

Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment

Reference: ECIA445631926

Submitted: 19 August 2022 16:18 PM

Executive summary

Title of policy / decision: Introduction of Home Office visa and citizenship application service to Chelmsford Library

Policy / decision type: Cabinet Member Action (CMA)

Overview of policy / decision: Essex Libraries have been approached by Libraries Connected to deliver the Home Office's visa and citizenship application checking service (UKVCAS) from Chelmsford Library. Libraries Connected are sub-contracted by Sopra Steria to deliver the Home Office's visa application service. They have experience of delivering the service through many other Council run libraries and it has proven mutually successful, so introducing Chelmsford Library as another application centre is their preferred delivery method. We have contacted other local authorities who report successful working relationships with Libraries Connected in relation to this service as well as good financial performance, benefitting the wider Library services.

The visa application service helps people who have already completed their visa application online to scan and submit their documentation and biometric data. This means applicants won't have to post off vital documents, like passports, and can complete their visa application locally.

The service is currently delivered by Sopra Steria at an alternative location in Chelmsford on Victoria Road. Initially the service will be lifted and shifted from the existing location into Chelmsford Library on a licence basis, with the existing staff moving across still employed by Sopra Steria and the service being delivered 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. After a pilot period, Essex County Council will employ their own staff to deliver the service and will be paid to deliver the service, covering the salary costs of the two staff and generating income for the library service to support the delivery of the Everyone's Library Service Plan.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: Sopra Steria currently operate the UKVCAS service from a rented office in Chelmsford and are planning to cease this arrangement and deliver from a more permanent site in Chelmsford. This provides certainty of continuing to offer the service in Chelmsford and that customers can continue to complete their visa application locally.

Essex Libraries are renowned as a trusted service and a safe space and are well aligned to the Levelling Up agenda, providing inclusive, accessible services for all residents. Libraries already work with a range of partners and have the opportunity to join partners up and signpost to each other's services to provide a more seamless and integrated experience for the customer.

Chelmsford Library benefits from being situated near to good public transport links, parking facilities and the Library itself has sufficient space to dedicate to the service point. Longer term there may be the opportunity to enhance the customer offer by offering appointments during library opening hours at times when the existing service offer in Victoria Road does not, for example until 7pm in the evening or at weekends.

The library will also be able to target a number of its services to this new audience accessing the libraries, which may give these customers access to services they weren't previously aware of. Customers applying for visas and citizenship will experience improved quality of life and feeling of security and belonging to their community by getting a quick and smooth experience when applying for a visa or citizenship; conversely a bad experience and a difficult application process would be detrimental to their health and family experience.

The financial return that the library service will receive from delivering this service once it is fully up and running will enable the profit raised to be reinvested in improving the library service offer as part of the Everyone's Library Service Plan.

Executive Director responsible for policy / decision: Mark Ash (Climate, Environment and Customer Services)

Cabinet Member responsible for policy / decision: Louise McKinlay (Deputy Leader and Community, Equality, Partnerships)

Is this a new policy / decision or a change to an existing one?: New policy / decision

How will the impact of the policy / decision be monitored and evaluated?: The pilot period will involve the existing trained, experienced staff employed by Sopra Steria moving across to Chelmsford Library and delivering a like for like service in the new location. Once new staff have been recruited, the service will move over to being managed by ECC. The pilot period will be used to monitor appointment demand and availability for consideration of future appointment offering. ECC will also work in partnership with Sopra Steria with support from Libraries Connected to ensure appointment availability is accurately reflected on the booking system (hosted by Sopra Steria) and KPIs are being met and reviewed both during the pilot period and thereafter.

Will this policy / decision impact on:

Service users: Yes

Employees: Yes

Wider community or groups of people: Yes

What strategic priorities will this policy / decision support?: Strong, Inclusive and Sustainable Economy, High Quality Environment, Health, Independence and Wellbeing for All Ages

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Economy?: Levelling up the economy

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Environment: Transport and built environment, Minimise waste

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Health: Promoting independence

What geographical areas of Essex will the policy / decision affect?: All Essex

Digital accessibility

Is the new or revised policy linked to a digital service (website, system or application)?: Yes

What steps you have taken to meet the digital accessibility: Although this decision relates to a new service being delivered at Chelmsford Library, there will be no change to the existing method for customers to book their appointment or to the software used by staff to deliver the service – these will be identical. ECC will not be responsible for either of these elements as we will be the venue for the service to be provided from, the responsibility for these will rest with Sopra Steria the service provider and/or the Home Office whose software is being used. Library staff will not have access to the booking diary for appointments. Libraries Connected are managing this relationship between library delivery sites and the providers nationwide.

Nevertheless, Essex Libraries will likely place some guidance on our own website to signpost customers to the correct method to book appointments. This has not yet been done but when it is done the service will liaise with the Content Team at Essex County Council to ensure compliance with accessibility requirements for the website.

How have you tested accessibility?: N/A - see above

How will you monitor and maintain accessibility once it has gone live?: N/A - see above

Equalities - Groups with protected characteristics

Age

Nature of impact: None

Disability - learning disability

Nature of impact: None

Disability - mental health issues

Nature of impact: None

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: None

Disability - sensory impairment

Nature of impact: None

Sex

Nature of impact: None

Gender reassignment

Nature of impact: None

Marriage / civil partnership

Nature of impact: None

Pregnancy / maternity

Nature of impact: None

Race

Nature of impact: None

Religion / belief

Nature of impact: None

Sexual orientation

Nature of impact: None

Rationale for assessment, including data used to assess the impact: For customers using the Visa service, initially at least, the offer provided in Chelmsford Library will mirror the existing offer provided in Victoria Road exactly in terms of the staff and opening hours providing the service. The distance between the two sites is 5 minutes walking distance and the two sites have equally good locations situated near the bus and rail stations in the city centre. Customers currently travel from all over Essex to the appointment in Chelmsford so the change of

location will make no difference. The library service has taken advice and an implementation checklist from Sopra Steria the existing service provider as well as from Libraries Connected, who support library authorities across the country, to ensure Chelmsford Library is ready to deliver the service.

For existing library customers, the space that has been created to deliver the service from has been achieved only by making small changes to the library layout. There has been no change to the library service offering and specific additional resource will be delivering this additional service so there will be no impact on a reduction in staff levels within the library.

Libraries are already fully inclusive spaces that have a statutory duty to provide services relevant to all groups with protected characteristics and therefore the library is a perfect fit for delivery of this new service.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Levelling up - Priority areas & cohorts

Children and adults with SEND, learning disabilities or mental health conditions (taking an all-age approach)

Nature of impact: None

Children on Free School Meals

Nature of impact: None

Working families

Nature of impact: None

Young adults (16-25 who have not been in education, training or employment for around 6-12 months)

Nature of impact: None

Harlow

Nature of impact: None

Jaywick and Clacton

Nature of impact: None

Harwich

Nature of impact: None

Basildon (Town) housing estates

Nature of impact: None

Canvey Island

Nature of impact: None

Colchester (Town) - Housing Estates

Nature of impact: None

Rural North of the Braintree District

Nature of impact: None

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What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Equalities - Inclusion health groups and other priority groups

Refugees / asylum seekers

Nature of impact: Positive

Extent of impact: Low

Homeless / rough sleepers

Nature of impact: None

Offenders / ex-offenders

Nature of impact: None

Carers

Nature of impact: None

Looked after children

Nature of impact: None

Veterans

Nature of impact: None

People who are unemployed / economically inactive

Nature of impact: None

People on low income

Nature of impact: None

Working families

Nature of impact: None

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Libraries are already places which provide support and signposting for groups in this category, for example as locations of Warmth for the homeless during winter or access to free borrowing of books and use of computers/internet facilities for refugees. Library staff will be well trained to help with any queries with this group, which may even be a positive aspect of the move into the library (but is as yet untested).

The nature of the service being delivered (namely to support those making visa/citizenship applications) will bring more of these types of customers through the door of Chelmsford Library than would otherwise be the case. This gives the library the opportunity to promote and tailor the offer of their services for these groups and make these prominent to the new audience who may not be library members and reach an untapped audience. These services could include: book stock (such as books in other languages or books helping customers make a citizenship application), ESOL resources and groups, access to the internet.

Libraries are already fully inclusive spaces that have a statutory duty to provide services relevant to all priority groups, working with a range of health and community partners such as Provide, NHS, Child and Family Wellbeing Service to achieve this, and therefore the library is a perfect fit for delivery of this new service.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Equalities - Geographical Groups

People living in areas of high deprivation

Nature of impact: None

People living in rural or isolated areas

Nature of impact: None

People living in coastal areas

Nature of impact: None

People living in urban or over-populated areas

Nature of impact: None

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exactly in terms of the staff and opening hours providing the service. The distance between the two sites is 5 minutes walking distance and the two sites have equally good locations situated near the bus and rail stations in the city centre. Customers currently travel from all over Essex to the appointment in Chelmsford so the change of location will make no difference: Chelmsford is an excellent central location for access from different parts of Essex due to the regularity of buses, trains and community transport serving Chelmsford.

The visa application service helps people who have already completed their visa application online to scan and submit their documentation and biometric data. This means applicants won't have to post off vital documents, like passports, and can complete their visa application locally – ECC providing this service from Chelmsford Library provides continuity of provision and ensures customers still have the option to complete the application locally.

The library service has taken advice and an implementation checklist from Sopra Steria the existing service provider as well as from Libraries Connected, who support library authorities across the country, to ensure Chelmsford Library is ready to deliver the service.

Moving the service into the library will enable the service to analyse appointment demand and take up. Theoretically it may be possible longer term to deliver the service from additional libraries, since the library service has an excellent geographical spread across 74 communities in Essex – this presents the possibility of improving the impact for some of these groups in the future but is as yet untested.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Families

Family formation (e.g. to become or live as a couple, the ability to live with or apart from children)

Nature of impact: None

Families going through key transitions e.g. becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities, onset of a long-term health condition

Nature of impact: None

Family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities

Nature of impact: None

Families before, during and after couple separation

Nature of impact: None

Families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown

Nature of impact: None

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The library service has taken advice and an implementation checklist from Sopra Steria the existing service

provider as well as from Libraries Connected, who support library authorities across the country, to ensure Chelmsford Library is ready to deliver the service.

Longer term the service will analyse the take up of appointments and investigate the possibility of delivering appointments at weekends or in the evenings, which may help families get an appointment quicker or at a more convenient time to them, but this will not be reviewed until after the pilot period.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Climate

Does your decision / policy involve elements connected to the built environment / energy?: Yes

Do you know what products, materials, and qualified built environment professionals you will be using?

Are you maximising the opportunity to source materials locally and maximise use of sustainable materials such as wood?: Yes

Are you using a qualified architect / design team / consultant with the experience and capability to design and secure planning permission to deliver to the highest carbon zero building standards?: N/A

Are you clear that the builder, sub-contractor is qualified and capable of delivering climate resilient buildings (noting risks including subsidence, flooding, overheating), to the highest net zero carbon build quality?: N/A

Is your proposed development / building using the best practice guidance and advice on design quality, climate change and health?

Are you using the design quality and advice provided by the Essex Design Guide?: N/A

Are you using the Climate Change guidance and advice provide by the Essex Design Guide?: N/A

Are you providing a policy compliant development which accords with the District Local Plan policies?: N/A

Are using the Health and Wellbeing guidance provided by the Essex Design Guide?: N/A

Have you provided a costed net zero option for consideration?: N/A

Is your proposed development / building as efficient as possible?

Is the Energy performance Certificate (EPC) rating of the achieving and EPC A+ or net zero carbon standard?: N/A

Have opportunities to reduce energy use through the use of smart digital systems been considered?: N/A

Does your development by design avoid the need for air conditioning?: Yes

Does your new development have water efficiency measures in place?: N/A

Do you know where your energy is coming from and how much of it comes from renewable sources?

Are you maximising opportunities to use onsite renewable energy (e.g. roof top solar panels) to deliver this service?: N/A

Are you maximising opportunities to use onsite renewable energy (e.g. roof top solar panels) to deliver this service?: N/A

Is your new or extended development using a renewable heat source e.g. district heating or a form of heat pump?: N/A

Is your development resilient to climate risks including flooding, overheating and subsidence?

Is your site at risk of coastal erosion? Is there a plan in place to protect the coastline: if the coastline is being allowed to erode, this may impact the lifetime of your site.: N/A

Have you reviewed environment agency to ascertain your flood risk? Do you need to put in place mitigation such as sustainable drainage?: N/A

Water is scarce and needs to be absorbed into the land wherever possible. Are you prioritising nature based flood risk mitigations such as sustainable drainage, water butts, planting and ponds which protect against water scarcity?: N/A

Are you using external planting, green walls and green roofs to insulate the building and provide shading to cut risks of overheating?: N/A

Is your development supporting active travel and minimising pollution?

Does your site allow connection to key public transport and active travel routes?: Yes

Are you using Green Infrastructure to interrupt the pathway of carborne pollutants to the public e.g. use of hedges, shrubs and trees?: N/A

Have you provided space for secure cycle parking, showering, cycle and walking pathways on site etc?: Yes

Does the building have adequate space for recycling and waste separation?: Yes

Does your decision / policy involve designing service provision and procurement to minimise freight and staff travel and enable use of active and public transport options?: No

Does your decision / policy involve elements connected to waste?: No

Nature of impact

Built Environment / Energy: None

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Moving the service into the library will enable the service to analyse appointment demand and take up. Theoretically it may be possible longer term to deliver the service from additional libraries, since the library service has an excellent geographical spread across 74 communities in Essex – this presents the possibility of reducing the amount of travelling for customers and thereby lessening the environmental impact in the future but is as yet untested.

For existing library customers, the space that has been created to deliver the service from has been achieved

only by making small changes to the library layout.

With one exception, all equipment that will be used to deliver this service have been recycled: either by equipment being moved across from the existing site to the new site; or by reusing equipment currently unused in other parts of the County Hall building that can be repurposed. The only new equipment is the network link required on site to the Home Office network for staff to access their software.

It is not anticipated that the service being provided will generate any waste, but in the unlikely event that it does (for example copies of documents that need to be printed or copied), County Hall already has excellent recycling provision for recycling waste and paper. Libraries also have ink bins for the recycling of ink cartridges used in printers as well as ECC's own corporate scheme.

As stated above, the service is currently delivered from Chelmsford for the entire county and what will be delivered in the short term will mirror this offer and so there will be no change. Longer term the service will analyse the take up of appointments and investigate the possibility of delivering appointments at weekends or in the evenings, which may help families get an appointment quicker or at a more convenient time to them, but this will not be reviewed until after the pilot period.

What actions have already been taken to mitigate any negative impacts:

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your ECIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more of the groups / areas identified?: No

Details of person completing the form

I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance: I confirm that this has been completed based on the best information available and in following ECC guidance

Date ECIA completed: 19/08/2022

Name of person completing the ECIA: Chris Kelly

Email address of person completing the ECIA: Chris.Kelly1@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Climate, Environment and Customer Services

Your service area: Customer

Your team: Library Service

Are you submitting this ECIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?: No

Email address of Head of Service: juliet.pirez@essex.gov.uk