

THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

The

Library

Oxfordshire

FOREWORD

For me, Libraries are about books, but they are more about stories...

It is the difference that reading a book or accessing a piece of information makes. It is the impact of attending an event or activity at a local branch.

It is about a conversation had with a member of staff or volunteer, or an organisation holding a 'drop-in' session, which leads to a life-changing moment or simply a mood change (hopefully, in a positive way!). It's about using library computers to apply for a job and getting it.

I have heard local stories of people undergoing successful cancer treatment off the back of a library visit to Thame; and someone starting a booming business after advice received from our team at Westgate library.

This report provides a snapshot of some of the difference that Oxfordshire libraries make in some key areas.

Mark McCree

Head of Libraries and Heritage

LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH & WELLBEING

In 2025/26 we had over **19,000** conversations with customers around health issues, including mental health, digital wellbeing, smoking, alcohol, weight, physical activity, and cost of living. These often lead to signposting to other NHS services, as well as to our “Reading Well” collections.



We won the Libraries Connected National Award for Health & Wellbeing in June 2025.

We also provide free:



period products



condoms



warm spaces and hot drinks
in the winter



NHS Health Checks



blood pressure monitors



help with combating
loneliness

What our customers have said:



The library is the only place in town where I can go to be warm in a quiet and friendly environment without spending a fortune. It is increasingly the centre of community life for more and more people as the cost of living continues to rise.



(...) having jigsaws has been so therapeutic and a lifeline. It is a wonderful service when you are 93 and less able to do other things.

LIBRARIES FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

In 2025/26 we welcomed

83,000 attendees
at over
6,000 family events

We provide free:

Storytimes & Rhymetimes • Book Clubs •
Code Clubs • Author Events • Family Learning •
Stay & Play • Health and wellbeing activities •
Pre-and post-birth support • Lego clubs •
...and more



What our customers have said:

“

This library has been such a blessing. My son loves it and so do I! Staff are incredibly friendly and make you feel at home. It feels like stepping into this warm community they have created. It's been great as a new mum to rediscover my love of reading.

“

My autistic and dyslexic daughter, has been coming here since she was a baby. In May she stopped being able to go to school or leave home owing to massive anxiety. Today, she said:

"the library is a safe place, let's go there!"

When we arrived, the staff member welcomed her by name and made reading suggestions which engaged her interest. My shut down, withdrawn daughter feels safe, seen and happy.

LIBRARIES FOR DIGITAL INCLUSION

103,269

hours of public computer use

2,500+

customers supported by Digital Helpers

363,010

eBook and eAudio issued

We provide free:

- Free computer access
- Free Wi-Fi
- Printing & scanning
- Digital support
- E-reference & lending content
- Online safety information
- Family history resources
- Large print keyboards



Case studies:

One of our Digital Helpers let us know that he had managed to reduce a customer's monthly bill **from £57 per month to £4** by using tips from Martin Lewis' website. The customer was over the moon and said it was not something she'd have been able to do herself and this would make a huge difference to her monthly budget.



Another customer asked for help to create a new CV. We helped him navigate online and signposted him to local digital support. The customer received help creating his CV and staff then showed him how to upload digital copies to job applications. Some time later, we had a phone call from the customer's sister:

'I don't think you realise what you have done for him.'

She went on to explain that he has low levels of literacy and little to show from formal education. As a result of the support he had received in the library and from the community centre, he had been offered a new job

TRANSFORMING LIBRARY SPACES

Where we've invested in library buildings, we've seen visitor numbers grow by:

82%

Chinnor

32%

Henley

31%

Faringdon

Libraries have been successful in gaining over £2M in external funding since 2023. Major capital projects have been delivered at Bampton, Chinnor, Faringdon, Goring, Henley, and Witney, with more on the way.

We consulted with residents in 2026 and they told us that libraries need to be inclusive, trusted, safe spaces for people to connect; bridging generations and neighbourhoods. Providing meeting spaces and opportunities for engagement through groups, activities and events, and drop in sessions from partner organisations

Before



Chinnor



Henley



Faringdon

After



What our customers have said:

“

Heaven is a library and this has to be the best. Uplifting welcoming and full of stories to intrigue!

“

We regularly came to this library after school to study. We really appreciated this space. I wrote my personal statement for university from the perspective of being at the library window, and I also sent off my application for an apprenticeship as well. I've been accepted to both!

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

“ Thank you so much. I would not have survived without it.

- A Home Library Service customer

“ I am so pleased to be able to pursue my interests again. I didn't think it would be possible.

“ Chess club is a brilliant asset. It is the only time in the week my son comes out independently.

“ I managed to get a lot of revision done here, especially since I didn't have a space at home. With all this time I spent there she got the grades to go to my dream uni. Thanks you so much for not kicking us out for when we would, on occasion, gossip loudly!

“ You helped my daughter with dyslexia books and her reading has improved dramatically thanks to you spending time with her and encouraging her. This was recognised by school when she received the year 5/6 Reading Award in the end of term service.

“ Having Libby on my phone has got me reading again, and borrowing books from the library again!

“ It is such a comfort to me knowing I have such a safe and friendly space to go to on the days I am utterly exhausted by pregnancy.

Libraries in numbers 2025/2026

2,056,321 library visits

3,584,805 items issued

17,318 events and activities

80,000 new items processed

185,017 reservations were satisfied

115,200 boxes delivered and collected

84 choir, orchestras and ensembles supported

825 housebound customers served by Home Library Service

