

Equality Impact Assessment - head of service review

Reference: EQIA374587575

Submitted: 30 March 2022 22:35 PM

Executive summary

Title of policy or decision: Everyone's Library Service 2022 - 2026

Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): Purpose: To set high-level aims for the Essex Library Service to be worked on over the next 4 years in the areas of:

- (1) Library Service and Literacy;
- (2) Communications and Infrastructure;
- (3) Supporting Communities and Levelling Up

The Plan is linked to ambitions in Everyone's Essex: Our Plan for Levelling Up the County 2021- 2025

Aims and Outcomes:

There are 15 outcomes to be achieved over the 4 years of the Plan. These are:

- Supporting children and adults to improve their literacy
- Encouraging people to enjoy reading for pleasure
- Increasing the range and diversity of online resources
- Introducing relevant and exciting events and activities to engage and inspire new and existing library service users
- Growing volunteering opportunities to expand the services we can offer through our libraries
- Benefitting from a programme of library refurbishments throughout the county
- Using our updated digital and IT services to improve the customer experience
- Working with partners to provide joined up and equal access to additional services
- Supporting the levelling up agenda by focusing resources in areas that most need them
- Providing residents with skills and support to help them achieve their aspirations wherever they live
- Doing more to encourage residents to read, for example through Essex's Year of Reading
- Using data to better understand the habits and interests of our library users
- Marketing our services in dynamic and engaging ways using Instagram and other relevant media
- Seizing opportunities to help educate and inform people on critical issues such as climate change
- Engaging with residents to promote local events

The principles, themes, and commitments of Everyone's Essex: our plan for levelling up the county 2021 to 2025 are woven through Everyone's Library Service 2022 – 2026.

Economy

With the focus on literacy for all age groups, this plan supports ECC's ambitions to tackle education inequalities - a driver in levelling up the economy. There are also plans to support people to improve employability skills helping them in the job market.

Environment

Through a programme of refurbishment, optimising the use of technology for staff and residents, and developing initiatives to reduce waste, the plan will contribute to the commitments to Net Zero and minimising waste.

Family

The commitment to support children to become school ready and develop their reading skills contributes to the education outcomes for families.

Health

By engaging with residents and communities to shape the service and events, working in partnership with other organisations, and continuing our outreach services, we can help to reduce social isolation and contribute to the wider health commitments.

Everyone's Library Service 2022- 2026 also helps to meet the equality objectives set out in the Organisation Plan 2021/22. In particular by having a focus on literacy and supporting people to develop employability skills we contribute to tackling causes of disadvantage, ensuring that all Essex residents can access good jobs and an excellent education, regardless of their backgrounds.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: Strong, Inclusive and Sustainable Economy, High Quality Environment, Health, Independence and Wellbeing for All Ages, A good place for Children and Families to Grow

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Enable inclusive economic growth: Good jobs, Levelling up the economy

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help people get the best start and age well: Net zero, Minimise waste

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help create great places to grow up, live and work: Healthy lifestyles

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Transform the council to achieve more with less: Educating outcomes, Levelling up outcomes for families

Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or project?: a new policy (or decision)

Please provide a link to the document / website / resource to which this EqIA relates:

<https://essexcountycouncil.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CabinetOfficial/Shared%20Documents/0422%20-%20Everyone%E2%80%99s%20Library%20Service%202022%20-%202026/FP-284-01-22%20Cabinet%20Paper%20Everyone%27s%20Library%20Service.docx?d=w42892982cab447689a1c3ad1533b2cbb&csf=1&web=1&e=Dd89Cc>

Please upload any documents which relate to this EqIA, for example decision documents:

<https://essexcountycouncil.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/sites/CabinetOfficial/Shared%20Documents/0422%20-%20Everyone%E2%80%99s%20Library%20Service%202022%20-%202026/FP-284-01-22%20Cabinet%20Paper%20Everyone%27s%20Library%20Service.docx?d=w42892982cab447689a1c3ad1533b2cbb&csf=1&web=1&e=Dd89Cc>

Assessing the equality impact

Use this section to record how you have assessed any potential impact on the communities likely to be affected by the policy (or decision): In preparing this Plan we have considered the existing data we have on our current library usage and users. The COVID pandemic and the closure of the libraries in that period significantly affected the data which could be collected in 2020 and 2021.

However, in 2019-20 (the last year unaffected by pandemic restrictions), the library service had 226,000 active users, 4.3 million visits, 3.9 million loans, and over 400,000 e-resources were borrowed.

To understand better how the ambitions in this plan may impact our residents, we collected demographic data as part of a public consultation. We engaged an external company to help us collate, analyse, and report on the feedback from that.

Consultation data: (A) engaging as widely as possible

Our communication approach for the consultation was designed to get a breadth of replies from as wide a range of people as possible including those who don't currently use libraries .

Social media was key to reaching younger populations and hard to reach groups. We proactively used the

demographic data received during the consultation to target promotion to specific areas, age groups and organisations, for example Mums groups, Community groups and Business groups. We reached more than 200,000 people through posts on our ECC and Essex Libraries social media channels as well as through a Facebook advertising campaign.

We sent out information to every school in Essex and reached out to both Essex Universities. We engaged directly with key groups including Young Essex Assembly, Epping Youth Forum, faith leaders, library clubs and groups, partners and groups who use library spaces, library employees and volunteers, and wider ECC employees.

Library staff went out to town centres and schools, engaging directly with residents about the plan and survey using information displays and handing out postcards with information about the consultation to encourage participation.

To extend the reach we asked partners to use their networks, for example:

Essex districts, boroughs, city, towns and parish councils

Essex Youth Service and Essex Young Assembly group

Facebook community groups and Essex is United

Local and national groups like the Rural Community Council Essex, Essex Rural Partnership and the Arts Council.

We communicated directly to around 80,000 residents through our e-newsletters, this includes approximately 40,000 library users. The consultation also featured on the ECC Homepage which gets on average 37,000 visitors a month. It has also been on the Essex Libraries website and all our social media channels.

Offline we engaged with local, regional and national press generating coverage in many local newspapers and on local radio stations via interviews, which presented the opportunity to talk more about the consultation. Posters and pop up banners were displayed in libraries and other community venues.

There was additional direct engagement through meetings with national and regional bodies including Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Libraries Connected, and The National Literacy Trust.

Consultation data: (B) Response rate

A total of 2,213 responses were analysed.

These were made up of:

2,185 individual survey responses of which 167 were paper copies and 86 online Easy Read responses

28 online Group responses

Consultation data: (C) Demographic data of individuals with protected characteristics compared with Essex population and Essex library users (where data is available)

Summary

We note that when comparing the demographic profile of respondents to the wider population/library users, we have an overrepresentation of female respondents (almost always the case with every consultation), an overrepresentation of older respondents (again, very typical with consultations), and the district comparisons look like they align quite well.

Gender:

A higher proportion of individual responses were from those identifying as female (70%) than in the Essex population (51%).

The proportion of library users identifying as female is 53%.

5% of the responses preferred not to say/left gender blank compared with 14% with the same user profile.

Age

37% of respondents are aged 65 and over compared to 26% in the Essex population. The proportion of library users aged 65 and over was 31%.

There was a lower response rate among the younger age groups (under 16, 16 – 24, 25 – 34) than in the Essex population.

We were aware through the consultation that response rate was low for these groups and had targeted comms

and promotion of the survey through social media channels including paid for social media which had a reach of over 220,000.

We engaged separately through webinars with the Young Essex Assembly and the Epping Youth Forum, which although not a formal consultation response, gave us some insight into the views of younger people.

Disability

71% of respondents stated no impairment, 5% with a hearing impairment/deaf, and 1% with learning difficulties was recorded. The library service does not collect this data. In 2017 it was estimated that 2% of the Essex population had a learning disability and 6% had a sensory impairment which will include hearing impairment but is not an exact comparison as it would include other sensory impairments. This data is limited but there appears to be some correlation between survey responses and the wider Essex population.

Due to the importance to ensure inclusion of these groups, face to face meetings were held with the National Literacy Trust to help encourage participation. Overall, 97% of respondents support the need to provide books and resources in formats that meet changing needs.

Ethnicity

A higher proportion of people identifying as Asian / Asian British completed the survey (3%) than in the Essex population. For White British, a lower proportion completed the survey (86%) than identify as White British in the Essex population (91%) Other ethnicities were reasonably consistent between the responses and the Essex population

The consultation did not collect data on the other protected characteristics.

Consultation data: (D) Data gathered from Groups and their representation of people with protected characteristics.

Summary

We also had a survey for groups and organisations. We asked the person completing the survey to tell us if the group primarily works with or represents people from groups broadly reflecting the protected characteristics. People were able to choose more than one category of people to support e.g., gender and age

28 groups in total responded. However, we are unable to say how many people each group was representing or how many people this represented in total.

Age:

18 groups responding represented older people

19 groups represented children.

This will be important when we consider services for younger and older people

Disability:

15 groups represented people with disabilities

This will be important when building on outreach and other services and building improvements.

Gender:

20 groups represented women

18 groups represented men

This is important when we consider resources, events, and activities.

Gender reassignment

11 groups represented transgender people

This is important when we consider resources, events, and activities.

Pregnancy / maternity

11 groups represented pregnant women and new mothers

This is important when we consider resources, events, and activities

Race

12 groups represented Black and Ethnic minority people

This is important when we consider resources, events, and activities

Religion / belief

12 groups represented Religious or faith communities

This is important when we consider resources, events, and activities

Sexual Orientation:

12 groups represented the LGBTQ + community

This is good representation and will be important when we consider resources and events.

Consultation data: (E) How we will use the data from the consultation to shape the plan and its implementation

Feedback from the consultation, together with views from other key stakeholders, informed the final version of the plan going forward for adoption.

There was broad agreement with all the proposals in the plan, with all but one having a good majority in favour, often with strong agreement. The proposal to 'explore options for providing chargeable activities alongside the existing free activities' had exactly 50% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing, 31 % neither agreeing nor disagreeing and the remaining 19% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This was mirrored in the Group survey responses with a slightly larger proportion neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Groups also differed in being even more strongly supportive (100%) with the proposed aim to support children in being school ready and develop their reading skills, with 93% agreeing with the plans aim to help adults improve their literacy for everyday life.

Group responses were also broadly aligned in developing the mobile library offer to support service outreach and community engagement with 86% in agreement

Reducing digital exclusion and improving digital skills scored 100% support from the groups who responded.

There were therefore only minor changes needed between draft and final plan. These were largely to shift emphasis in response to what is important to residents and to give greater clarity on some of the proposals.

Approach

Essex Library Service already comply with their duty under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality and diversity, and this plan will ensure that continues.

More older people responded to the survey than is represented in the population, so we are using some of the direct engagement with the younger users to ensure we provide services to meet their needs. For example Events, service and activities for young adults / teenagers

Targeted and localised comms to particular groups

Local libraries are flexible in their events, activities and stock to target local needs.

Our calendar of events links to national events, such as Black History Month, LGBTQi month and festivals of different faiths. Having so much participation in the survey from groups representing or working with people covering a range of protected characteristics gives us good evidence to continue to provide resources, events and activities such as these and we will ensure this continues.

The plan commits the service to keeping the stock appealing and up to date and this will be in line with the policy to ensure it reflects and celebrates our diverse community and promotes good relations across all equality areas including race, disability, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. In addition, an Equality Impact Assessment has been done on the stock policy to ensure Essex Libraries complies with the statutory obligation to promote equality and diversity.

The plan highlights the importance of our mobile and home library offer and community outreach programmes which improves access for people at risk of being socially isolated, residents with long term conditions or disabilities, communities which are hard to reach, and people who might find it difficult to visit a library.

The Plan is aligned to the Levelling Up ambitions and its aim is to ensure services are targeted in areas of deprivation, which often have an over representation of people with some protected characteristics. The equality and diversity information gathered from the consultation and engagement process will be really helpful in the implementation stage. We will deliver services across the county but will take account of local need when designing specific initiatives, for example, identifying where job clubs are most needed, or reading groups to support refugees with literacy and isolation.

Next steps

The final plan is now going forward to Cabinet for a decision to adopt it. How we implement the plan including how we engage with local communities and residents about plans for their areas, will follow any required engagement and governance processes.

Does or will the policy or decision affect:

Service users: Yes

Employees: Yes

The wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities: Yes

Which geographical areas of Essex does or will the policy or decision affect?: All Essex

Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?: No

Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?: No

Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies?: Yes

Is the new or revised policy linked to a digital service (website, system or application)?: No

Description of impact

Description of Impact. If there is an impact on a specific protected group tick box, otherwise leave blank. You will be given the opportunity to rate identified impacts as positive, negative or neutral on the next page: Age, Disability - learning disability, Disability - mental health issues, Disability - physical impairment, Disability - sensory impairment

I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics: I confirm that I have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics

Describe any actions that have already been taken to mitigate negative impacts on any of the protected characteristics: There are no negative impacts identified.

To make the Plan accessible we will publish the plan in a range of formats including:

Web pages as well as pdf to improve digital accessibility.

Printed copies of the plan and make them available from libraries.

Easy Read version on line and in print

Large Print printed copies .

A robust Communications plan is in place to promote the final version of the plan which will include a variety of ways to promote the plan including:

Animation

Promotional Video

Social media posts, graphics

Media interviews

Face to face engagement

Events.

This should ensure a wide reach and accessibility to the Plan for all.

Age

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Children and Young people

The Plan sets out an ambition to work with partners to support our children to develop their reading skills and to catch-up on missed education. We will work with Education, ACL, charities, and the Essex Education Task Force to support children to develop their literacy skills, explore how our libraries can be used to support education catch-up and continue to provide a safe space for young people to study and learn outside of the classroom. We may therefore be able to provide more support for students in secondary and tertiary education as they use the space for independent study after school or college.

Older People

87% of respondents were aged 65 & over which reflect figures published by the Office of National Statistics which predicts the need for residential home places in Essex for those aged 65 & over increasing by 12% by 2025. The aim to develop the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, will help support this group.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The service already provides the safe space and opportunities for children and students to improve literacy skills, read, learn, and study. So, we would be building on something we already do.

For groups responding there was 100% support for children to be school ready

The plan builds on the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, which support outreach in residential homes and communities to support the older population.

Disability - learning disability

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: The Plan sets out an ambition to work with partners to support residents with learning disabilities

Working closer with our partner groups will enable us to expand our outreach, ensuring awareness of the services are made available to existing / new users and to those who can't access our physical sites.

The plans aim to develop the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, to support community engagement. By working with partner organisations it is hoped that a wider span of residents can be reached.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The Service already works with The Local Linked Support team, who hold drop-in sessions for adults with learning disabilities or autism to talk about their goals and how to achieve them by connecting with community resources and opportunities

The plan builds on the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, to support people with learning disabilities.

Disability - mental health issues

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Alongside range of books and other resources, and activities already on offer through our libraries, we will work with partners to look at the additional support for

residents to improve their mental wellbeing, and social isolation. This will build on services which are already provided.

Extent of impact: Medium

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The library service currently runs the Reading Friends scheme, which aims to tackle loneliness and isolation which are major factors in mental wellbeing.

The plan builds on the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, to support people with mental health and wellbeing.

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: All library buildings are accessible and have induction loops.

Some libraries have accessible toilet facilities.

We work with partners to provide support for people with physical impairments.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The plan will help build on the mobile and outreach service, and the home library service, ensuring that residents who are unable to access Library Buildings can still access the Library Service.

The plan sets out our ambitions to work more with partners to support users.

Disability - sensory impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Sensory walls and sensory equipment is already in place at some libraries to support children and adults with specific needs, such as learning disabilities, sensory impairment, and dementia.

The plan allows us to build on our work with partners to look at the additional support residents need for their wellbeing

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The plan allows us to build on this.

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your EqIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?: 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 EqIA completed: 30/03/2022

Name of person completing the EqIA: Adrienne Knight

Email address of person completing the EqIA: Adrienne.Knight@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Organisation Development, People and Service Transformation

Your service area: Transformation Delivery and Support

Your team: Delivery and Assurance

Are you submitting this EqIA on behalf of another function, service area or team?: Yes

Name of person completing the EqIA: Adrienne Knight

Function: Corporate and Customer Services

Service area: Corporate and Customer

Team: Libraries

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