

Green Libraries Survey

Progress, challenges, opportunities
and supporting future action

September 2022



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1. Introduction

The Green Libraries Partnership (GLP) is a multi-year research and development programme, established in 2022. Led by CILIP working together with Libraries Connected, the British Library and Julie's Bicycle, the partnership is funded by Arts Council England and chaired by Hampshire County Council's Assistant Director for Culture and Information Services.

The GLP was established in response to COP26 and the long-term climate commitments made by libraries and local authorities across England, drawing on the sector and environmental knowledge and expertise of the partners.

What drives us

Our vision

is of a better future for planet and people, empowered and supported by librarians and library workers.

Our mission

is to place libraries at the heart of environmental change.

Our purpose

is to enable libraries to build environmental action within their communities.

Key partnership actions to date

Green Libraries online hub

Sharing resources, knowledge, insights and case studies to inform and inspire sector action

Green Libraries Manifesto

A shared set of commitments for libraries who want to lead by example through their own environmental actions and use their influence and reach to inform and inspire people to take positive action

Green Libraries Grants

Small grants totalling £40,000 awarded across 15 library services for environmental action and engagement projects in 2022

One of our main objectives in 2022 is to lay the ground for developing a UK-wide, cross-sector, longer-term programme to support public libraries in building environmental understanding and action themselves and with their communities. The Green Libraries Survey was done to inform this process, by developing an understanding of what public libraries are already doing to be green, what they would like to do and what would help make this possible.

2. Methodology

The Green Libraries Survey was developed by Julie's Bicycle in collaboration with the GLP partners and open between 22nd June and 8th July 2022 via an on-line survey tool. A focus group comprising representatives of 16 library services across England – from COOs and Directors to Engagement Officers and Librarians – was also established to support the process, following a call for volunteers by Libraries Connected. The focus group meetings were invaluable to informing survey design and also provided an opportunity for exchange on key survey questions and to share and get feedback on the findings.

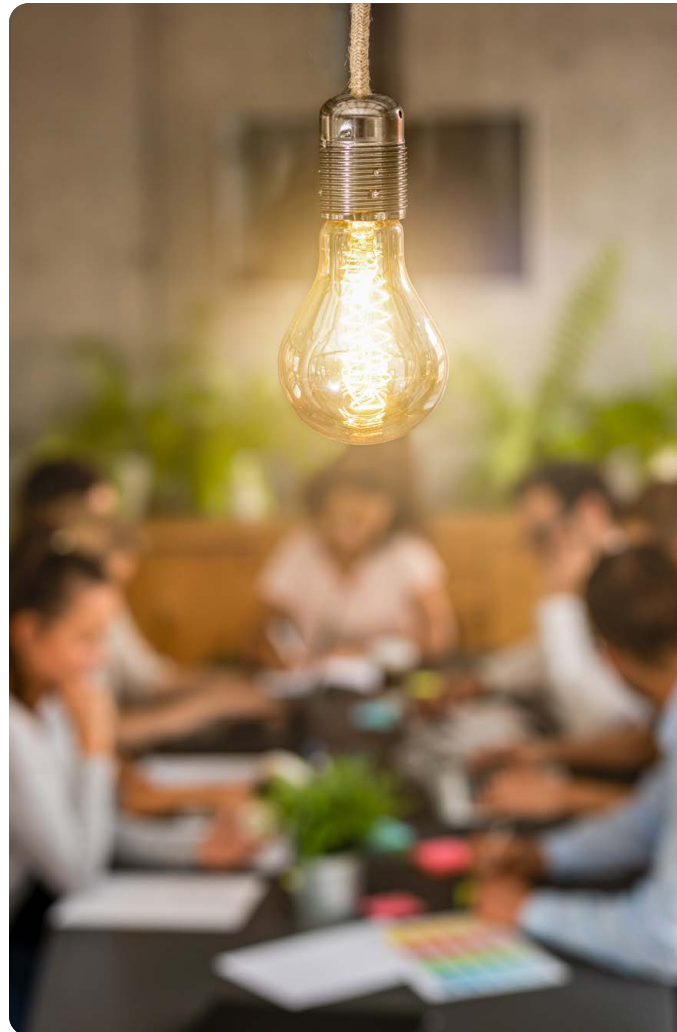
One person was asked to respond on behalf of each library service, in consultation with relevant colleagues and the head of library services. An offline version of the questions was also provided to facilitate this.

The survey was intended to be open to library services across all UK regions and was shared UK-wide by the GLP and its partners. When the survey closed, we had a total of 55 responses, 53 of which were from regions in England, just over a third of all English public library services.

Survey results were analysed by Julie's Bicycle and shared with the focus group and GLP partners. They aligned closely with the focus group exchange and discussion. The following findings were compiled by Julie's Bicycle and reviewed by the GLP partners.

We are extremely grateful to all the library services which responded and the focus group members who supported the process.

The survey was carried out just as the UK was starting to experience record temperatures and as the cost of living and energy price crises were coming to the fore. Had the survey been done even slightly later, these issues would have had more prominence, both in terms of survey design and responses.



3. Key findings

55 library services responded, a third of library services in England

~7,500 staff and 10,000 volunteers

1,204 buildings in total

Most library services are earlier on in their environmental journey

27% at the very beginning

56% making initial progress

Policy and action plans

85%

follow local authority environmental policy, though their relevance to library services varies

15%

have their own environmental policy and plan

32%

are developing their own environmental policy and plan

People

36%

have some environmental roles and responsibilities

38%

have had some environmental training, mainly via their local authority, but no library-specific training

Action and engagement



Key areas for action: building energy use, materials and waste, plastics, green procurement



Key engagement activities: environmentally-themed books and collections, environmental services (e.g. e-waste recycling) and environmental learning activities, festivals and events

64%

say environmental action and engagement has brought benefits

Challenges and opportunities



Key challenges: dependence on local authorities for bigger changes and investments, access to environmental data, and lack of money, time, knowledge and expertise

91%

believe environmental action and engagement can bring opportunities



Key opportunities: financial benefits e.g. cost savings, environmental awareness-raising, new engagement opportunities and improved health and wellbeing for library staff and users

Support

48%

have had some environmental support in the past, mostly via local authorities



Key areas for future support: funding – both capital and project funding – environmental training, webinars and events and access to better information on green services, products and solutions

While public libraries are early on in their environmental journey, there is a clear recognition of the role they can play in demonstrating, informing and inspiring environmental change, and a clear desire to do much more.

4. Key recommendations

Key recommendations for the Green Libraries Partnership in developing of a UK-wide, cross-sector, longer-term programme which places libraries at the heart of environmental change and enables them to build environmental action within their communities:

Celebrate

Celebrate and share environmental best practice to raise the profile of libraries and library workers leading on environmental change e.g. through annual Green Library and Green Library Champion awards

Facilitate

Facilitate the development of collective environmental action and solutions for the library sector focusing on key environmental issues – e.g. energy, plastics, digital and technology, transport, nature and biodiversity – working in collaboration and partnership with local, regional and national environmental organisations and campaigns and local authorities

Empower

Empower librarians and library workers to take informed action for planet and people by developing or advocating for the development of library-specific environmental training and professional development opportunities, working in partnership with environmental experts and organisations, professional bodies and local authorities

Advocate

Advocate for additional funding and support so libraries can lead by example through their own actions and inform and inspire their communities to take positive environmental action, working with local authorities, local government representation bodies, other public bodies as well as the private and voluntary sectors

Evidence

Evidence the role libraries can play in a green and just transition, given their unique and diverse reach and position of trust, linking to the principles of the Green Library Manifesto

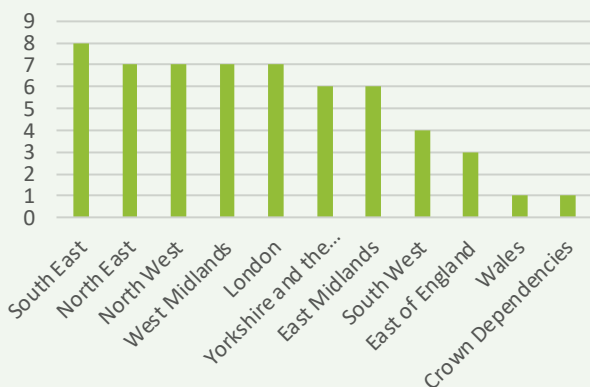
5. Survey results

5.1 Who responded?

55 library services in total

53 in England –
a third of all library services in England

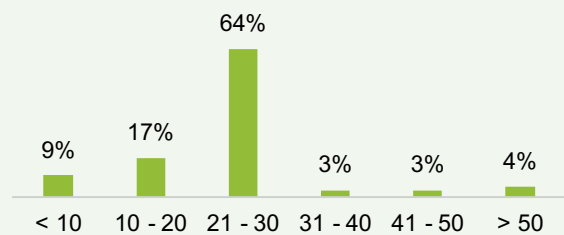
Regional distribution



1,204 buildings in total

Average 22 per service

Library buildings per service



49 provide a
home library
service

24 provide a
mobile library
service

~7,500 employees in total

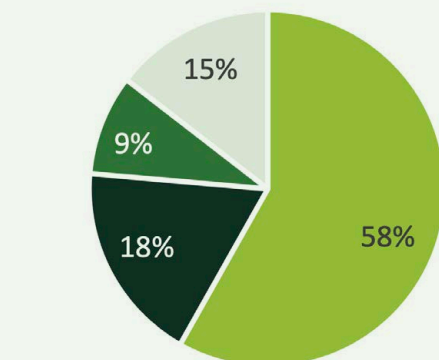
About half of library services are also
staffed by volunteers ~10,000 in total

How are library services staffed?

- 49% paid employees only
- 42% mainly paid employees with some volunteers
- 7% mainly volunteers with some paid employees
- 2% volunteers only



How are library services managed?



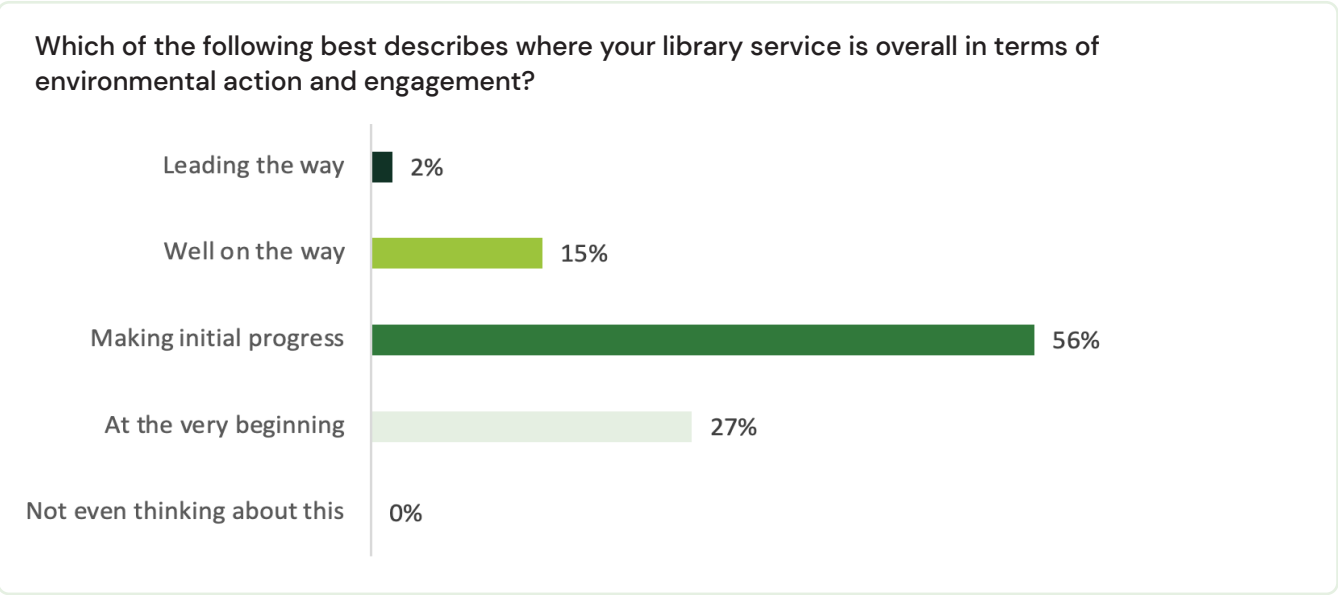
- Local authority service – funded, run and managed by local authority staff
- Local authority service – funded, run and managed by a mix of local authority staff and volunteers
- Spin-out service – run and managed independently on behalf of the local authority
- Other

5.2 Where are they in their environmental journey?

5.2.1 Overall

While the environment is on everyone’s radar, overall library services are in the earlier stages of their environmental journey.

The majority of respondents are in the early stages in terms of environmental action and engagement – 27% at the very beginning and 56% making initial progress. Of the remaining 17%, 15% consider themselves to be well on the way and just 2% leading the way.



“Library Climate Champions have all completed Carbon Literacy training. We have Climate Champions across the service and we have a service wide comprehensive climate action plan”

“Libraries are fully engaged in the Council’s Climate Action Plan, engaged in projects to improve sustainability of buildings and vehicles, green routines and to deliver educational programmes and information”

“We have established a Green Group of library staff who are looking at what changes can be made in terms of materials used and processes within the workplace. Also will be looking at awareness raising and education. Libraries Development Office sits on a Directorate Climate Change group which will feed down to the library Green Group”

“We have recently been successful in gaining a small amount of funding to raise awareness of climate change”

Top 3 drivers of environmental action	
36	Local authority environmental or climate change policy
34	Desire to do the right thing, now, and for future generations
19	Funding requirements



5.2.2 Policy and action plans

Overall, library services are in the early stages of formalising their environmental commitment. 85% of services follow local authority environmental policy, and rate this positively (40% as good, 34% as very good and 11% as excellent). However, the extent to which this policy is relevant to library services varies.

To what extent is local environmental policy or strategy relevant to your library service?

Based on 48 responses

8%

highly relevant

52%

relevant

33%

of limited relevance

6%

'don't know'



"Our City Council leads the way in environmental action publishing an Environmental Emergency Strategy 2020-23 and an Environmental Emergency Action Plan 2020-2023."



"The Council has a commitment to carbon neutrality by 2028 but it hasn't filtered down to individual departments in terms of greening up."



15% have their own environmental policy and action plan already and **32%** are developing this

85%

follow local authority
environmental policy
and action plans



9%

also have their
own policy and
action plan

32%

are also
developing their
own policy and
action plan

43%

don't have
their own
policy or plan

13%

don't follow local
authority environmental
policy and action plans



6%

of these do have
their own policy
and action plan

8%

don't have their
own policy or plan

2%

don't have a local authority environmental policy
or plan to follow and don't have their own policy or plan



"The Council's Carbon Reduction Plan is a commitment to becoming a carbon neutral Council by 2030 and, with partners, to becoming a carbon neutral County by 2034 [...] As a service we will contribute to the County Council's efforts to meet its targets around carbon reduction by supporting communities to take steps towards positive change."



"One of our corporate objectives is to "protect the environment" and this is reflected in all our library business plans."

5.2.3 People

Overall, environmental roles, responsibilities and training are not well-developed and, for local authority services, environmental roles and responsibilities sit within the authority's broader structures.

36% have some kind of environmental roles and responsibilities in place. Most commonly this consists of staff taking environmental action on their own initiative on an informal basis; secondly existing roles which cover some environmental responsibilities, and; thirdly an environmental or climate champion role.

Does your library service have any environmental roles and responsibilities in place?

Based on 53 responses

36%

Yes

64%

No

What kind of environmental roles and responsibilities?

Based on 19 responses

- | | |
|----|--|
| 18 | Staff taking environmental action on their own initiative informally |
| 15 | Environmental responsibilities in existing roles |
| 12 | Environmental / green / climate change champions |
| 6 | Green team |
| 1 | Dedicated environmental role |



"We have 15 Climate Change Champions and want to widen this across the library service."



"The Service Development Team lead on environmental initiatives and work with a climate champion in each area to coordinate activities and information sharing."

38% have had some environmental training opportunities, mainly provided via their local authority, none of which was library-specific.

Have there been any environmental training opportunities for your staff?

Based on 53 responses

38%

Yes

62%

No

What kind of training?

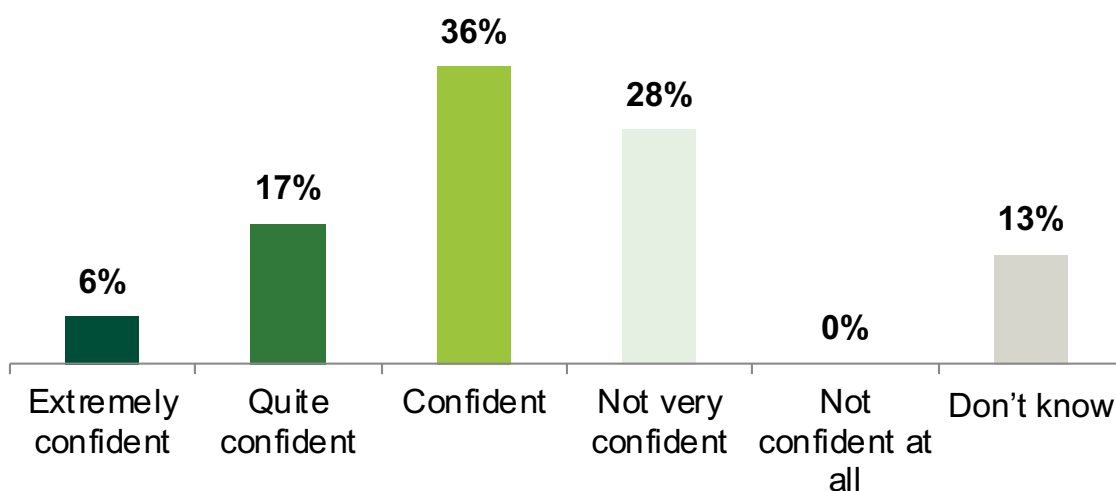
Based on 21 responses

- | | |
|----|---|
| 17 | Local authority environmental training |
| 4 | Other |
| 3 | Professional development training |
| 1 | Training provided by local or regional environmental associations or networks |



More than half of respondents feel that people who work for their library service are confident overall in their understanding of climate change and environmental issues.

How confident do you think your staff are overall in their understanding of climate change and environmental issues?



"Whilst confident, there are varying degrees of understanding. Staff are at different points on their climate change journey"



"We have not surveyed staff on this issue. Some staff may be confident and taking action on a personal level."

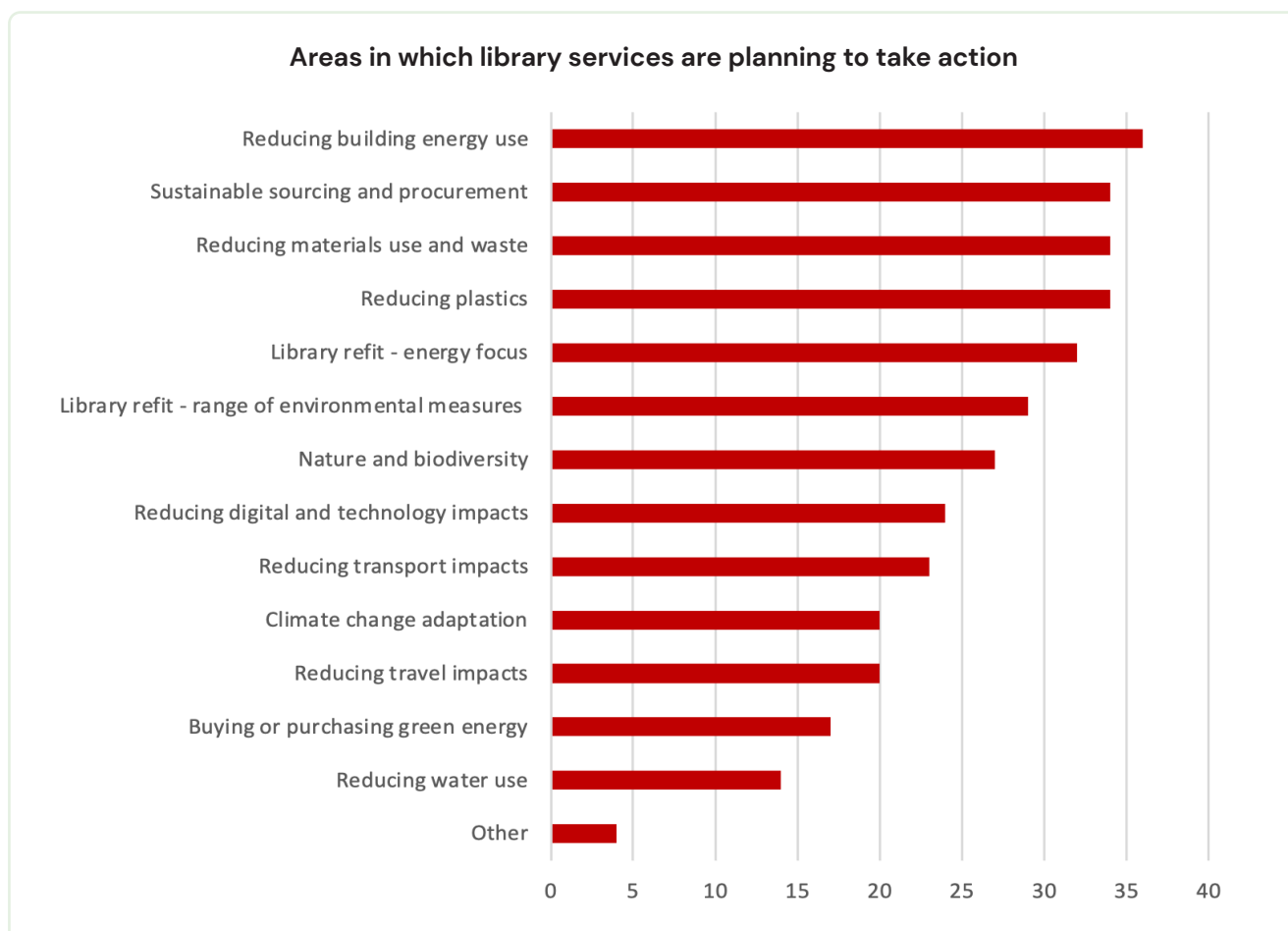
5.2.4 Action and engagement

While libraries are starting to take action, this has tended to focus on quick wins and behaviour change, as in many cases they depend on local authorities for bigger changes and investments (addressed further under 5.3 Challenges and opportunities). On the other hand, library services have much more agency around engagement initiatives.

Library action to date has focused on: building energy use (usually for most or a few libraries), reducing materials use and waste, reducing plastics and sourcing sustainable products and services (usually across the whole service). These four were also ranked as the key areas for future action.

Key areas of action to date Based on 48 responses	
37 Building energy	<p><i>“We are carrying out carbon footprint assessments of our libraries in order to set ourselves challenging 'green' targets to meet by 2025”</i></p> <p><i>“We have 4 new libraries, which were required to meet environmental standards when they were built”</i></p>
32 Materials use and waste	
31 Plastics	
30 Green procurement	

Key engagement initiatives to date are: environmentally-themed books and collections (usually across the whole service), environmental services and learning activities (usually in a few libraries). Looking forward, the focus shifts to environmental services and learning activities, across the whole service, with environmentally-themed events or festivals ahead of books and collections.

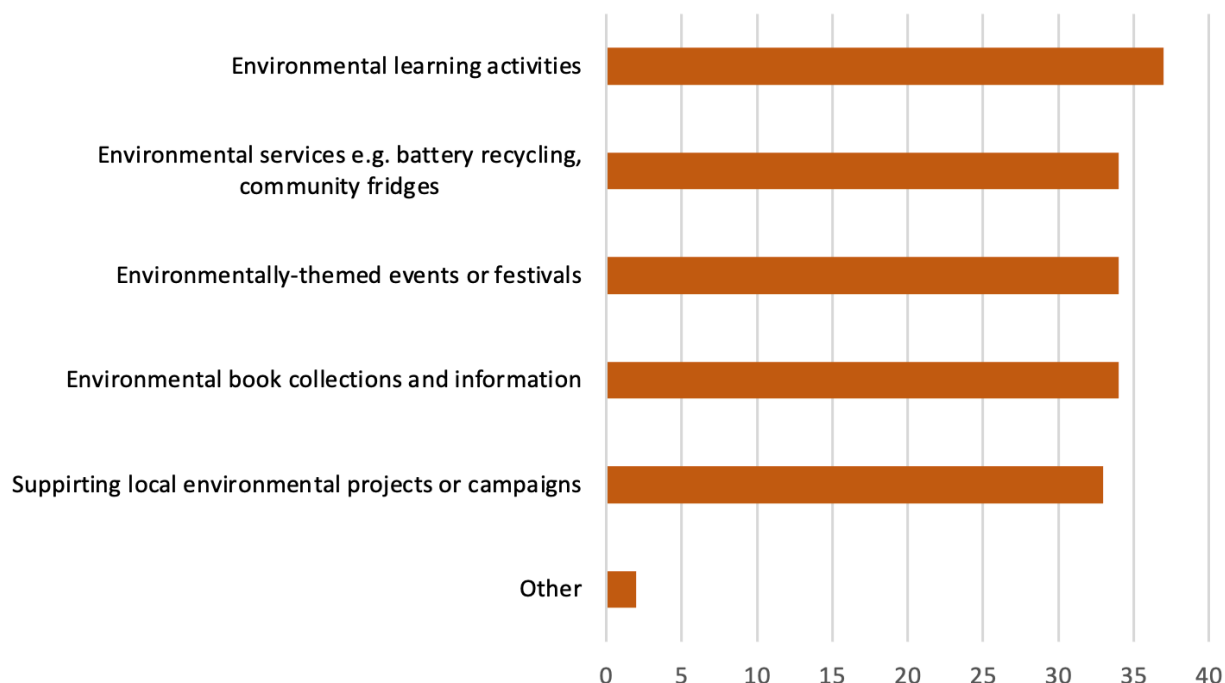


Key engagement initiatives to date

Based on 46 responses

- 38** Environmental book collections and information
- 30** Environmental services e.g. e-waste recycling
- 29** Environmental learning activities

Ways in which library services planning to engage users and community



64%

of those which have taken action say it has brought benefits

Top benefits (Based on 31 responses)

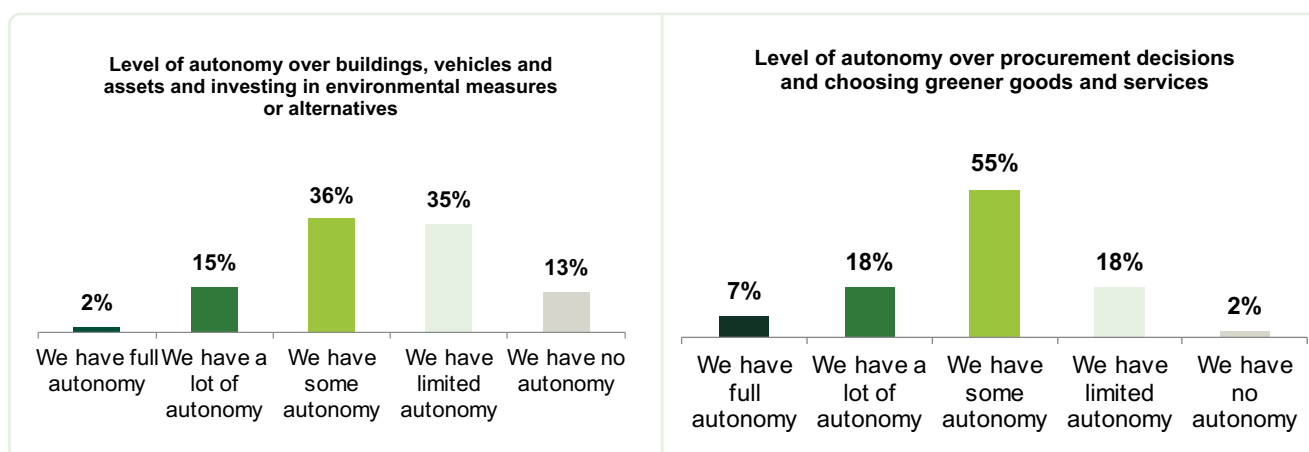
- 26** Raising environmental awareness with library users and communities
- 19** New engagement opportunities e.g. with library users, community groups, artists, service providers etc.
- 16** Financial benefits e.g. cost savings



5.3 Challenges and opportunities

Overall, the key issues and challenges looking forward are dependence on local authorities for bigger changes and investments, access to environmental data, and a lack of time, money, knowledge and expertise. Despite the challenges, however, nearly all respondents believe environmental action and engagement can bring opportunities for their library service, users and community.

Level of control and influence over buildings, investment and procurement choices is a key determining factor in terms of what a library service can do environmentally, in particular for local authority services. Overall library services tend to have more control over procurement than over buildings and assets. Independently run services usually have a higher degree of autonomy around environmental decision-making, planning and investment.

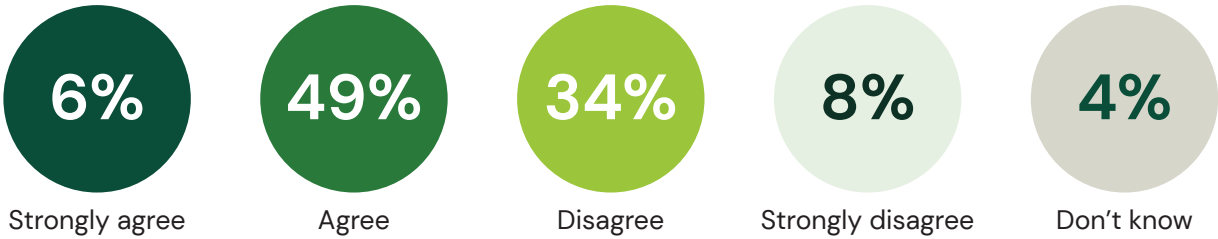


Most library services own or use vehicles for stock management, mobile and home library services. Survey findings and focus group discussions showed that some services have already introduced or are exploring low or zero carbon transport options – from e-Cargo and book bikes to electric vans and even a converted ice cream van which runs on waste vegetable oil. The higher cost of better environmental alternatives, in particular electric vans, is a challenge.



While over half of respondents feel they have a good understanding of their environmental impacts, the majority say it is difficult to access information on their impacts.

To what extent do you agree with the following statement
"We have a good understanding of the environmental impact of our library service activities"

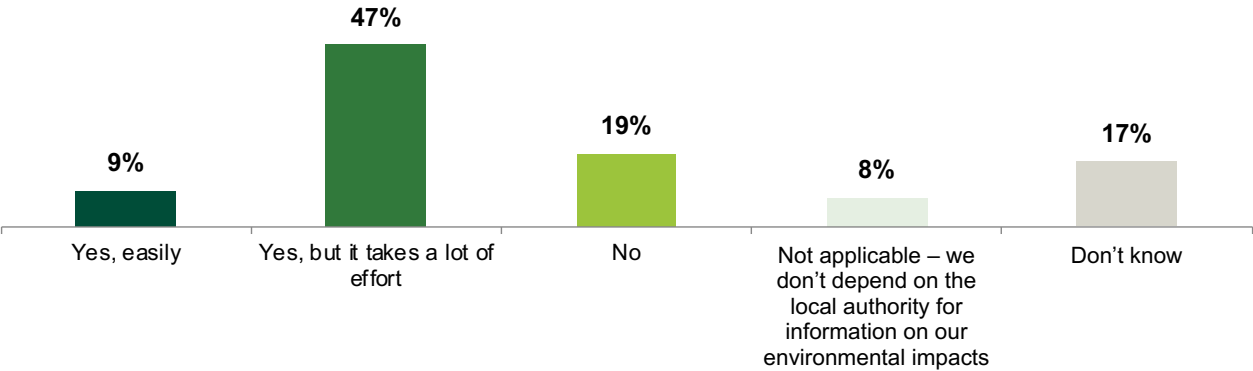


"We have a lot of data but there is more work to be done to analyse and understand this, as well as educating staff and customers on this."



"Measuring our environmental impact is part of the challenge."

Can you get information on the environmental impacts of your library service?





Key challenges

Based on 43 responses

- 24** Lack of financial resources
- 17** Lack of time
- 16** Lack of funding
- 15** Lack of knowledge and expertise

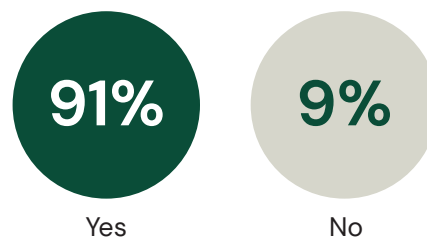
Key opportunities

Based on 43 responses

- 23** Financial benefits e.g. cost savings
- 24** Environmental awareness-raising with library users and community
- 21** New engagement opportunities
- 18** Improved staff and user health and wellbeing for

Despite the issues and challenges faced, nearly all respondents believe environmental action and engagement can bring opportunities for their library service, users and community.

Do you think environmental action and engagement can bring opportunities for your library service?



5.4 Support

48% of library services have had support in the past, mostly environmental project funding and environmental training, webinars or events, and mainly via local authorities.

Have you had support on environmental action and engagement?

48%
Yes

42%
No

10%
Don't know

What kind of support would help going forward?

Based on 47 responses



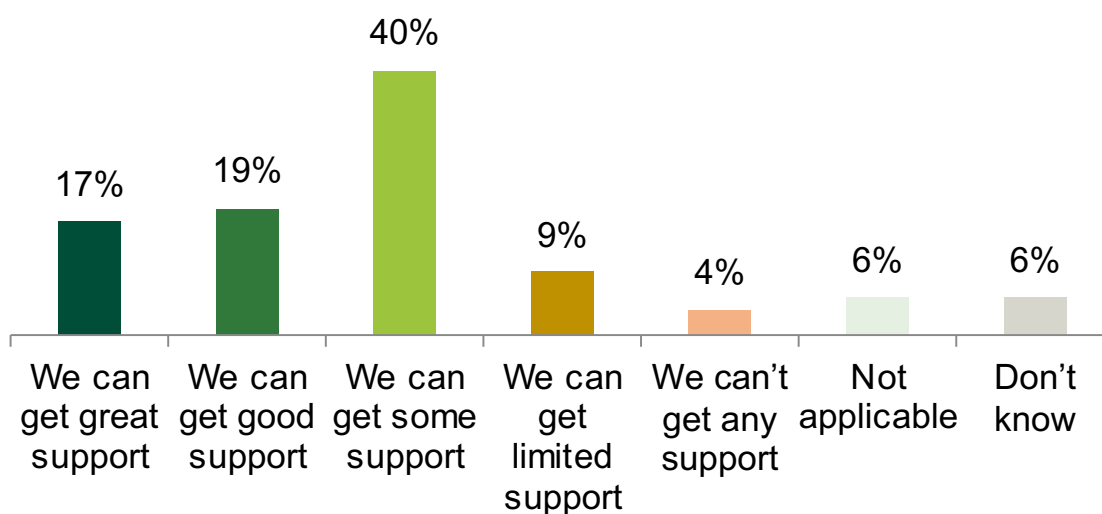
Who provided this support?

Based on 22 responses

18	Local authority services
6	Library sector organisation
6	Government agencies or bodies
5	Community groups
1	Non-governmental funding bodies

Most respondents currently feel they can get at least some support from local authority environmental or climate change teams.

To what extent can you get support from local authority environmental or climate change teams?





"The climate appraisal has benefited a number of libraries with 'retrofit' upgrades to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions, further work is planned at community facilities if funding bids are successful."



"The team responsible for Climate Change are going to create a toolkit for library Climate Change Champions."



"Good support in terms of library buildings, but less so in other areas."

Going forward, respondents have indicated that they would like to get support in the areas they identify as their main challenges, especially on funding, resourcing, and building knowledge and expertise, followed by access to better information on green services, products and solutions.

What kind of support have you had?

Based on 22 responses



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The library
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CREATIVE • CLIMATE • ACTION



Libraries
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