Essex Future Library Services Strategy

2019 - 2024

This is a strategy for the provision of library services in Essex over the next five years, from 2019/20 to 2023/24. This document is a draft version, published for public consultation which will run from 29 November 2018 to 20 February 2019. Essex County Council will consider responses to the consultation and may amend the strategy before agreeing the final version.

Contents

Foreword

I am incredibly proud of the public library service in Essex and the employees and volunteers who deliver it. Library services play a unique role in our society as providers of reading, learning, digital access and culture, and as safe community spaces.

Library services have successfully adapted before to changing demands and customer needs. But now, with advances in technology and evolving customer expectations, they need to adapt even further. We must seize the opportunities presented by technology and embrace the changing demands of service users.

The facts and figures are stark.

Use of libraries has slumped over the last six years – book borrowing has almost halved, fewer than one in five Essex residents are active library users and fewer people now use the public computers in libraries. We need to reimagine the service to make it relevant to people's lives, now and in the future, and financially sustainable.

Earlier this year, we asked the people of Essex what their priorities for future libraries were. Books and reading were top of their list, so this strategy listens to this and is about books and library services, not buildings.

Our vision is that we will have a 21st century library service that is inclusive and vibrant, one that offers a consistently good customer experience, embraces digital technology and enables all users to learn, engage and remain connected to their communities. We are ambitious in our thinking; we will explore the opportunities technology offers and be open to new and creative ideas.

We want to support our employees and volunteers to work in different ways and encourage communities and partners to get involved.

But there are challenges ahead. We need to spend taxpayers' money wisely. We need to be innovative and resourceful, and work with the people of Essex to make the best of the resources we have.

Essex has one of the largest networks of libraries in the country. But it is irresponsible to spend taxpayers money on keeping poorly used buildings open when we could spend it on improving the library services that people do use and need whilst still maintaining a network of well-located libraries throughout Essex. So, our goal is to have a smaller number of libraries more effectively focused on meeting the needs of communities.

We propose placing library services into four tiers based on needs across the county and closing libraries where they are not required - while still providing a comprehensive library service through the network, supported by our eLibrary, and mobile and home library services.

This is a draft strategy; public opinion and engagement on these proposals is vital. I want to know what you think of these proposals before any decisions are made. You can find out more at essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation or at a drop-in at one of our libraries. The public consultation on this strategy will be open for 12 weeks from 29 November to 20 February 2019, so please have your say by completing the consultation survey.

I look forward to finding out what you think about our proposals and creating a new library strategy that works for the people of Essex.

Cllr Susan Barker
Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate

Summary

Our vision for library services over the next five years is a 21st century library service that is inclusive and vibrant, and enables users to learn, engage and remain connected to their communities.

Over the lifetime of this strategy, our ambition is that we will:

- Have books and reading at the heart of our library service offer

- Have a class-leading eLibrary and embrace digital technology

- Have a smaller number of libraries more effectively focused on meeting the needs of communities

- Work in partnership with our communities to run and improve library services

- Offer a consistently good customer experience.

This is a strategy about library services not buildings. It focuses on how best to provide library services, both physical and online. What we provide will be based on need, and will be provided in different ways and in different locations and spaces than currently.

For instance, library shelves and study spaces could be in community centres or other public buildings, children's story-times or library events could take place in village halls, smart access and self-service technology could make it much easier for you to browse, study, borrow and return books outside regular opening hours.

In the future, we think community groups and volunteers are much more likely to be involved in delivering library services, taking the opportunity for people who live and work in the community and who best understand the unique needs of their community to run services in ways that fit local needs.

Library services are integral to society, helping people to thrive and prosper. They help create great places to grow up, live and work and help people get a good start in life and age well.

But customer expectations are changing, our population is growing, and we need to make sure that we offer the best possible value for money. The county council also needs to ensure it meets its statutory duty and provides a library service that is fit for the future, financially sustainable and fits with people's lives and expectations.

Essex Libraries serve a population of 1.5m through 74 library buildings, eLibrary services, two mobile libraries and home library service volunteers. It also supports eight volunteer-run community libraries that are not part of the core offer. The location and spread of libraries are the result of historical decisions rather than design and do not reflect current demographics or need.

In 2016-17, Essex was the second largest library authority in England, with a higher than average number of outlets and the fourth highest spending per head of population (see p20).

But in the last six years, here in Essex and across the country, use of libraries has sharply declined. Loans from Essex libraries decreased 43% from over 7.1m loans a year in 2011/12 to less than 4.1m loans in 2017/18. Demand for public network computers in libraries fell 22% over the same period.

The equivalent of 16% of Essex residents – fewer than one in five – are active library users.

Meanwhile, technology has transformed how people consume information and entertainment. Loans of eBooks, eAudio and eMagazines rose 205%, from 61,000 to 186,000 in five years. And with 85% of UK adults now owning a smartphone and 10% using an eReader daily, we expect that trend to continue. In March 2018, we did extensive research and engagement with Essex residents and library users (p15). Your feedback informs this strategy and the results are published in appendix 3, Your Community, Libraries and You. Our priorities (p21), with books and reading at the top, reflect your priorities.

These are challenging times for local government. We can no longer afford to spend as much on services as before and we must take opportunities to do things in new and more efficient ways. In the future we will look to reduce the number of library buildings that we manage, so that we can focus our attention on meeting needs.

This strategy sets out the priorities for library services, based on what you have told us. It also defines a 'core offer' you can expect from library services and a future approach that will meet our statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

Key points

- Keep books and reading at the heart of our comprehensive library offer, as this is the top priority for the people of Essex.

- Invest in eLibrary and online services to respond to changing demand, particularly among younger users, and make services more accessible, for instance offering easier browsing, ordering and downloads on mobile devices.

- Explore the potential of smart libraries – offering members swipe card access outside staffed opening hours - to increase opening hours and the ways people can use libraries, and introduce them where viable.

- Seek investment to modernise library spaces to a consistent standard, so they are welcoming, easy to use and meet diverse user needs.

- Focus on outreach, working closely with other Essex County Council (ECC) services and partners to reach communities and individuals with the greatest needs and promote and deliver our offer more closely with other services in different settings, such as community hubs and other community settings.

- Provide future library services based on evidence of need, taking into account distance between locations, usage, population size, deprivation and social isolation.

- This strategy places current libraries in four tiers, based on evidence of need. We propose that the future of the existing library network will be:

  o Tier 1: main or 'hub' libraries, at least one per district/borough, managed by ECC as part of our statutory provision of a comprehensive network.

  o Tier 2: library services in areas where there is a need for them, managed by ECC as part of our statutory provision of a comprehensive network and delivered in partnership with the community or other partner.

  o Tier 3: locations where no library service is needed in order to have a comprehensive and efficient network, but where ECC wishes to support the provision of library services run by a community or partner organisation with ECC support.

  o Tier 4: locations where a library service is not required as part of a comprehensive service but where ECC will consider proposals for community libraries.

Tier 1 libraries will act as hubs for their area. The council will meet its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service through a combination of library services in tiers 1 and 2, the online eLibrary, mobile libraries and the home library service.

Tier 3 community-run libraries will supplement the core offer. Partners could include community groups or other agencies. ECC will review mobile library stops to meet changing needs.

More information about the tiered approach is on p23 and in the needs assessment which you can view at essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation or ask to see in your library.

This strategy is about the service, not the buildings. However, it is worth noting that as the strategy develops, we will work in partnership to make the most efficient use of public buildings, whether owned by the council, public bodies or community organisations.

This includes considering the most appropriate building for the service. Most library services will be in shared spaces, not their current buildings by 2024.

Our vision and ambition

Essex County Council's Organisation Strategy 2017-21

Libraries have a key role to play in enabling Essex County Council to deliver on its strategic aims, be that through providing spaces and resources to help people in Essex to increase their skills and prosper, or through providing safe, welcoming and stimulating spaces for all users to learn, engage and remain connected to their communities.

As library services evolve to meet our changing communities, we recognise that we need to achieve more with less, be that through limiting costs or driving growth in revenue. We will re-imagine how residents' needs can be met in a digital world and support our staff to deliver great customer service.

ENABLE INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

HELP PEOPLE GET THE BEST START AND AGE WELL

HELP CREATE GREAT PLACES TO GROW UP, LIVE AND WORK

TRANSFORM THE COUNCIL TO ACHIEVE MORE WITH LESS

Our Vision

Our vision for library services over the next five years is a 21st century library service that is inclusive and vibrant, and enables all users to learn, engage and remain connected to their communities.

We are ambitious for our library service – we recognise the challenges and will embrace the opportunities. Over the course of this strategy we will build on the great foundations of our library service to achieve our vision.

What will be different in five years?

If this strategy is delivered, we expect that by 2024 it will have the following impact:

- There will be a consistent library service across the county, that people can access more easily in ways and at times that are convenient to them, whether online or on the ground.

- People will be able to access library services online more easily 24 hours a day via the eLibrary.

- The quality and range of books, eBooks and materials on offer will be much better informed by customers' preferences, through improvements in management systems and insight.

- We will have re-imagined how people access library services and how reading materials are borrowed and distributed. It will be more of a service 'without walls': fewer library buildings, more shared spaces with other council services or community groups, many more people borrowing and reading online, aspects of the service delivered in community spaces according to what best meets local needs. For instance, children's activities may take place in a village hall or community centre; customers may be able to pick up items from an outlet in a local shop or leisure centre.

- Essex residents and community groups will be much more involved, with many libraries run by or run jointly with community groups and volunteers.

- Extended opening hours through volunteer support and the introduction of smart library technology that, where viable, will enable people to use libraries at times that are convenient to them.

- Smart library technology will also make it easier for community groups and businesses to hire library spaces for other activities and generate income to support libraries.

"I had an appointment at the Job Centre and Council Offices. When it's cold outside it's great that everything is under one roof. I don't need to leave the building."

Female Basildon library user, age 49

Our Ambition

Over the life of this strategy we will continue to deliver our core offer and seek new ways of working so that in 2024 Essex library service will:

- Have books and reading at the heart of our library service offer

- Have a smaller number of libraries more effectively focused on meeting the needs of communities

- Work in partnership with our communities to run and improve library services

- Offer a consistently good customer experience

- Have a comprehensive eLibrary offer and embrace digital technology.

Context

Library Services in Essex

Essex Libraries serve a population of 1.4m through 74 library buildings, an eLibrary service, two mobile libraries, home library service volunteers and support for eight volunteer-run community libraries. The location and spread of libraries is a result of historical decisions rather than design and does not reflect current demographics or need.

In 2016-17, Essex was the second largest library authority in England, with a higher than average number of outlets and the fourth highest spending per head of population.

The national average ratio is one library per 22,425 people; in Essex the ratio is one per 17,325. [i]

The mobile library service was reviewed and changed after public consultation in 2017-18. This strategy does not propose another review of mobile libraries but routes and timetables may be adjusted over the course of the strategy to meet changing needs.

Library services have evolved and changed over recent years.

They play a role in preventing health and social problems by providing safe spaces where people can access or find out about other services, meet others and socialise or simply spend time.

Some of the many things that happen in libraries

Books and magazines

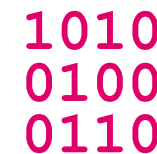**Job clubs and job search help**

Free public network computers

Baby and Toddler Rhymetimes

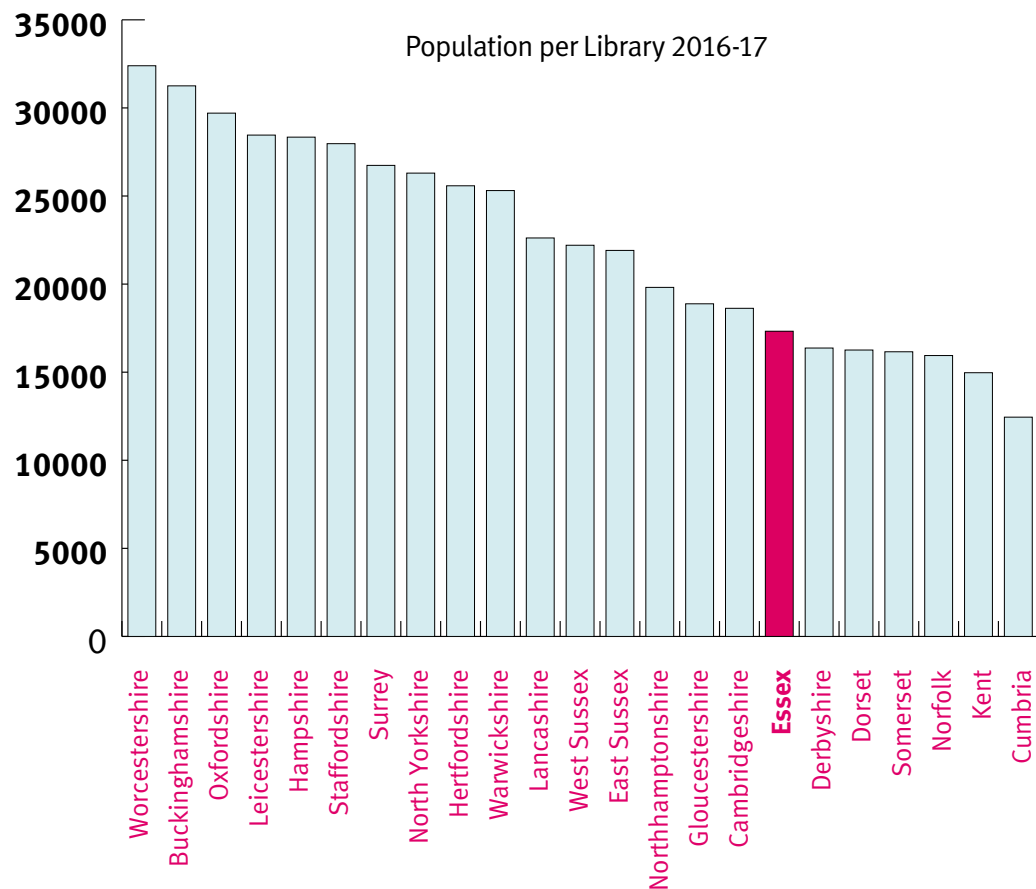**Book readings, music and events**

Language books and classes

Code Clubs

Wifi access

How Essex compares with other counties

Population per Library 2016-17

Worcestershire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Leicestershire, Hampshire, Staffordshire, Surrey, North Yorkshire, Hertfordshire, Warwickshire, Lancashire, West Sussex, East Sussex, Northhamptonshire, Gloucestershire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Derbyshire, Dorset, Somerset, Norfolk, Kent, Cumbria
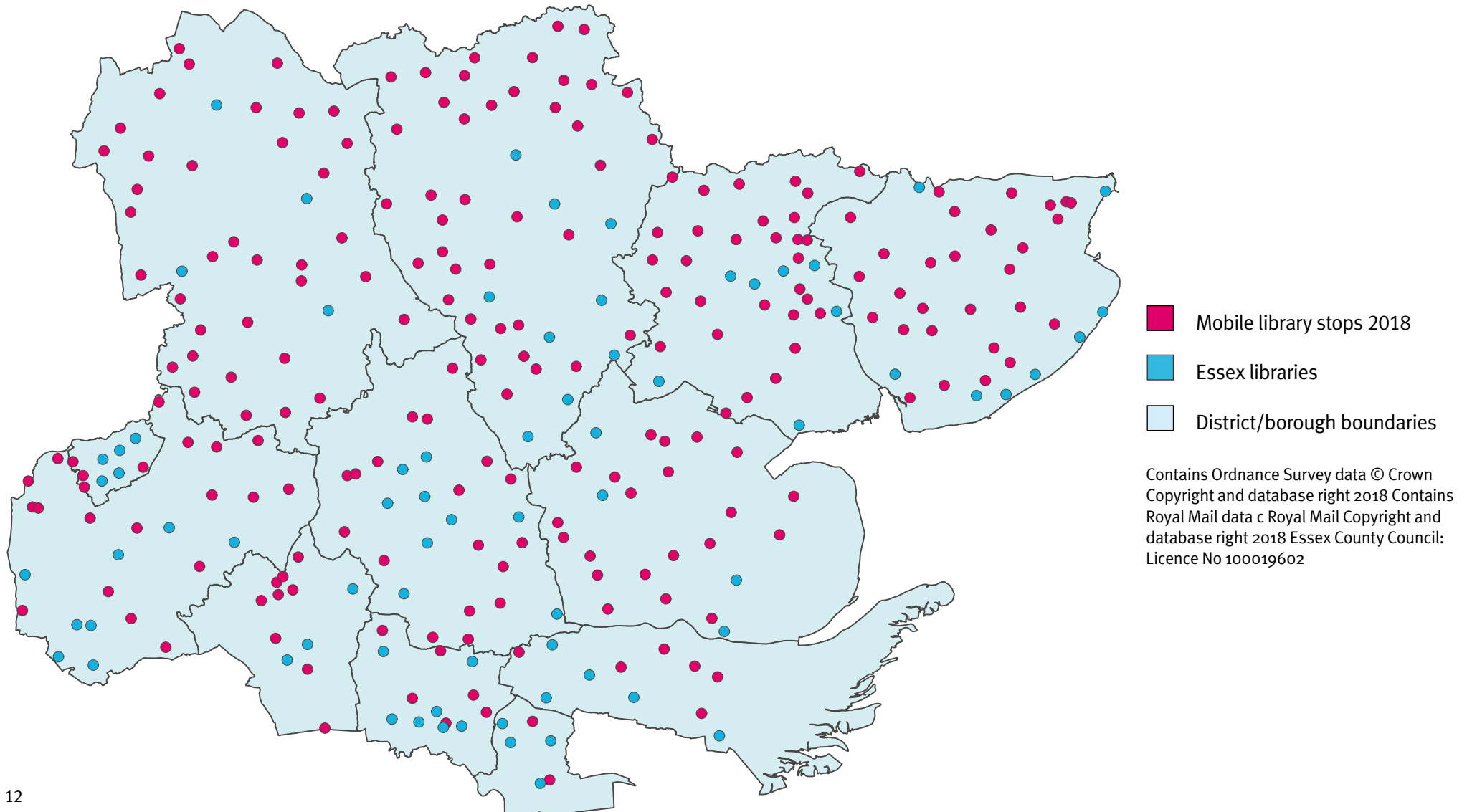
Source: Cipfa Benchmarking 16-17. Population / Authority run libraries (includes mobiles).
Outlier Lincolnshire excluded due to only having 2.

County	Total population	No of libraries	Council run libraries	Population per library based on current number of libraries	Population per library based on number of council run libraries
Lincolnshire	743,400	51	2	14576.47	371700.00
Worcestershire	583,100	23	18	25352.17	32394.44
Buckinghamshire	534,700	30	17	17823.33	31452.94
Oxfordshire	683,200	43	23	15888.37	29704.35
Leicestershire	683,000	51	24	13392.16	28458.33
Hampshire	1,360,400	53	48	25667.92	28341.67
Staffordshire	867,100	43	31	20165.12	27970.97
Surrey	1,176,500	54	44	21787.04	26738.64
North Yorkshire	604,900	43	23	14067.44	26300.00
Hertfordshire	1,176,700	48	46	24514.58	25580.43
Warwickshire	556,800	31	22	17961.29	25309.09
Lancashire	1,198,800	47	53	25506.38	22618.87
West Sussex	843,800	36	38	23438.89	22205.26
East Sussex	547,800	26	25	21069.23	21912.00
Northamptonshire	733,100	36	37	20363.89	19813.51
Gloucestershire	623,100	40	33	15577.50	18881.82
Cambridgeshire	651,900	42	35	15521.43	18625.71
Essex	**1,455,300**	**75**	**84**	**19404.00**	**17325.00**
Derbyshire	785,800	46	48	17082.61	16370.83
Dorset	422,700	33	26	12809.09	16257.69
Somerset	549,400	34	34	16158.82	16158.82
Norfolk	892,900	47	56	18997.87	15944.64
Kent	1,541,900	99	103	15574.75	14969.90
Cumbria	497,900	40	40	12447.50	12447.50
Suffolk	745,300	45	0	16562.22	
Devon	779,800	50	0	15596.00	
Nottinghamshire	810,700	60	0	13511.67	

Essex libraries and mobile library stops, April 2018

The map below shows where Essex libraries and mobile library stops are currently located. Other maps, showing libraries in relation to areas of deprivation and where there are clusters of libraries are in the Needs Assessment that supports this strategy. Data information for this map can be found at essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation.

Mobile library stops 2018

Essex libraries

District/borough boundaries

Contains Ordnance Survey data © Crown Copyright and database right 2018 Contains Royal Mail data c Royal Mail Copyright and database right 2018 Essex County Council: Licence No 100019602

Essex libraries use in 2017-18

5.3m
Visits made to Essex libraries

241,400
Active library members

4m
Loans of books and other items

74
Libraries in Essex

16%
Of Essex residents are active library users

1,200
People volunteered with libraries, 700 regularly, 500 for the summer reading challenge

25%
Public network computers are used 25% of the time available

31hrs
Is the average amount of time libraries are open each week

92%
Of users are satisfied with their library (CIPFA children's survey 2017 and adults 2016)

National Context

Essex County Council has a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service that lends books and other materials free to people who live, work or study in Essex and want to use it.

We have looked at best practice around the country and guidance from the government's Libraries Taskforce, but most importantly we have listened to the views of Essex residents and their needs. This is a library strategy for Essex.

What Essex people say

In spring 2018 Essex County Council ran public engagement and research to find out what people think about libraries, what they value and what their priorities for future library services are.

This included a countywide survey, interviews with users, focus groups with young people and public events for community groups, elected representatives and the public. More than 3,000 people responded. A summary of the research and engagement is published as a supporting document to this strategy.

Key points

- **Books and reading** are still far and away the top priority: that's what 90% of users visit libraries for now and what survey respondents say is priority for the future.

- **People use library services at different stages of their lives.** Children and young people are most likely to use them; Women use them more than men. Life changes such as becoming a parent, losing a job or retiring are triggers for using them more. People who don't use library services say they either don't need them or don't have time. Working age men are least likely to use them.

- **People value well-informed employees and volunteers** to help them and users are satisfied with the service they get.

- **People value having a local library**. Two out of five visit more than one library, either because they are near home and work, to access the books or materials they are interested in or, because the opening hours at different libraries are convenient to them.

- **Libraries are valued as safe social spaces** to find a quiet space, help, information, learning, social activities or simply shelter.

- **People want to get involved.** Around 1,200 people already volunteer in libraries, One in four would consider volunteering and eight community-run libraries are now open.

- **Some people want activities, some want quiet.** Some people want to be able to access more services and do more things in libraries; others worry that too many activities take the focus away from books and reading and libraries are no longer the quiet spaces they value. They suggested having quiet booths, zones, days or designated 'quiet libraries'.

- **Libraries are seen as valuable public spaces** that could be hired for community use in the evenings and at weekends: as rehearsal spaces or performance venues, for art exhibitions, for meetings and public celebrations.

- **Many recognise the budget constraints** and that hiring out spaces generates income to support the service. But there is a tension between this and the impact that charging for space might have on voluntary groups.

- **Young people do not feel libraries are designed and delivered to meet their needs.** The layout of libraries is a priority for them, to give space for study, reading, games and chilling out. They also want more digital provision and libraries open in the evenings.

Top six public priorities
(% level of support)

89%
Quality and range of books and other stock

70%
Well informed employees or volunteers to assist

66%
A local library

62%
Convenient opening times

35%
A range of children's events and activities

34%
Access to computers

What else could your library be used for
(% level of support)

71%
Adult learning classes

55%
Providing health information and advice

54%
Accessing other council services, e.g. council tax/housing

55%
Groups/activities run by the community

Why do we need a new strategy?

The way people use libraries and their expectations of public services are changing. Financial and demographic challenges are increasing. Standing still is not an option.

Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England, 2016-2021, Department for Culture, Media and Sport. [ii]

Libraries remain a valued part of the communities they serve. We have continued to invest in the service, for instance offering eBooks, improving our online catalogue and opening a new children's library in Chelmsford. But in the last five years, traditional use of libraries has significantly fallen.

"Free activities: that's really important. There are lots of single mums in Loughton - they may only have libraries as a place to go for free, to access activities for their little ones, and for themselves. It can be lonely for them."

Female Loughton library user, age 55

We know there are significant budget pressures ahead. The council can no longer afford to spend as much on it's services as before and must consider all options to deliver services in new and more efficient ways.

Technology is fast developing and the way people use libraries is changing. The number of people visiting libraries to borrow books is steadily falling. In the last five years, loans of books and other material have dropped 43%. Demand for public network computers fell 22% over the same period. The number of active library users (people who have used their library card in the last year) fell by 17% (from 291,000 to 241,400). [iii]

At the same time, online demand is rising. Loans of eBooks, eAudio and eMagazines rose 205%, from 61,000 to 186,000 over the period as these options became more readily available (eMagazines were not available before 2014) and as more people gained online access and devices.

According to an annual survey of electronic device use in the UK, 85% of adults owned a smartphone, in 2017, up from 52% in 2012; 78% own a laptop (up from 73%) and 68% own a tablet (up from 16%). The study also found that 10% of adults use an eReader daily and the percentage of 55 to 75 year olds owning smartphones rose from 29% to 71% between 2012 and 2017. It forecast that this upward trend would continue. [iv]
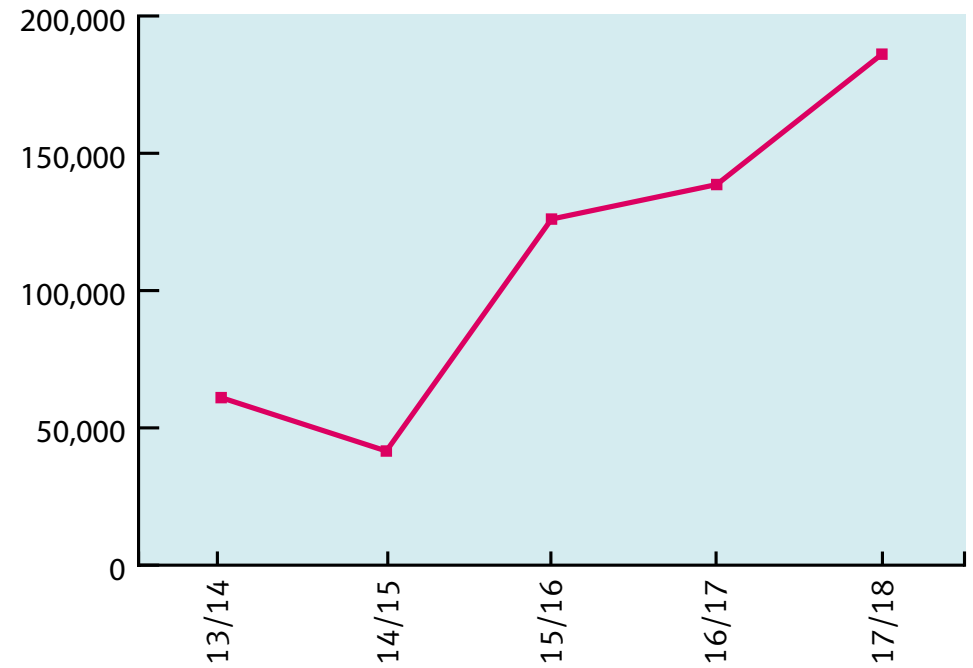
Graph 1: Annual loans

Year	Amount
2011/12	7,159,974
2012/13	6,311,754
2013/14	5,823,790
2014/15	5,259,998
2015/16	4,717,339
2016/17	4,410,717
2017/18	4,060,133
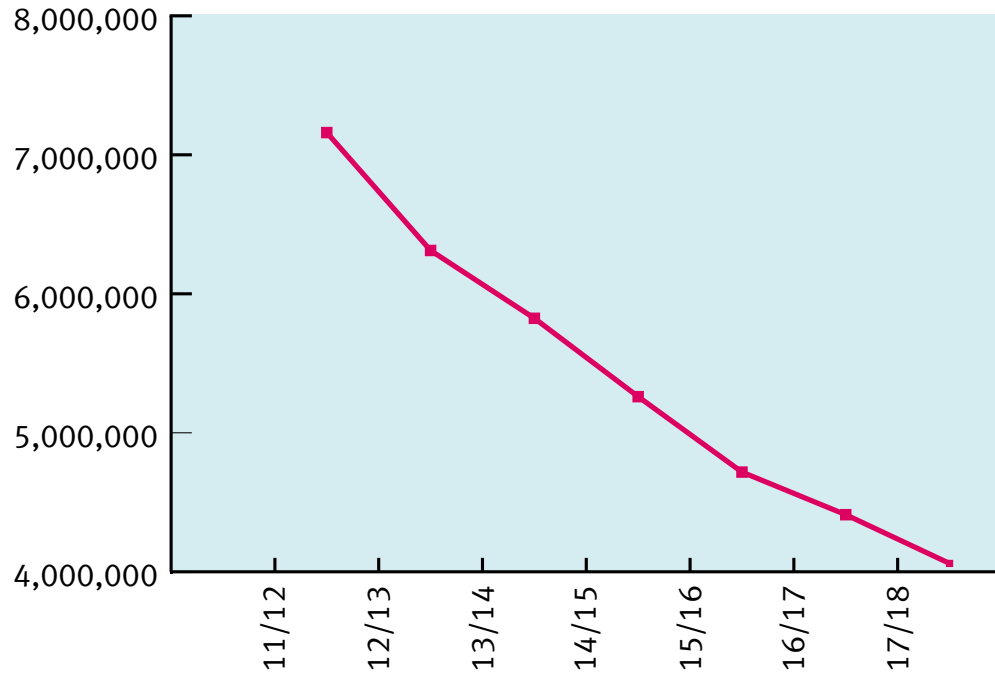
Graph 2: Loans of eBooks, eAudio and eMagazines

Year	Amount
2013/14	61,018
2014/15	41,571
2015/16	126,042
2016/17	138,620
2017/18	186,099

Covers eBooks and eAudio
and eMagazines from June 14

Technology presents us with a great many opportunities, and we are keen to re-imagine how residents' needs may be met in a digital world.

People in Essex are changing too. Essex's population is forecast to grow by 20% between 2014 and 2039, to 1.7m.[v] It is currently 1.48m. One in five of the population are aged over 65. By 2039 it is predicted that there will be 61% more over 65 year olds and 16% more under 16 year olds.

The impacts are varied, with a significant association with child poverty and lower educational attainment. These challenges are not consistently spread across Essex so our library service therefore needs to be able to 'flex' to recognise and respond to differing needs.

"We'd like chill out zones, quiet spaces, extended computer time, cafes, loan-an iPad, after school revision activities and post-school takeover time from 3-7pm."

Participant in a focus group for young people aged 12 to 18

We know that many Essex residents experience feelings of loneliness or isolation.[vi] These feelings do not discriminate by age or gender but we know people in rural areas, older people and new parents can be particularly affected. Libraries have a vital role to play in this. For example, Rhymetime sessions for babies and toddlers are activities where new parents can meet and socialise.

Libraries reach and support the whole community regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status or educational attainment. This is reflected in what people want from their library, be that a quiet place to study, a shared space for community events, or access to books to encourage a love of reading from early years to old age. This does however create challenges. We need spaces that work for all these audiences and needs.

Whilst we do not underestimate these challenges, the opportunities to create a sustainable service that has a lasting impact on the lives of Essex residents are great.

Doing nothing is not an option. If we do not reshape the service it will become increasingly irrelevant to people's lives, use will continue to fall while the costs of maintaining our ageing estate of 74 buildings will continue to rise.

Within five years it is highly likely that funding will run out and we will be forced to close libraries without a clear plan or alternative provision.

Budget and funding

The financial outlook for all of local government is challenging and as a public body it is important we spend taxpayers' money wisely. Demand for services is increasing and becoming more complex. Government funding is reducing. Over the last five years ECC has saved £597 million. This track record has enabled the council to maintain services and also invest for the future. However, we still face substantial challenges.

By 2021 the county council will need to identify £186 million a year of savings or income generation. [vii] The library service is required to contribute as much as possible and we expect the pressure on budgets to continue beyond 2021. We also anticipate that capital costs to maintain and refurbish the aging estate of 74 library buildings will increase over the next five years.

We need to target capital towards improving library spaces most in demand and take opportunities to generate financial benefits from development or sale of sites no longer required, that can be invested back into services.

ECC spends £13.25 a year per head of population on libraries, the fourth highest spend in England and 28% more than the average of £10.37. [viii] We would need to reduce libraries revenue by circa £3m to match county average spend on libraries per head. The cost per active library user in Essex is £80. [ix]

Essex Libraries budget 2018/19	
Gross expenditure	**£12,953.000**
Income	**£1,590.000**
Net expenditure	**£11,363.000**

How it is spent

- Employees
- Premises
- Books & Resources
- Supplies & Services
- Transport Related
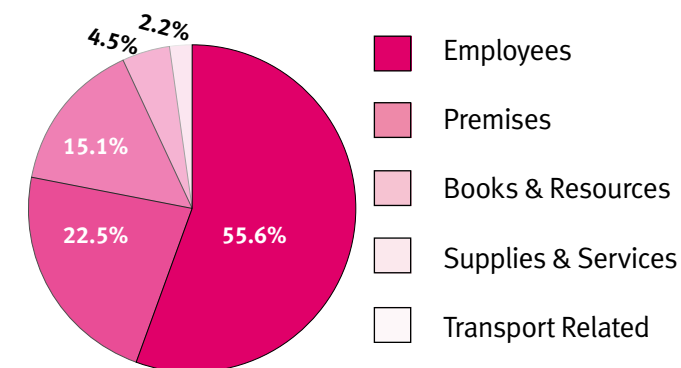
55.6%	Employees
22.5%	Premises
15.1%	Books & Resources
4.5%	Supplies & Services
2.2%	Transport Related

Our priorities

Our priorities are informed by what the people of Essex have told us.

To meet our statutory duty and the challenges ahead, and to seize new opportunities, we need to understand who uses the service, what their needs are and how needs are changing. We have looked at the results of our public engagement (p15), what comparable library services are doing and at what our own data tells us to inform our priorities. These are:

Put books and reading at the heart of what we do. Books are still at the top of the list of things people expect from libraries. Book borrowing remains by far and away the main activity people use libraries for: 90% of users say they come into borrow books and one in four do so at least every two weeks. The section about our Core Offer contains more information about this priority.

Create safe social spaces where people can read and study quietly or socialise and do activities without disrupting each other. People told us this was important. Whilst some said they would like to be able to access more services and do more things in library spaces, others worried that they would lose the quiet space that is so important to them. Our priority is to understand both these views and create spaces that can meet a whole range of needs.

Invest in and support our employees and volunteers so they remain well informed and have the right skills and equipment. We also heard about the value that people place on well-informed employees and volunteers. People are at the heart of the library service and ensuring they have the right skills and equipment is a priority (see p35) for more about this priority.

Create consistently good customer experiences wherever and whenever our library services are accessed. Customer satisfaction with Essex Libraries is high: 88% of library users in the 2018 household survey are satisfied with their local library service. But satisfaction varies from site to site and we know we can improve the online service.

Create a library service that fits people's lives and is convenient. Opening hours and convenience are important to library customers. Our priority is to use eLibrary and 'smart library' technology and work with communities to create a library service that continues to meet the needs of current users but also encourages new and returning users to the service.

"I feel safe here. No one is horrible to me; the staff are always nice and help me."

Chelmsford library user

"At home there's a TV everywhere, and in every room someone is watching TV or playing the Xbox and you can't read. In the library It...feels like you're in a place of nature – comfy chairs and you can imagine things when you're reading."

Children's focus group participant, aged 7-16 years

Our core offer and tiered approach

We propose to deliver a core offer through a range of physical and online services and take a tiered approach, based on evidence of need, to where we provide library services around the county in future. The needs assessment and the approach we have designed will enable ECC to meet its statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to all who desire to use it.

"We have to be careful not to lose the whole idea of the library –there still needs to be areas where people can concentrate and read without major noise and disruption."

Survey respondent

Our core offer

Over time, the range of activities taking place in libraries has expanded so they are, in a way, offering all things to all people. We think it is useful to define our core, free service. The core offer will be delivered through the following network:

- Libraries run by ECC alone or in partnership with other groups or organisations

- eLibrary services

- Mobile libraries

- Home library service.

The future service will reflect the Universal Offers [X] from libraries and the priorities our customers told us about as follows:

Books – we will make available for loan adults and children's fiction, non-fiction and audio books. We will review the library stock and how we spend the Book Fund to keep our stock modern, fresh, available in a range of formats and responsive to customer needs and trends. We will use insight from customer usage and best practice to define stock levels for each service tier and to target our spending on books. We will provide access to the library catalogue to search available materials, request materials, make payments, renew loans.

eLibrary (includes online services) – customers can already access a wealth of eBooks and reference material, browse our catalogue, reserve items and book events online. We will explore new technologies and how we can optimise current technologies to make it easier for customers to access library materials anywhere, anytime from their own devices. We will continue to invest in eContent such as eBooks, eAudio and online reference resources.

Digital access – We will continue to offer public access computers – targeting the resources where there is the highest need – and help people to develop their digital skills and confidence.

People – employees and/or volunteers will help people access library services and materials, and sign-post services offered by partners. We will support employees and volunteers to develop new skills and work in different ways as library services evolve.

Activities – our employees will continue to deliver activities for the community that provide cultural and creative experiences such as Essex Book Festival. We will continue to provide story times, Rhymetimes for young families, Summer Reading Challenge and other activities for children. We will offer a safe space for community led activities such as knit and natter and local book groups.

Learning – our employees will signpost learners to reference materials and our libraries will continue to provide space for study.

Space and Place – we will seek investment to provide modern, fresh, flexible spaces where people can easily find the information and resources they need and which are welcoming and practical for a range of age groups and diverse needs.

To ensure best value and best fit of our future service, we will review non-core services, for example:

- InterLibrary Loans

- Performance sets (music scores and play sets)

- Collecting performance sets at any location

- Newspapers - physical and digital

- Access to online courses.

We will also encourage volunteers and other organisations to take on running as many activities as possible, to free up library employees to concentrate on delivering the core service in a professional and effective way.

A tiered approach

A tier model for Essex library services has been developed to ensure that a library service is provided in appropriate locations across the county according to the needs of the community.

This approach focuses on library services, not buildings. The tiered approach is based on evidence of need for a library service taking account of proximity to other libraries, usage, population, social deprivation and social isolation. Library services could be provided in different ways and from different spaces than we currently use. Over the life of the strategy the service offer could change, depending on changing needs, the level of community involvement and resources available.

"When I go into the library at Hadleigh or Rayleigh the computer services are always being used. I think this is a crucial service for those with no internet access."

Survey respondent

We have conducted a countywide analysis of need for libraries, taking account of a combination of factors. We have used evidence from national and local sources such as the Office for National Statistics, the NHS and our library systems as well as feedback from users and staff. The Library Services Needs Assessment for 2018-19 is published as a supporting document to this strategy.

It explains the approach in more detail and contains the evidence on which the tiers will be decided.

We will monitor these factors over time to check provision is still appropriate to needs.

Based on the needs assessment, we propose placing current libraries into four tiers, continuing to provide a public library service in tiers 1 and 2 and supporting community or other partner organisations to run library services in tier 3.

The criteria we will use to assess need for library services in each location are shown in table 1 (opposite).

Over the next five years we will look to reduce the number of library buildings that we manage. We will maintain at least one tier 1 hub library in each district, in a main town with good transport links and shopping facilities, which is also likely to be a centre for employment.

We will also maintain a network of tier 2 services and offer support to communities to run tier 3 services around the county.

We will seek partnerships to support ECC provision of library services in tier 2 and support community groups or other partners to run library services in tier 3. This creates the opportunity for library services in tier 3 to be run by people who live and work in the community and who best understand the unique needs of their community. We think local groups can deliver a service that 'best fits' local needs and helps to deliver reading learning and improve literacy in their community.

Table 1: Library service needs assessment evaluation criteria

Criterion	Evaluation criterion	Weighting of category
Location	Proximity to other libraries. Libraries clustered within two miles, by foot (Google Maps) of each other will be ranked at lower need*	**30%**
Usage	Active users	**25%**
Population	The number of libraries per head of population in each district. Based on current figures, not projected growth. Districts with more people per library ranked higher for need	**25%**
Deprivation	The deprivation level of the lower-layer super output area (LSOA) the library's postcode is in, as identified in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)	**15%**
Social Isolation (district)	Prevalence of new parents** and % of residents over 65 as indicators of higher risk of social isolation	**5%**
	Weighted score (100%)	**100%**

*A local library was important to 66% of survey respondents; 39% of library users travel to more than one library (BMG Research survey for Essex Libraries, 2018). 63% of Essex library users walk to the library (CIPFA survey of adult users, 2016); Travel distance by car or public transport has not been taken into account at this stage. This will be considered when making decisions on the future of individual libraries.

** Measured by fertility rates in each district. New parents and older people are recognised as being at risk of social isolation. [xi]

Table 2: Tier descriptions and alignment to our core offer

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
	A comprehensive and efficient service provided by ECC to meet its statutory duty		Not required to meet ECC's statutory duty	
Brief description	Hub libraries at least one per district/borough, may also rent/lease space to other service providers. Location normally in the main town but informed by local knowledge such as proximity to other facilities, transport and population size	Library services in areas where there is a need for a library, managed by ECC and delivered in partnership with the community or other partners	Library services where no library is needed in order to have a comprehensive and efficient network, but where ECC wishes to support the provision of library services run by a community organisation or other partners with ECC support	Locations with low evidence of need. A library service in these locations is not required as part of a comprehensive service
Management and Support	Managed by ECC as part of our statutory provision of a comprehensive network	Managed by ECC as part of our statutory provision of a comprehensive network and delivered in partnership with the community or other partners	Run by the community or other partners with ECC support. If no suitable offer for a location is received and accepted within six months of Cabinet approval of the strategy, we intend to re-consult on the future of that library. This six-month period may be extended to up to 12 months if proposals have been received but not agreed - or if we believe that deliverable proposals are likely to be forthcoming during that period	Not required as part of a comprehensive library service although it may be possible for a community library to be run in these settlements, if a suitable proposal from a community or partner organisation is received

Table 2: continued

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Library Location	Main Town	Throughout Essex, where there is need for an ECC library	Throughout Essex, where ECC believes it is desirable to provide a library and a suitable partner has been found	
Opening times and smart library access	Minimum 40 staffed hours per week, Monday to Saturday, plus smart library (self- service) where viable. We will look to extend opening hours, including into the evening if this can be resourced by volunteers or can be made affordable	Typically 16-32 hours per week plus smart library (self-service) where viable. We will look to extend opening hours, including into the evening if this can be resourced by volunteers or can be made affordable	To be agreed in partnership	
Range of books and stock	Wide range of stock	Mid range of stock with opportunity to search and request stock from other libraries	Mid - Low, to be agreed in partnership	
Digital access (computers and advice)	Yes	Yes	No	

Table 2: continued

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
People	Majority ECC employees, with volunteer support	A mix of ECC employees and community volunteers	To be agreed in partnership but with majority community volunteers	
Activities	A high level of activities promoted by ECC	Some ECC activities with opportunity for community to participate	Some opportunity for ECC activities but activities will mainly depend on community provision	
Space and place	Space for reading, study and activities in a town centre location	Space for reading and study, typically in a shared, accessible location; space for activities may be in the library space or elsewhere in the vicinity	To be agreed with partner	

Table 3: Essex libraries by tier per district

The tables on the following pages places each of the 74 libraries into one of the four tiers, using the criteria described above.

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Basildon	Basildon	1
	Billericay	1
	Fryerns	4
	Laindon	2
	Pitsea	2
	Vange	4
	Wickford	1

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Braintree	Braintree	1
	Coggeshall	3
	Earls Colne	3
	Halstead	2
	Hatfield Peverel	4
	Kelvedon	4
	Sible Hedingham	4
	Silver End	4
	Witham	1

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Brentwood	Brentwood	1
	Ingatestone	3
	Shenfield	3

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Castle Point	Canvey Island	1
	Great Tarpots	3
	Hadleigh	3
	South Benfleet	3

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Chelmsford	Broomfield	4
	Chelmsford	1
	Danbury	4
	Galleywood	4
	Great Baddow	2
	North Melbourne	2
	South Woodham Ferrers	2
	Springfield	3
	Stock	4
	Writtle	4

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Colchester	Colchester	1
	Greenstead	2
	Prettygate	4
	Stanway	3
	Tiptree	3
	West Mersea	3
	Wivenhoe	3

Table 3: continued

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Epping Forest	Buckhurst Hill	4
	Chigwell	4
	Chipping Ongar	2
	Debden	4
	Epping	2
	Loughton	1
	North Weald	4
	Waltham Abbey	2

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Harlow	Great Parndon	3
	Harlow	1
	Mark Hall	4
	Old Harlow	2
	Tye Green	4

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Maldon	Burnham-on-Crouch	2
	Maldon	1
	Southminster	4
	Wickham Bishops	4

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Rochford	Great Wakering	4
	Hockley	3
	Hullbridge	4
	Rayleigh	1
	Rochford	2

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Tendring	Brightlingsea	3
	Clacton	1
	Frinton	3
	Harwich	2
	Holland-on-Sea	4
	Manningtree	3
	Walton	3
	West Clacton	3

District	Library	Proposed Tier
Uttlesford	Dunmow	2
	Saffron Walden	1
	Stansted	4
	Thaxted	4

How we will work

Alternative delivery models: Essex Libraries are currently delivered in-house, managed by ECC. There are alternative delivery models that some other authorities use, such as setting up a local authority trading company, transferring the whole service to a commercial company or charitable trust, or partnering in a joint venture. At this time ECC intends to keep the service in-house, albeit community and Tier 3 libraries will be run by a partner organisation.

We will continue to review options over the life of the strategy.

Engagement - we will review our communication channels and develop a communication and marketing approach that maximises digital communication and makes accurate and timely information about our services, activities and events available to customers to easily access in a self-service way.

We will market library services to attract new customers and improve the future sustainability of the service.

Logistics - we will review the current reservations system, management systems and logistics network to ensure the service is provided as efficiently as possible.

Resources

In the context of such significant budget pressure over the coming years, the council needs to do more than simply identify savings each year. It must reshape and reimagine services to make them streamlined, sustainable and fit for the future. We need to think very differently about how we operate, be more innovative, entrepreneurial and commercially minded.

Reducing the size of the library service estate will save on running and capital costs and free up resources to invest in improving other aspects of the service. Withdrawing library services from tier 4 locations, where they are not required to provide a comprehensive library offer will save an estimated £974,000.

As plans develop we will seek capital investment to modernise library spaces.

We will explore additional sources of funding for our services including:

- Grants for specific projects such as the recent redevelopment of Chelmsford Children's Library funded by Chelmsford City Council through the Community Infrastructure Levy and Arts Council England

- Encouraging local fundraising to support local delivery of library services

- Generating income from hire of library space, chargeable events, sale of complementary products and by reviewing our current chargeable services

- Moving some services to lower cost digital delivery channels where appropriate.

What about the buildings?

This strategy is about the service, not the buildings. But we know that library buildings are often seen as valuable community assets and many people will be concerned about their future use. We will work in partnership to make the most efficient use of public buildings, whether owned by ECC, public bodies or community organisations. Most library services will be in shared spaces by 2024.

Once library locations have been placed in tiers, we will review running costs and the condition of library buildings in Tier 1 and 2 with a view to bringing all services up to a consistent, modern standard and finding the most effective ways to respond to local needs. This includes considering most appropriate location for the service.

In future, library services could be provided from a range of outlets, such as shared locations with other services, new spaces provided as part of housing or retail developments or co-located in community centres, shops, leisure centres or other locations.

We would expect community libraries would be run from premises owned or paid for by the community groups. Buildings that are no longer required by the library service will be incorporated into the council's property strategy.

Our eLibrary

We use the term eLibrary to cover a range of online services. Customers can currently browse the catalogue and reserve books online to collect at their local library. They can download ebooks, read newspapers and magazines, book events, volunteer or find out about the home library service or mobile library timetable.

> *"I prefer using technology for learning because stuff in books are not updated, for example the recent resignation of the Home Secretary won't be in a book"*
>
> Children's focus group participant

Public engagement has highlighted a need to target and tailor our services to new generations of tech-savvy users. Younger users in particular use technology on a daily basis and want to be able to study and access services online.

To make this ambition a reality, we will review our processes and technology to make it easy to do as much as possible online: communicate with our employees, transact and pay for things we charge for, such as room bookings and some events (core services are all free).

This will include:

- Improving our management system to enable efficient operating processes and deliver a high quality customer experience

- Bringing e-content such as eBooks into the main library catalogue so that all resources can be searched and accessed in one place

- Exploring "smart library" technology to enable access to library buildings, materials and services outside of staffed opening hours (see highlight box below)

- Improving the range of payment options available to customers

- Updating our website

- Reviewing our electronic communication channels and 'online chat with a librarian' service

- Reviewing the content and availability of eBooks and eAudio Books

- Investing in our public computers and review print services

- Exploring the option of loaning eReaders to increase range of accessible materials and access to eBooks

- Exploring options for improving access to library services on mobile devices such as smart phones

- We will help customers to access eLibrary services by reviewing our help and guidance, which may include adding step by step video guides on the website e.g. downloading eBooks, searching the catalogue.

Smart libraries

Smart libraries can increase opening hours and use of library services by enabling customers to use their library card to enter the library outside staffed hours. It is similar to the secure ATM lobbies some banks have. People could browse, study, borrow and return books using self-service machines or even hire the library for meetings or activities. We will explore the potential this technology offers.

Opening hours and access

Opening hours are important to our customers: 62% of survey respondents said convenient opening hours were important to them. Alternative opening hours, for example, evening opening, would encourage 39% of respondents to use libraries more.

But this is one aspect of library services that is most difficult to get right. ECC cannot afford to provide more staffed opening hours but if we change opening hours to suit some users, they won't necessarily suit others.

Since we last reviewed opening hours in 2011, technology and lifestyles have changed, affecting what library users need and what they see as convenient.

Our aim is to create an overall pattern of library opening that will maximise access to libraries through a combination of:

- Staffed opening hours

- Smart library technology

- Community supported opening hours

- Improved eLibrary which people can access 24 hours a day.

By staffed we mean paid ECC employees and unpaid library volunteers. Some libraries are already opened outside the staffed hours by volunteers from other groups or organisations that share space with libraries. We will seek to encourage more of this.

We will draw on a wide evidence base, including usage data to develop a consistent approach to opening hours across the tiers and respond to changes in demand over time.

See the table on p27 for the opening hours we propose to offer at libraries in each tier, based on current evidence.

Our People

Employees

Our library employees are at the heart of our business. Research and engagement feedback shows they are hugely valued and trusted by our customers.

Essex Libraries is committed to ensuring that our employees have the skills and competencies they need to help deliver our future vision. Having well informed staff or volunteers was the 2nd highest priority for respondents (70%) to the countywide survey. This view was mirrored across both library users and non-users.

As the service evolves we will support employees to develop skills and be able to work in different ways, such as being out and about in the community more, collaborating with partners and keeping up to date with technology.

We will train and support our employees so they feel valued and can continue to deliver the brilliant service our customers appreciate. As the service changes, we will support employees to build on the expertise they already have to act with honesty, integrity and empathy, to help customers use library services easily and to resolve any issues they have.

We will recognise the good work of our employees to motivate them to continuously improve the service. To deliver a modern, fit for purpose library service, we will prioritise ensuring our employees develop the following skills:

- Excellent customer service

- Deep local knowledge to enable effective signposting to services and activities

- Digital knowledge and expertise to support customers in accessing information and improving their skills

- Securing opportunities to generate income and external funding to enable us to improve our settings and service offer.

This approach will enable us to offer a consistent experience for our customers across library services.

Volunteers

Essex Libraries offers a wide variety of volunteering opportunities, including delivering the home library service, helping to run clubs and activities and supporting the annual Summer Reading Challenge.

In 2017-18, 1,200 residents, aged from 14 to 94, volunteered in our libraries. All of our volunteering opportunities are advertised online at volunteeressex.org/news/library-volunteers. [xii]

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting and enhancing our library service and will continue to do so in the future. It is important to Essex Libraries that our volunteers complement the work delivered by our paid employees and work alongside them, enabling us to develop and improve the experience of our customers whilst helping to meet our budgetary challenges.

We aim to ensure our volunteers feel valued and get something worthwhile from the time they give us. In order to do this, we will work closely with Volunteer Essex to ensure their interests and skills are well matched to our opportunities and that they are fully trained and properly supported by our paid employees and fellow volunteers.

We will also take every opportunity to recognise and celebrate the contribution they make to the library service and our customers.

Our volunteers will also be supported to ensure that our customers experience a consistent level of service wherever they access our services.

Customers

Our customers are diverse, of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. We will continue to provide our services in a way that has regard to our duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. An equalities impact assessment will inform the implementation of this strategy. This includes having a range of stock that reflects and celebrates our diverse community in Essex, and promotes good relations across all equality areas including race, disability, gender, religion and sexual orientation, making library spaces and services accessible to people with disabilities, having transgender-friendly membership and providing a home library service for people who can't get to the library owing to age, disability or caring responsibilities.

We will continue to seek feedback and use insight about customer preferences to update our stock and services over time.

Community involvement

Essex Libraries are intrinsically connected to our communities. We have an active membership of over 241,000 residents and work closely with community groups and partner organisations across the county.

We see our libraries as supporters of community life and part of the cultural infrastructure of Essex. Our libraries act as community hubs; places where people socialise, volunteer, access vital community services through partners and exchange information and ideas. We will provide vibrant, accessible spaces to enable communities to prosper.

Public engagement shows there is an appetite among residents and groups to be more involved with libraries. One in four survey respondents would consider volunteering in libraries while eight community-run libraries are now open and more interest in opening community libraries was shown at the public events. We will engage our communities to ensure that they can provide valuable input on aspects of the services including our approach to stock purchasing.

Community-run libraries

Eight community libraries currently exist in Essex. They are volunteer-run and owned and managed by local groups, not ECC. They do not form part of the statutory library provision of the county. Some have existed for many years, others are new. In 2017 alongside the mobile libraries review we supported some communities to set up community libraries in places that didn't already have one.

Current community-run libraries are based in: Beaumont-cum-Moze, Chrishall, Finchingfield, Great Bromley, Jaywick Library Access Point, Lamarsh, Ramsey and Steeple Bumpstead.

We want to hear from groups interested in setting up community-run libraries in tier 3 locations, where no library is needed in order to have a comprehensive and efficient network, but where ECC could support the provision of library services run by a community or other partner organisation with ECC support.

We will look to identify and reach agreement with partners within six months of Cabinet approval of the strategy. If no suitable offer for a location is received and accepted within six months we intend to re-consult on the future of that library.

This period may be extended to up to 12 months if proposals have been received but not agreed - or if we believe that deliverable proposals are likely to be forthcoming during that period.

We are also interested in hearing from organisations interested in partnering with ECC to run services in tier 2, where there is a need for a library service and will consider viable offers from community groups in tier 4 locations.

We hope community organisations will take the opportunity for people who live and work in the community and who best understand the unique needs of their community to run services in ways that fit local needs.

Many community-run libraries now operate successfully across the country. The government's Libraries Taskforce describes two emerging models: "a community managed library which is delivered by the community, rarely has paid staff, but often has some form of ongoing local authority support and may be part of the public library network. Or, a community supported library, which is led and funded by the local authority, has paid professional staff and is supported by volunteers."

What does good look like?

We will consider this strategy to have achieved our ambition for libraries if:

- Overall use of library services, whether online or in person, increases

- Smart technology and working in partnership to maximise opening hours means people can access libraries at times that suit them

- We have made the service financially sustainable

- Customers understand the core library offer and make good use of it, as measured by customer surveys and user insight

- Customers receive consistently good service across all library services, as measured by reported satisfaction rates in regular CIPFA surveys

- We know what our customers need and target books and materials to meet those needs

- The service is economic, efficient and effective

- Libraries are continuing to help create great places to grow up, live and work and to help people get the best start and age well

- We regularly monitor how the service is meeting needs and have accurate information to enable us to measure the impact and outcomes

- Income from activities helps reduce costs or enhance the service we provide

- The service is reaching new communities and bringing in new customers

- Libraries help people to help themselves and live full and independent lives

- We have reduced costs and increase effectiveness through co-location with community based services such as Job Centres, Citizens Advice Bureau, Post Offices, other voluntary and community groups.

Glossary

CIPFA
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy; collates bi-annual survey data from library users across England and Wales; analyses data from library authorities and provides benchmarking information for library authorities.

Digital access
Ability to see and use library services and information online; within a library: access to public network computers and help or advice to learn digital skills.

eBooks
Books available in digital format online.

eLibrary
Essex Libraries' online offer; includes the website, online catalogue, eBooks and eMagazines to download.

Online services
Another term for eLibrary. Also refers to being able to access other websites and services.

PN
Free-to use public network computers, available in libraries across the county, connected to the internet.

Smart library
Technology that enables card holders to swipe in to gain secure access to libraries outside staffed opening hours; connects membership, security, power and lighting systems so they can operate without employees present.

Appendices

These appendices are published as supporting documents to the draft strategy. They are available online at essex.gov.uk/libraries-consultation or ask to see them at your local library.

Essex Library Services Needs Assessment 2018

Your Community, Libraries and You, public engagement summary report

Equality Impact Assessment

[i] Source: CIPFA Library Statistics 2016-17

[ii] Source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Libraries Deliver, 2016

[iii] Source: Appendix 2 - Essex Library Services Needs Assessment 2018

[iv] Source: https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/mobile-consumer-survey.html

[v] Source: Headline statistics from Sub-National Population Projections 2014, Essex Insight www.essexinsight.org.uk/Resource.aspx?GroupID=40&ResourceID=1314

[vi] Social Isolation in Essex, ECC Strategic Planning & Commissioning, 2013; Social Isolation & Loneliness: Literature & best practice review, research and recommendations, ECC Organisational Intelligence; Social Isolation of Pregnant Mothers and Families with Young Children, ECC Organisational Intelligence, July 2016

[vii] ECC Organisation Strategy 2017-2021

[viii] CFO Insights, per capita spend of 27 county library authorities 2016-17

[ix] CIPFA benchmarking data 2016/17

[x] Source: www.librariesconnected.org.uk

[xi] Social Isolation in Essex, ECC Strategic Planning & Commissioning, 2013; Social Isolation & Loneliness: Literature & best practice review, research and recommendations, ECC Organisational Intelligence; Social Isolation of Pregnant Mothers and Families with Young Children, ECC Organisational Intelligence, July 2016

[xii] www.volunteeressex.org/news/library-volunteers