

Equalities Monitoring Libraries

Annual Report - 2022-23



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1. Introduction

The library service has nine libraries located throughout the Borough. They provide a wide range of resources to their local communities and visitors to the area. These resources include books, e-books and e-magazines, spoken word CDs, DVDs, newspapers, free internet access via public computers, free Wi-Fi, digital resources, photocopying, printing and scanning, plus a wide range of activities and events.

Residents and visitors to the area can apply for an e+ smartcard that acts as a membership card to access the resources. Each time the card is used a transaction is recorded to enable usage to be monitored.

The purpose of equalities monitoring is to ensure the Council is providing a fair and equitable service to all residents.

To ensure the service is fair and equitable, monitoring has been undertaken in terms of:

- Access to the service
- Changes in service provision

It has been analysed by the following equality groups:

- Age
- Race
- Sex
- Religion
- Disability

When sufficient data for analysis is available for the other protected groups in the Equality Act 2010, these will also be included.

The data below has been taken from:

e+ smartcard database – enrolments and transactions for libraries (1/04/22 to 31/03/23).

Office for National Statistics (ONS) population estimates unit published tables. Crown copyright.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) - Census 2021.

2. Measuring access to the service

Access to the library service can be measured by enrolments and transactions using the e+ smartcard at the nine libraries. Although people who do not use the e+ card may also use the service, the e+ card numbers are sufficiently high to make this a viable measurement of access to the library services.

As people may enrol for the e+ card but not use it, transactions have also been analysed. The tables below show the age, gender, ethnicity and religious belief of those who are using the library facilities.

All data is for residents of Bracknell Forest only. Enrolments for access to library facilities by non-residents were 7,044 in the year.

The data below pertains only to enrolments undertaken within the Library Service and does not include enrolments that include library membership undertaken at other Council venues. For this reason, some data may appear lower than expected.

Table 1 – Enrolments by age

Enrolments in e+ card - Libraries 01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Age Range	Enrolments in e+ card	E+ card %	BF population Census 2021	BF population Census 2021	Variance
Under 18	1,326	38%	30,100	24%	14%
18 to 34	245	7%	24,000	19%	-12%
35 to 49	993	28%	27,400	22%	6%
50 to 64	339	10%	24,300	20%	-10%
65 to 79	534	15%	14,000	11%	4%
over 80	75	2%	4,700	4%	-2%
Total	3,512	100%	124,600	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Table 2 – Transactions by age

Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2022- 31/03/2023 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Age Range	Library transactions	Library transactions %	BF population Census 2021	BF population Census 2021	Variance
Under 18	18,895	38%	30,100	24%	14%
18 to 34	801	2%	24,000	19%	-17%
35 to 49	9,100	18%	27,400	22%	-4%
50 to 64	5,295	11%	24,300	20%	-9%
65 to 79	10,763	21%	14,000	11%	10%
over 80	5,277	10%	4,700	4%	6%
Total	50,131	100%	124,600	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Comments

The number of enrolments within the majority of the age ranges is slightly below the proportion of the Bracknell Forest population as a whole, with the major exception being the 'under 18' and the '35 to 49' age groups where there is a positive variation of 14% and 6% respectively. This trend reflects the high usage by children and their parents, and the significant role that Libraries play in the development of children's literacy.

The number of transactions by the over 65 age ranges is also significantly higher than the Bracknell Forest population as a whole and potentially highlights the important role that Libraries play in combatting loneliness and social isolation.

Table 3 – Enrolments by Race

Enrolments in e+ card for Libraries - Race 01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023 (Residents of Bracknell Forest only)					
	Resident	% (exc. 'unknown')	BF pop. Census 2021	BF pop. Census 2021 %	Variance
White	591	87%	107,269	86%	1%
Mixed	10	1%	3843	3%	-2%
Asian	59	9%	8879	7%	2%
Black	19	3%	2993	2.5%	0.5%
Other	0	0%	1621	1.5%	-1.5%
Not known	2,991	(81%)			
Total (exc. not known)	679	100%	124,605	100%	

*N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding
Non-specific data included under not known*

Table 4 – Transactions by Race

Transactions for Libraries using e+ card - Race 01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023 (Residents of Bracknell Forest only)					
	Library transactions	Library transactions % (exc. unknown)	BF pop. Census 2021	BF pop. Census 2021 %	Variance
White	12,744	91%	107,269	86%	5%
Mixed	286	2%	3843	3%	-1%
Asian	758	5%	8879	7%	-2%
Black	140	1.5%	2993	2.5%	-1%
Other	31	0.5%	1621	1.5%	-1%
Not known	36,210	(72%)			
Total (exc. not known)	13,959	100%	124,605	100%	

*N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding
Non-specific data included under not known*

Comments

Enrolments and transactions using the e+ card are broadly in line with most of the population in relation to ethnicity. However, given the number of enrolments and transactions where people have opted not to provide their ethnicity, the results are rather skewed and have, therefore, been omitted from the calculations. It seems that the majority of Library users actually reflect the Bracknell Forest Census data.

Table 5 – Enrolments by Sex

Total enrolments by Gender for Library Service 01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023 (Bracknell Forest Residents only)					
Gender	Resident	Library transactions % (exc. unknown)	BF population – Census 2021	Bracknell Forest %	Variance
Female	2,416	54%	63,200	50.7%	3.3%
Male	1,873	42%	61,400	49.3%	-7.3%
Unknown	162	4%			
Total	4,451	100%	124,600	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Table 6 – Transactions by Sex

Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Gender	Library transactions	Library transactions % (exc. unknown)	BF population - Census 2021	Bracknell Forest %	Variance
Female	31,131	62%	63,200	50.7%	11.3%
Male	15,668	31%	61,400	49.3%	-18.3%
Unknown	3,365	7%			
Total	50,164	100%	124,600	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Comments

Enrolments and transactions show more women than men are using Libraries with a positive variance of 3.3% for enrolments and 11.3% for transactions respectively.

It is a national trend that women constitute the majority of users of all public library services. Bracknell Forest is clearly reflecting this. This has also been corroborated by previous user surveys.

Table 7 – Transactions by Religion

Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2021 - 31/03/2022 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Religion	Library transactions	E+ card %	Bracknell Forest population Census 2021	Bracknell Forest population Census 2021 %	Variance
Christian	1,310	52%	59,140	48%	4%
Buddhist	0	0%	1,039	1%	-1%
Hindu	116	5%	2,942	2%	3%
Jewish	14	0.6%	190	0%	0.6%
Muslim	29	1%	2,216	2%	-1%
Sikh	2	0.1%	1,055	1%	-0.9%
Other religion	3	0.1%	7,680	6%	-5.9%
No religion	1,040	41%	50,338	40%	1%
Prefer not to say	46,010	(95%)			
Total	2,514	100%	124,600	100%	

*N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding
Non-specific data included under prefer not to say*

Comments

Data on enrolments by religion is not currently available through the SmartConnect database as all new members chose “prefer not to say”. Religious group transactions using the e+ card are broadly in line with the population. However, as 95% also prefer not to say, the results may not wholly represent the religious profile of Bracknell Forest’s population.

The Library Management System and supplier databases do not record ethnicity data nor religion either.

3. Actions from last year’s equalities monitoring

Open+ is live in all branches apart from Bracknell and Crowthorne. This has made facilities at all seven Libraries more accessible to everyone, but especially for people who work as they can use the branches at times that are convenient to them. Overall, opening hours have increased by 355 hours per week through the Open+ technology.

The Library Service has also actively supported Holocaust Memorial Day, with flameless candles in the windows of each Library, plus Black History Month, Diwali, Pride and LGBTQ+ with displays and events.

4. Equality objectives and service planning

Although data from the E+ enrolments and transactions should ideally be used for service planning, the available data is very limited due to the large number of people who refuse to answer questions relating to equalities’ monitoring when joining the Library Service. For example, 129 transactions were by people who are registered

disabled, but 37,334 transactions were by people who refused to state whether they had a disability or not.

Similarly, with regard to sexual orientation, 8 transactions were by people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, 2,981 transactions were by people who identify as heterosexual, whereas 45,535 transactions were by people who did not disclose.

Therefore, feedback about usage is usually obtained from frontline staff, along with consultation with community groups and library users, public feedback forms and stock suggestions.

5. Inclusivity in all we do

The Library Service runs a large programme of events and activities for people of all ages and are socially inclusive. These include reminiscence sessions for older people, talks with experts on hand to provide advice on benefits, careers' guidance, health and well-being and safety at home, chess clubs to improve memory, knitting and craft activities, sensory story times for children with special needs, and a range of activities to promote general health and well-being, such as yoga, mindfulness and Tai Chi. Children's meditation has been very popular and positive feedback has been received from parents.

The Creative Youth group for young people aged 11 to 17 on Saturdays in Bracknell Library, in collaboration with South Hill Park, has been fully booked every week. Young people can learn a new skill each week with a different artist, from dance and drama to arts and crafts.

The Library Service has continued to work in partnership with the Social Prescribing Team, who refer clients with depression to the Library Service to take part in the activity programme. Feedback received has indicated the positive impact that joining the library has had on people's health and well-being and some have stated that the Library Service has been a lifeline for them and enabled them to meet new people and make friends.

Six Libraries were designated "Community Winter Hubs" during the winter to provide a safe and warm space for people to gather, with free refreshments, free Internet access and a programme of "Winter Wellness" events in collaboration with the Social Prescribing team. Many people worked in the Library during this time, bringing their own devices in addition to using the public PCs that are available in all branches.

The Library Service has also developed a partnership with Stepping Stones Recovery College enabling people to attend taster sessions and gain access to support and advice if they are undergoing mental, physical or emotional challenges.

All Libraries have specially chosen collections of "Books on Prescription", which are books recommended by health professionals and are self-help books on dealing with a wide range of physical and mental health issues, including dementia, long-term physical conditions and depression. A similar collection for teenagers and children has been developed, called "Reading Well". There is also a large stock of resources to support people going through the menopause. All resources are free to borrow for Library members.

In order to assist customers who are suffering from financial hardship, all Libraries have increased the amount of stock available on subjects such as managing finances and debt, eating well for less, grow your own and repair and recycle.

The Library Service also subscribes to Press Reader, enabling library members to access thousands of newspapers and magazines in every language.

Although LGBTQ fiction is purchased, it is not identified as a separate genre within the Borough's Libraries. This is a result of feedback from this community, some of whom completed customer comment forms, who did not wish LGBTQ stock to "stand out" and requested that it be interfiled with general fiction.

The Library Service continues to provide support for those who are seeking employment. The staff provide ad hoc assistance for those who require help completing application forms at all branches. Northern Training Solutions also provide free advice on benefits and employment advice on Tuesday mornings in Bracknell Library. On the first Friday of each month in Bracknell Library, BEEP (Berkshire Education Partnership) provides one to one appointments and workshops for young people aged between 15-24 with special needs and disabilities, who are unemployed and not in education. Adviza also provide support on Mondays with CVs and preparing for job interviews.

6. Accessibility for All

Visually impaired users can borrow up to 6 spoken word items at a time, free of charge.

Members who are registered hearing impaired can borrow up to 2 subtitled DVDs per week, free of charge.

Adults and children with special needs can borrow up to 6 spoken word items at a time, free of charge.

The accessibility of buildings has been of paramount importance when considering the rollout of Open+ technology to extend opening times, and consultation was held with the Bracknell Forest Access Group. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out. All Libraries, apart from Bracknell Library, are fully accessible to wheelchair and motorised vehicle users when staffed and unstaffed. Bracknell Library has lift access to all floors but the Access Group felt it was acceptable to put the lifts out of action in Open+ mode, to avoid anyone being trapped in the event of a fire.

Older people and users with disabilities who have difficulty physically visiting a library can sign up for the Home Library Service. A selection of stock will be chosen for them, according to their preferences, and will be delivered to their homes free of charge either by a volunteer, or by a member of the Home Library Service staff. Volunteers also play a befriending role, as many of our housebound clients are socially isolated.

There are 25 loanable Galaxy tablets, purchased by the Library Service, with full training materials, to enable people who lack digital skills, or who lack the means to fund their own access, to get online, download e-books, and connect with other people through Zoom activities. Initially, the tablets were loaned through the Dementia Services' team, for dementia sufferers and their carers to use as a way of keeping in touch with others. However, the tablets were also made available for library members to borrow. This in addition to free Internet access and free Wi-Fi that is available in all Libraries.

The Princh air printing service has also been launched in Bracknell Library to enable members of the public, who are not Library members, to print from their personal

devices and collect and pay in the Library at a time that is convenient for them. This will be rolled out to all Libraries shortly.

7. Diverse and Inclusive Workforce / Volunteers

6% of the current library workforce represent different ethnic minorities and 23% of the workforce are male. Traditionally, library services have been dominated by a largely female workforce. However, the Library Service has been pro-actively recruiting a more diverse workforce.

Fifty-five volunteers are assisting the Library Service, with over ten new recruits starting in the last quarter. Of these, 15% are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 4% have special needs and 1% are registered disabled. This has enabled us to foster good relationships with people from protected characteristics' groups. All have reported that they enjoy the positive contribution that they are making not only to the Library Service, but to the local community as a whole.

8. Conclusion

There have not been any complaints received about discrimination from people with different protected characteristics.

Plans for the coming year include extending opening times at all Libraries with Open+, which will increase accessibility for everyone in all areas of the Borough, rolling out wireless (air) printing at all branches and offering over one hundred free digital skills' courses, in partnership with the Good Things Foundation, to combat digital exclusion and to support the unemployed.

There will also be a satisfaction survey carried out, using the Objective tool. This will provide useful feedback on the demographics of service users, and their satisfaction with stock, opening times and the level of service received, which will, in turn, inform further decision making.

There will also be public consultation regarding the new Warfield Hub and potential move of the existing Whitegrove Library to the new location.

Plans are also underway to increase cultural activities for a diverse range of audiences. This has including applying for funding from the Arts Council to enable streaming of live events to audiences across multiple sites by means of hybrid technology.