

**Forward Plan reference number:** 'Not applicable'

<b>Report title:</b> Extending the Community Outreach and Literacy team roles and vehicle using the Future Libraries reserve funding	
<b>Report to:</b> Councillor Chris Whitbread, Chancellor of Essex	
<b>Report author:</b> Juliet Pirez, Head of Libraries	
<b>Date:</b> 24th January 2024	<b>For:</b> Decision
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<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All of Essex	

## 1. Everyone's Essex

- 1.1 The Everyone's Library Service Plan, 2022 -2026 delivers against the Council's broader aims of Renewal, Equality, Ambition as well as supports equality of opportunity and our Levelling Up and Climate Change agenda.
- 1.2 The plan has a strong focus on supporting Literacy and reaching new audiences. Most library staff are front line, working across 74 libraries delivering services to customers, so, to ensure Essex Library Service and the literacy offer reached wider audiences, the service created some temporary specialist Community, Outreach and Literacy Team roles.
- 1.3 These roles were specifically tasked with supporting and delivering the literacy and levelling up objectives within the Everyone's Library Service Plan, 2022-2026. They have successfully delivered new services and have reached new audiences, and, so, the service would like to extend these roles beyond their current contracts and explore how to maintain the services delivered to local communities within the main library structure.
- 1.4 Extending the roles aligns with the aims of the Everyone's Essex, particularly:
  - Levelling up outcomes for families - We will work to address inequalities affecting children and families by focusing on recovery from the pandemic, tackling family poverty, mental health support, emotional wellbeing, and healthy, active, and productive lifestyles, and making sure that we engage hard to reach groups.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Agree to draw down £340,000 from the Transformation Reserve in 2024/25 to extend the temporary specialist Community Outreach and Literacy Team roles (6 FTEs) until March 2025, and the Outreach driver role (1FTE) and the outreach vehicle until December 2024 to allow the current service provision to continue as part of the delivery of the Everyone's Library Service Plan, 2022 –26.

## 3. Background and Proposal

- 3.1 The library plan delivers 3 Service ambitions: Library Service and Literacy, Communications and Infrastructure and Supporting communities and levelling up
- 3.2 Many of the projects currently delivered by the team focus on the levelling up priorities which are a main feature of pillars one and three in the Library Plan, looking at how the service can engage with those areas of the community that need support, promoting books and reading and developing activities that ensure all preschool and school age children and supported to achieve, and have the best start and opportunity to improve literacy and reading attainments.

- 3.3 The temporary Community Outreach and Literacy Team roles ensure the service has the capacity and the resources to work with external partners such as The Literacy Trust, The Arts Council, Libraries Connected, NHS, Multiply, Mind, etc and deliver exciting projects to encourage people to read and enjoy storytelling and the arts.
- 3.4 The roles have enabled the service to develop our libraries turning them into interactive places where families and people of all ages feel comfortable and welcome, and expand our offer to create new services and experiences for residents. The roles and the outreach vehicle have also increased our reach into the community, promoting the Library service at community events across the county, and highlighting the importance of reading to improve literacy levels in both children and adults.
- 3.5 Since January 2023, the Community Outreach and Literacy team have attended 333 events engaged with over 23,000 customers (of whom 14,000 were children) and have signed up 1550 new library members.
- 3.6 They have promoted the new Literacy Areas installed in 2022 in every one of Essex's 74 libraries and have helped to train staff in the benefits of the literacy stock for customers. Across these areas, a total of 50,053 books were loaned between June 2022- June 2023, and the Community, Outreach and Literacy team have been instrumental in promoting them in local communities such as schools, who have been pleased with the resources that we are offering to children with literacy difficulties, commenting that they have appreciated the low reading age stock.3.7 They have also initiated several new activities and programmes for the Essex community which have created opportunities for volunteering across Essex, with reading support for adults and children, as well as developed Lego® in Libraries session leaders.
- 3.7 They have enabled the service to engage with and promote the benefits of reading and engaging with the library service to improve literacy levels to over 40 partners including Essex Country Parks, National Literacy Trust, Year of Numbers, Explore Learning, ACL (Adult Community Learning). They have joined forces with charities such as Read Easy, Shannon Trust and Trust Links, as well as worked with public services such as Essex Police and the Fire Service. Essex Family Wellbeing Service, Adult Community Learning, and local businesses such as Hopefield Animal Sanctuary and Colchester Zoo.
- 3.8 The team have also supported the service with temporary library closures, such as Hatfield Peverel during its closure due to RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete). The team visit the local train station every fortnight to promote the library service and have signed up new members. In addition to this, the Outreach mobile visits the village hall every Wednesday.
- 3.9 The obvious value to the service these roles bring e.g., new, additional partnerships and resources, promotion of the service to local communities is clear but the service has to work within a restricted staffing budget, so in order for these additional services to continue to be offered, it needs to look at how the services provided can be absorbed and provided by the main staffing establishment and library budgets.
- 3.10 The outreach vehicle was extremely busy in 2023, visited various settings across the county, attending 155 events, and attracting 7806 visitors. In December 2023, for example, it took on the role of a Santa Bus was incredibly successful, with all tickets being taken and several walk-ins also joining in on the day. Over 50 people volunteered to support the Santa events from both ECC (Essex County Council) and external partners.

Extending the Community Outreach and Literacy team roles and vehicle using the Future Libraries reserve funding

- 3.11 It is proposed to draw down £340,000 to extend both temporary specialist Community Outreach and Literacy Team roles until March 2025, and the driver role and the outreach vehicle until December 2024. £270,000 will be used to extend the specialist Community Outreach and Literacy Team roles and £70,000 will be used to extend the driver role. This will cover the salaries for the Community outreach and Literacy team roles and the driver role and the lease of the vehicle.
- 3.12 Extension of the temporary specialist Community Outreach and Literacy Team roles beyond their current contracts will enable the service to continue to deliver some clear objectives committed to in the Everyone's Essex Library plan 2022 -26. and will provide the service with the time and capacity to consider how best to embed the activities of the outreach and literacy team into the business-as-usual service delivery in the long term.
- 3.13 Extending the driver role and the outreach vehicle until December 2024 will enable the service to plan this in a meaningful way by reviewing the team's outcomes and objectives to ensure that they can continue to be achieved in the future.

#### 4. Links to our Strategic Ambitions

- 4.1 This report links to the following aims in the Essex Vision
- Enjoy life into old age
  - Provide an equal foundation for every child
  - Strengthen communities through participation
  - Develop our County sustainably
  - Connect us to each other and the world
- 4.2 This report links to the following strategic priorities in the emerging Organisational Strategy 'Everyone's Essex':
- A high-quality environment
  - Health wellbeing and independence for all ages
  - A good place for children and families to grow

#### 5 Options

- 5.1 Do nothing (**Not Recommended**): This will result in the existing team disbanding in June 2024 and the existing services provided by the team ceasing. Everyone's Library Service Plan, 2022 -26 is committed to improving literacy, Supporting Communities and Levelling up and this team currently support these commitments. Without these roles, the current service provided would cease. The outreach service delivered by the outreach vehicle would also cease.
- 5.2 Agree to (**Recommended**) extend the Community outreach and Literacy Team roles to March 2025 to enable the service to have time to consider how to embed the services they offer into the existing staffing establishment and extend the outreach vehicle and driver until December 2024 to allow the current service provision to continue for the remainder of this year as part of the delivery of the Everyone's Library Service Plan, 2022 –26.

#### 6 Issues for consideration

##### 6.1 Financial implications

- 6.1.1 In April 2022, a decision was made relating to the adoption of the new plan for libraries: 'Everyone's Library Service 2022 – 2026 (FP/284/01/22). It was agreed that £2.4m would be

Extending the Community Outreach and Literacy team roles and vehicle using the Future Libraries reserve funding directed to Everyone's Library service and £800,000 was approved for drawdown to costed schemes. This left £1.6m in the Transformation reserve for libraries.

6.1.2 Since then, drawdown of £112,500 has been formally approved for Colchester Children's Library refurbishment. The remaining Everyone's Library Service reserve allocation has been reviewed as part of internal governance processes for budget setting for 2024/25. As a result of that, a CMA (Cabinet Member Actions) will be brought forward at the right time for other costed schemes.

6.1.3 Following Member support, this CMA requests drawdown of £340,000 to fund 6 FTE for the Community Outreach and Literacy team until March 2025 and 1 FTE Outreach driver and vehicle until December 2024. The lease for the vehicle is payable until December at a cost of £22,000 and will need to be paid even if the driver's contract were not extended. All drawdowns will be in 2024/25 and will be funded by the Transformation Reserve.

6.1.4 Three out of the seven postholders will have continuous local government service of two years if they remain in post for the duration of the contracts, so, they may be eligible for redundancy. The service will need to accommodate any associated costs from the Transformation Reserve budget assigned to the Everyone's Library Service. The service will bring forward another CMA to approve this drawdown if it is needed in the future.

## **6.2 Legal implications**

6.2.1 The Council's financial regulations state that all drawdowns from reserves must be approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance.

6.2.2 Drawing down of money from reserves does not authorise any expenditure that is a key decision or any significant changes to ECC services or funding which must be authorised by the relevant Cabinet Member.

## **7 Equality and Diversity Considerations**

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

7.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

7.3 The Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

## **8 List of Background papers**

- Everyone's Library Service plan 2022-2026

<b>I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Councillor Christopher Whitbread, Chancellor of Essex</b>	11.03.24

**In consultation with:**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Councillor Mark Durham, Cabinet Member for The Arts, Heritage, and Culture</b>	08.03.24
<b>Executive Director, Corporate Services (S151 Officer)</b> <i>Please send to your Head of Finance/Finance Business Partner who will arrange S151 sign off.</i> <b>Karen Williams, Head of Finance, and Adrian Osborne, Head of strategic finance and insight on behalf of Nicole Wood</b>	02.02.24
<b>Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)</b> <b>Laura Edwards on behalf of Paul Turner</b>	01.03.2024