



Please ask for: Kelly Leeson  
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Date: 2 November 2020

Dear Mr Couchman-Sawyer

Thank you for your request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 relating to libraries. Please see the response provided below:

***On 21 September 2020 you published an article on social media that said that you would be closing 66 libraries across Kent. This decision was made without public consultation and therefore is unlawful. It is important for all residents of Kent to have access to library services including internet access and books. Therefore I have several requests which I would like answers to, this is to support an open letter which I am writing to the DCSM.***

***1. How many library staff have left since March 2020?***

*Library, Registration and Archives (LRA) Service Units Leavers between March 20 to September 20*

*GT - LRA - Operations 36*

*GT - LRA - Specialist and Support Services 2*

*Grand Total 38*

***2. Please provide all accessibility risk assessments which were created to support closing libraries and explain how you have mitigated against loneliness, digital exclusion, rural locations, people with disabilities.***

*All libraries were closed further to Government mandate and to comply with the lockdown in March 2020, therefore no risk assessments were required. As restrictions have eased, Kent LRA have been taking a careful and phased approach to reopening our libraries, with customer and staff safety taking primary consideration. This has involved the completion of Covid19 secure specific risk assessments.*

*During the lockdown, our Befriending Service was established, where vulnerable customers who normally use our Home Library and Postal Loan services received regular telephone calls from LRA staff. This was also extended to our Mobile Library customers. As soon as restrictions were eased, the first services to be resumed were the Home Library and Postal Loan services, in recognition that some of these customers would prefer a physical rather than digital service. These services are available to all customers with disabilities. The Mobile Library service has also now resumed to meet the needs of customers in more rural areas. Our online services have also provided digital forms of events and activities so that it is still possible to connect and interact with the service.*

*Our Ask a Kent librarian service which operates over the phone or email has continued throughout the period.*

**3. How much money has been spent by KCC on libraries, registration and archives for April 2018-2019, April 2019-2020 and April 2020 to date.**

The gross revenue expenditure relating to KCC's Libraries, Registration and Archives Service for April 2018-2019, April 2019-2020 and April 2020 to date is as follows:

	Gross Expenditure
2018/19	£19,620,700
2019/20	£19,907,300
2020/21 to date (end of September)	£9,383,300

**4. Usage statistics for 2020 for all libraries.**

Please refer to the Quarterly Performance Reports on the KCC website for usage statistics: [Council performance - Kent County Council](#)

For Quarter 2 2020-21, library issues are as follows:

July	151,951
August	145,395
September	186,207

**5. Please provide information about what alternative decisions were considered and reasons why they were not used.**

There were no safe and viable alternative decisions available and therefore the LRA concentrated on providing an excellent virtual service including e-books, magazines, the home library and postal loan services. Also established was a befriending service where vulnerable customers received regular telephone calls from LRA staff.

**6. Please confirm whether the DCMS were informed about the decision to close 2 thirds of the county's public library access.**

Yes, the DCMS were informed, and we have been working to the guidelines on the DCMS/Libraries Connected toolkit, details of which can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service>

**7. What are KCC doing to ensure that people who do not have access can continue to use their services.**

Our Home Library Service is available to all customers who are unable to leave their homes to access libraries, along with the Postal Loan Service for visually impaired customers. Our Mobile libraries are back on the road to serve customers in rural communities. Our digital offer continues to run parallel to our physical services, with more eBooks and other eResources available free of charge to all LRA customers. We are also looking at extended library opening hours at the sites we do have currently open.

If you are unhappy with this response, and believe KCC has not complied with legislation, you have 40 working days from the date of this response to ask for a review. You can do this by following our complaints process; details can be found at this link <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/complaints-and-compliments#tab-10> on our website. Please quote reference 16908398.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you can appeal to the Information Commissioner, who oversees compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Details of what you need to do, should you wish to pursue this course of action, are available from the Information Commissioner's website <http://ico.org.uk/concerns>

Yours sincerely

Kelly Leeson  
Information Access Officer