

Library visits on the up for the third year running

London, 4 January 2006 – For the third consecutive year there has been a rise in the number of people visiting public libraries in England. Statistics released today from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy show that in 2004/05 visits to public libraries increased by just under three million. There were over 21 million more visits to libraries in 2004/05 than there were in 2001/02.

The figures, which represent the most accurate information available on public library usage, show that 42% of library services are achieving seven or more of the ten Public Library Service Standards. At the same time they challenge libraries to improve, showing that the number of active borrowers and the number of issues continue to fall.

Commenting on the findings, Head of Library Policy at the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), John Dolan said: “These figures are a welcome spotlight on library performance and their timely release means that public libraries services can start the year knowing that more people are visiting and also with a clear set of goals for the future.

“The impact of the People’s Network shows that investing in a new means of accessing information and learning was a wise move. At the same time it will always be a priority for libraries to focus on books and reading, and MLA is working with other organisations including The Reading Agency and publishers to implement best practice in this area.”

Meanwhile MLA is working with a broad range of stakeholders to develop options for new models of stock procurement. The project will consider how improvements in technology, procurement and stock management practice that have already been adopted by some, can be harnessed more widely for the benefit of all libraries.

The goal is to improve the availability of stock (with flexibility to meet local needs) and to create the potential for reinvestment of efficiencies so libraries can provide the best possible service to their communities through better opening hours, stock and other services.

John Dolan added: “There is clear evidence that good practice is having an impact in many library services; the challenge for the sector is to replicate this good practice across the board. We want to see even more services operating opening hours that reflect community demand, and a greater emphasis on involving communities in service development.”

David Lammy, Minister for Culture at DCMS, said: “Public libraries continue to provide a vital and popular service to individuals of all ages, to families and to local communities. In the 21st century knowledge, information, and literacy skills and reading for pleasure are at the heart of ensuring quality of life as well as economic well-being. Local authorities must ensure that their libraries provide the quality of services people need and expect.”

Through the MLA’s public libraries improvement programme, Framework for the Future, £9million of central government funding is being invested in supporting reading and literacy initiatives, improving leadership and management, challenging under-performance and on a major campaign to attract a new generation of public library staff.

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Notes to Editors

MLA

MLA is the national development agency for museums, libraries and archives, advising the government on policy and priorities for the sector. MLA's roles are to provide strategic leadership, to act as a powerful advocate, to develop capacity and to promote innovation and change. www.mla.gov.uk

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