

Update on Libraries Services during the Pandemic Report of the Head of Communities

1 DCC Commissioners overview

The last 10 months have proved challenging in the management and delivery of Library services across the County. The pandemic has forced upon us different approaches to the commissioning of services that naturally have had to be more flexible and responsive to demands and the constraints of changing Covid-19 guidance. Our commissioning priorities were:

- Public to access Covid-secure services where possible and within guidance
- Staff should not be placed at unnecessary risk
- Services should flex to meet changes in demand

Meetings between commissioners and Libraries Unlimited have been more frequent and our communications teams work very closely together jointly providing information to the public in a timely manner.

At the beginning of the pandemic we invested more funds into e-resources to help cope with the high demand for e-books and audio books and these services continue to be popular among residents.

During the first lockdown Libraries staff contacted many of their vulnerable members to check in on their wellbeing and provide help and information. In the summer Devon was one of the first authorities to re-open its doors to the public and provide Covid-19 secure access to valuable services including public access computers. The mobile libraries also restarted essential rural access.

We are now in a third set of tight restrictions and alongside Libraries Unlimited the decision was taken to temporarily suspend opening of libraries and the mobile library services across the county whilst we analysed the new guidance. I am pleased to report that from 18th January libraries will be offering the resumption of essential and lifeline services such as choose and collect and appointments to computers for essential internet access, for instance benefits applications. Together with Libraries Unlimited we will also be investing further in e-resources.

The data in the following sections reflect the demand on services throughout the year and we monitor this closely with Libraries Unlimited at our quarterly contract meetings. The data provides us with valuable learning from changes to the way libraries members interact with the services on offer and help us understand the impact the pandemic has had on customer behaviours.

Whilst adapting and reacting to the pandemic Libraries Unlimited have also begun to look at how to support residents in Devon post Covid restrictions. In a separate attached report, they have outlined some of the areas of focus in the coming months.

2 Monthly Comparative Data

2.1 Issues

During much of 2020-21 usual methods of accessing physical library materials has been restricted. Despite this library staff have worked creatively to ensure Devon residents can access the books and other materials that they would normally collect from their local library:

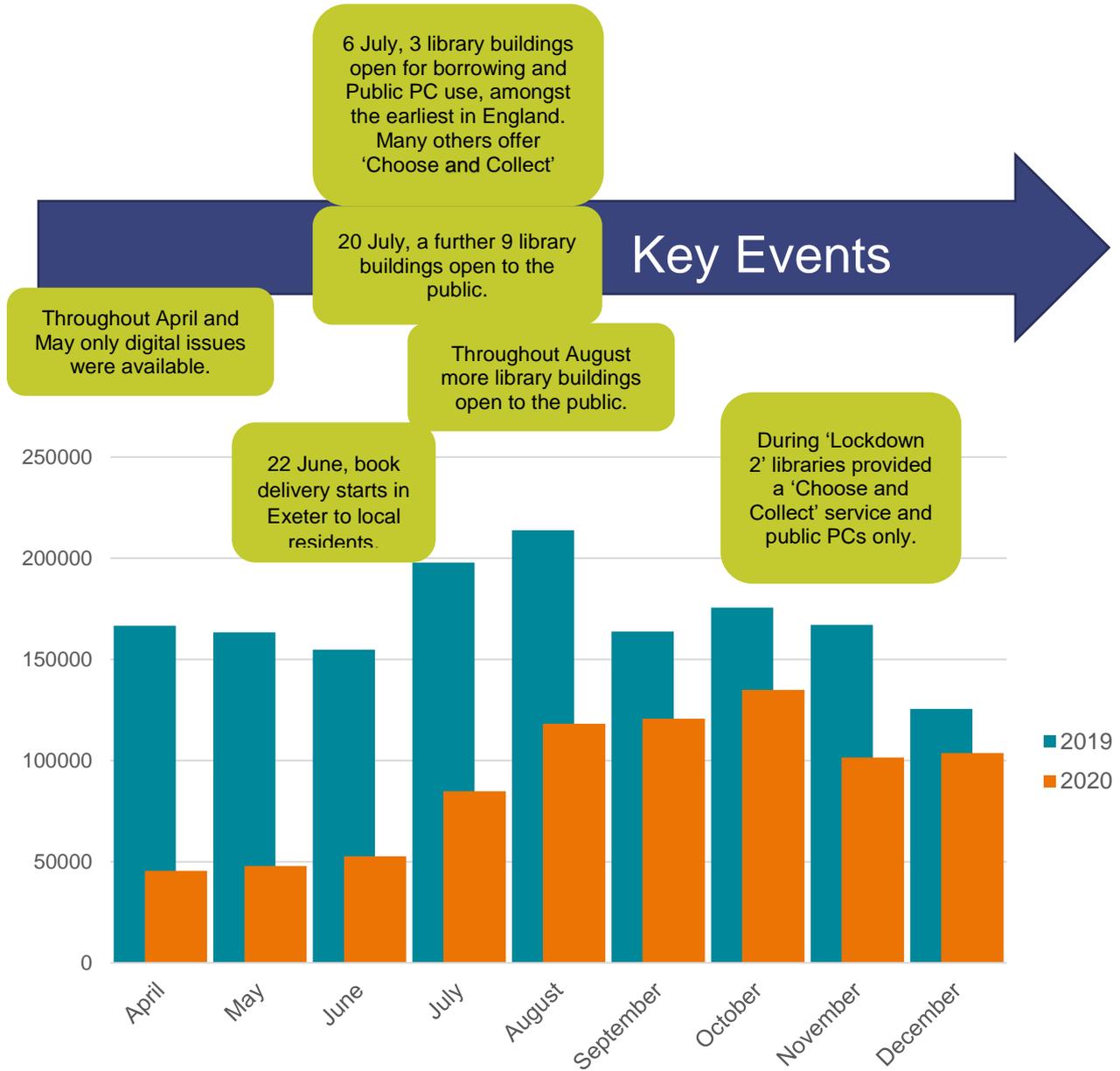
- In June Exeter Library offered a Book Delivery (by bike or by foot) service for those who live within 5 miles of Exeter Library, along with a postal service. A generous donation covered the cost of posting books to customers.
- Exeter Library linked with St Petrock's (Exeter) to provide 80 books for people who are temporarily accommodated due to lockdown, teaming up with the volunteer group FREEMOOVEMENT to deliver the books by bike.



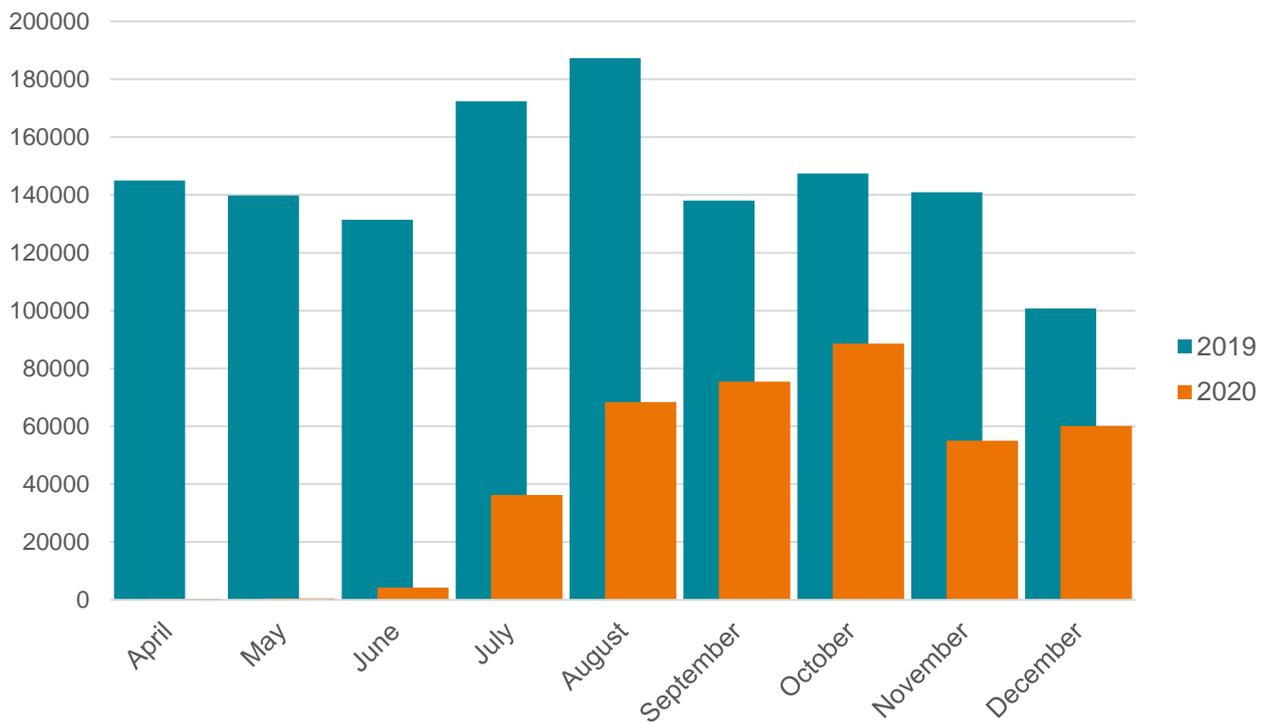
- Choose and Collect launched on 6 July offering libraries across Devon the chance to get books to their customers again. Customers phoned/emailed their local library with a specific list of books or a general wish and staff collated the books, bundled them up and they were collected from front entrances.

Digital issues have grown significantly over the last twelve months, but do not make up for the reduction in physical issues.

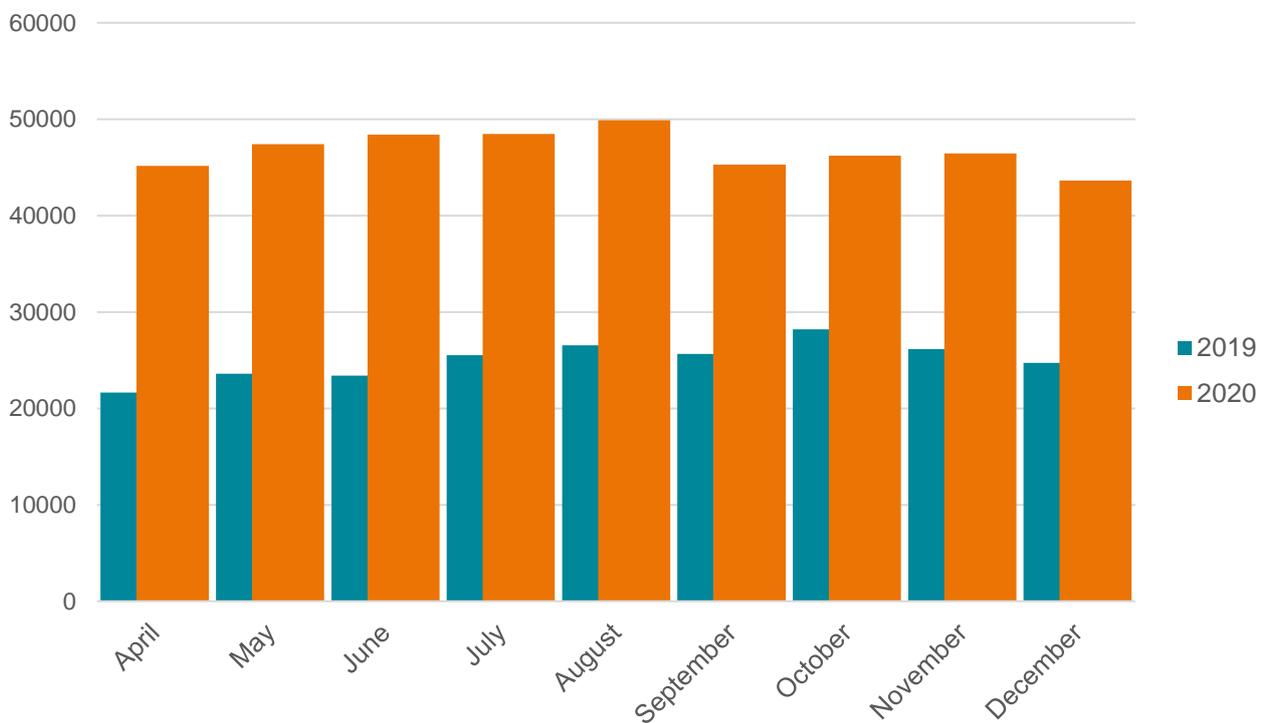
2.1.1 Total Issues (Physical and Digital combined)



2.1.2 Physical Issues



2.1.3 Digital Issues



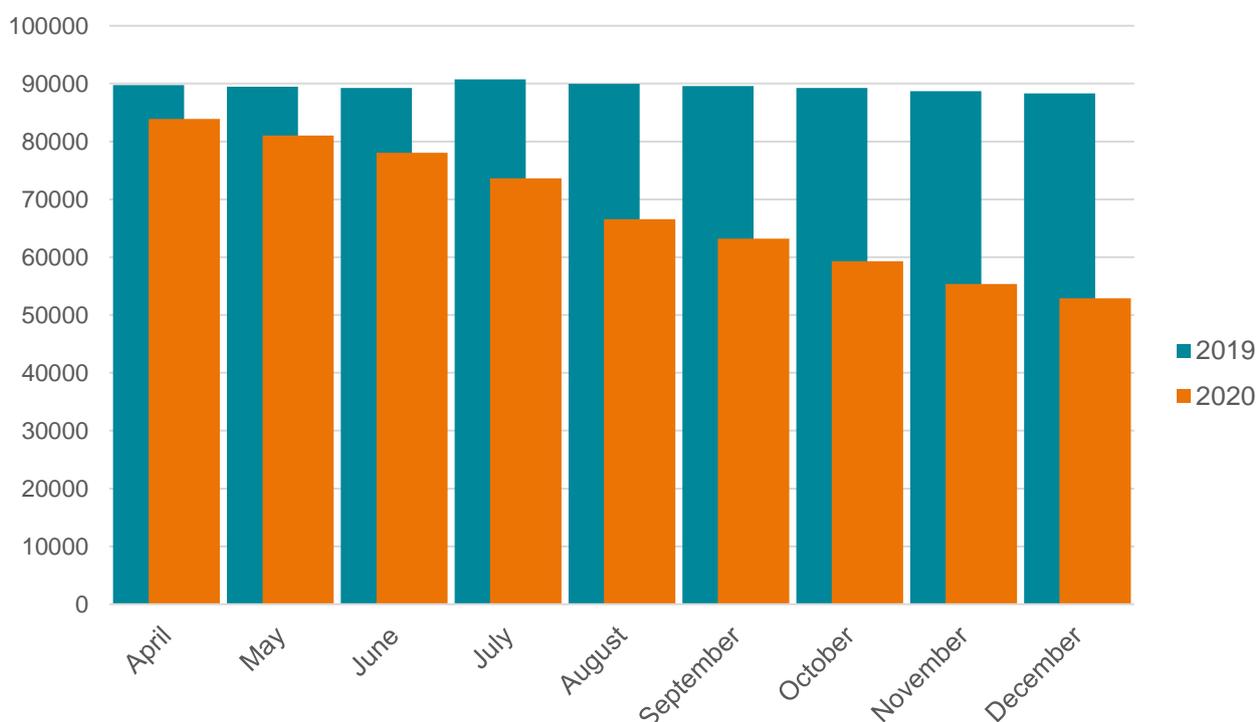
“...reading eBooks from Libby has been my salvation and I’ve really enjoyed them.”

3 Library Users

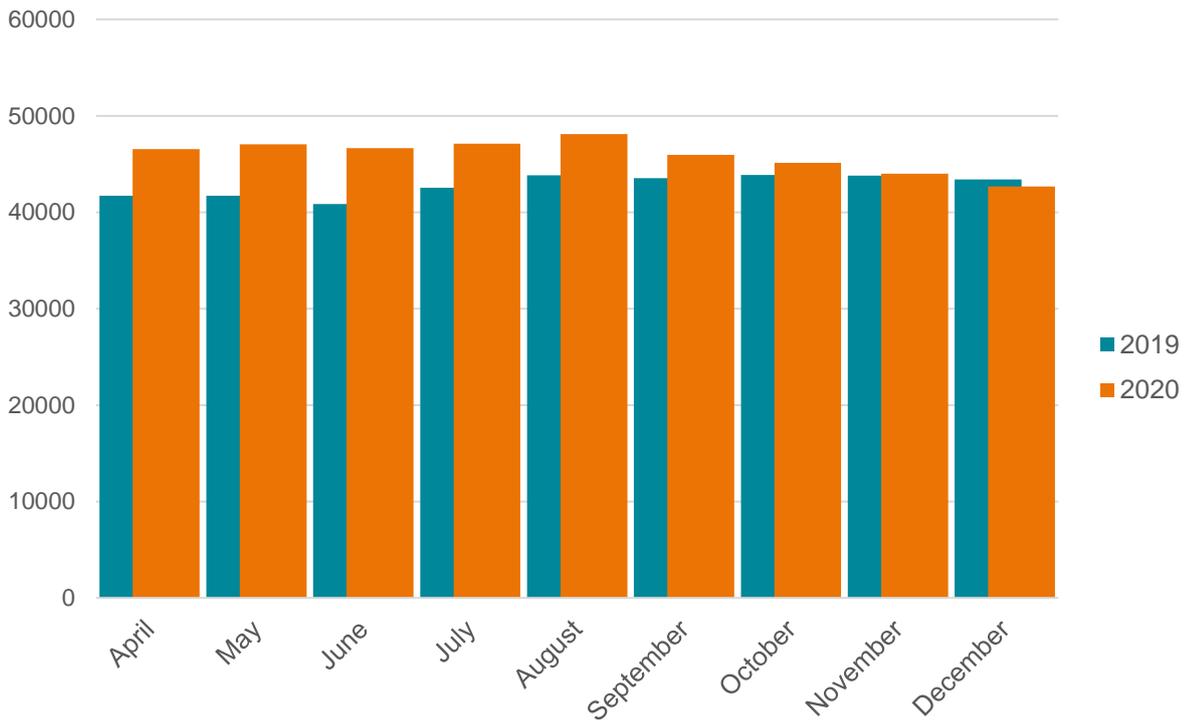
Library users in this section has a narrow definition. The Library Management System (LMS) defines a library user as either an Active Borrower; somebody who has borrowed a physical item from a physical library, or an Active User; somebody who has used their library membership number to access another service, e.g. an eBook, a public PC, or public printer. Users are counted based on the last service they used, i.e. if your last interaction was to borrow an eBook then you are an Active User. The LMS only counts you as a Borrower or User if your last interaction was in the last twelve months.

There are a lot of library users who are not counted using this system, for example those using the public Wi-Fi, room hire users and those attending events. See section 2.4 for more information about events specifically.

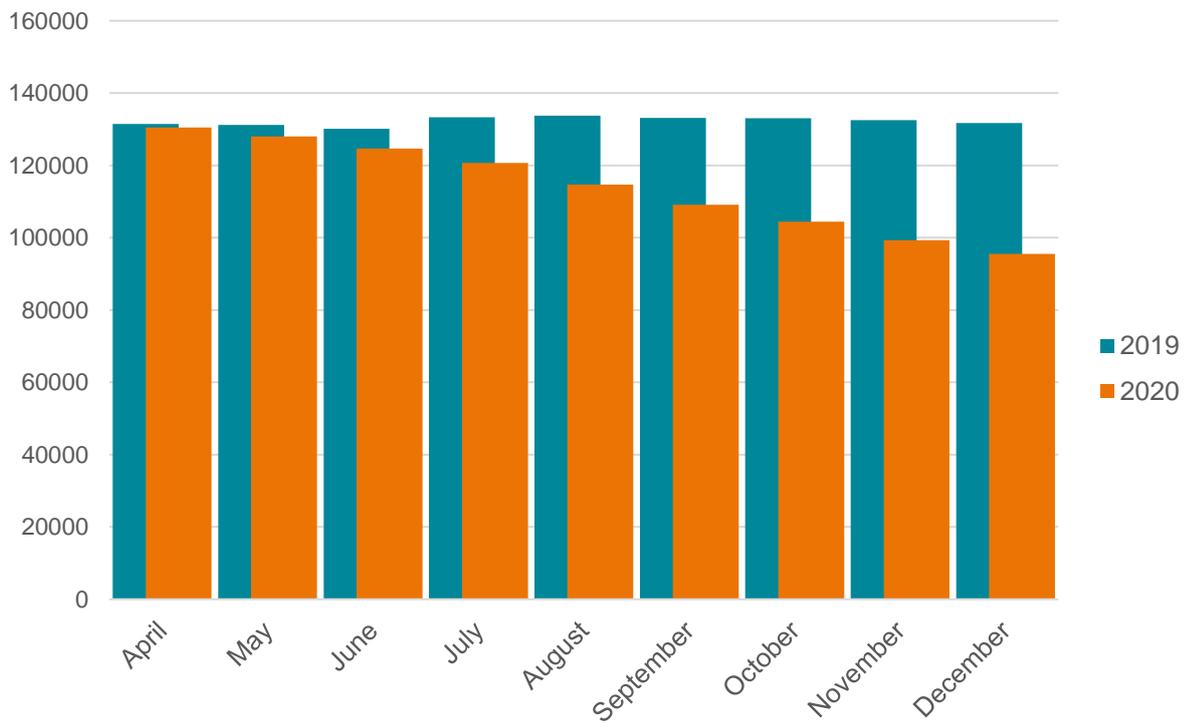
3.1.1 Active Borrowers



3.1.2 Active Users



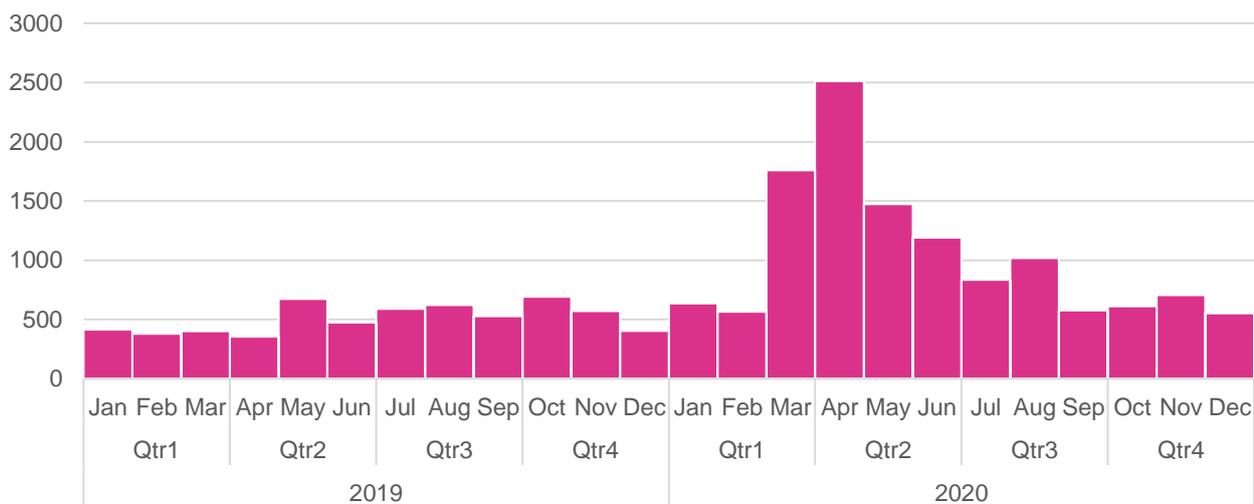
3.1.3 Total Library Users



3.1.5 Summary

The number of Active Borrowers has dropped throughout 2020. Access to library buildings has been limited for most of the year, therefore opportunities to borrow physical items has been restricted. Active Users have been consistent through the year. A significant contribution to this is existing and new users accessing eBooks, eAudiobooks and eMagazines for the first time. New users registering between 1 April and 1 July increased the total registered users of digital library services by 32%, higher than the national average of 27%.¹

eLibrary New Users



4 Public PC Usage

To enable libraries to offer public PC usage, careful placement of the computer to ensure a minimum of 2 metre distance between users has seen the number of PCs available reduced. Along with reduced opening hours and from November PCs only being available for 'essential' use has meant a drop in overall PC usage. The two measures presented here are the total time, measured in minutes, of PC usage, and the utilisation as the time used as a percentage of availability.

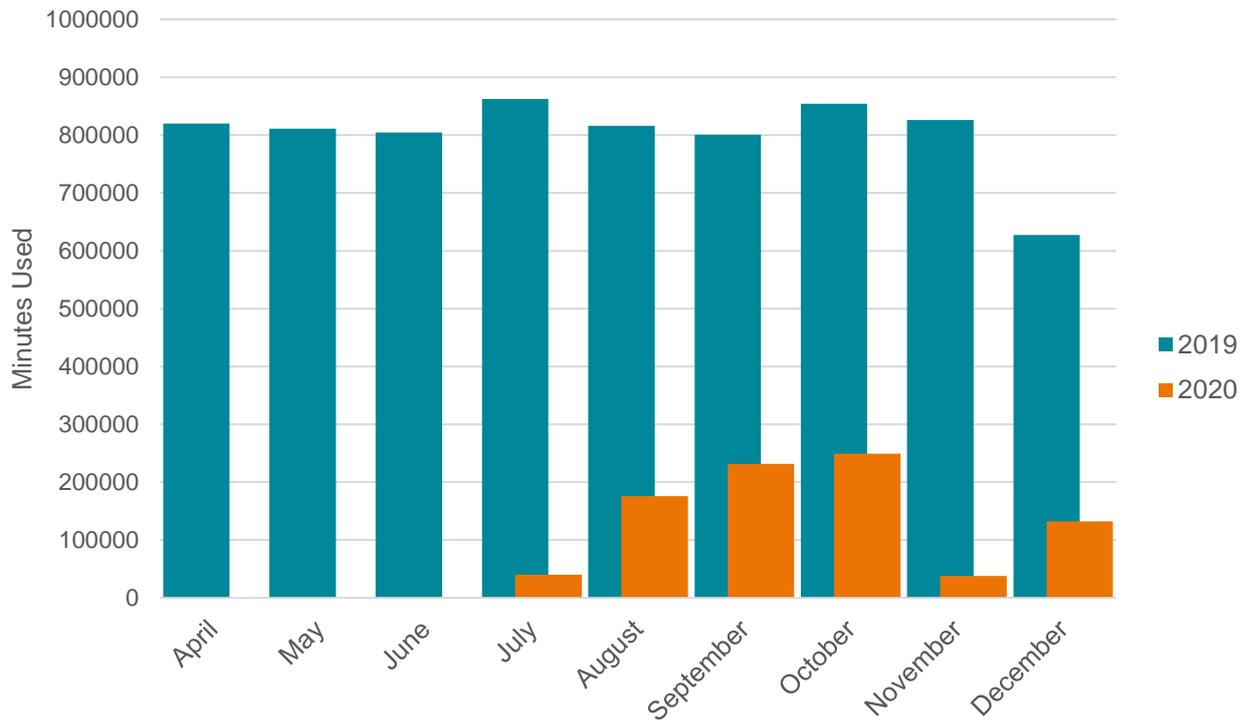
Honiton was one of the first libraries opened for public PC use, and staff their reported that customers had travelled from Exeter, Seaton and Axminster to use them.

In north Devon:

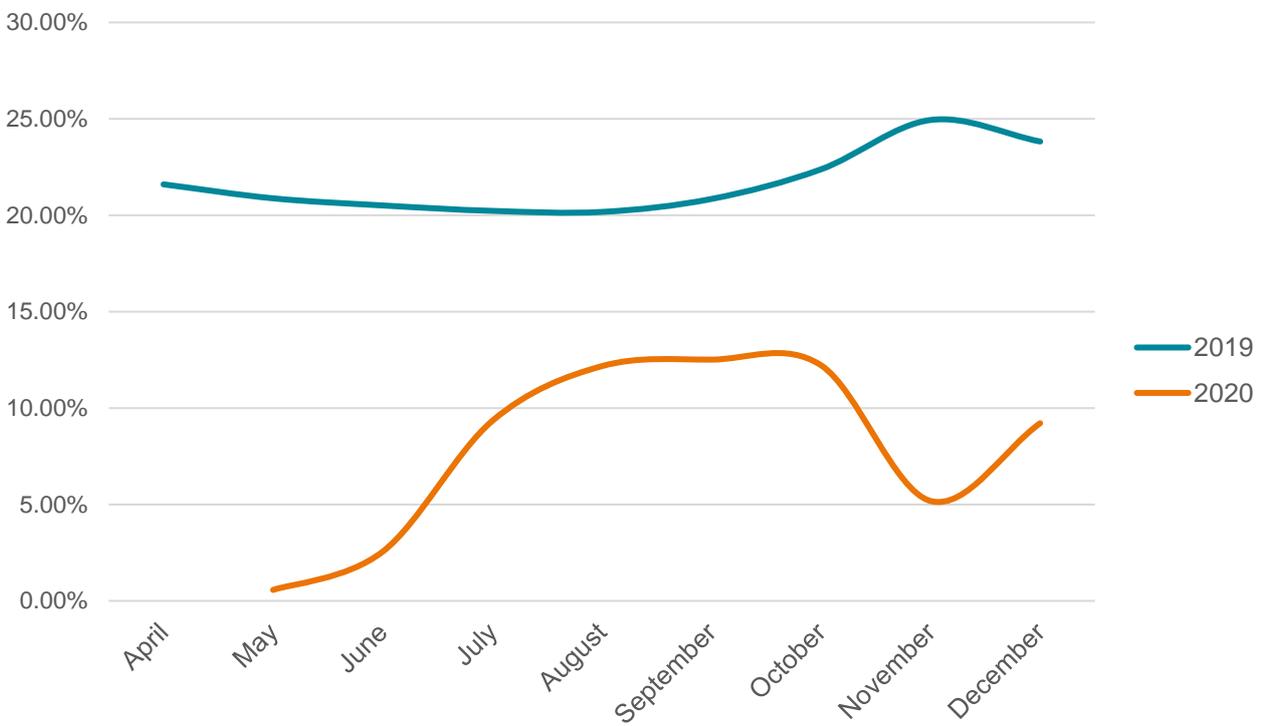
"I didn't have access to emails or online services during lockdown...I walked for 2 hours to use the library when it reopened"

¹ National Data from Libraries in Lockdown, Libraries Connected, October 2020.
<https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/library-services-online-events-lockdown>

4.1.1 Public PC Usage



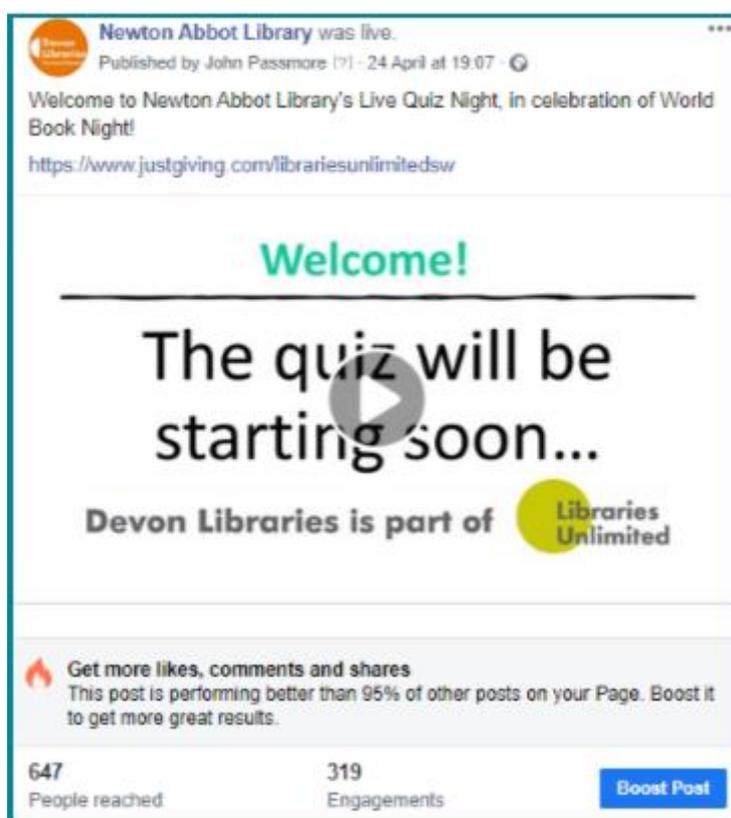
4.1.2 Public PC Utilisation (Percentage of Public PC usage compared to total PC availability)



4.3 Events and Activities

In 2019-20 Devon Libraries organised 10,064 events attended by over 175,000 people. Almost all of these events took place in Library buildings, and very few took place online. Following the first lockdown in April, most of these regular events and activities have not been possible. Where these could transition to an online forum this has happened. During the first lockdown many libraries hosted online activities, for example:

- Exeter Library held weekly online Language Cafés via Zoom, with conversation sessions available in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, and an ESOL Conversation Group at different times of the week.
- Crediton Library held the annual Crediton Literary Festival online this year. Being able to hold it for the whole day, instead of just the afternoon while the library building was closed, enabled the number of sessions to be increased. The online event broke down distance barriers so people could attend from further afield. 162 people enjoyed author talks, a crime panel and an interview with Veronica Henry about her new book.
- Dartmouth Library moved their popular Reader Group onto Zoom. By doing this they were able to welcome back previous members who had moved elsewhere in the country.
- A daily 3pm chat over a cuppa on Zoom has been hosted by Exeter Library throughout the first lockdown period
- Tavistock Library hosted virtual guided walks by local archaeologist Andrew Thompson. With images taken during his daily exercise in lockdown, there were also opportunities for questions in Zoom sessions.
- Many local libraries held quizzes and started reading or book groups.



- Bounce and Rhyme sessions continued online during the first lockdown. Many libraries hosted their own local sessions.

In total over 1200 events were hosted online during the first lockdown. As library buildings reopened and services such as Choose and Collect started library staff returned primarily to serving customers in their library buildings. To maintain the online presence that had started during the first lockdown a centrally coordinated Bounce and Rhyme session was delivered for all libraries as well as other events. Some local libraries maintained their own local online events as well. In the second quarter the number of events had reduced to 328 but reached an audience of over 22,000 people.

4.4 Additional Services

4.4.1 Bideford and Barnstaple Work Hubs

During the first lockdown many Work Club customers found things difficult. Many were very isolated and with mental health challenges and contacting them was difficult.

In total we contacted 150 people during the first lockdown and 35 responded. As a result of these contacts, the Work Club coordinator has individually worked with 19 customers providing phone contact, texts, emails and Zoom calls. He is in contact regularly and offers support and information about job opportunities, practical advocacy and information about available training schemes.

Alongside the general sense of appreciation, we recorded several practical outcomes. In some cases, existing customers secured work, even during lockdown, including jobs as kitchen assistants, administrators, nurses, care workers, sale assistants and coronavirus response volunteer

4.4.2 Beyond the Horizon

An Evolve-curated series of talks with international Library pioneers and high-profile UK library figureheads, was launched. These talks have been promoted in partnership with the Wellcome Centre Exeter, Exeter UNESCO city of literature, Libraries Connected and Carnegie UK trust. Over 600 people have joined the Zoom talks so far, tuning in from countries around the world, and the online recordings have had over 400 views to date.



4.4.3 Fab Lab

Exeter FabLab 3D-printed over 75 visor headbands and reinforcement strips for frontline NHS staff during early April. A team of volunteers, led by Dr Rupa Chilvers of Tangerine Bee, collected and prepared the visor kits and the first deliveries of the visors went out on Monday 6th April to local doctor surgeries. DART (Devon Ambulance Response Team) also asked the FabLab to 3D print headbands as a trial for their crew to test. ITV Westcountry featured the story in their news programme. The FabLab continued to produce 3D printed visor parts during the lockdown period.



4.4.5 Mobile Libraries

Devon Mobile Libraries were one of the first services in the country to go back on the road when restrictions were lifted. From 13 July, a special Choose and Collect service was offered. When Mobile Library Assistants rang their customers to say they were operating again they offered to pick 5 books for customers based on their reading preferences, which were collected from the door of the vehicles. The mobile Choose and Collect service was incredibly popular with staff, reporting around a 90% uptake.

From 7 September customers have been allowed to access the vehicles again, one person at a time, and choose for themselves, though due to quarantine requirements borrowing limits have been set at 3 items per person to ensure there is enough stock for all.

4.4.6 Customer Telephone Calls

To help reduce isolation during the first lockdown, library staff made 5,500 telephone calls to customers, all of whom were aged over 70, had a disability and/or were otherwise identified as vulnerable (most often through local staff knowledge of their customers). Once library staff returned to running services from the buildings, the capacity for these calls was lower, but a further 1,611 calls were made in the second quarter. Many of those customers may still not be venturing into public spaces due to shielding or other precautionary measures. Through an established relationship with Exeter City Community Trust (ECCT), who have received funding from DCMS to tackle isolation, we are now working in partnership to provide links to our customers in order that regular telephone-based contact can continue.

“We really thought your call yesterday was brilliant and so reassuring that the library is fulfilling its full role of a caring community resource and not just a place to borrow a book. THANK YOU...for just being there for those who need to feel they haven't been forgotten and left without a friendly chat and for being pro-active in contacting people.”
