

The following is a press release from the Museums Libraries and Archives Council, issued 01 June 2004:

Libraries adapt for 21st century audiences

- **Library visits increased by almost 5 million**
- **Library investment reaches all time high of £1bn**
- **Libraries are buying more books – spend on books is up by almost 6%**
- **Total spent on CDs, Videos and Talking Books is also up**
- **More libraries are opening for longer**

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council welcomes the findings of major new research published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in the 42nd Annual Report of the UK's Public Libraries - the only authoritative report on the performance of libraries. It is based on information received from 99% of the UK's local authorities and highlights significant changes taking place in libraries. With total investment at an all-time high of £1 billion, UK libraries are moving with the times and drawing in new visitors with cutting edge technology and longer opening hours. The new research shows that libraries have bought more books than ever before and more money is also being spent on audiovisual media such as Talking Books, Language Packs, CD Roms, Videos, and Music.

This new approach has generated an increase in the number of visits made to libraries for the first time since the early 1990s. The rise of almost 5 million is equivalent to over 93,000 extra visits a week made to libraries across the country.

The increase in visitors last year also coincides with the introduction of the lottery-funded People's Network project: 32,000 new computers giving free or low cost internet access in all public libraries.

The impact of the first year of the People's Network is also highlighted in a report published today. So far, 25,000 people have completed a course or gained a qualification online, 50,000 have used the computers for projects to help their local community and 8000 have found new jobs.

Libraries use the network to introduce new users to their full range of services. In the last year, some libraries have been enrolling almost twice as many children as library members while others have used the People's Network to attract new audiences as the new computers came online, with particular success in attracting 'hard to reach' groups such as 14-30 year old males.

Mark Wood, Chairman of MLA (Museums Libraries and Archives Council) said, "This research shows that the tide has turned for public libraries. They have begun to change the way they serve their communities in a wide variety of ways beyond book lending and the results are starting to show.

Our People's Network programme, which has put computers and broadband access into every library in the country, has played a key role in reinventing the traditional library and helping to make it a more attractive and vibrant hub for the community it serves."

Bob McKee, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) said, "The latest CIPFA figures show the way that increased investment in public libraries is beginning to pay off - with longer opening hours and a significant increase in library visits. The investment in the Peoples Network is changing the way that people think about libraries and use libraries.

The figures suggest a continuing decline in book borrowing but do not yet reflect the exciting work on books and reading being supported by The Reading Agency as part of the government's Action Plan to improve public library services. We need more sophisticated measures than book borrowing data to show the huge impact that libraries are having on reading and the central importance of reading to literacy, learning and personal wellbeing."

Ends

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Notes to Editors: *overleaf*

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The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) is the national development agency working for and on behalf of museums, libraries and archives, advising government on policy and priorities for the sector. Museums, libraries and archives connect people to knowledge and information., creativity and inspiration. MLA is leading the drive to unlock this wealth for all. www.mla.gov.uk

The information included in this press release is an extract from the CIPFA Public Library Statistics for 2002-03. This is the forty-second return and is based on information sent by library authorities to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The data is based on returns from 205 authorities (99% of total) in England, Scotland and Wales.

The People's Network is a project to connect all public libraries to the Internet, as part of the Government's commitment to give everyone in the UK the opportunity to get online. There are now more than 4000 library ICT centres available throughout the UK. The People's Network is lottery funded by the New Opportunities Fund and managed by MLA. The Report about the People's Network can be downloaded from <http://www.mla.gov.uk/information/publications/00pubs.asp>

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) is one of the leading professional accountancy bodies in the UK and the only one which specialises in the public services. It is responsible for the education and training of professional accountants and for their regulation through the setting and monitoring of professional standards. Uniquely among the professional accountancy bodies in the UK, CIPFA has responsibility for setting accounting standards for a significant part of the economy, namely local government. CIPFA's members work (often at the most senior level) in the public service bodies, in the national audit agencies and major accountancy firms. They are respected throughout for their high technical and ethical standards and professional integrity. CIPFA also provides a range of high quality advisory, information and training and consultancy services to public service organisations. As such, CIPFA is the leading independent commentator on managing and accounting for public money. For further information contact Clare Rice or Elizabeth Hetherington-Senger at the CIPFA Press Office by telephoning 020 7543 5712/5687 or email: pressoffice@cipfa.org

The CIPFA library actuals 2002/3 can be obtained by registering at www.cipfastats.net

CILIP: the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers, with around 23,000 members working in all sectors, including business and industry, science and technology, further and higher education, schools, local and central government, the health service, the voluntary sector, national and public libraries. For more information about CILIP, please go to www.cilip.org.uk .

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