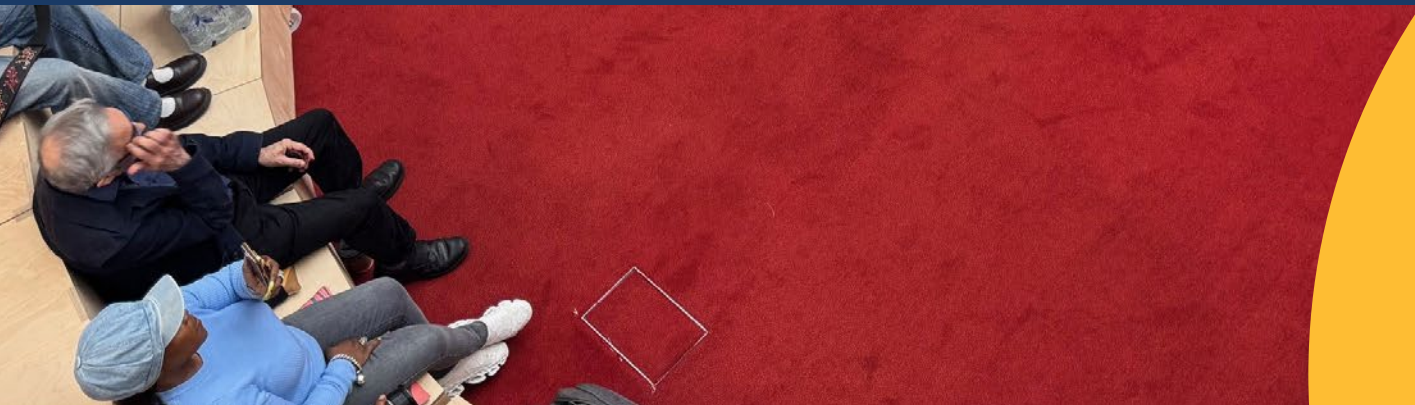




Libraries Do!



Camden Libraries Strategy 2026-2031



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Foreword

Councillor Sabrina Francis
Cabinet Member for Jobs,
Young People and Culture

As the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture, it is my pleasure to introduce Camden Council's Explore, Read, Learn, Connect: Camden Libraries Strategy 2026 – 2031. Camden is a special place where we find the solutions to the challenges we face by collaborating and co-designing with our residents and partners. Many of the reasons we chose to work differently a few years ago remain just as relevant today. We are tackling the challenges you identified and focusing our action around four Camden Missions which are at the heart of our work as we look to the future: Diversity, Young People, Food, and Estates and Neighbourhoods. By working together, we are making a difference every day.

Camden Libraries are at the heart of this shared endeavour and the Explore, Read, Learn, Connect: Camden Libraries Strategy 2026-2031, shows how they are part of the solution to making the borough a place where residents can thrive. Library services are a statutory duty for local authorities, but they are far more than that. I have always believed that libraries have a unique role to play as neighbourhood spaces where people can find escape, explore, and connect with each

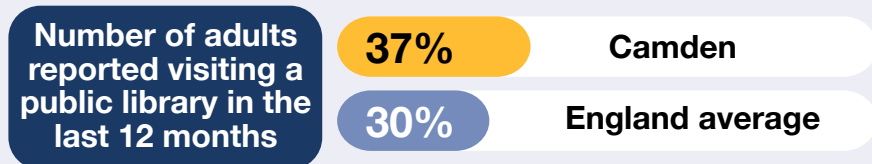
By working together, we are making a difference every day.

other. They are also places where residents can get advice and support when times are difficult. In our libraries, we innovate with partners to ensure the service you are given meets your needs but is also empowering and nurturing.

“Attending the Equity Boost sessions run by The Apex Project at Swiss Cottage Library helped me realise I had an idea that could help people in my community. I was supported to turn that idea into a social enterprise. I have since launched Plan-It Perfect CIC, supporting young people, including those with neurodivergent conditions, and delivered our first workshop in January. More young people need to know about the opportunities available in their local library.”

Mohammed Siam Ali, aged 17, Director of Plan-It Perfect CIC

Camden has the highest participation levels in London, and the second highest in England, which is testament to the vision we have of libraries as community spaces. In 2023/24, 37% of Camden adults reported visiting a public library building in the last 12 months with an England average of 30%.



We want to keep on delivering for you. This new strategy is ambitious, shaped by what our residents and partners have shared with us. The strategy articulates the plan for the next five years for this vital community focused service.

Introduction

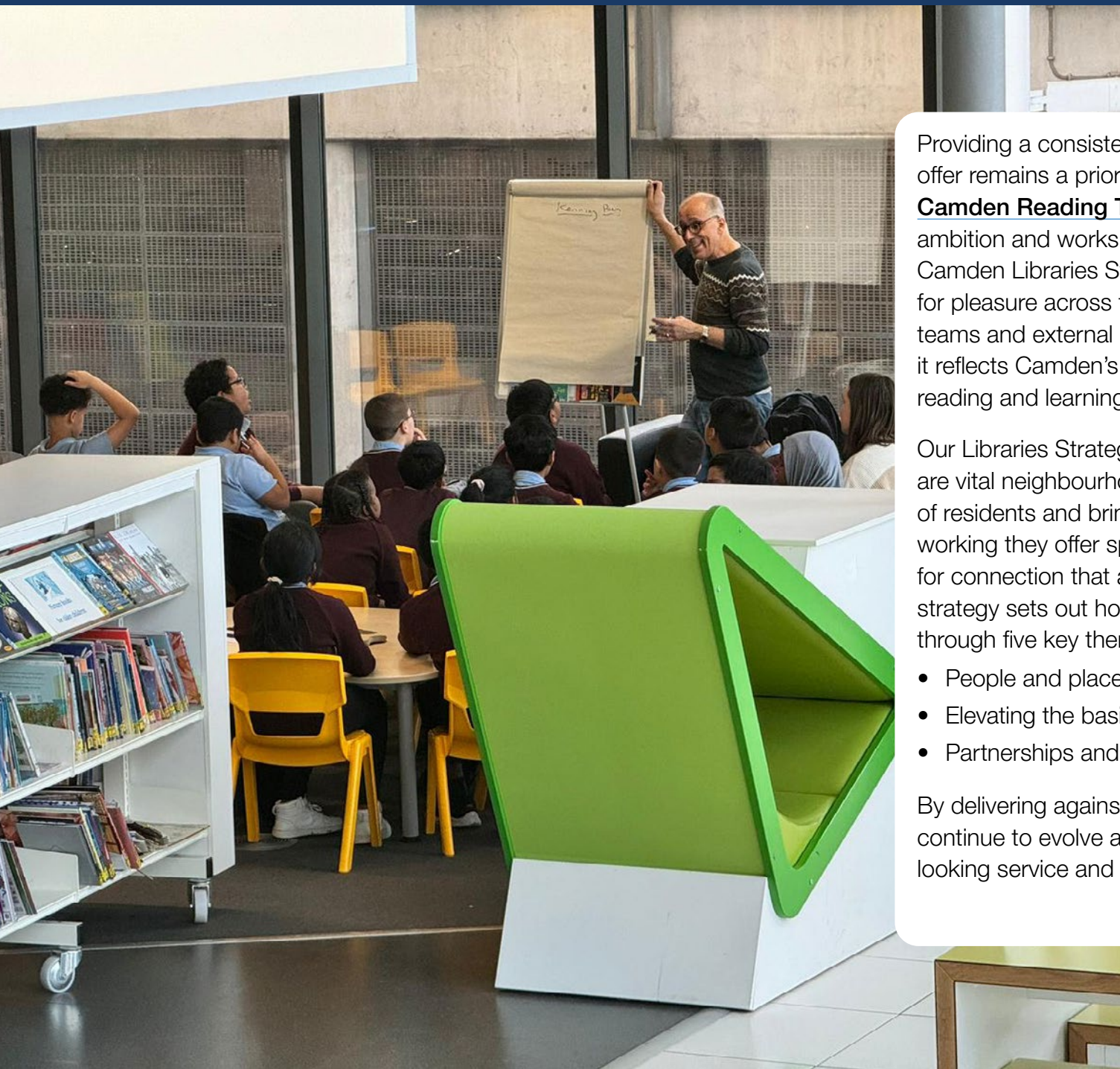
“ We welcome everyone into Camden’s Library spaces as the go-to place in our communities for free resources and activities. We inspire learning and reading choices and enrich lives.”

Explore, Read, Learn, Connect: Camden Libraries Strategy 2026-2031 has been shaped with residents, staff and partners to capture and celebrate the strength, ambition and impact of the service to-date. It recognises Camden Libraries as a valued and well-used community resource, and sets out how the service will continue to develop over the next five years.

Camden Libraries put people at the centre of everything they do, responding to local needs, testing new ideas and building partnerships that make a real difference to residents’ lives. Physical visits to libraries continue to grow, increasing by 23% when comparing 2025/26 with 2024/25. The service is recognised internally and externally as a ‘can-do’ service that others want to work alongside. We want to build on this position of strength and success.

Libraries across Camden play an active role in community life. They are a universal resource, here for everyone. They reduce isolation, help to build communities, support digital inclusion, provide safe and welcoming spaces, connect residents to advice and opportunities and promote wellbeing through reading and cultural activities. Engagement work carried out during the development of this strategy reinforced how valued the service is by residents and partners, and highlighted the dedication of the Camden Libraries team in delivering this impact.





Providing a consistent, high-quality reading and information offer remains a priority. Our first borough-wide strategy **Camden Reading Together Strategy 2025-30**, supports this ambition and works alongside Explore, Read, Learn, Connect: Camden Libraries Strategy 2026-2031, to strengthen reading for pleasure across the borough. Developed with council teams and external partners, including **The Reading Agency**, it reflects Camden's commitment to improving access to reading and learning opportunities for all.

Our Libraries Strategy recognises that Camden Libraries are vital neighbourhood spaces that respond to the needs of residents and bring people together. Through partnership working they offer spaces, resources, activities and places for connection that are relevant, inclusive and vibrant. This strategy sets out how the service will build on these strengths through five key themes identified through engagement:

- People and place
- Elevating the basics
- Partnerships and outreach
- Telling our story
- Cohesion, inclusivity and relevance

By delivering against these themes, Camden Libraries will continue to evolve as a connected, responsive and forward-looking service and support the communities it serves.



“I am a practicing Druid and a member of the Order of Bards and Druids. I have been a member for 20 years, and I have just found in the Local Studies and Archives, some hand written notes from the founder of the order and the hairs on the back of my neck have risen. This is a profound and personal thing for me, and its thanks to the staff here that I have been able to discover this and touch it.”



Sarah, Local Studies and Archives customer

Libraries in Camden

Camden Libraries are welcoming, free, inclusive spaces across neighbourhoods, open to all who live, work in, or visit the borough. They are widely valued as safe havens, trusted community anchors and places of quiet transformation. Many residents view them as living spaces or a third place beyond home and work.

Camden Council's statutory library provision operates through:

- Nine static libraries across the borough
- A Home Library Service supporting residents unable to visit in person
- A Local Studies and Archives Service based at Holborn Library.



1. Camden Town Library
2. Kentish Town Library
3. Kilburn Library
4. Highgate Library
5. Pancras Square Library
6. Holborn Library
7. West Hampstead Library
8. Queens Crescent Library
9. Swiss Cottage Library

In addition, three community-run libraries – Primrose Hill, Belsize and Keats – operate independently alongside the Council’s statutory provision. Accessibility remains strong across the borough. Ninety-nine per cent of Camden residents are within a 30-minute walk from a Camden library, compared with 97% across London.

Library collections for Camden Libraries include physical and digital lending stock, online learning resources, newspapers and magazines. Libraries host a wide-ranging events programme, including rhyme time sessions, arts and crafts, shared reading, author talks and more. These are delivered with partners and promoted through the digital booklet on the [Council website](#) and the monthly e-newsletter.

Camden Libraries

Our Camden libraries are a place for everyone. Our libraries are spaces where you can borrow books, take part in a range of events and activities, access resources, get support with finding work and financial advice and much more.

See how our libraries have been used from August 2024 to September 2025



In 2024/25:

2,793 events were delivered

28,805 people attended events



*“This has been the heart of my self-education.
Its given me so much.*

*I love this library. I’ve been coming to this library for
40 years. Reading and writing has done so much
for me, its part of my history.”*



Mo, Swiss Cottage Library

Celebrating Camden Libraries

Camden Libraries deliver a wide range of activities, partnerships and programmes that support creativity, wellbeing, learning and connection across the borough. Recent achievements demonstrate the breadth and impact of this work.



Key achievements for the service include:

Culture and Creativity

- Free play pianos are available in two libraries, donated in partnership with Camden Music Service and the **Lang Lang International Music Foundation**. The pianos have become a much loved feature of the libraries, offering residents of all ages and abilities a way to engage with music in their local community, with no booking or experience required.
- Creative partnerships with **Bloomsbury Festival** and the **Black British Ballet project** enabled us to deliver performances, events and exhibitions across Camden Libraries, reaching over 900 residents in 2025, with the Bloomsbury Festival partnership projected to grow to 1,500 residents in 2026.
- Hosting two **Old Vic** theatre performances at Swiss Cottage Library, with 105 residents attending. This brought high-quality cultural experiences directly into local communities, free and accessible to residents who may not otherwise have the opportunity to attend live theatre.
- Delivering three exhibitions and events in partnership with the British Library as part of the **Living Knowledge Network**, including Fantasy, Beyond the Bassline, Unearthed and an exhibition focused on Agatha Christie in 2026. The programme gives communities across Camden direct access to content and events inspired by the British Library's temporary exhibitions, bringing nationally significant cultural experiences into local library spaces.



Local resident playing the piano at Swiss Cottage Library



Bloomsbury Festival ballet performance at Holborn Library

Photo: Stuart Keegan



Celebrating Camden Libraries

Key achievements for the service include:

Health and Wellbeing

- Pancras Square Library's Community Café, responding to the **We Make Camden** Food Mission by providing affordable, nutritious food. The cafe has created a true community hub with additional offers, including a preloved clothes rail and introduction of partner activities in the space.
- Delivering **Arts for Dementia** workshops at Swiss Cottage Library, with 932 people attending since the end of 2024. The programme offers people living with dementia and their carers a positive, creative experience in a safe and welcoming space, supporting connection with others and reducing isolation.
- Holding health drop-in sessions across seven libraries in partnership with Camden's Public Health Team, with 71 patients seen in 2026 and referrals made to onward support, including blood pressure monitoring, drug and alcohol support and weight and lifestyle management. The sessions made health services accessible and identified residents who may not otherwise have sought support.
- Sharing Spaces in five Camden Libraries initiated in partnership with **Think & Do**. These spaces have pre-loved clothes rails, promote energy saving ideas and offer activities that are based on community needs.
- Delivering a weekly creative writing course in partnership with **Mind** at Camden Town Library, giving residents attending Mind Camden a regular space to connect, express themselves and build confidence through writing. The course reached 35 participants across seven sessions in 2025.



Community
Café at
Pancras
Square
Library



Jewellery
Making
Workshop at
Pancras Square
Library



Mind and
Body Display
at Pancras
Square
Library

Celebrating Camden Libraries

Key achievements for the service include:

Information and Digital

- Digital lending of e-books and e-audiobooks by adults and physical lending of fiction and non-fiction books is higher than the average when compared to other local authority library services.¹
- Delivering digital drop-in sessions across Queens Crescent, Camden Town, Swiss Cottage, Kentish Town, Highgate and Pancras Square Libraries, supporting more than 737 residents in 2025 to develop their digital skills and confidence. Sessions offer one-to-one support with everyday essentials such as booking medical appointments, helping to reduce digital exclusion across the borough.
- Supporting **ShiftED**, a charity based at Holborn Library, to deliver hands-on making sessions for children and young people. Between April 2025 and March 2026, the programme reached 570 children aged 8 to 13 across 32 projects, with 43% of participants eligible for free school meals, reflecting the programme's commitment to reaching children who can benefit most.
- Establishing data and device banks in partnership with the **Good Things Foundation**, gifting 80 sim cards and 65 devices to residents across Queens Crescent, Kentish Town, Highgate and Camden Town Libraries in 2025, helping those who are digitally excluded to get and stay connected.
- **Library of Things** at Swiss Cottage Library and Kentish Town Library, with 3,501 users signed up as of February 2026. The scheme allows residents to borrow everyday items including carpet cleaners, drills and sewing machines, reducing costs for households and supporting more sustainable consumption.



"I had too many problems filling in forms. The staff here were very helpful, filling them in with me... I am now in a better situation."



Rizwan, Kilburn Library



Library of Things at Swiss Cottage Library



ShiftED workshop at Holborn Library

Celebrating Camden Libraries

Key achievements for the service include:

Reading

- Publishing Camden's first all-age borough-wide reading strategy, **Camden Reading Together 2025-30**, in Summer 2025, with a multi-agency working group now actively delivering against the action plan. The strategy sets out a shared ambition to develop literacy skills and a love of reading across all ages, from early years through to adulthood.
- Shared Reading groups, led by library staff who have been trained by **The Reader** to deliver reading experiences that support connection and wellbeing.
- Delivering a regular author talk programme across West Hampstead Library and Highgate Library, with 12 events between April 2025 and March 2026 reaching more than 300 residents. The programme brings residents into direct conversation with a diverse range of authors, including Hannah Maria Stanislaus during Black History Season, and children's authors Marielle Baylis and Rosemary Clunie, inspiring a love of reading and celebrating voices and stories.
- An annual book fund supporting reading choices and responding to community needs identified by each library.



“As a child, this was the place where we could learn and borrow books we couldn't afford to buy. To learn from those books was priceless.”



Linda, Holborn Library



Summer reading club at Highgate Library



Local author visit at Kentish Town Library

Celebrating Camden Libraries

Key achievements for the service include:

Children, Families and Young People

- Gifting Read and Share packs to all Camden families when they register their newborn, ensuring every baby receives their first library card from birth. The packs also include leaflets signposting parents to support from multiple services.
- Delivering free book gifting for children through the **Children's Book Project**, which collects and redistributes quality donated books to families, and the **Dollywood Foundation Imagination Library**, funded by the People's Postcode Lottery, which gifts a free book every month from birth to a child's fifth birthday. Since launching in December 2025, 1,944 children across Camden have enrolled in the Imagination Library, supporting a love of reading and language development from the earliest years.
- Increasing children's engagement with the **Summer Reading Challenge (SRC)**. 2025 saw an increase of 7% of children starting the challenge and a 21% increase in children completing compared to 2024. The SRC 2025 was launched at the British Library with 250 primary school children attending. Additional funding from **The Reading Agency** supported a programme of outreach which resulted in 325 new library memberships.
- Delivering a LEGO robotics offer has led to greater connections with home schooled families and contributed to the Holiday Activities and Food Programme.
- Securing funding from **The Reading Agency** and **Mercers** to train the Camden Libraries' team to deliver **Chatterbooks** reading clubs, encouraging 7-to-11-year-olds to build lifelong reading habits. Across Kentish Town Library and Pancras Square Library, 12 sessions and one author event were delivered, reaching 121 children.
- Piloting the **Talking With Your Toddler** programme in partnership with **Speech and Language UK** and the **Local Government Association**, training library staff across all Camden Libraries to deliver workshops for parents on how to share books with their children to support early language development, with further sessions planned across the borough.



"Generally the library at Kilburn has given me opportunity to meet other people and get the support I needed within the community."



George, Kilburn Library



**Storytelling
at Swiss
Cottage
Library**



**Lego
Robotics at
Camden Town
Library**

Celebrating Camden Libraries

Key achievements for the service include:

Partnerships

- Opening the **Clore Learning Space** at Holborn Library, funded by the **Clore Duffield Foundation**, provides an interactive learning environment used by partners, including ShiftED, to deliver creative and educational programmes for children and young people.
- Camden was the first London Borough to join the British Library's **Living Knowledge Network**. As part of the Network, Camden Libraries receives exhibition panels linked to the British Library's temporary exhibitions and streams live events, bringing nationally significant cultural experiences into local library spaces.
- Working with the **Royal National Institute for the Blind** (RNIB) to improve the accessibility of our computer services. A **LibraryOn** grant, supported by **Arts Council England**, helped upgrade a computer in each library, and all our staff have been trained to support visually impaired residents to download e-books onto Envoy Connect, an accessible device.
- Twinning our library service with Soloniansky Library, Kiev, sharing ideas and support. We also gifted a collection of young people's books and we are planning an exhibition produced by them for Summer 2026.
- Supporting research through our partnerships with universities to develop a greater understanding of the role of libraries and the impact they have in neighbourhoods and for residents.



“For many people, libraries are the only place they can get online, apply for housing, or connect with family.”



Internal Partner



Young persons digital artwork in the Local Studies and Archive Centre at Holborn Library



Camden Highline Workshop at Swiss Cottage Library

Who we work with

Working in partnership is one of Camden Libraries' key strengths and a key theme for our Libraries Strategy. Camden Libraries have a range of established internal and external partnerships at local, regional and national levels. Over time this will grow organically as new interventions are planned, focused on resident needs and interests.

We are continuously seeking new partnerships and collaborations that support the service to deliver **We Make Camden** and the **Universal Library Offers**.



“The role Camden Libraries play in supporting children and adult learning across the borough, reducing social isolation, and providing opportunities to retrain and upskill, is hugely important in the development of an inclusive innovation district and knowledge economy, in which local residents reap the benefits.”



**Sam Oates, Partnerships Manager,
The Knowledge Quarter**

The National Context for Libraries

Statutory Duty

Public library services are funded and either run or commissioned by local government. Library authorities (unitary, county or metropolitan borough councils) have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons, for all those who live, work or study in the area. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by councils in England and secure the proper discharge by councils of their functions as library authorities. Our Libraries Strategy is aligned with the Independent Review of English Public Libraries, commissioned by DCMS in 2024.

Whilst Camden Libraries continue to develop and seek inward investment, many library services across the country are facing significant challenges due to resourcing constraints. Over the last three years, the service has generated £1,471,000 through various sources including S106, the Community Infrastructure Levy, and external funding from Arts Council England (ACE), Clore Duffield Foundation, Mercers, The National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. A key example of the benefit of this inward investment is the refurbishment of Holborn Library in 2025, with the funding supporting the creation of attractive, flexible spaces enabling partner organisations to co-locate and collaborate with the service.



Libraries Connected and the Universal Library Offers

The **Universal Library Offers** were developed by **Libraries Connected**,² an independent charity that supports, promotes and represents the public libraries sector, and “provide a framework for a high-quality library service and demonstrate the power of libraries to enrich lives.”³ They help to build consistency in the national public library offer. The Universal Library Offers are integral to the services Camden Libraries deliver, they are woven through day-to-day programming and showcased through partnerships and projects:

Culture and Creativity

Energising communities with inspiring, fun and imaginative experiences in safe and vibrant spaces that promote inclusivity and diversity and a sense of belonging.



Information and Digital

Ensuring communities can access quality information and digital services, learn new digital skills and be safe online, supported by trained staff and volunteers, by removing barriers and enabling people to participate.



Health and Wellbeing

Supporting the health and wellbeing of local people and communities through activities which help tackle health inequalities.



Reading

Creating excitement about reading which has the power to positively transform people's lives.



Arts Council England

Arts Council England (ACE) is the national development agency for libraries in England. It supports libraries to develop and strengthen practice, advocates for their value, impact and public benefit, and invests in projects, research, and infrastructure across the public library sector.

This investment reflects ACE's strategy **Let's Create**, which recognises libraries as a vital cultural and creative resource that improve lives, supports local economies and brings people together.

ACE convenes and chairs the English Public Library Strategic Working Group and administers the Libraries Development Framework. Library services can apply to join this programme to demonstrate their commitment to ongoing development, innovation, and best practice.

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) are the leading voice for the information, knowledge management and library profession. Its current strategy, **Empowering Impact**, sets the direction for the profession nationally.

Camden Libraries is an employer member of CILIP, supporting staff development and professional learning. The service attend the Innovative Public Library meetings convened by CILIP and contributes to sector-wide knowledge sharing.

Camden Libraries are one of the first three Green Library Hubs funded by the **National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future**. The project enables Camden Libraries and the British Library to work together to raise awareness of climate action.



The Local Strategic Frame for Camden Libraries

Our Libraries Strategy supports the delivery of the missions set out in **We Make Camden**, the Council's vision for the future of Camden. The strategy aligns library activity with these missions and demonstrates how libraries contribute to wider outcomes for residents and communities.



Our Diversity Mission

By 2030, those holding positions of power in Camden are as diverse as our community – and the next generation is ready to follow



Diversity

Camden Libraries are in different communities across the borough, offering a Cultural Calendar inspiring a diverse programme of activities and events, which respond to, and represent, community and resident's interests and needs.

We are committed to inclusive practise to ensure all who visit us feel empowered to get involved. The service provides resources in a range of formats to aid accessibility and inclusivity, such as audio and large print, and each library has an accessible computer.

The Home Library service delivers items to those who can't physically reach a library. Kilburn Library and Swiss Cottage Library offer **Changing Places** facilities supporting people with severe disabilities and their carers when they are out in the community.

Our Youth Mission

By 2025, every young person has access to economic opportunity that enables them to be safe and secure



Young People

Camden Libraries support young people through volunteering and work experience opportunities.

Libraries are vital spaces for young people for studying and connection, and for free access to physical and digital resources to support learning and recreational reading.

Libraries offer employability support to help young people find their pathway, working with partners like [The Apex Project](#) and [ShiftED](#) to connect young people's interests to employment and training and delivering activities to children and young people, boosting resilience.

Our Food Mission

By 2030, everyone eats well every day with nutritious, affordable, sustainable food



Food

Camden Libraries promote healthy eating by providing access to information and reading choices via books, free Wi-Fi and public access computers.

Our partnerships help us to deliver more including the Community Café at Pancras Square Library, run by **Lifeafterhummus**, who use food waste to create affordable food for residents, and with **Think & Do** through Sharing Spaces which bring residents together to share ideas, green initiatives, swap clothes and share a meal.

Libraries are part of the Holiday Activities and Food programme, are food donation points for the City Harvest, offer seed banks and visit the Euston Food Bank to promote library membership and run activities.

Our Estates Mission

By 2030, Camden's estates and their neighbourhoods are healthy, sustainable and unlock creativity



Estates and Neighbourhoods

Camden Libraries are free, safe, trusted, neutral neighbourhood spaces in the heart of their local communities, supporting community cohesion and connection, bringing different cultures together.

Libraries are one of the Council's frontline services, bridging the gap between residents and the Council and in the unique position of being able to facilitate residents directly connecting with those making decisions that affect them. They offer spaces where councillor surgeries and neighbourhood teams can connect with residents and offer support. We work with the Camden Public Health Team to deliver free health checks and with the Property Management Team to support residents with housing repair issues.

A breadth of activities are hosted in our libraries from knitting and play reading groups to chess and homework clubs.

Camden Libraries supporting inclusive economic growth

Like our missions, inclusive economic growth is a long-term goal for the Council, focused on improving prosperity, opportunity and wellbeing across Camden. The Council will work with Camden residents and partners to shape how it can help build a future the people of Camden want to see. Inclusive economic growth will come from different sectors and benefit everyone, improving jobs, education, health and living standards.

As community-based innovation hubs across the borough, libraries are valued and supported places used by, and for, the community, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurship through offers such as [The Workary at Holborn Library](#) and the business support sessions delivered in partnership with the [British Library](#). Libraries can support growth, reduce inequalities and play a key part in the strategy to support employment and skills, business support, and climate change action. For example, libraries work with [The Apex Project](#) supporting young people into employment; we are planning to work with [Good Work Camden](#) in the refurbished Kilburn Library; and we currently work with the formal and informal learning programme which forms part of the [Camden Reading Together Strategy 2025-30](#).

The Insights Learning and Impact team analysed library catchments using active member data (defined as library users who have used their library card in the last 12 months) and compared this with census data. They found that deprivation in health, education, disability and housing are overall similar across library catchments to Camden levels. However, residents within library catchments are more deprived in the employment dimension. Catchments range

from 1.5 to 2.8 times more deprived in employment compared with Camden overall, highlighting the important role libraries play in supporting pathways to skills, opportunities and employment.

Camden Libraries supporting sustainability

Camden Libraries are contributing to the Climate Action ambitions through operational improvements, partnerships and community programmes.

Since 2021, three library buildings have been decarbonised, with further environmental improvements including LED lighting and improved ventilation systems. The Green Library Hubs project funded by the [National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund – Our Shared Future](#) will see Pancras Square Library become a Green Library Hub. A Green Library Coordinator will deliver programmes at the hub and in other libraries and outreach venues.

Camden Libraries also hosts two [Library of Things](#): one at Swiss Cottage Library and the other at Kentish Town Library. The service also presented at the Green Libraries Conference in 2025.

Sharing Spaces have been introduced in the libraries initiated in partnership with [Think & Do](#). They promote reuse and energy awareness through pre-loved clothes rails and community-led activities. Libraries are working with the [Children's Book Project](#) to collect and redistribute quality donated books to families in school and early years settings. Some of these books are used to create pop-up libraries in community venues, supporting delivery of the [Camden Reading Together 2025-30](#) strategy.

Camden Libraries Strategy

Our commitment to you, our residents and communities



“We welcome everyone into Camden’s Library spaces as the go-to place in our communities for free resources and activities. We inspire learning and reading choices and enrich lives.”

These are complemented by the key aims of the [Camden Reading Together 2025-30](#): **Reading, Skills, Connect, Wellbeing.**



The Themes Explored

People and Place

Putting Camden Libraries at the heart of local communities

What we heard:

People: staff, residents and partners are central to making Camden Libraries warm, inclusive, living spaces, that are loved and bring communities together.

Data: it is critical that the services we provide meet the needs of all the different communities using libraries, and that data is used to measure our impact and keep us on track.

Community resilience: libraries are neighbourhood spaces and facilitators of community resilience, built around place. You'd like to retain good provision across the borough in buildings which are fit for purpose, in the right locations, and open at the most convenient times.

Co-location and connection: libraries act as spaces for partners and organisations to connect with residents.

Spaces: making our library spaces as flexible, clean, attractive and welcoming as possible is important to you.

Active social spaces, places of self-improvement and belonging: libraries are neutral, peaceful, safe havens where people engage in their own way and at their own pace. They are social and playful spaces, places where people can interact with others, be curious, or equally sit quietly and reflect and still feel connected to others.

People and Place

Our goals

There is more to do. Over the next five years we will:

Secure libraries as key neighbourhood spaces: through continued investment in accessible, flexible and welcoming buildings.

Focus on our communities: build on our commitment to listen and adapt to changing needs or if something isn't working.

Explore collaborations that support community resilience and connection, foster local early intervention and prevention: collaborate with council teams, community and external partners, where their missions and values align with We Make Camden and our Libraries Strategy to ensure residents can access relevant support, information and activities.

Continue to use data: tailor and measure the impact of the service and our partnerships to ensure we meet community needs.

Utilise the Local Studies and Archives service: collect, preserve, make accessible, and foster interest in the history and documentary heritage of the area today known as the London Borough of Camden.

By 2031 we will have:

Continued our inward investment plans: including refurbishing Kilburn Library as a key neighbourhood space.

Reviewed opening hours: assessing, within the available resource, whether a shift in the opening hours at some libraries might enhance the offer, and make the options for out-of-hours use by community groups and partners clearer.

Developed a social impact assessment with the Insights, Learning, and Impact Team: to understand and measure the impact of the events programme, and other interventions, so that the service can better demonstrate the preventative value of its offer on people's lives, communities, cultures and wellbeing.

Supported inclusive economic growth: including boosting the learning offer by hosting open days for employers, training and education providers, and developing financial literacy programmes with a focus on young people.

Delivered Camden Reading Together 2025-30 strategy: using reading to reduce loneliness across the borough. Evidence shows one in five readers cite reading as a key factor in alleviating loneliness, with Camden Libraries playing a central role in making reading accessible to all through the delivery of the reading strategy.

Elevating the Basics

Strengthening the foundations of the service to deliver a consistent, quality and resilient library service

What we heard:

The core offer: getting the basics right and consistent across the network of libraries is vital. The Local Government Association Library Peer Challenge Report for Camden Libraries, in 2023, also reinforced this.

The team: staff are loved and respected. Ongoing skills development is needed to deliver a future-proofed service which can respond to a changing world.

Local and national information: libraries are a key source for accessing trusted information and help people make sense of the volume of information and misinformation in the AI world.

Supporting digital access: libraries act as a first point of access for digital inclusion and support those who are digitally excluded. They are essential in providing digital support and access via public computers, free Wi-Fi and skills.

Learning: it is important to have formal and informal learning opportunities in libraries.

Health and wellbeing: there is potential to develop further use of library spaces to support health and wellbeing for individuals, including their mental health and resilience in communities responding to [Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-30](#). Libraries can support public health, health literacy, and expand social prescribing and volunteering opportunities.

Elevating the Basics

Our goals

There is more to do. Over the next five years we will:

Deliver high-quality reading choices: ensure Camden Libraries provide a tailored, diverse and resident led reading choices offer which delivers best value for money.

Deliver a variety of experiences through a cultural and learning programme: a range of activities, events, creative health experiences, exhibitions, informal and formal learning opportunities aligned with the [Universal Library Offers Calendar](#) and user feedback, so that everyone can enjoy culture and creativity, and thrive.

Deliver the [Camden Reading Together 2025-30 strategy](#): we will widen understanding of reading and the library space; celebrate the joy of reading and nurture lifelong learning; embed reading across council services and community spaces; improve access to reading and language development for all; promote reading to support better health and wellbeing; build skills and pathways into meaningful employment; strengthen community connections through shared reading activities.

Support the Camden Libraries' team: deliver a focused training plan to equip the team to deliver a high-quality service to residents to ensure a future proofed service that is responsive and inclusive.

Build on the digital offer: to ensure residents that need digital access and support know that libraries are the place they can go to for this support.

Develop the Local Studies and Archive Service: review the current storage of collections and continue to respond to The National Archives resilience tool.

Implement [Camden Reading Together 2025-30](#): utilise the strategy to widen understanding of reading and the library space; build skills and pathways into meaningful employment; support Camden residents to live well; promote and support better health and wellbeing; nurture lifelong learning, the joy of reading, and language development.

Conduct access audits and introduce peer assessments: continue to conduct access audits for library buildings as part of redevelopment projects and introduce peer assessments of spaces to inform the layout, presentation, wayfinding and signposting.

Elevating the Basics

By 2031 we will have:

Continued to develop local library plans: tailored to the local offer, ensuring consistency of the core offer across our network.

Revitalised the Camden Libraries' team's training plan: to support the team to deliver service expectations, including a robust information service with a social prescribing approach.

Achieved Arts Council England's Libraries Development Framework status: demonstrating Camden Council's commitment to development, innovation, and best practice in Camden Libraries.

Gained The National Archives' Archive Service Accreditation: for Camden's Local Studies and Archives service.

Achieved auto enrolment for library membership of all primary aged children: with more children (aged 0 to 11 years) accessing the library offer.

Refreshed the Library Service's Digital Plan: delivered a refreshed network of public computers; offering data and device banks in all libraries; explored the opportunities to offer devices for loan; reviewed our library management system and considered options to ensure the best experience for users, and that the most cost-effective model is adopted.

Delivered the Camden Reading Together 2025-30 strategy: working with others to champion reading choices and informal and formal learning.



Cohesion, Inclusivity and Relevance

Libraries as places of sanctuary, shaping offers to meet residents' needs and sharing spaces to connect residents of all ages and cultures

What we heard:

Accessibility: libraries should be welcoming to all and meet diverse needs.

Connectedness, wellbeing, and reducing loneliness: libraries can bring people from different cultures and generations together through events, shared conversations, the exchange of hobbies, ideas and more.

Representation and diversity: libraries need to continue to be shaped by the diverse communities that surround them, they should collaborate with, and be representative of, the communities they interact with through the services and collections they offer.

Cohesion, Inclusivity and Relevance

Our goals

There is more to do. Over the next five years we will:

Ensure the library offer is accessible, welcoming, inclusive and representative: working with partners to better understand needs.

Reflect our communities: in the people working and volunteering in our libraries.

Build on our existing programme and displays: to bring a high-quality offer across the whole borough, appealing to all ages and cultures with a focus on connecting people.

Position the library as a platform for dialogue: a dynamic space where residents from all backgrounds can connect with each other and with local decision-makers.

Provide services that represents the cultures within Camden: through the [Universal Library Offers Calendar](#) and user feedback, and by using data to inform the selection of resources and programming.

By 2031 we will have:

Achieved the Library of Sanctuary award: celebrating Camden Libraries as a place of welcome for the wider community.

Created spaces in our libraries for people with specific needs: embedded and considered differing needs when configuring spaces, choosing resources and displaying information.

Established clear forums for engagement and dialogue: to celebrate our borough's rich cultural heritage and diverse voices, fostering open conversations about key issues.

Developed a volunteer framework and a range of volunteer roles: for people of all ages to help them find connection, purpose and learn new skills, supporting opportunities for employment.

Delivered a programme of regular community days: involving the community in stock selection to ensure the libraries collections meet community needs, making it easier for residents to make suggestions.

Delivered against the [Camden All Age Autism Strategy 2025-2030 implementation plan](#): ensuring there is information about support for autistic residents and sensory packs available in all libraries, ensuring our library buildings are autism friendly.

Partnerships and Outreach

Working with others to ensure relevance and meet needs, bringing people, communities and organisations together to maximise our joint abilities and talents to deliver more

What we heard:

Connectors: libraries are a trusted and valued partner locally, regionally and nationally. By continuing to be forward thinking, innovative connectors and “leading lights” in the sector, Camden Libraries are going above and beyond to support partners and the community.

Responsive: libraries are responsive to partnership opportunities and ambitious in their approach to collaboration and partnership working.

Deepening strategic partnerships: to achieve maximum strategic impact it is vital that the service can leverage internal and external support to build capacity, skills and resilience, to increase its profile, and to share best practice.

Partnerships and Outreach

Our goals

There is more to do. Over the next five years we will:

Broaden collaboration and continue to build new partnerships and nurture existing relationships: to optimise outreach and collaboration for the benefit of Camden's residents and the wider libraries sector, working with partners who align with our Libraries Strategy, we will embrace libraries into Camden's ecosystems, and at regional and national level, giving resilience and sustainability to the service.

Enhance Camden Libraries role in inclusive economic growth: seeking ways in which partnerships and outreach can support our libraries to deliver against the inclusive economic growth agenda.

Work with partners to explore funding opportunities: build on Camden Libraries strengths as a trusted and valued partner and the service's funding success to date, to leverage support and explore opportunities to bring additional funding to develop services and added value for Camden's residents and communities.

Deliver Camden Reading Together 2025-30 strategy: to build skills, confidence and community through partnership working and the council-wide promotion of reading.

Partnerships and Outreach

By 2031 we will have:

Established a partnerships framework: shared with local, regional and national partners to support the delivery of our Libraries Strategy so they understand who we are, who we currently work with and this will support us to secure additional inward investment and resource to deliver benefit to our residents and communities.

A robust outreach plan to expand our audiences: enabling connection and delivery with partners and residents, expanding our audiences and engaging with those not currently using the service. For example, working with Camden's Leisure Team to deliver the Summer Reading Challenge as part of Camden's Parks Outreach Programme.

Developed the Green Library Hub: supported Camden's communities to take action on climate change and residents to become more involved in climate action, delivered via a programme of green activities, events and outreach led by our Green Hub coordinator, working with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), the British Library, Julie's Bicycle, and community-based partners and evaluated by CAG consultants.

Explored and secured funding opportunities available through Arts Council England: achieved success with our applications to the Libraries Improvement Fund, National Lottery Project Grants and secured National Portfolio Status, enabling us to deliver more for the residents and communities of Camden.

Developed our approach to supporting inclusive economic growth: successfully able to demonstrate how libraries contribute to the inclusive economic growth agenda.

Telling our Story

Connecting with residents and partners in a deeper way

What we heard:

Better, broader and stronger promotion: the library service holds a personal connection with people. The libraries team need to connect directly with audiences within and outside of the library space and articulate the breadth of the libraries' physical and digital offers. Social media is a key tool for promoting the service.

Multiple languages and accessible formats: library collections and information should be available in multiple languages and accessible formats.

Library ambassadors: Residents could be more involved. A new role of Library Ambassador could be a way to do this, as well as community and partner representation on any steering group created to take our Libraries Strategy forward.

Changing perceptions: the service should speak with others, including community centres and locality groups, so that what libraries offer complements what is available elsewhere and to ensure residents needs are met.

Telling our Story

Our goals

There is more to do. Over the next five years we will:

Work with our residents, communities and partners: to tell our story, to promote our services and learn about how we can improve and develop our services.

Ensure the service has more exposure: through increased advocacy, internally and externally, including the use of social media to connect in a deeper way and shift perceptions of what libraries can do.

By 2031 we will have:

Refreshed and further developed a clear communication plan: improved the way we advocate and engage with people to better coordinate the production and distribution of information about what we offer, in multiple languages and accessible formats, linked to key campaigns and service offers. Regularly use social and digital media, alongside other communications channels, to engage Camden residents and build direct connection with our libraries and the full range of services and support on offer.

Developed a group of Camden Libraries Ambassadors: involved Camden's communities and our partners to work with Camden Libraries to oversee the delivery of our Libraries Strategy and [Camden Reading Together 2025-30](#) strategy.

Developed a Youth Advisory Panel: directly impacting on service design.

What will success look like?

Libraries interact with residents of all ages and backgrounds, alongside organisations and community groups across the borough. We want to assess what change has been delivered over the period of our Libraries Strategy and how libraries have an impact on people's lives in Camden.

We will upskill libraries staff to collect data to measure success and contribute to the Council's wider ambition to increase understanding of people's experience. Our metrics for success will be based on the [Good Life Camden](#) framework which describes what it means to live a good life in Camden and how that can be measured. We will use both qualitative and quantitative data collection, as well as our own administrative data, to understand the experience of general library visitors as well as specific groups, including those who might not visit libraries. We will also continue to use customer insights and feedback to shape and adapt our resources, collections and services.

Our annual action plan will set out how we will deliver each of the themes set out in the strategy to ensure we are on track to achieve our goals by 2031. Progress against the annual action plan will be published in an updated annual action plan to enable residents to see in one place the actions to be taken in the year, the overall progress towards the targets by 2031, and the remainder of what it is to be achieved.

Themes	Preliminary outcomes
<p>People and Place</p> <p>Putting Camden Libraries at the heart of local communities</p>	<p>More visits to our libraries We will aim for a 10% increase across digital and physical visits by 2031.</p> <p>More community involvement We will have more volunteers and volunteer hours per year by 2031.</p> <p>Improved library spaces Using data to ensure we are making an impact and meeting needs.</p>
<p>Elevating the Basics</p> <p>Elevating the foundations of the service to deliver a successful and resilient library service</p>	<p>Opening times reflective of the communities they serve Hours will be set within the available resource to meet local need.</p> <p>Staff equipped to meet the needs of residents Staff will have the skills and support required to deliver a successful and resilient service.</p> <p>A clear and deliverable digital service plan A plan will be in place to ensure our digital offer is consistent, accessible, and fit for purpose.</p>
<p>Cohesion, Inclusivity and Relevance</p> <p>Libraries as places of sanctuary, shaping offers to meet resident’s needs and sharing spaces to connect residents of all ages and cultures</p>	<p>An increased sense of connection and belonging among library users. We will monitor how people feel and interact in the libraries, and how the libraries act as a space to connect across different backgrounds and population groups.</p> <p>Collections will be shaped by residents This will be done through community days giving residents the opportunity to contribute to book selections.</p>
<p>Partnerships and Outreach</p> <p>Working with others to ensure relevance and meet need</p>	<p>Increased engagement through cultural experiences Event attendance will increase by 5% by 2031, with improved satisfaction across Camden Libraries.</p> <p>A demonstrated contribution to inclusive economic growth and pathways to employment Through volunteer roles, learning opportunities, and a partnership with The Apex Project, creating meaningful routes into work for people of all ages.</p>
<p>Telling our story</p> <p>Connecting with residents and partners in a deeper way</p>	<p>Telling our story in a more amplified and strategic way We will connect with residents and partners more deeply, sharing the impact and reach of Camden Libraries.</p> <p>Community participation through ambassador roles We will work with resident ambassadors to champion Camden Libraries in their local communities, helping us connect with and reach more residents across the borough.</p>

Get involved

Your voice

Your voice should continue to shape the services and decisions that affect your life. Participation in Camden is about creating meaningful opportunities to lead change, hold us accountable, and see ideas reflected in action.

Camden Libraries will:

- provide safe, welcoming environments where you feel comfortable sharing your views and ideas
- enable you to express your ideas in accessible and inclusive ways tailored to your needs
- actively listen and act on your contributions so you can see that your input leads to meaningful change

To achieve this, we will form a Libraries Ambassadors Group who will work with us as we deliver the strategy over the next five years. We may develop a group for each library to help create a local approach.

Get involved with your local library

There are already so many great ways you can get involved with your local library:

- Find out what's going on at your local library by dropping in and speaking with a member of the Camden Libraries' team.
- Have an idea for an activity or book you'd like to see in the library? Chat with one of the Camden Libraries team. We are open to new ideas and activities.
- Try something new at your local library. You could try borrowing an eBook, check what services you can access or find out what events are coming up.
- Think about volunteering at your local library. It's a wonderful way to meet people, make friends and feel connected to your community.



Get in touch: libraries@camden.gov.uk



Check out our website at camden.gov.uk/libraries

Endnotes

1. Library Loans Review report for Libraries Connected. Independent Mind, October 2025.
2. Libraries Connected is an independent charity that supports, promotes and represents public libraries. Camden Libraries are a member of Libraries Connected and part of the Libraries Connected London Region
3. <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/projects/universal-library-offers>. Each offer is underpinned by the **Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise**, developed by Share the Vision, and **The Children's Promise**, developed by Libraries Rising which sets out what the public library service offer to children and young people should be.

Libraries Do!



**Camden Libraries
Strategy
2026-2031**