

Briefing on Current Book Stock

Reported Book Stock per 1000 population 31 March 2005 - October 2007				
Date	Per 1,000 pop'n	Actual number of books	% change	Comment
31 March 2005	1,738	389,428		Inaccurate catalogue
31 March 2006	1,179	264,175	-32.16%	Initial review of catalogue undertaken; stock which had not been issued for 5 years taken off catalogue
31 March 2007	717	160,656	-39.19%	First major stock take for many years undertaken. Catalogue revised accordingly. Also weeding of stock in preparation for refurbishment resulting in removal of books not 'fit for purpose'. Stock put in store during refurbishment.
31 Oct 2007	881	194,680	+21.18%	34,000 items added this year. The stock take will be repeated within the next three months.

Stock in Refurbished Libraries

The figures for stock before and after refurbishment of the four refurbished libraries are as follows:

	Before refurbishment*	After refurbishment
Walthamstow Central	45,170	47,464
Leytonstone	20,064	26,243
Hale End	17,055	21,548
North Chingford	27,024	29,454

These numbers relate to all stock assigned to that branch, and include items on the shelf, on loan, and in storage.

* An estimate due to incomplete work at the time on the out-of-date catalogue.

Q: How many items does the library service have in its entire stock?

A: Total items: 229,544 (including catalogued books in store)
Books available for loan: 194,680

Q: How many books does the library service have in storage?

A: The catalogue shows that we have 2,792 books in store. However, we have a significant number of items that have been withdrawn from the catalogue over decades. The stored stock is currently under review.

Q: Where are they stored?

A: In libraries stores in the borough.

Q: How many books does the library service have on the shelves or on loan?

A: Books available for loan 194,680 (on the shelves or on loan).

Q: When will the books you say are in storage waiting to be returned to the shelves in Walthamstow Central library actually be returned?

A: Work is continuing to return these books to the shelves - this exercise should be completed by Christmas.

Briefing on the Disposal of Book Stock

Policy for unwanted stock

Our stock policy defines how stock is 'weeded' from the shelves. Items identified as being out-of-date, in poor condition or not used for a period of years, depending on the type of book, are removed from the catalogue. This is done by experienced library staff.

What happened to unwanted stock?

- 1 Majority retained for book sale
- 2 Other stock is donated, eg some has recently been donated to the volunteer-run Whipps Cross library for patients.
- 3 Stock which can't be sold or donated, ie is unusable through damage or being out-of-date (eg a directory which has been replaced with an up-to-date version) is disposed of in the Bulky Waste recycling at London Waste.

Q: Are books burned?

A: No.

Q: Why have so many books 'disappeared'?

A: Prior to 2007 there had not been a comprehensive service wide stock take in Waltham Forest for at least 25 years, although individual libraries would have reviewed their stock periodically.

In 2005 a new libraries management team recognised the need to upgrade our library catalogue to ensure it was accurate and took steps to ensure this happened.

As of 2005 our library catalogue showed we had around 400,000 items on our catalogue.

A review of the position in 2006, which involved the removal of all items on the catalogue that had not been borrowed for at least five years, reduced this figure to approximately 264,000 items.

A full stock take was undertaken in March 2007. This resulted in the catalogue being updated to contain a new stock figure of 160,656 items. During this process stock was further weeded to remove all items that had not been borrowed for a set period. This was following standard practice for public lending libraries.

Apart from the stock "weeding" (as described above) the drop was due almost entirely to items not being removed from the catalogue when they were removed from service over the previous two-three decades. Items would have been removed from service because they were damaged, out-of-date or not borrowed for a number of years, as is standard and approved practice in public lending libraries.

Additionally, as part of the preparation for the refurbishment programme of its libraries, all books on the catalogue were checked to ensure that they were suitable for issue (ie in a good condition, a current edition if a reference book and a title that had been borrowed in the an agreed period).

The Audit Commission were appraised of the situation throughout this process and are happy with the action taken and the outcome of it.

A recent assessment of the library service's data quality systems by the accountancy firm Deloitte on behalf of the Audit Commission resulted in the Council, including libraries, being given a rating of "excellent".

Fundamentally, the reduction in the number of items on the catalogue is due to the fact that the catalogue was not updated until 2007. As a result of the fact that all the

books that were removed from the service were not also deleted from the catalogue, the catalogue had become enormously inaccurate, overstating the number of books held. It was the action taken by the new libraries management team that brought the problem to light.

Q: How many books were weeded altogether?

A: Following our stock take in 2007 we deleted 109,099 entries for books from our old catalogue. These entries related to books that no longer physically existed in our libraries. Many of these books had been removed from our libraries years earlier but were not removed from the catalogue.

A small number were also weeded as they had not been borrowed for a considerable period of time.

Prior to the stock take in 2007, a number of books were disposed of through donations to charity, book sales or waste disposal as was common practice in all lending libraries. In recent years this waste disposal has become recycling. Books that are destroyed are those that have been defaced, that have deteriorated, are out-of-date (eg reference books) or that have no value either as donations or second hand sales.

Q: Why don't you just keep the books?

A: MLA London has stated: "The withdrawal of books is efficient and should be promoted as such. You need to make space on the shelves for new stock. ... all libraries do it [pulping] because there is no real alternative."

Q: How many books do you estimate you had in 2005?

A: The stock listed on the library catalogue in 2005, which has already been identified as inaccurate, was approximately 390,000 items. However, we know that we had far fewer books on the shelves and in circulation because we could not have put that many books on the existing shelves.

Since we updated our catalogue and upgraded our electronic library management system we are now able to manage our stock more effectively. Our figures have been presented to the Audit Commission and we are confident we will continue to maintain accurate and up-to-date records of our stock holding.

Q: Why did your employees not keep accurate records of books disposed of?

A: It was not possible to retain such information using the old library management system. This was raised as an issue during the 2005/06 audit where it was also discovered that most local authorities who used this system had the same problem regarding the keeping of records for deleted items.

We have now replaced the old system with a new library management system.

We would like to make it clear that the Council is NOT attributing any blame to staff for the condition of the catalogue prior to 2007. In fact, it was the diligence of staff who identified the review of the catalogue as an priority.

Q: If proper records have not been kept how do you know how many books you did or did not have in the first place?

A: It was not possible to retain such information using the old library management system. We now know that the catalogue was overstating the number of books. In previous years we had to rely on the data provided by the catalogue. Other libraries had and still have the same problem.

Q: How did you decide to weed reference books as they had not been borrowed?

A: Like other libraries services we weed reference items according to good stock policy based on:

- Condition

- Relevance, eg we dispose of books that contain out-of-date or inaccurate data
- Availability on-line - many reference items are now only available online as they are regularly updated (eg Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Q: Did you remove out-of-date reference books when you did not have the up-to-date version of the book?

A: In the vast majority of cases we would not remove an old reference book without replacing it with an up-to-date alternative. For example, we might not replace school books that are no longer required for the national curriculum. The increasing use of on-line reference materials sometimes leads people to think we have cut back on our reference section when in fact the resource has merely been moved on-line.

Q: What are the up-to-date figures that show there are more books now than your old "inaccurate" figures?

A: 31 March 2007: 160,656
31 Oct 2007: 194,680

Q: Where have these figures been published?

A: Stock data is provided to CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) every year. The annual audit noted the good work of the stock take in cleansing our stock data - this informed the overall council audit on data quality - The Council received a rating of 'excellent' for data quality.

Q: Have they been put before Cabinet or any other council committee meeting?

A: Stock data for March was received by Cabinet in July 07. Subsequently, the relevant indicator has been removed by the Government from the CPA basket of indicators and therefore from the Cabinet reporting system.

Q: The question of what happened to the missing books was put to Cllr Geraldine Reardon by a library campaigner in September but no explanation was given. Why?

A: Neither politicians nor officers could be expected to be able to answer detailed or specific questions about the borough's entire book stock at a public meeting when no prior warning of the nature of the question is given. Had the question been submitted in advance, we could and would have answered it.

It is perfectly reasonable to say we would supply a full answer to the next Community Council, as we do for all other questions.

Q: Where are the books that were once in St James Library?

A: Some are on the shelves in Walthamstow, some are on the shelves at Hale End and some are in storage waiting to be returned to the shelves. Some have been removed from service.

Q: Why are users of Hale End and North Chingford Libraries also claiming that their book stocks have been depleted?

A: The lack of shelves at Hale End was the result of an overestimation of the space needed between shelves to make the space DDA compliant (ie aisles wide enough for wheel chairs and shelves low enough to be reached). We have been consulting with library users at Hale End Library and have put in more shelves and stock. There have been many compliments about the library, staff and stock levels at North Chingford.

Briefing on Lorna Lee's appointment to the post of Head of Libraries, Museum and Gallery

Q: Was the appointment, and pay rise of around £15,000, in contradiction of the council's own recruitment policy?

A: No. Lorna went up one grade through an agreed process in line with the Council's HR policies. She had to demonstrate by way of interview that she met the essential criteria for the post.

Q: Will HR procedures now be examined by councillors on the scrutiny committee and the member of the public who demanded to know what was going on give evidence?

A: In accordance with Council procedures Peter Spiro will be able to address the scrutiny management committee meeting on Wednesday 5th December.

Q: Did Lorna Lee's promotion put her up four council grades, from a salary range of £40,782 to £45,048 to one of £53,154 to £60,957 - an equivalent of four grades?

A: No. Lorna Lee was appointed as Head of Museum, Gallery and Archives (PO8) in May 2004. In January 2006 she was given additional responsibilities for running the Cultural Services Improvement Team. This put her on PO10, a grade she held for approximately 16 months.

The post of Head of Museum, Gallery and Archives was deleted in the restructure, as was the post of Head of Libraries. She consequently decided, as was her right, to apply for the post of Head of Libraries, Museum and Gallery, which is a PO11/12 position. She was appointed following an interview.

This is a grade differential of one grade, which means this process is in line with Council HR policy.