Report title: Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024
Report to: Cabinet
Report author: Suzanna Shaw, Director, Customer Services
Date: 23 July 2019   **For:** Decision
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County Divisions affected: All Essex

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 This report asks the Cabinet to agree the Essex Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024 as amended following public consultation. The revised strategy does not envisage the closure of any library during the life of the strategy. The revised strategy focuses on developing libraries with local communities so that the library service can thrive and that the decline in usage is addressed.

2. Recommendations

2.1 To note the strong public engagement with the consultation on the draft Essex Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024, and the results of that consultation as set out in section 4, detailed in appendices 1 and 2.

2.2 To agree to adopt the Essex Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024 at appendix 3.

2.3 To support the people of Essex to reinvigorate and reverse the downward trend in library use and in particular to work closely with, and support community groups or organisations to implement viable and sustainable community-run libraries according to the support offer set out in section 5.13.

2.4 To note that the revised strategy does not envisage the closure of any library during the life of the strategy

2.5 To authorise the draw down of £3m from the Transformation Reserve as set out in paragraph 6.1.3 to set up and support Community-run Libraries and invest in modernising libraries and technology. Further draw downs to be considered in the normal budget process in later years

3. Summary

3.1 In early 2018 we surveyed 25,000 Essex residents on what they thought about our library service. We also visited libraries and spoke to people there and held community events to gather ideas. Following this we drew up a draft

library strategy and needs assessment to consider the future of the Essex library service. This proposed investment in main libraries and encouraging the community to take over responsibility for smaller libraries, if there was interest.

3.2 In November 2018, Cabinet approved a 12-week public consultation on that draft strategy. There was an impressive response to the consultation. We received nearly 22,000 survey responses and 80 expressions of interest to run community libraries. Nearly 3,000 people told us that they would be interested in volunteering to work in or support libraries.

3.3 The Council welcomes these responses. We have analysed and responded to the feedback received – which is set out in appendices 1 and 2. The draft strategy has been updated in the light of the feedback and the Cabinet is now asked to agree the strategy attached to this report at appendix 3.

3.4 People have told us that they value libraries not just for the books but also as spaces for people to meet, learn and exchange ideas.

3.5 The updated strategy doesn't take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, recognising that different communities may want different things. It aims to transform the service to make it more relevant to the way we live now and fit for the future.

3.6 There was significant interest from the community in taking over responsibility for delivery of library services in many places – we received 80 expressions of interest from communities and several libraries received more than one expression of interest. The interest from the community in volunteering and in taking over the delivery of library services is extremely encouraging. Coupled with the large response to the consultation it suggests that the community may now be more engaged with their library service than was previously the case. We would like to use this enthusiasm to see if we can together reverse the decline in library usage.

3.7 We need to ensure we spend money wisely and we believe the expressions of interest shown will help ensure this by reversing the decline in the usage of the library resources. If this does not prove to be the case and the decline continues then there will be a time when it will be difficult to justify continuing with the same level of service, and at that point, and if that happens we will need to reconsider the approach.

3.8 The draft strategy proposes support and time for communities who wish to take over the running of the library service in their location. This will allow communities to develop the facilities in the way most appropriate to them, and for the services to be provided in locations alongside other local facilities, such as village halls, local shops, parish council offices. The updated strategy proposes:

- Developing a plan to invest in and improve libraries prioritising, at least initially, larger libraries. This will be the subject of a further Cabinet report.

- Investing in support to help communities develop proposals to run their local library facilities in a way that suits the local community, where the

Council is satisfied that the community will provide an inclusive and high quality library services in a location.

- Opportunities to further embrace digital technology to reflect the way many people live their lives and be more responsive to customer needs and expectations;

- Providing more library outreach and encouraging community libraries to do the same, taking the library service into a wider number of people;

3.9   The vision is for a library service which is inclusive and enables all users to engage with a wide range of reading materials, participate in learning activities and connect with their community.

3.10 The proposed support for the creation of community libraries includes the offer of grant funding over three years, an initial donation and a regular quarterly refresh of books, as well as continuing support from ECC libraries employees.

3.11 The need to develop a new strategy for library services was driven by a significant and continuing decline in library usage over the last 10 years (see section 4.5 below). What this means for the long-term viability of the current library network remains a concern. However, having listened to what people have told us and seen how many are passionate about libraries, we believe the best way forward is for the Council and communities to work together. The public response has shown that communities have the energy and expertise to revitalise local libraries as community-run facilities with Council support.

4.   Background

4.1   The Council's aim in having a strategy for future delivery of library services is and always has been to create a modern service that is more relevant to the way we live now, responds to the needs of local communities, is open to new and creative ideas, that works with employees, volunteers and communities and is fit for the future.

4.2   In Spring 2018 the Council ran a programme of public engagement and research, including sending a survey to 25,000 households to find out people's views about libraries and inform the development of the strategy. Key findings were that:

- Books and reading are the top priority, for library users and non-users alike
- People use libraries more at different stages of life: as children, as new parents, if they lose a job or when they retire; women use libraries more than men
- Libraries are valued as safe social spaces where people can meet, get help, read, learn or just pass the time
- People want to get involved

- People have different ideas about what libraries should be: some want more activities and services under one roof; others want quiet spaces, where books and reading are the absolute priority.

4.3   People's top six priorities for libraries (the levels of support are shown in brackets) were:

> 1. Quality and range of books and other stock (89%)
> 2. Well informed staff or volunteers to assist (70%)
> 3. A local library (66%)
> 4. Convenient opening times (62%)
> 5. A range of children's events and activities (35%)
> 6. Access to computers (34%)

4.4   Using this information, Cabinet authorised a consultation on a draft strategy and needs assessment in November 2018. This originally placed libraries into four tiers, based on an assessment of need.

4.5   The main driver for a new strategy was the significant decline in library usage over recent years, which reflects a national trend. It is clear that libraries aren't being used in the way they used to be. Updated figures show that the trend is continuing. In Essex, over the 10 years to 2018/19:

- Book borrowing more than halved, down from 8.4m loans a year to 3.9m loans

- Demand to use public network computers in libraries fell 38%, from 805,000 sessions to 495,000 sessions

- The number of active library members (members who have used their library card for any purpose in the last year) fell 33% from 331,482 in March 2009 to 221,640 in March 2019 (this figure excludes mobile library and online only services). This includes a fall of almost 5% in 2018/19 alone. Active members now equate to 15% of the total Essex population.

- Visits fell by 43% from 7.9m visits a year to 4.5m a year 2018/19.

- One library in the county has bucked the downward trend in usage: Springfield. This volunteer-run library opened in 2013 and has seen its membership grow by 216% from 382 to 825; the number of loans has held steady at nearly 47,000 a year. However, the number of visits fell by 33% from 35,307 to 23,802.

4.6   It should be noted that the rolling annual figure of loan issues increased by 1% during the consultation - between October 2018 and March 2019, but the March 2019 figure was still 3% lower than that for March 2018.

4.7   The rise in use of the internet and availability of mobile devices has transformed the way we access information, reading materials and entertainment. Whilst demand for books and reading materials in society remains strong, far fewer people are now using libraries to borrow or read them.

4.8   We remain concerned by the decline in library usage. We want to work with the community, particularly with those people who have expressed such strong support for libraries. We want a library service which is thriving and supported, where usage is maintained or increasing. We continue to consider that community run libraries is the best way to produce the engagement and community interest to do this. If this does not prove to be the case and the decline continues, then there will be a time when it will be difficult to justify continuing with the same level of service, and at that point, we will need to reconsider the approach.

Consultation on draft strategy and needs assessment

4.9   The public were able to respond to the 12-week consultation via a survey available online, by phone or on paper. Large print and Easy Read versions were available. It was open to individual adults and children (with parental permission), families with children under 11 and organisations. A report analysing the consultation responses is set out at appendix 1.

4.10   The Council was keen to hear from as many people as possible and the consultation received wide publicity. All active library members as at 29 October 2018, were notified by letter or email, as were Essex MPs, District, City, Borough, Town and Parish Councils, 700 groups who use libraries, community organisations, and interested stakeholders, such as the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Arts Council England. Briefing sessions were held for county and district councillors.

4.11   Drop-in sessions to further inform people were held at all libraries. An estimated 2,500 people attended these sessions.

4.12   Some 600 items of print and online coverage plus at least 12 pieces of regional radio and TV coverage were generated. More than 100 social media posts across the Council's corporate and library service social media channels reached 273,000 people and targeted posts reached 74,000 working age adults on Facebook. Coverage in 17 Council e-bulletins reached 127,000 subscribers.

4.13   The survey received 21,961 responses. Eighty nine percent of these (19,485) were completed online, 11% (2,442) on paper and less than 1% by phone (34). Of the paper questionnaires, 189 were completed on the Easy Read form. The response rate equates to 2% of the Essex population and 9% of active library members.

4.14   The survey responses were analysed by a specialist company and their report is at appendix 1. Many survey responses raised individual issues which have been grouped together in appendix 2. The Council has listened and the updated strategy responds to views expressed.

4.15   Ninety seven percent of the individual and family respondents said they had visited a library in the last year. One in ten indicated that they use library buildings without using a library card. The response rate was higher among

people over 60 and users of libraries identified as tier 3 and 4 (where the most significant changes were proposed). Percentages below relate to the number of respondents to the relevant question, not the total number of respondents. For full detail see appendix 1.

4.16   Among individuals and families who responded:

- 90% have internet access at home, work or on a mobile device

- 70% said they use at least one library identified as tier 3 or 4 frequently (compared to overall usage statistics which show libraries identified as tier 3 and 4 were used by 29% of library users in 2018/19)

- 62% of users of libraries identified as tier 4 said they would be able to use an alternative library service if tier 4 libraries were not retained. The most popular alternative was to use another library

- 52% use more than one library frequently

- 47% were aged over 60 (people in this age group make up 22% of active library members)

- 1,280 (6% of 21,633 individual and family respondents) said they used a library identified as tier 4, did not classify that they use a library in another tier and said they would be unable to access any alternatives.

- 5% said they only access the internet in a library or public café.

4.17   Among organisations:

- 89% of organisations had visited an Essex library, 61% had used a library card.

- 80% said withdrawal of their nearest library/ies would have an impact on their organisation, and 97% said it would have an impact on their members/people they serve

- Colchester and West Mersea were the libraries most frequently used by the organisations that responded

- 38% had used a library which was proposed for classification within tier 4 in the draft needs assessment with Stansted, Galleywood, Kelvedon, Thaxted and Tye Green being the most used

4.18   Survey respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the ambitions and other elements of the strategy.

- A majority of individuals and families agreed overall with the ambitions, evaluation criteria used in the draft needs assessment, and proposals to support community-run libraries in the locations where this was proposed in the draft needs assessment.

- A majority of individuals and families disagreed that the proposals provided a reasonable range of ways to access library services according to needs.

- An equal percentage of individuals and families agreed as disagreed with proposals for outreach.

- Agreement was generally higher among non-library users, 17-30 year olds, over 60s, males, non-disabled respondents and those who do not use a library identified as tier 3 or 4.

- Disagreement was generally higher among groups and organisations, Easy Read form users, users of libraries which were identified as tier 3 and 4 libraries in the draft needs assessment, disabled people and those who do not have access to the internet at home, work or on mobile devices. More detailed equality breakdowns are contained in appendices 2 and 4.

4.19   Unlike individuals and families, more organisations disagreed than agreed with the ambitions, evaluation criteria, community libraries and outreach proposals, and 61% of organisations didn't agree that the proposals provided a reasonable range of ways to access the service, although it should be noted that only 6% of consultation respondents individual and family respondents who said they used a library identified as tier 4, did not identify that they use a library in another tier and said they would be unable to access any alternatives.

4.20   A clear message from comments made is that many people value the library service, not just for books or access to computers, but for the opportunity for people to meet and learn, exchange ideas, meet new people and talk.

4.21   The top three preferences for opening hours were fully staffed opening, volunteer-supported opening and self-service access using smart library technology. This supports the recommended direction in the strategy.

4.22   Encouragingly, the consultation revealed that 2,842 individuals and families and 84 organisations are interested in finding out more about volunteering to support library services. Customer services and home library service roles were the most popular. 105 of the potential volunteers were aged under 16 (20% of all under 16s who did the survey). This shows the volunteering culture in Essex remains strong and that young people want to help libraries thrive.

4.23   There were many comments and suggestions made as part of the consultation and the Council's response to these is detailed in appendix 2.

4.24   The Council wishes to provide an inclusive library service and there were some differences between responses from people from different equality groups:

- Respondents with a disability or impairment were more likely to say that they would be unable to travel to an alternative library.

- Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) respondents were significantly underrepresented in comparison to the proportion of active library members who identify as BAME.

- Consultation respondents aged 60 or over were significantly overrepresented in the consultation response compared to active members generally.

- Consultation respondents aged 16 or under were significantly underrepresented in comparison to active members, although 22% of responses were from families with children under 11, on behalf of their family.

Other feedback

4.25 The volume and content of emails and letters to the Council demonstrates the interest in libraries within communities. The Council received 1,094 emails and letters; 844 of these included comments or suggestions which were analysed alongside the survey responses. Some comments fell outside those themes and were grouped under a new theme or listed separately.

4.26 Comments and correspondence arising from the consultation, and the Council's responses, are included in appendix 2.

4.27 We also received 57 petitions containing approximately 60,000 signatures from people in Essex and from other places too.

4.28 The petitions generally had a similar message, either to keep a particular library open, to keep some or all libraries open or, in the case of Waltham Abbey proposed as tier 2, not to cut opening hours. Petitions are listed in appendix 2.

4.29 After the consultation closed, an extraordinary Full Council meeting was held on 12 March 2019. Thirteen members of the public asked questions at the meeting. Council resolved to call on the Cabinet member to continue to explore the opportunity to use all libraries as community hubs and to maximise the use of the buildings and sites to generate income for the Library Service. Although this motion does not have legal effect, it has helped to shape the proposed strategy and will be borne in mind through implementation, by working with partners and supporting communities to develop community hubs where appropriate.

4.30 Fourteen of the county's 16 MPs submitted various comments and letters during the consultation period. Details of these letters and the Council's response to the points made are in appendix 2.

4.31 Most District, Borough and City Councils submitted an identifiable response to the consultation Responses were also received from 51 Town and Parish Councils. Other authorities' comments are listed in appendix 2.

4.32 Points made by other authorities echoed the comments made by other respondents that libraries are important community hubs where people can access a range of services and activities beyond core library services. They expressed concerns that closing libraries could impact particularly on older users and those who rely on public transport or find it difficult to travel. Some argued that significant new housing is planned in their area and therefore population forecasts should be considered. Those in more deprived areas said that closure would have a greater effect on their residents or that a wider catchment area should be used to measure deprivation. Some in more rural areas said that the deprivation measure did not take account of pockets of deprivation.

4.33 Many of the Parish or Town Councils are involved in expressions of interest in setting up community-run libraries in their towns or villages. See 4.36 for more information about the levels of interest in this.

4.34 Comments or suggestions that did not fit the analysis themes or were specific to their local library are listed in appendix 2.

4.35 In addition to the consultation responses, 24 community organisations submitted written responses. Their responses generally echoed the themes of the survey and other representations above. Where they did not, or where the organisation made a comment or suggestion specific to their local library, these are listed in appendix 2.

Expressions of Interest in setting up community-run library services

4.36 The Council invited community organisations to express interest in setting up community-run library services in proposed tier 3 or tier 4 locations. As at 25 June, 80 valid expressions of interest (EOIs) had been received for 39 current ECC libraries with libraries receiving up to four expressions of interest.

4.37 This level of interest, coupled with the experience at Springfield, is encouraging and the Council is keen to ensure that this energy and enthusiasm is given the best possible chance to succeed by working with the interested groups to help them develop their ideas and proposals to have a community-run library in their area. We believe that communities are best placed to develop, nurture and grow the library service

4.38 Engagement with communities that may be interested has continued with meetings, correspondence, showcase events and briefings for interested groups, arranged in partnership with Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) and existing community libraries.

4.39 The Council remains open to new expressions of interest and will work with the interested groups to help implement these new community-run libraries. The level of community interest suggests that Essex could be the home of one of the largest networks of community-run libraries in the country.

4.40 As a result of this strong interest in providing community-run libraries, the strategy proposes to offer a package of support to organisations which wish to take over the running of library services in any current library location.

Scrutiny

4.41 Place Services and Economic Growth Policy Scrutiny Committee (PSEG) has been engaged on a number of occasions. The meeting of 30 May 2019 made a number of recommendations which are shown in appendix 6. In brief these are:

> o That the reservation and distribution service continues in all libraries
> o That Council functions collaborate to maximise use of library spaces

    o That there be universal principles set out for community library services and a service level agreement with each
    o Greater clarity on the forward vision and future-proofing of the strategy
    o Evidence of engagement with the Education Service to clarify relationships between the libraries service and schools,
    o Revisit previous conversations with districts which have experienced a change in political control following local elections in May 2019.

4.42   The recommendations from PSEG Scrutiny Committee have either already been addressed or will be during the strategy period.

4.43   The offer to encourage the development of proposals for the community to take over library provision in locations served by an existing library which Cabinet is asked to agree is set out in section 5.13 below. There will be an agreement in place with each provider. All community-run libraries will be offered a community library card which would allow them to reserve titles and receive a regular distribution of new stock. It will be up to each community run library to determine if they will offer reservations to their members. The reservations service, including a review of the current fees and charging will be reviewed during the Strategy period.

4.44   The library service has a working relationship with schools and the education service and intends to build on this through outreach and new initiatives during the strategy period. More information about current and ongoing work to support children's literacy, learning and development is contained in appendix 2.

4.45   The service will continue to work with other Council functions to support initiatives to address social isolation and loneliness and is liaising closely with officers leading on this area of work. The Cabinet member with responsibility for libraries has already met the new Leader of Rochford District Council and is seeking to meet other councils over the coming weeks and months.

5.   Recommended strategy

5.1   In response to the consultation feedback (appendices 1 and 2), the Council has produced an updated proposed strategy (appendix 3) and conducted a detailed equality impact assessment (appendix 5).

5.2   The Council has listened to the feedback. It is very clear the community has responded to the consultation to say that libraries are valued by those who use them, as safe social spaces and hubs for a range of activities. The community has expressed strong support and interest for libraries and community organisations have expressed an interest in taking over running many libraries in many locations. Whilst some people responded to the consultation to say that they wished to see libraries run by paid staff and trained staff, the experience of Springfield, which is run by volunteers and where usage is being maintained demonstrates that these models can be very effective, and this has also been seen elsewhere in the country. We would support community-run libraries to ensure there is appropriate training

provided to those running libraries so they are able to train their volunteers to ensure a good service.

5.3   In addition to the provision of a network of Council-run libraries the strategy makes it clear that the Council wants to work with communities to support the creation of as many community-run library services as possible. The Council will support the development of these community run libraries through a funding and support package. This is set out in more detail at para 5.13.

5.4   The proposed strategy will also see:

- Work across the Council and with partners to make the best use of public buildings and assets and provide access to library services outside stand-alone library buildings

- Enhance the current eLibrary and further embrace digital technology to improve the service to customers. This includes exploring options to introduce smart library technology in Council-run libraries, to increase access to them outside staffed opening hours

- Develop a robust outreach programme to take library services and activities into community venues, according to need.

5.5   The revised strategy is driven by the need to respond to changing use and customer demands, as well as public feedback demonstrating support for local library services. However, it does have financial implications as set out in section 6.1.3

5.6   The proposals in this report, the Strategy and supporting documents will enable the Council to meet its statutory duty and modernise the service to meet needs and expectations in the future.

Investment Programme

5.7   The Council proposes a package of investment to modernise the service. This comprises an investment programme for County run libraries to radically transform the experience of using these library services by refurbishing them to deliver a consistent high-quality look and feel across the network and by continuing to develop staff skills to improve the service provided to library service users.

5.8   Planning of this work will start in 2019-20 and it is expected that delivery will start later in 2019-2020. Proposals will be the subject of another Cabinet report.

5.9   Current library services may be moved to different buildings to take advantage of opportunities to share space with others or provide the service more efficiently in new locations and alongside other public services.

5.10   In addition, the proposed strategy responds to the enthusiasm and energy in some communities to run their own libraries in their own way, provided that this is an inclusive service and continues to maintain access to free loans of reading material.

5.11   Council will aim to support the community to take on the provision of a community library service, and this will be particularly appropriate in smaller locations.

5.12   The Council will provide training to those running community libraries so that they can train and cascade information to their volunteers, provide information and advice to help groups set up and manage a library service run by community groups and volunteers. This will include advice on ensuring DBS (safeguarding) checks - which are free - are completed on community-run library volunteers if necessary.

5.13   The support offered to organisations wishing to take responsibility for community-run library services includes:

- A grant of £18,000, paid over three years to help meet costs for furniture/furnishings, property, additional stock and computers internet access and software. This would be paid as follows:
    o Year 1: £8,000
    o Year 2: £7,000
    o Year 3: £3,000
- A one-off donation of books to be determined on a case by case basis and proportionate to usage
- A quarterly bulk loan of books from Council stock, proportionate to usage to be delivered to and collected from the Community-run library by Essex library staff.
- A system to allow the Community-run library to reserve and collect Essex Libraries stock from Council-run libraries on behalf of its users
- Ongoing support and visits by Essex Library staff to run outreach activities for children and adults, based on local need
- Ongoing advice, guidance and training from Essex Library Service, such as how to manage services and collaboration between community-run library services and how to ensure volunteers are trained.

5.14   Community libraries will be required to open for a minimum number of opening hours which will be agreed on a case by case basis. Detailed information about the support available to groups to develop their proposals and get started will be published on the Community Library Services web pages.

Property Issues

5.15   The Council's preference is for community-run library services to be run from other community premises, but it is open to other innovative suggestions and viable options will be explored including co-locating, re-development, using the existing property in different ways and new locations.

5.16   The Council will welcome proposals from community groups that wish to purchase the existing library building. Some groups interested in setting up community-run library services have expressed interest in taking on the existing building, and this may also apply to future expressions of interest.

5.17   Options and solutions will be explored on a case by case basis

5.18   Where libraries have been taken over by the community and are run from other buildings, we may be left with vacant premises which are no longer required by the Council and these will be considered under usual Essex County Council policies and procedures for dealing with surplus assets.

6.   Options (including financial implications)

6.1.   Option One: (Recommended) Adopt the new draft strategy as amended in light of consultation

6.1.1   Impact: The service would be modernised in a way that responds to changing public behaviour and expectations. This takes into consideration the feedback received during public consultation and the equality impacts identified, as well as the considerable community interest in supporting local library services. It also minimises the equality impacts by committing to support a library service in all current locations, either Council-run or community-run; continuing to run all current libraries while supporting communities to develop their proposals; and offering a stronger programme of outreach to bring library activities to local communities. This will:

- Support reducing social isolation and loneliness by empowering communities and keeping a library service in as many communities as possible, either run by the Council or by communities

- Respond to the interest within communities in setting up community-run library services, by offering enhanced support to help them get off to the best start possible.

This option is considered to have the best chance of growing library usage – by enabling the Council to invest in modernising the service it provides and broadening its appeal to new audiences, whilst also empowering communities to shape and deliver community-run library services in some locations, and allow the local community to develop the services alongside other facilities in a way that sits that community. The service will be more able to flex to meet changing usage, which will be monitored closely over time.

6.1.2   Risks: There is a risk that some users of libraries may not wish to use a community-run library. However we will support the organisations and provide refreshed stock with a view to ensuring that the libraries remain attractive. We believe that this risk is small, given the experience at Springfield.

There is a risk that a community-run library organisation will cease to operate or not prove possible to develop in some locations. However, such libraries

have proved very successful elsewhere. The support offered aims to help the libraries become sustainable quickly and the fact that almost 3,000 residents indicated a preparedness to volunteer suggests that this risk is low.

6.1.3 Financial Implications: The financial implications of adopting the new strategy is set out in the table below, this equates to £3m over the life of the strategy.

	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000
Set up and support for Community-run Libraries	0	399	351	159	15
Investment in modernising libraries and technology	1,320	380	380	0	0
Total cost	**1,320**	**779**	**731**	**159**	**15**

6.2 Option two: Adopt the original draft strategy and needs assessment (as used in the consultation)

6.2.1 Impact: This would not take account of the responses to the consultation and would not provide the time or the support which we consider is required to maximise the opportunities to realise the community interest in those libraries identified tier 3 and 4 locations. The initial draft needs assessment also did not reflect some important local issues to which our attention was drawn during the consultation. It would also be a departure from the Council's commitment to listen to what people tell us during consultations.

6.2.2 The table below sets out the anticipated investment and savings that would be realised should the draft strategy as originally proposed be adopted.

	2019/20 £000	2020/21 £000	2021/22 £000	2022/23 £000	2023/24 £000
Support for Community-run Libraries	320	15	15	15	15
Costs associated with changes in delivery model	412	1,283	127	0	0
Procurement of Libraries Management System	0	180	0	0	0
Saving from withdrawal of County-run provision	0	(965)	(1,696)	(1,786)	(1,907)
Net cost/(saving)	**732**	**512**	**(1,554)**	**(1,771)**	**(1,892)**

6.2.3 This option is not recommended.

6.3 Option three: Reject the strategy and continue to run the current library service with no changes (do nothing)

6.3.1 Impact: Evidence over the last 10 years, as outlined in section 4 demonstrates the significant and continuing decline in library usage. This trajectory shows that if nothing is done the decline in usage of libraries would continue as the service would not be modernised and made relevant to new users or be flexible to adapt to changing trends over time. Communities would have less opportunity to be involved in shaping local services to suit their needs, as resources would not be available to develop the outreach and community support envisaged in option one. Efficiencies and greater convenience associated with sharing space, embracing digital technology and other planned improvements would not be achieved.

6.3.2 Continuing to run the current library service as is would mean the service would operate within its existing financial envelope of £12.4m.

6.3.3   This option is not recommended

7. 1   Delivery Approach

7.1.1   If the strategy is approved, the aim is to deliver the proposals in two parts (which will overlap) as described below.

7.2.1   part 1 –Help to support the establishment of community run-libraries. Invest in technology and implement an updated library management system.

7.3.1   part 2 – Invest in the refurbishment of Council-run libraries, introduce 'smart' technology, enhance customer service and enhance eLibrary service.

7.2   Communicating the changes and marketing the service

7.2.1   The approach to communicating the recommended strategy will focus on and be characterised by three themes:

- Early engagement where possible
- Creating advocacy
- Localised approaches supporting a County-wide message

7.2.2   Advice and guidance will be provided to groups wishing to develop a community-run library and regular updates on progress towards setting up this network will be published.

7.2.3   Significant marketing has been done and is ongoing to promote the range of library services on offer, to appeal to existing and new audiences. This includes marketing materials in libraries, e-bulletins, social media, website, support for events such as Essex Book Festival and the Summer Reading Challenge. A new marketing plan will be developed to build on this and promote new initiatives such as outreach.

7.3   Technology plan

7.3.1   Over the life of the strategy we will invest in technology to support and enable a modern and flexible service, to use data and customer insight effectively to respond to changing customer demands and deliver excellent service. Proposed Technology improvements in Council-run Libraries are to include:

- Replacement of outdated self-service machines (already planned)

- Replacement of the library management system, through which memberships and stock are managed, with an up to date and flexible system that can provide greater insight

- Embracing new technology and 'smart' libraries functionality that enables users to choose when and how they access books and learning materials. We will need to pilot this to ensure that libraries are appropriately

protected and that people are safe when accessing the building when unstaffed.

7.4 People plan

7.4.1 The current workforce is comprised of ECC employed staff and volunteers. There are 666 employees (225.2 full time equivalent), including peak relief resources, and 679 volunteers, with more volunteers over the summer to support the Summer Reading Challenge. 90% of the workforce are part-time and 83% are female. The workforce is the heart of the library service and the face of the Council to library users.

7.4.2 Work has been undertaken to review current operating model of libraries. That review and the implementation of the Libraries Strategy will help define the future target operating model and the future size and shape of the library workforce. This will result in the redefining of some roles to create new roles that will be required by the future library services strategy.

7.4.3 Volunteers play a vital role in supporting and enhancing the library service and will continue to do so in any future model. It is important to engage with volunteers to ensure they also fully understand the vision for the future library service and their role in that. The library service will work to ensure that volunteers are well trained and supported to ensure that customers experience a consistent level of service. The Council ensures DBS (safeguarding) checks are done as needed on its volunteers and will provide advice to community-run library services to ensure DBS (safeguarding) checks, which are free, are done on their volunteers as necessary. Every opportunity will be taken to recognise and celebrate the contribution that volunteers make.

8. Issues for consideration

8.1 Legal implications

8.1.1 Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 places ECC under a duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof, although borrowing facilities only have to be made available to people whose residence or place of work or study is in Essex.

8.1.2 The law says that in fulfilling its duty ECC must have regard to the desirability—

(a) of securing, by the keeping of adequate stocks, by arrangements with other library authorities, and by any other appropriate means, that facilities are available for the borrowing of, or reference to, books and other printed matter, and pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials, sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general requirements and any special requirements both of adults and children; and

(b) of encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and of providing advice as to its use and of making available

> such bibliographical and other information as may be required by persons using it; and

(c)   of securing, full co-operation with other authorities in relation to any matter which concerns both library functions and the functions of another authority.

8.1.3   The Courts have made it clear that this does not mean that everyone must live within walking distance of a library or that a library has to be provided in every settlement. There is a frequently quoted paragraph from a judgement which says:

'A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to mean delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on council resources.'

'The availability of resources is highly material to the question of what constitutes a comprehensive and efficient library service. The section 7 duty cannot be exempt or divorced from resource issues and cannot in law escape the reductions which have been rendered inevitable in the light of the financial crisis engulfing the country.

"The key is reasonable ability to access the service by all residents of the county. This means that distances and time taken to reach a library must be reasonable and any particular problems, whether physical disabilities, or created by age or family considerations, must be capable of being met'

8.1.4   It is for the local authority to decide how the duty is to be discharged based on the need for services. If usage of services declines significantly, as has been the case in Essex, the Council may reasonably conclude that the need for library facilities is reduced. In this report, the Cabinet is proposing to retain all libraries and is therefore not assessing the need for any library.

8.1.5   The Council may lawfully provide more libraries than would be needed to discharge the duty if it is satisfied that to do so represents an appropriate use of public funds.

8.1.6   The proposals in the strategy are clearly designed to encourage children and adults to use libraries.

8.1.7   It is important that the Cabinet to consider the equality impact assessment and the consultation response appendices.

8.2   Equality and Diversity implications

8.2.1   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.

8.2.2   The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, 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).

8.2.3   The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has looked at the results of the consultation, usage and demographic data to identify equality impacts of the draft strategy as consulted on. It provides an overview at Essex wide level, tier level including a detailed analysis in relation to each proposed tier 4 location. The assessment recommended measures to minimise any disproportionate negative impacts on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

8.2.4   The EIA looked in more detail at proposed tier 4 locations, based on the draft strategy that originally proposed withdrawal of these libraries. It has now been updated to consider the equality impacts of the recommended strategy to assess impact of a community-run delivery model.

8.2.5   The recommended strategy removes any disproportionate negative impacts on people with protected characteristics by aiming to keep a library facility in all the current locations, with community support. Library stock can still be accessed through the network of Council-run libraries, mobile libraries, elibrary, and home library service. In addition, library services and activities can be delivered via the Outreach programme based on community need.

8.2.6   The EIA recommends that individual EIAs are undertaken on each community-run proposal to assess the impacts for that community

8.2.7   In addition, equality and diversity training will also be offered to community-run libraries in two parts ('understanding your local communities needs' (one session) and an 'introduction to diversity' (second session)

9.   List of appendices

   1. Essex Future Library Services Consultation 2019 report (Enventure)
   2. Consultation Response Report
   3. Essex Future Library Services Strategy 2019-2024
   4. Library usage data, 2008/09 to 2018/19
   5. Essex Future Library Services Equality Impact Assessment 2019

6. Place Services and Economic Growth Policy Scrutiny Committee report, 30/05/2019

10. List of Background papers

Essex Libraries, engagement summary report, 2018: <u>Your community, libraries and you</u>