and best practice from across the full range of digital projects supported by the grants programme. They have also been

used to spotlight guest speakers from **Halton Libraries** [\[1\]](#), who discussed their social media strategy, and **Cheshire East Libraries** [\[2\]](#), who discussed their digital newsletter alongside Stuart Waterman, LibraryOn’s Content Strategist.

The first sharing session took place in September 2023 and was attended by 18 people, of which 11 represented grantees.^[1] The second sharing session, with an invite list extended to include round two grant recipients, took place in December 2023 and was attended by 19 people, of which 12 were grantees. 11 viewers went on to watch the recap recording of the latter session, which was made available to all invitees.^[2]

Following a hiatus over the first few months of 2024, the third sharing session took place in June 2024 and was attended by 22 people, of which 17 were grantees. **Brighton & Hove Libraries** [\[3\]](#) and **LiveWire Warrington’s** [\[4\]](#) library team joined to give presentations on their respective grant projects. This was followed up with some brainstorming of insights via **Slido**. Eight people have watched the recap so far.

Infographic of a word chart by Slido generated in the third sharing session



Four of the sessions have been expert sessions, open to attendance by anyone working in the library sector.

Recordings of each expert session were made publicly available on the LibraryOn website.

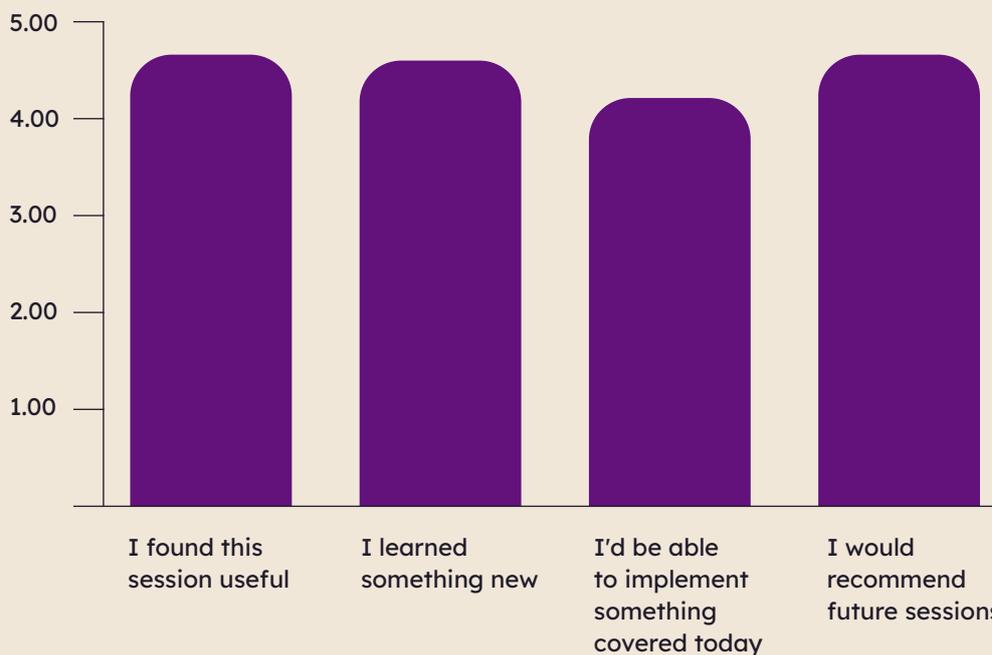
The sessions were curated based on consultation with CoP members through a variety of feedback opportunities. Zoom’s survey tool was used at the end of meetings, advertised through Basecamp and hosted as surveys on Slido.

Feedback was collected on each session using Zoom’s post-meeting survey tool. Attendees were asked to rate the following statements from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicated strong agreement: **‘I found this session useful’**; **‘I learned something new in this session’**; **‘I would be able to implement something covered today in my own service’**; **‘I would recommend future CoP sessions to a colleague’**. Attendees were also asked to suggest any

topics they would like to see covered in future sessions. Across all sessions the average agreement rating was 4.44 out of 5, indicating a generally high level of approval among our attendees.

The first expert session, which focused on digital accessibility, took place in October 2023 and was hosted by Roberta Beattie from the **Digital Culture Network** [↗](#). It was attended by 57 people, of which 52 were external to the British Library, and has had 104 recap viewers.^[3] The session received the highest average score for the **‘I would recommend future sessions to my colleagues’** feedback question (4.7), suggesting that we managed to successfully promote our future programming.

Average feedback scores



“Thank you so much, this was really interesting and has given me lots to think about!”

Attendee feedback

The second session, titled ‘Telling Stories with Data’, took place in November 2023 and was hosted by Dave Rowe, founder of **Libraries Hacked** [↗](#). It had 69 total attendees, of which 62 were external and 35 were grantees. It has subsequently garnered 99 recap viewers.

Although the session was generally popular in the feedback, with comments like **‘Excellent workshop. It has ignited my curiosity for data!’**, the session only received an average rating of 3.85 in terms of viability of implementation.

“I think I was already on board with the theory, so the most useful bits for me were practical: I’m going to look up OpenRefine and some of the external data sources mentioned.”

Attendee feedback

The third expert session, which took place after an interceding sharing session, was hosted by independent trainer **Ned Potter** [🔗](#) in January 2024. The subject of the session was social media, and it loosely followed a ‘surgery’ format, with attendees submitting their concerns and questions in the weeks prior via a Slido survey. It was attended by 64 people. Six were from the British Library and 58 were from library services, of which 39 were grantees. It has had 101 views. It was also the most popular session in terms of feedback, with an average rating across all four evaluation questions of 4.69 out of 5.

“Very well structured and delivered - engaging and relevant content. The two hours flew by. Came out feeling positive and encouraged about an area I currently lack confidence in.”

Attendee feedback

The fourth expert session took place on in February 2024 and was hosted by Emma Weston from **Digital Unite** [🔗](#). The session’s subject was digital inclusion and potential synergies between public libraries and the charity’s **Digital Champions Network** [🔗](#). As the topic was more niche than previous sessions, the session received lower levels of attendance. 34 people attended in total, with 29 external to the British Library, of which 20 were grantees. Another 49 people have subsequently watched the recap recording. This was the least popular session in terms of feedback, with an average rating of 4.22 out of 5.

“Really interesting to hear about what people are doing to help with digital inclusion. Lots of information to go back to work with and think over. Very helpful.”

Attendee feedback

The fifth expert session happened in July 2024. Library Data Visualised was delivered by Rufus Spiller from **Reason Digital** [🔗](#) and focused on using data to create inspiring infographics. 47 people attended for the session and so far the recap has been watched 95 times.

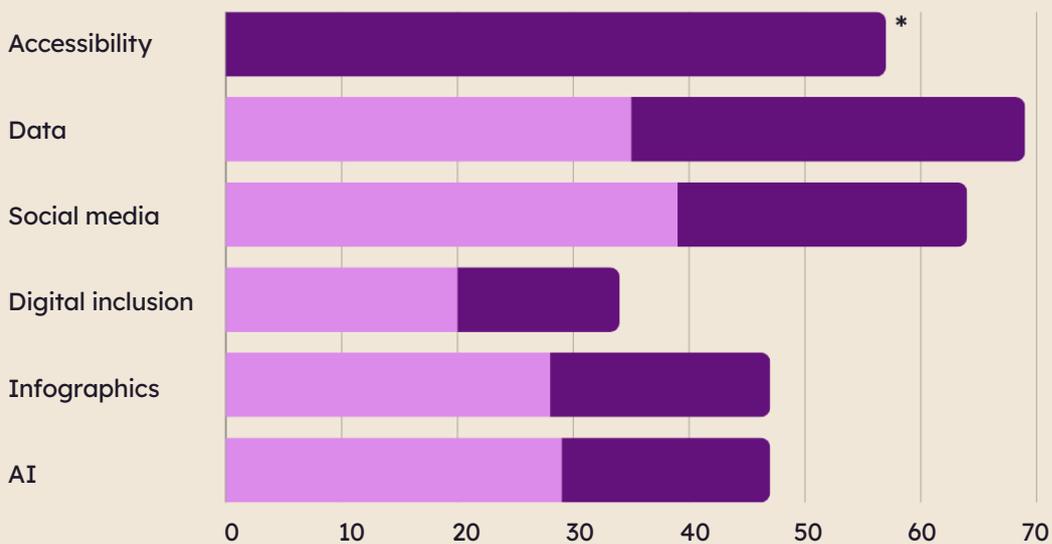
The sixth session was delivered in August 2024 and focused on AI for public libraries. **Phil Bradley** [🔗](#), Internet Consultant and Librarian was joined by Olly Hellis, Digital Development Officer for **Somerset Libraries** [🔗](#) to explore the many applications of AI and how it is being used in a library setting. 47 people attended on the day and the session has since been viewed a record 535 times on recap. This makes it the most popular expert session to date.

“Really informative - definitely improved my understanding of AI and what it can do - now feels more accessible/useable and less scary!”

Attendee feedback



Attendees per Expert Session



* Accessibility attendee details not available

The total number of attendees across all CoP sessions was 377, of which 326 were external to the British Library and 193 represented grantees. The total number of recap viewers across the recorded sessions was 997.^[4] Representatives from 78 English library services and six from the wider UK attended at least one CoP session, indicating that the learning spread beyond the core grantee cohort.

^[1] No recap figures available as meeting took place on Microsoft Teams and was not recorded.

^[2] All recording figures as of September 2024

^[3] Due to the invite settings used in this meeting, attendee's emails were not recorded, meaning we could not ascertain how many of the external attendees were from grantee services. This was amended for subsequent sessions.

^[4] These figures do not account for repeat attendees who attended multiple sessions.

9. Managing a grants programme

9.1 How it started

As the British Library has not run many similar grant giving programmes, most processes were built from scratch. The British Library's legal and finance teams provided some brilliant guidance that helped to navigate institutional policy and support the writing of key documentation.

The team was lucky to be able to work closely with the **Endangered Archives Programme (EAP)** [\[1\]](#), who imparted priceless insights into running a grant-giving initiative within the British Library. Despite their work involving the administration of grants in international, usually academic contexts and therefore not having much overlap with the more localised projects, the team were able to draw upon their experience when designing the programme.

The quick build and launch of the application portal was key. There was a tight schedule for both rounds and a robust, reliable tool was needed that could accommodate multi-round decision panels. An integral EAP policy the team adopted was the use of Zengine, their online grant management platform and application portal. Thanks to their advice and guidance docs, the team were able to hit the ground running. Having a platform external to the British Library also helped to avoid the systemic disruption caused by the cyber-attack in October 2023, allowing the programme to be kept on track.

9.2 Things that worked well

Getting the sector to help shape the programme

Consultation with the library sector was a key strand of inspiration throughout the programme. Surveys and feedback opportunities were used, shared via the LibraryOn comms channels (the newsletter, show and tell sessions, Community of Practice Basecamp, etc.), to gather insights into what kind of funding would be most useful to libraries.

Sector voices were also included in the decision-making process when selecting applications. Representatives from **Arts Council England** [\[2\]](#), **GLL** [\[3\]](#), **Coventry Libraries** [\[4\]](#), **Libraries Connected** [\[5\]](#), **CILIP** [\[6\]](#) and retired senior library staff all took part in panel stages across both funding rounds.

Keeping the application process light-touch

The funding periods were short in timescale, so the aim was to reduce the administrative burden on applicants as much as possible. By limiting the monitoring reports to top-level details and only a maximum of two per grantee per round, it was felt that there was enough of a perspective on the projects' progressions without taking up too much capacity.

The second round had to be more streamlined than the first due to its even tighter turnaround time. Whereas the first round involved an expression of interest stage and an interim monitoring form, this was removed both for the second round, keeping just the full application stage and a shorter version of the final monitoring form.

Streamlining the application process had the dual benefit of both reducing the time projects needed to spend on administrative work and making the entire grant-getting experience less onerous for applicants. The positive responses to this were evidenced by the number of returning applicants in round two and by feedback across both rounds.

“The process went smoothly. The finance bit and explaining internally why the money needed to be capitalised took a bit of time but some conversations at high levels this end meant that was overcome. It did mean monthly reporting about the project as part of internal finance systems here throughout the duration of the project. Colleagues who have previously applied for grant funding from other bodies did not have this process.

Overall really pleased with application process and everything about the project including the monthly online drop-ins you organised.”

Jo Steele, Principal Librarian – Customers and Partners, West Sussex Libraries 

Targeting specific project types in round two

In order to streamline round two, the scope of eligibility was honed. In round one all projects which could improve a service's digital offer could apply. In round two applications were only considered if they fit in four project types:

- **Library apps**
- **Online registration upgrades**
- **Virtual tour production**
- **Improvements to Library Management Systems.**

These project types were based on feedback from the sector and popular themes from round one applications.

Narrowing the scope in this way succeeded in making the fund more targeted, reducing the capacity demanded of both applicants and decision panelists. Although it meant projects which did not fit within the fund's narrow parameters weren't considered, limiting the eligibility pool greatly increased the efficiency with which the grants could be administered.

9.3 Things that could have gone better

Time for delivery

Both rounds were compressed into extremely tight timescales. Round one took place over 11 months, with a three month application period and eight subsequent months to complete the project activity and submit final monitoring documents and accounts. Round two was even shorter, taking place over six months. The application period was just four weeks long, and the subsequent delivery period concluded four and a half months later.

Due to this truncated timeline, several of the projects struggled to meet their deadlines. As of September 2024, eight round one projects and round two projects had not submitted their final monitoring form and accounts, despite their respective deadlines in January and March. However, some projects also experienced internal issues and supplier difficulties which meant they were unable to complete the monitoring on time. Some projects are also utilising an underspend.

Both delivery periods stretched over the Christmas period. This created difficulties for services due to staff absences and having to accommodate seasonal activities. The festive period also introduced additional roadblocks for projects involving virtual tour production, who experienced delays due to working around Christmas decorations and bad weather.

“Thank you for a well-managed and effective programme. In an ideal world, going forwards, the timeline for delivery would be longer.”

Jacqueline Widdowson, Senior Library Officer, Oldham Libraries [✉](#)

Capitalisation requirements

As stipulated in the funding agreement with Arts Council, grants could only be used for capitalisable expenditure.

This raised two issues. First, many of the projects would have benefited from staff training to consolidate their technical upgrades. Unfortunately, training is not a capitalisable expense. This meant services had to either source free or peer-to-peer training or fund through other sources, usually their local authority, internal budget, another external source or a combination of the three.

Second, capitalisation policy varies greatly between local authorities and, although there were a number of steps to prepare services for this, several of them struggled to navigate the process of capitalising their expenditure. One service even found that, despite assurances from their council's finance team during the application process, they were unable to capitalise their project expenditure when it came time to deliver. A greater sense of how these capitalisation policies would affect the grantees would have potentially allowed the prevention of some of these disruptions.

“The grant funding being capital only was incredibly problematic so some additional support on this in the early stages would have been appreciated, for example by flagging up how this would have posed challenges. Also, had there been more relaxed timelines in application phase, this would have meant investigating the parameters around capital funding with internal finance teams would have been easier as would have given more time for responses to be received and queries to be followed up on. Information as to why the short timeline for project delivery would also have been gratefully received as this timescale has put additional pressure when the public library sector is under huge pressures with respect to capacity.

The community of practice set up as part of the funding has been greatly appreciated - wonderful to be able to connect to other library colleagues across the country.”

Anonymous grant recipient

Underspend process

There were several projects that underspent their grant award. This meant there was a need to formulate a procedure for reallocating excess funds.

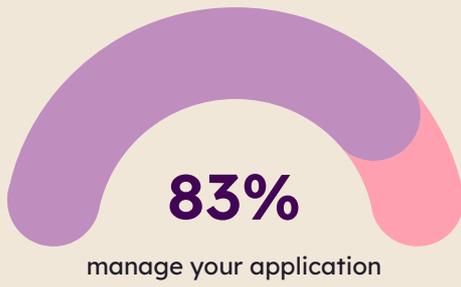
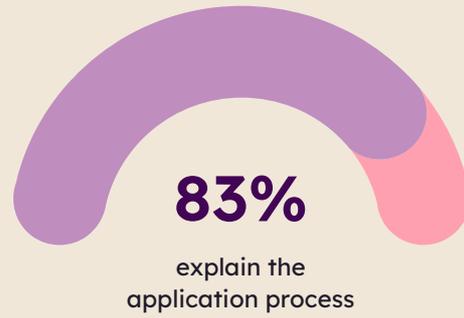
Although this process worked and in most cases the original grant award was distributed, it would have been better to have included the policy in the guidance.

Reporting timeline

Projects had a set time to be delivered and for reporting to be submitted. This meant there was limited time to collect engagement data before monitoring had to be completed. As a result, some grantees had limited information on how many users had engaged with their project after completion.

How well did we...

% of 'very well' feedback answers



10. Conclusions

The investment of just under £1.5m has certainly supported libraries to digitally upgrade. The fund's overall purpose to enhance the online presence of libraries through digital improvements and increasing discoverability has been met.

The programme has identified a number of areas that inform future needs and digital development of services.

- In continuing the digital development of libraries, there is a need to skill up staff in delivering digital projects. Many grantees said they had increased their digital knowhow. This will inevitably support the development of future projects and enable them to do more digitally in the future. Building in staff development and learning should be an essential part of all digital library projects.
- Many services built on relationships with their local authorities. Libraries said they had a developed understanding of how systems worked and better understood what they do and vice versa. These relationships were often very beneficial for both parties. In most cases collaboration had been fruitful and resulted in partnerships that will support future work. Greater understanding of what each other does and how they operate could benefit both local authorities and libraries. There is an opportunity for some local authority teams to support library teams more and for them to benefit from their resources.
- Having a network or a community of practice provides a way to share learning and not reinvent the wheel.
- There is uneven digital provision between services. Some functions such as room booking aren't automated, and whilst some services prefer to manually organise, it does require a serious amount of staff time and resource. Digitising some functions such as space hire and using time-saving apps for printing etc would free up staff to support users more.
- Many services have limited budgets and staff capacity. This can make delivery of new projects challenging. However, there was clear drive from services to develop their digital capability and add to their knowledge.
- Data collection and how that data is used, varies significantly between services.

Appendix A

Grants awards list round one

Area	Library Service	Amount	Primary activity
North	Darlington	£30,000	Website upgrade
North	Gateshead	£29,147	Website upgrade
North	Kirklees	£10,326	New software
North	Leeds – Ask for a Book	£69,600	Website upgrade
North	Leeds	£70,000	Website upgrade
North	Lincs Inspire	£30,000	Marketing activity
North	Middlesbrough	£14,000	LMS
North	Newcastle	£13,780	Booking system
North	Oldham	£42,150	New website
North	Sefton	£30,000	Marketing activity
North	Sunderland	£64,000	New website
Midlands	Leicester City	£25,000	New software
Midlands	Stoke-on Trent	£20,500	Website upgrade
London	Camden	£41,200	Digital equipment
London	GLL Bromley	£70,000	Marketing activity
London	GLL Greenwich	£70,000	Website upgrade
London	Lambeth	£45,607	New software
London	Newham	£28,720	Digital equipment
South East	Brighton & Hove	£52,994	Marketing activity
South East	Hertfordshire	£21,200	Digital equipment
South East	Suffolk	£70,000	Website upgrade
South East	Surrey	£56,656	Virtual tours
South East	West Sussex	£30,000	Marketing activity
South West	Gloucestershire	£30,000	New website
South West	Libraries Unlimited	£37,321	Booking system
South West	Libraries Unlimited	£49,095	Website upgrade
South West	Southampton	£29,650	New software

Grants awards list round two

Area	Library Service	Amount	Primary Activity
North	Blackpool	£27,400	LMS upgrade
North	Bolton	£12,135	Virtual tours
North	Cumberland	£17,291	Library apps
North	Halton	£13,000	LMS upgrade
North	Kirklees	£16,079	LMS upgrade
North	LiveWire Warrington	£10,379	Virtual tours
North	Manchester	£20,250	Virtual tours
North	South Tyneside	£15,000	Virtual tours
Midlands	Northamptonshire	£16,000	Library apps
Midlands	Nottinghamshire	£30,000	Virtual tours
London	City of London	£25,800	Library apps
London	Hammersmith & Fulham	£10,115	Virtual tours
London	Hillingdon	£10,200	Library apps
London	Merton	£24,500	Virtual tours
London	Redbridge	£29,952	Library apps
South East	Cambridgeshire	£15,287	Library apps
South East	Kent	£24,800	Virtual tours
South East	Suffolk	£29,200	Virtual tours
South West	Bristol	£15,340	Virtual tours
South West	Libraries Unlimited	£24,500	Virtual tours
South West	Somerset	£19,116	Virtual tours

Appendix B

Press and social media coverage

Round one

[Brighton & Hove: In 2024 we want to inspire new... - Brighton & Hove City Libraries | Facebook](#) 

[Camden: Library news - Camden Council](#) 

[Darlington: Darlington BC - News Item](#) 

[Leicester Libraries: New app launched for Leicester library members - BBC News](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Room Booking](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Room Booking](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Room Booking](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Secret Book Quest: Devon libraries launch reading adventure for under-fives](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Secret Book Quest](#) 

[Libraries Unlimited - Secret Book Quest](#) 

[Middlesbrough: New Website Boosts... - Middlesbrough Libraries | Facebook](#) 

[Sefton: News and Updates | Sefton Council](#) 

[Sefton: Sefton Libraries are delighted to announce that... - Sefton Libraries | Facebook](#) 

[Stoke-on-Trent: Stoke-on-Trent Libraries awarded LibraryOn grant to improve online presence and discoverability | Stoke-on-Trent](#) 

[Suffolk: Welcome to our new website! - News - Suffolk Libraries](#) 

[West Sussex: All the latest from West Sussex Libraries \(govdelivery.com\)](#) 

Round two

Cambridgeshire: #LibraryOn have announced their latest... – Cambridgeshire Libraries | Facebook [↗](#)

Halton [↗](#)

Hammersmith & Fulham: Library accessibility tours | London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (lbhf.gov.uk) [↗](#)

Hillingdon: Today, we are excited to announce the... – Hillingdon Libraries | Facebook [↗](#)

Kent [↗](#)

London Libraries: The Bookseller – News – London Libraries creates reading app inspired by ‘Couch to 5k’ [↗](#)

London Libraries: London Libraries’ ‘ReadOn’ uses quizzes and challenges to get people reading | Libraries Connected [↗](#)

London Libraries: Lambeth Libraries back new “Couch to 5k for reading” app - Love LambethLove Lambeth [↗](#)

London Libraries: Community: New app aims to get people to read more in Lambeth | NEWS FROM CRYSTAL PALACE (wordpress.com) [↗](#)

London Libraries: ReadOn Brand New Library App (visionrcl.org.uk) [↗](#)

Manchester [↗](#)

Manchester: View our new virtual tours! – manclibraries blog [↗](#)

Manchester: Manchester City Council and Zeus 360 bring virtual tours to all 22 of authority’s libraries – Prolific North [↗](#)

Manchester: Virtual Tours – manclibraries blog [↗](#)

Manchester: Take a walkthrough tour of Manchester Libraries online | Manchester City Council [↗](#)

Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland: App to help neurodiverse people access libraries in Cumbria – BBC News [↗](#)

Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland: New app for library members in Cumbria | Cumberland Council [↗](#)

Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland [↗](#)

Appendix C

Press Play information

“I think the overall programme was excellent and there was plenty there to stimulate and learn from”

Press Play attendee

Press Play took place on Friday 1 March 2024 at the British Library’s Knowledge Centre, St Pancras in London. The day was badged as ‘A playground of digital ideas’ and focused on sharing innovation in the digital realm relevant to the library sector. The themes were engagement, data and inclusion with each session sitting under one of those headings. There were also big picture sessions which covered broader digital topics.

The day was co-curated with the sector after they were polled on topics of most interest and relevance. It was open to UK library services and associated organisations, and was attended by heads of service, digital project managers and front-line library staff. Sector support organisations and Arts Council England were also present.

How many people attended?

In person and those joining online totalled 192. This broke down as:

- 69 attendees, who either purchased a ticket, or received a bursary to attend
- 27 in person speakers
- 27 British Library staff including the LibraryOn team
- 26 attendees online
- 10 invited guests
- 7 exhibitors
- 6 remote speakers

Of the in-person attendees, 40% were made up of services that had received a LibraryOn grant. 27 services including those part of a consortium were present.

Unfortunately, there was a train strike on the day of the event that affected the north of England. This had a bearing on the number of people able to attend.

14 bursaries were awarded to support attendance and overnight accommodation if required.

What was on the programme [↗](#) ?

Engagement

- Artificial intelligence: Let's embrace playfulness – **Jocelyn Burnham** [↗](#), AI trainer for culture sector
- TikTok: Leveraging video content for advocacy, outreach and book promotion – **Kelsey Bogan** [↗](#), High School Librarian & Adjunct Professor at Great Valley High School, USA
- Journey of a library Instagram – Izzy Ashley, Library Outreach Assistant, and Lorna Hulme, Development Officer, **Halton Libraries** [↗](#)
- Future-proofing libraries – Maaïke Verberk, Director of **DEN, Netherlands** [↗](#)
- Setting up a studio in your library: Photography, video, lighting and podcasting – Ryan Johnson, **BIPC Oxfordshire** [↗](#)
- Digital Powerwash: Ethics around the use of Big Tech for socials - Jantien Borsboom, Director of **PublicSpaces, Netherlands** [↗](#)

Inclusion

- Inclusion potential of digital spaces – Dr Tola Dabiri, Director of **Museum X** [↗](#) and Cultural Sector Lead at **National Academy for Social Prescribing** [↗](#)
- Libraries digital inclusion meetup - LIVE! – **Good Things Foundation** [↗](#) and **Cambridgeshire Libraries** [↗](#)
- Envoy Connect project: Audiobooks for blind and partially sighted users – Abul Kashim, Programme Manager for **Camden Libraries** [↗](#), and Lara Marshall, Libraries Engagement Manager from **RNIB** [↗](#)
- Inclusive digital zones – Rahat Ismail, Service Manager, and Sarah Sobakin, Frontline Officer, **Barking and Dagenham Libraries** [↗](#)
- Virtual tours and room hire: Online solutions to drive inclusive and sustainable footfall in libraries – Jack Woodley, Head of Sales at **Kajima Community** [↗](#)
- Making digital assets accessible – **Dr Amy Kavanagh** [↗](#), disability rights activist and trainer

Data

- Panel discussion: Why do we need open data? – chaired by Luke Burton, Director, Libraries at **Arts Council England** [↗](#), with Sander van Kempen, Senior Advisor for **National Library of the Netherlands** [↗](#), and Aude Charillon, **PTFS Europe** [↗](#)
- Data storytelling live – Dave Rowe, Founder of **Libraries Hacked** [↗](#)
- Using data to understand online audiences – Chris Unitt, Founder of **One Further** [↗](#)

- Transforming the customer experience using open data – Georgina Carr, Marketing Programme Owner – Libraries, [GLL](#) [↗](#)

Big picture

- Information in the digital age – Lucy Crompton-Reid, CEO of [Wikimedia UK](#) [↗](#)
- In conversation: Role of libraries in the digital age – Tony Ageh OBE, former-Chief Digital Officer of [New York Public Library](#) [↗](#), and Sir Roly Keating, CEO of the [British Library](#) [↗](#)
- Widening access to collections through digital – Chaired by Katherine Blamire, Head of the British Library’s [Living Knowledge Network](#) [↗](#), with Alison Stevenson, Vice-Chair of [Library and Information Council](#) [↗](#) and Interim Associate Director for Collections and Research at the [National Library of Scotland](#) [↗](#), and Richard Davies, Head of Collection Programmes at the British Library
- Lifting the lid: Stakeholder communication with ideas from agile ways of working – Giles Turnbull, [Use the human voice](#) [↗](#)
- Books Unbanned and the digital library card: Role of the public library in providing access and information literacy – Nick Higgins, Chief Librarian, and Amy Mikel, Director of Customer Experience, from [Brooklyn Public Library](#) [↗](#)
- Closing reflections from Dave Lloyd, Service Development Manager from [Coventry Libraries](#) [↗](#)

Stands in the foyer throughout the day

- Live demonstration of the interactive [Tovertafel](#) [↗](#) digital table – [Surrey Libraries](#) [↗](#)
- Funding surgeries – [Arts Council England](#) [↗](#)
- Applying AI in your service – [Hannah Wood](#) [↗](#), Knowledge Specialist, NHS England
- Skill sharing one-to-one with the LibraryOn team

Feedback from attendees

Positive

- Quality and content of the sessions
- Variety of topics
- Good networking opportunity
- Good venue/ location

- Format of the day
- Catering
- Tech/ production was well done.

Constructive

- At times the schedule clashed
- Room organisation
- Comms before the day could have been better
- More practical demos would have been useful
- More information about LibraryOn would have been useful.

So what?

A co-curated event ensured the topics were important, interesting and applicable to libraries. The aim was to offer a programme that reflected the digital aspirations of the sector.

Leading on from the Community of Practice, Press Play was intended to provide inspiration and share useful, practical and thought-provoking ideas that libraries could apply straightaway. Feedback demonstrated this was achieved, and whilst the event schedule could have been slightly more spread out, in general attendees found it a very useful day.

Conversations have continued and connections made on the day have been lasting. Recordings in the main space and speakers' presentations remain available to view on the [LibraryOn website](#) [↗](#), ensuring people can revisit what was shared at the event.



“This was a new experience for me and I really enjoyed it. It is clear that we are all facing the same challenges across the sector. Seeing what people are doing to overcome them and learn from their experience is always very valuable, as well as reinforce that we are already on the right path. The food and the atmosphere that LibraryOn created were great too.”

Press Play attendee

Image courtesy of LibraryOn team