Equalities Monitoring – Services
G - Libraries

Annual Report - 2019-20

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Contents

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, 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 its 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

A satisfaction survey of the library services was undertaken in 2015 and is usually scheduled to take place on a rolling three-year programme. However, as two public consultation surveys were undertaken is 2016 as part of the Library Service's transformation review, in addition to the number of technological changes that took place in Libraries during 2018 and are continuing to be implemented during 2019 and 2020, the survey has been deferred until spring 2020, to enable customers to become accustomed to the new technology before a satisfaction survey is conducted.

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 (1/04/19 to 31/03/20).

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

Office for National Statistics (ONS) - Census 2011.

2. 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 645 in the year; transactions were 12,754 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.

Table 1 – Enrolments by age

Enrolments in e+ card - Libraries 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Age Range	Enrolments in e+ card	E+ card %	Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019	Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019 %	Variance
Under 18	1,098	34%	28384	23%	11%
18 to 34	757	24%	24856	20%	4%
35 to 49	727	22%	27215	22%	0%
50 to 64	335	10%	24083	20%	-10%
65 to 79	280	9%	13316	11%	-2%
over 80	36	1%	4695	4%	-3%
Total	3,233	100%	122,549	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Table 2 – Transactions by age

Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Age Range	Library transactions	Library transactions %	Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019	Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019 %	Variance
Under 18	30280	35%	28384	23%	12%
18 to 34	3859	4%	24856	20%	-16%
35 to 49	12819	15%	27215	22%	-7%
50 to 64	11854	14%	24083	20%	-6%
65 to 79	20528	24%	13316	11%	13%
over 80	7160	8%	4695	4%	4%
Total	86,500	100%	122,549	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Comments
The number of enrolments within a majority of the age ranges is slightly below the Bracknell Forest population, with the major exception being the 'under 18' group where there is a positive variation of 11%, this is a continuing trend from the previous year where there was a 13% variance. The negative variance of 10% between the 50-64 age range is more difficult to understand.

The number of transactions varies considerably amongst each age range, with significant negative variances within the 18-34 (-16%) although this is consistent with last year's findings, whilst the opposite is the case within the 65-79 age range with positive variance of 13% and the 'under 18' age group, with a positive variance of 12%. This is a similar trend that was noted in the previous three years.

Table 3 – Enrolments by Race

Enrolments in e+ card for Libraries - Race 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Residents of Bracknell Forest only)					
	Resident	% (exc. 'unknown')	BF pop. Census 2011	BF pop. Census 2011 %	Variance
White	664	21%	102,554	91%	-70%
Mixed	14	0.4%	2303	2%	-1.6%
Dual Heritage	0	0%	0	0%	0%
Asian	68	2%	5664	5%	-3%
Black	27	1%	2189	2%	-1%
Other	3	0.1%	495	1%	-0.9%
Not known	2457	76%			
Total (exc. not known)	3,233	100%	113,205	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 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Residents of Bracknell Forest only)					
	Library transactions	Library transactions % (exc. unknown)	BF pop. Census 2011	BF pop. Census 2011 %	Variance
White	32911	38%	102,554	91%	-53%
Mixed	424	0.5%	2303	2%	-1.5%
Dual Heritage	82	0.1%	0	0%	0.1%
Asian	2561	3%	5664	5%	-2%
Black	602	0.7%	2189	2%	-1.3%
Other	268	0.3%	495	1%	-0.7%
Not known	49653	57%			
Total (exc. not known)	86,501	100%	113,205	100%	

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

Comments

Apart from people identified as "white", race enrolments and transactions using the e+ card are broadly in line with most of the population. However, given the number of enrolments and transactions where people have opted not to provide their ethnicity, the results are rather skewed. The reality is 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 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest Residents only)					
Gender	**Resident**	**Library transactions %** *(exc. unknown)*	**Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019**	Bracknell Forest %	**Variance**
Female	1,840	57%	61,708	50%	7%
Male	1,386	43%	60,841	50%	-7%
Unknown	7				
Total	3,233	100%	122,549	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Table 6 – Transactions by Sex

Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Gender	**Library transactions**	**Library transactions %** *(exc. unknown)*	**Bracknell Forest population Mid-2019**	Bracknell Forest %	**Variance**
Female	53,279	62%	61,708	50%	12%
Male	26,531	31%	60,841	50%	-19%
Unknown	6,689	7%			
Total	86,499	100%	122,549	100%	

N.B Percentages may not sum due to rounding

Comments

Enrolments show more women than men are enrolling for the e+ card. Females are also shown to have completed more transactions during the year with a variance of 12%.

It is a national trend that women are 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 – Enrolments by Religion

Religion	Enrolments in e+ card	E+ card %	Bracknell Forest population Census 2011	Bracknell Forest population Census 2011 %	Variance
Enrolments in e+ card - Libraries 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Christian	27	27%	68,524	65%	-38%
Buddhist	1	1%	825	1%	0%
Hindu	9	9%	1,824	2%	7%
Jewish	0	0%	176	0%	0%
Muslim	3	3%	1276	1%	2%
Sikh	0	0%	455	0%	0%
Other religion	1	1%	490	0%	1%
No religion	58	59%	32184	30%	29%
Prefer not to say	3,134		7451		0%
Total	99	100%	**105,754**	100%	0%

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

Table 8 – Transactions by Religion

Religion	Library transactions	E+ card %	Bracknell Forest population Census 2011	Bracknell Forest population Census 2011 %	Variance
Transactions - Libraries 01/04/2019 - 31/03/2020 (Bracknell Forest residents only)					
Christian	6,471	58%	68,524	65%	-7%
Buddhist	13	0.1%	825	1%	-0.9%
Hindu	439	4%	1,824	2%	2%
Jewish	47	0.4%	176	0%	0.4%
Muslim	177	2%	1276	1%	1%
Sikh	37	0.3%	455	0%	0.3%
Other religion	49	0.4%	490	0%	0.4%
No religion	3916	35%	32184	30%	5%
Prefer not to say	75,351		7451		
Total	11,149	100%	**105,754**	100%	0%

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

Comments

Religious group enrolments and transactions using the e+ card are broadly in line with the population, with only exceptions being the negative variance with regards to

Christian enrolments, and a positive variance towards the enrolments of those who declared themselves as having no religion.

3.   Actions from last year's equalities monitoring

A Public Library User Survey has not been carried out since 2015. They are usually conducted on a three year cycle. However, as part of the Library Service's Transformation Review programme, the public were able to take part in two separate consultation surveys about future service provision in 2016. They also had the opportunity to attend 8 public consultation meetings, led by the former Director of Environment, Culture and Communities and former Executive Member Cllr Iain McCracken.

The review included consultation with all members of the community, including children and young people. As a result of the feedback received, the Library Service actively recruited eighty-eight volunteers from all sectors of the community to assist with service delivery and began the process of extending opening hours through self-service technology and technology enabled-opening in 2019.

By the end of March 2020, Open+ technology was successfully implemented in a further three Libraries i.e. five Libraries in total. Whitegrove, Ascot Heath and Harmans Water Libraries extended opening hours along with Binfield and Sandhurst Libraries, increasing the opening hours by an additional 33 hours at Whitegrove, 58 hours at Ascot Heath and 61 hours at Harmans Water Library. This has made services at all five Libraries more accessible to everyone, but especially for people who work.

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

4a.   Feedback from community groups

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 the elderly, coffee mornings for carers with experts on hand to provide advice on benefits, chess clubs to improve memory, knitting and craft activities, sensory storytimes for children with special needs, and a range of activities to promote health and well-being, such as yoga, mindfulness and Tai Chi. A great deal of both anecdotal and written feedback has been recorded from members who have attended events, and some have stated that the Library Service has been a lifeline for them and enabled them to meet new people and make friends.

In October 2019, the Library staff took part in the International Day of Older Persons at the Lexicon in order to engage with older people who are not currently Library users and to promote the services and activities that Libraries offer.

In order to foster good relations between different community groups, the Library Service hosted its first literary festival in October 2019. Although entitled a literary

festival, this was actually a week-long programme of different cultural activities, including Indian cookery demonstrations and a very popular talk given by a member of the Asian community on traditional Asian dress. Feedback following the talk was that it had been a fascinating insight into another culture, and similar events were requested.

Following on from the success of the festival, Bracknell Library began a series of multicultural story times in different languages led by volunteers, including Italian, French, Polish, Russian and Hindi, and a wide range of children's books were purchased in dual languages.

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

Although LGBT 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 LGBT stock to "stand out" and requested that it be interfiled with general fiction.

4b.   Services to the elderly, disabled and those with special needs

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, 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.

Elderly and disabled users 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.

On 21st March 2020, all Libraries were required to close as part of a national lockdown. In order to assist with the mental health and well-being of the Borough's older population and to combat loneliness and social isolation, the Library Service began a process of telephoning all residents aged over 70, offering them the opportunity to join the Home Library Service free of charge, and receive free deliveries of books of their choice to their door. As a result, 386 older people joined the Home Library Service. Verbal and written feedback received demonstrated how much this service was valued and that a chat with a friendly member of staff, both on the telephone, and at a safe distance when books were delivered, had been a lifeline to many and had kept them going through such a difficult time.

4c.   Volunteers

The Library Service had 86 active volunteers registered in the year 2019-2020. Of these, 11% are from ethnically diverse backgrounds, 3% have special needs and 2% 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.

5.   Conclusion

Plans for the coming year include extending opening time at all Libraries with Open+, which will increase accessibility for everyone in all areas of the Borough, and to conduct a satisfaction survey 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.

If Covid 19 restrictions continue to prevent all Libraries from fully opening, small scale surveys of Home Library Service users and users of the "Select and Collect" service will be undertaken instead.