

Annual Report

Financial year

1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023

A large graphic with a teal background and a white dotted border. In the center, the text "Read Yourself Well" is written in a mix of bold and italicized fonts. Surrounding the text are five circular icons: an open book (top), a person meditating (left), a heart with a pulse line (right), an apple (bottom-left), and a person running (bottom-right).

**Read
Yourself
Well**

**Borrow books from us to help
maintain your health and wellbeing**

For your free membership visit www.westberks.gov.uk/libraries





Introduction

Our vision is for an inclusive, modern, sustainable, and high-quality public library service at the heart of every community in West Berkshire. This is our sixth annual report, and it is intended to give you an idea of what libraries do, who uses them, our staff and volunteers, what the service costs, and how much town and parishes contributed in the financial year April 2022 to March 2023.

Libraries continue to play an important role in promoting well-being and community cohesion through offering a range of cultural activities and providing many people with free access to vital online services. We continue to work hard to ensure that West Berkshire libraries reflect and respond to local needs and provide a safe and trusted space for all. We recognise the importance of being a part of our local community, responding positively to the needs of that community. We aim to ensure that our service, including the events and activities that we hold, the library buildings, and the provisions that are available, reflect inclusivity and provide a welcoming experience for all who visit, live in, or work in West Berkshire.


As in previous reports we have included comparative data, and the data for 2022-23 reflects that this was the year of recovery from the global pandemic. We are always happy to respond to requests for sharing general data about library usage, but please be mindful that requests take up staff time and their priority is to help customers use our services.

Libraries Review

Phase 1: Our Libraries Review started in September 2021, with consultants Shared Intelligence undertaking a Community Needs Assessment for libraries in West Berkshire.

Phase 2: We were successful in applying to have a Libraries Peer Review Challenge through the Local Government Association, funded by the Arts Council. The Peer Review took place in April 2022 and concentrated on the specific question: 'How can we deliver the library service more efficiently in a largely rural area, including innovative ways in which to ensure access?'

Phase 3: The information gathered in Phase 1 and Phase 2 has formed the basis of the Libraries Review options report which will be considered by WBC Council Members.



“The library service continues to shine as the beacon in all our communities. It is a welcome sanctuary not just for those wanting to read but for people to come together for a variety of reasons. Covid taught us that support of others is much needed, and the library continues with that legacy.

Libraries are now going through a transition, and with the financial challenges we are facing we must be more innovative in how we deliver the service. We are entering an amazing new world and embrace the opportunities that this brings for libraries. Traditional values will always be heart centric, but now how we run the libraries must change. It will not happen overnight, but overtime with a great deal of creative thought and community input. For example, libraries can become community hubs with additional services from other WBC and community providers. It is not always convenient or easy to travel to the WBC offices for support and we would like to help residents by providing access to these services more locally where we can.

As well as the essential element providing a much-needed resource in the way of books to read for entertainment, enlightenment, education and research, the library has an amazing digital store of delights. The library also has an important role in helping our communities adapt for digital inclusion and supporting those finding it challenging to adapt to the rapid growth of services such as online banking, or online shopping.

As always, the library team of staff and volunteers are the true guardians of whatever guise our libraries take on. They are forever resourceful and hardworking, dedicated to being there for the residents, and adapting to the needs of a changing community.

Our libraries are not just a sanctuary, or a shining beacon, but our Community Champion.”

Councillor Janine Lewis

Have you got a suggestion or query?

Email: Felicity Harrison, Culture & Libraries Manager,
West Berkshire Council
Felicity.harrison@westberks.gov.uk

About the service

The library service is **FREE** to join for everyone, of any age, living, working or studying in West Berkshire. We have 8 libraries: Newbury, Burghfield Common, Hungerford, Lambourn, Mortimer, Pangbourne, Thatcham and Theale, as well as a Mobile Library and an At Home service for housebound readers. As well as providing **free access** to over 117,000 books to borrow, including large print format, graphic novels, quick reads and world fiction, the library service offers the following:



- Free Libraries app – a quick and easy way for library users to access their accounts, to search the catalogue, renew, reserve and check out books.
- Free computer use and wi-fi.
- Free access to e-books, e-magazines and e-newspapers.
- Audiobooks and e-audiobooks to listen to on the go.
- Wellbeing Bags, with activities to help maintain health and wellbeing.
- Children's online and in-person events, including Rhymetimes, Code Club, craft events and the Summer Reading Challenge.
- Self-service printing, photocopying and free scanning to email.
- Room hire/library hire.
- Online/in-person talks on popular topics.
- BBC micro:bits to try coding projects and ideas at home.
- Book groups – hundreds of titles available in sets of 10 copies (annual fee applies).
- Family and local history resources – including Newbury Weekly News archives available on microfilm.
- Online resources, all available free of charge:
 - **Access to Research** – access to over 10 million academic and research journal articles (available only from computers and mobile devices within a West Berkshire library).
 - **Ancestry Library edition** – the leading online resource for family history research (available only from computers and mobile devices within a West Berkshire library).
 - **Brillder** – helps students to investigate any academic topic.
 - **Britannica Online** – full version of the world's most famous and respected multi-volume encyclopedia, plus student and junior additions.
 - **British Newspaper Archive** – millions of pages of historical newspapers from the British Library collection.
 - **GoCitizen** – online resource for candidates preparing for the Life in the UK test (British citizenship).
 - **Oxford Dictionary of National Biography** – the life stories of over 50,000 people who shaped the history of the British Isles throughout the ages.
 - **Oxford English Dictionary (OED)** – probably the most famous dictionary in the world.
 - **Theory Test Pro** – online simulation of the UK driving theory test, including the entire official question bank from the Driving Standards Agency, plus online hazard perception tests.
 - **Who's Who** – biographical information on the most influential people of today as well as entries back to 1897.

2022/23 comparative statistics

West Berkshire Library Service	2021-2022	2022-2023	% Var
Loans or renewals of library stock	553,903	665,546	20.16%
Active borrowers	11,812	13,997	18.50%
New library members	4,891	5,648	15.48%
Reservations placed	62,419	65,968	5.69%
Visits to the library	201,657	277,754	37.74%
Items added to library stock	15,195	15,743	3.61%
No. of public computers	54	49	-9.26%
Public computer usage (hours)	7,552	12,683	67.95%
No. of public computer users	1,573	2,440	55.12%
No. of visits to public computers	10,923	17,106	56.61%
No. of staff (total)	46	47	2.17%
No. of staff (full time equivalent)	25.06	25.06	0.01%
Weekly staff working hours	927.23	927.33	0.01%
No. of volunteers	248	269	8.47%
Volunteer hours	10,001	12,278	22.76%
Weekly opening hours	219.3	219.5	0.10%
Annual opening hours	11,404	11,416	0.10%
Planned closure hours	595.0	206.5	-65.29%
Unplanned closure hours	51.3	145.6	184.04%
Total closure hours	646.3	352.1	-45.52%
Summer Reading Challenge participants (main challenge in person - not including online participants)	2,792	2,969	6.34%

2022-23 highlights

- During this year, our **47** staff members and **269** volunteers welcomed **277,754** visitors (an increase of **38%** on the previous year), and we gained **5,648** new members, an increase of **15%**. The number of library loans increased by **20%** to **665,546**. Our e-library was particularly popular again, with **202,271** loans and **17,478** reservations. Our library stock was replenished with **15,743** new items, and library customers also took advantage of our free reservation service, which enables borrowers to reserve an item, either online or in person, and collect it from their chosen branch. We dealt with **65,968** book reservations during the year.
- For the second year running, West Berkshire had the highest percentage participation in this year's **Summer Reading Challenge** of any region in the South East of England, reaching 19% of all 4-11 year olds across the district (an increase of 3% on the previous year).



- The lighting at **Theale Library** was updated in October. The new lighting design, utilising energy efficient LEDs, has created a much brighter environment and is saving on CO₂ emissions as well as energy costs.



- **Burghfield Library** had a much-needed refurbishment.


- The **Newbury Library VIP Book Group** for visually impaired adults celebrated its 21st birthday in 2022. This group was started in 2001, after West Berkshire Libraries took part in a national project involving the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind), NLB (National Library for the Blind) and Calibre Audio. The group meets monthly to share thoughts about a selected audiobook.
- In response to customer demand, we reduced the number of networked library PCs for public use at Newbury Library and created more study space for people who want to use the free Wi-Fi to work or study in the library, bringing their own laptop to do so.



- In November 2022, we held our first **West Berkshire Author Showcase** at Newbury Library in response to feedback received in our Libraries Review community engagement exercise. The showcase provided a forum for over 30 local authors to promote and sell their recently published books, including titles for both children and adults. The showcase was a great success, and we are intending to make it an annual event.
- We increased our range of free online resources for library members with **Brillder**, designed primarily for secondary school students. It provides an enjoyable, interactive way to study and learn through over 200 game-type units, called 'bricks'. It is an ideal resource for revision or for independent learning, particularly beneficial for anyone seeking to apply to university.

Brillder - New in Libraries

Revising, applying
to university, or
simply love learning?



Start building your **Brilliant Mind** with Brillder's
scholarly challenges, FREE for library members.



A more interesting way to study online, for computer, tablet, or phone.
Find out more and sign up through your library at brillder.com/libraries.

Be sure of a warm and friendly welcome in your local library!

For your free membership visit www.westberks.gov.uk/libraries

- During the winter, we promoted our libraries to the West Berkshire community as part of West Berkshire Council's **warm-spaces initiative**.

- In conjunction with West Berkshire Public Health, we launched **Wellbeing Bags** for library members to borrow from West Berkshire Libraries, free of charge.

These are packed full of activities and ideas to help maintain health and wellbeing, including colourings sheets, card games and suggestions for learning a new skill.



- A **Golden Time Club** was launched at Lambourn Library to offer activities and games for children and families every Friday afternoon when school has finished.

- We celebrated the **Queen's Platinum Jubilee** in style. Activities and events took place in all our libraries.

- We also took part in the **Big Jubilee Read**, a national campaign which celebrated The Queen's Platinum Jubilee with great reads from across the Commonwealth. Seventy titles - 10 from each decade of the Queen's reign - were chosen by an expert panel to introduce to library members a brilliant selection of authors and books.



- Our collaboration with **Educafe** community café every Wednesday 11am-2pm at Newbury Library has grown from strength to strength, providing a safe space for people to make friends, enjoy arts and crafts, games and puzzles, activities for parents with babies, and improve English language skills.

Additionally, Hungerford, Thatcham and Theale libraries each hosted two Educafe sessions during the year.



- We worked closely with The Corn Exchange, Newbury, to help them deliver their Ageing Creatively programme across the district, including arts courses in several libraries and weekly World Crafts sessions at Newbury Library.



- Throughout the school summer holidays, we hosted English language courses for young Ukrainian refugees at Newbury Library.

How much did it cost / how much income generated?

People sometimes ask how much a certain library branch costs. Some costs are specific to a branch – for example, staff, energy, rates, and maintenance. Others are shared with the whole service – professional librarians and back-office staff, emergency staff cover, book stock and digital library stock, ICT support, marketing etc. All the parts of the service are inter-dependent, so all branch libraries benefit from being part of the wider service, and the library service benefits from being part of West Berkshire Council – for example, corporate support for ICT, health and safety, HR, and phone contracts.

Our income includes voluntary contributions from town and parish councils, library item charges and fines, income from rent, events, book sales and grants.

In the information below we have also included information about capital investment in the library service.

Revenue Expenditure (Running costs)	£ 2021-22	£ 2022-23
Staff	925,034	976,528
Premises - energy, rates, maintenance costs	273,895	297,432
Supplies and services - ICT, marketing, transport, e-resources	205,231	188,174
Total	1,404,160	1,462,134
Income		
*Fees and charges/fines, rent, venue hire, events, sales	-91,274	-77,659
Voluntary contributions from town and parish councils	-75,227	-38,030
Other income including donations	-3,579	-4,811
Total	-170,080	-120,500
Net cost of the library service	1,234,080	1,341,634
*Figures for 2021/22 include £33,854 Government loss of income contribution.		
Capital Investment (Fixed Assets)		
Building improvements	72,988	54,855
Book stock and associated costs	119,832	121,359
ICT improvements (** CIL funding)	12,702	1,212
Total	205,522	177,426

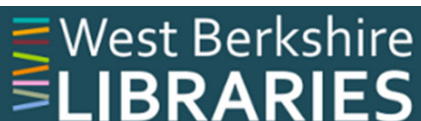
**The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. It is an important tool for local authorities to use to help them deliver the infrastructure needed to support development in their area.

Support from town and parish councils

We always appreciate the help and support we get from town and parish councils in helping us to promote the library service, for example, by publicising libraries to their communities and helping us to recruit local volunteers.

We would like to thank those who made a voluntary financial contribution to the library service. In 2022/23 we received a total of £38,030 from town and parish councils. The amount we can raise through voluntary contributions impacts on the level of service we are able to deliver to our residents and helps to support communities across the district through our libraries.

We value your feedback about the service so that we can work together to improve it for residents. We are always happy to attend town and parish council meetings to talk about the service and what it can offer to your community.

The logo for West Berkshire Libraries, featuring a stylized 'W' made of vertical bars in red, yellow, and blue, followed by the text 'West Berkshire LIBRARIES' in white on a dark teal background.

West Berkshire
LIBRARIES

We're here for you.

**As the cost of living increases, remember
that you can borrow from us for FREE.**

Volunteers

We are always immensely grateful to all our volunteers for the help they provide. During 2022/23, **269** volunteers played a vital role in supporting our libraries and the West Berkshire community. Between them they spent **12,278** hours helping us by:

- Supporting staff in ensuring that visitors made the most of their time in the library.
- Assisting PC users with getting online and answering their IT queries.
- Helping out with events and activities such as Rhymetimes and crafts.
- Helping with stock work using our library management system.
- Supporting the At Home service by regularly delivering books and audiobooks to housebound readers.
- Ensuring books were shelved correctly and the library kept tidy.
- Supporting the Summer Reading Challenge, engaging with the participants, and chatting about the books they have read.



We have also helped 48 young people complete the volunteering section for their Duke of Edinburgh placement this year.

We are always keen to recruit new volunteers and to review the roles that we offer to be as flexible as possible.

We always take the time to communicate with our volunteers, thanking them for their efforts and giving feedback about the difference they are making. We greatly appreciate the fact that they give their time to support libraries, and we couldn't run the service without them.

If you would like to volunteer please talk to library staff or look online:

www.westberks.gov.uk/volunteer

Challenges and plans for 2023-24

Our plans for 2023/24 include:

- Finalising the recommendations from the Libraries Review to make best use of our resources for West Berkshire residents.
- Launching a new events module so that customers can access information about all library events and activities in one place, through the West Berkshire Council website.
- Working with Family Hubs and the Early Years team to develop the national Bookstart offer for pre-school children and West Berkshire Council's offer of 50 Things To Do Before You Are 5.
- Applying for Library of Sanctuary status in recognition of the work we do at Newbury Library in collaboration with Educafe to welcome and support refugees and people seeking sanctuary in our communities.
- Completing the building improvement work at Thatcham Library.
- Continuing to work with The Corn Exchange to provide venue opportunities in community libraries in rural areas throughout the district, to allow the development of their Ageing Creatively programme.
- Reviewing and extending opportunities for volunteers to assist staff in our libraries.

