

Freedom of Information request: Reference number FOI2025/00399

Date of request: 18th April 2025

Request:

Can you tell me why the community book swap scheme at London Tube stations is banned, but the free newspapers can be distributed at stations?

How many calls has LFB attended because of the fire caused by the Community book swap since 2011, when the first one opened?

How many calls to London Underground stations have there been where the free newspapers have caused the start of a fire, and again, since 2011

If the answer to the last two questions is zero, then can you explain why books have been banned and free newspapers have not?

Finally, as the book program has been around for quite some time, why has it taken so long for LFB to ban the book swap

Response:

Question one relates to decisions made by Transport for London (TfL), who are best placed to respond. TfL are responsible for the fire risk assessments (and the decisions) therefore London Fire Brigade (LFB) are unable to answer this question.

For questions 2 to 3, the London Fire Brigade (LFB) Data Team has conducted a review of fire incidents in or near London Underground station platforms between January 2019 – December 2024, with a particular focus on fires involving books. There are not any recorded incidents of fires being caused by books or bookshelves.

LFB are the regulator under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and are the (fire safety) regulator for London's transport infrastructure. LFB will inspect sites for compliance and will work with the responsible person (e.g. TfL in this case) as part of this process, including reviewing revised risk assessments where appropriate.

The London Fire Brigade has been working closely with TfL on the decision to suspend the book swap scheme due to fire safety concerns and reviewed the decision.

The leaders of both LFB and TfL are committed to ensuring we learn from past tragedies and take every step to keep people safe. Therefore, it was right to review the use of book libraries and work together, as we have done, to examine the risk posed and explore ways to mitigate it. We have found a way forward

that will allow book libraries to operate, while protecting the safety of all those travelling and working on London Underground.

We have dealt with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. For more information about this process please see the guidance we publish about making a request on our website: <https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/request-information-from-us/>