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Essex County Council

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Introduction

Libraries have traditionally been at the heart of communities delivering reading, literacy, learning, culture and well-being. But communities, lifestyles and expectations are changing so libraries need to change too. Traditional library use – people coming in to borrow books – is falling as more people find more of their information and entertainment online. The nature of the county is changing too. Our population is set to grow by a fifth as we approach the mid-century and there will be more residents under 16 and over 65 years old. Planning ahead for the library service is therefore essential.

Before we started to make plans, we wanted to find out what the people of Essex need from libraries and to invite people to work with us to reshape the service so that it is relevant to people's lives now, fit for the future and sustainable.

So, in spring 2018 we embarked on the biggest exercise of research and public engagement that Essex County Council has done about libraries in more than a decade. We surveyed residents to get the views of a range of people, whether they use libraries or not. We interviewed library users to get more in depth

insight into their views and needs. We met children and young people, through focus groups in mainstream and special schools and also with the Young Essex Assembly. We held events across the county for community leaders, library users and members of the public to share their ideas. We also delved deep into our own monitoring data to find out what it can tell us about how, where and when people are using libraries, what the trends are and where we could improve.

Books and reading are still at the top of the list of things people expect from libraries. They also value well-informed staff and volunteers including the safe space libraries provide for reading, socialising, studying and activities. I was particularly struck by the enthusiasm and wealth of ideas that people shared at the public events. I was also impressed at how many people said they'd be interested in volunteering to help libraries. We already have over 1,200 regular and occasional library volunteers and a small but growing network of community run libraries. This confirms to me that, whilst change is unstoppable, so are the people of Essex and that we share an appetite for getting stuck in and working

together to make a difference for our communities. There is now a lot of work to do to analyse all the evidence we have covered and develop our plan for the future of libraries. For starters, this report provides a summary of all that we found out and makes for interesting reading, so I hope you enjoy it and want to work with us to shape the libraries of the future.



Cllr Susan Barker

Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate

Executive summary

In spring 2018 Essex County Council conducted extensive public engagement and research about libraries. This was the largest exercise of its kind in more than a decade and included a countywide survey, interviews with library users, focus groups with young people and public events for community groups, elected representatives and the public.

Nearly 3,000 people responded to the survey, 273 library users were interviewed, five focus groups were held with children and young people and more than 250 people came and shared nearly 900 ideas and comments at the public events.

This has given the council a comprehensive picture of what people think about Essex libraries, how they use them now, how they would like to use them in future, and the role libraries play within communities now or can play in future.

Key findings

1. Books and reading are still the most important thing about libraries, both for library users and non-users. 'The quality and range of books' was identified as the top priority in the survey. Book borrowing is by far and away the main activity people use libraries for: 90% of users say they come in to borrow books and one in four do so at least every two weeks.
2. Libraries become more or less important to people at different stages of their lives. Children and young people are most likely to use libraries. Women are more likely to use them than men and life changes such as becoming a parent, losing a job or retiring are triggers for using libraries more. People who don't use libraries say they either don't need them or don't have time. Working age men are least likely to use them.
3. In addition to books, libraries are valued as safe social spaces where people can come to find a quiet space, get help, information or, support learning, socialise and take part in activities or simply find shelter and pass the time.
4. There is an appetite to get involved. One in four survey respondents would consider volunteering for libraries, eight community-run libraries are now open and more interest in opening community libraries was shown at the events.
5. Some people want to be able to access more services and do more things in libraries, with many suggestions being made at the events for different clubs, activities, health sessions or advice drop-ins or to have cash machines or Post Office counters under the same roof. But others worried that the focus of libraries was being diluted, that books were no longer the priority and that they would lose the quiet space that was so important to them. Quiet booths, zones, days or designated 'quiet libraries' were suggested.
6. Library buildings are seen as valuable public spaces that could be hired for community use in the evenings and at weekends: as rehearsal spaces or performance venues, for art exhibitions, for meetings and public celebrations.

7. Many recognised the budget constraints facing public services and that hiring out spaces was one way to generate income to support the library service. But there was a tension between this and the impact that charging for space might have on voluntary groups.
8. Young people do not feel libraries are designed and delivered to meet their needs. The layout of libraries was a top priority for them, desiring space for study, reading, games and chilling out. They also wanted more digital provision and libraries open in the evenings.
9. People value well-informed staff and volunteers to help them and users are satisfied with the service they get.
10. People also value having a local library. But, two-fifths of library users visit more than one library, mostly because the location is convenient to where they live or work, to access the books or materials they are interested in or, because the opening hours at different libraries are convenient to them.









Themes that emerged from the events were that libraries need more or better promotion, people were interested in hiring and using library spaces for other activities, libraries help reduce social isolation, the service offer could be extended, the focus on increasing skills and knowledge should be retained and more could be done to encourage young library users and bring young and old together.

All this information is now being looked at in detail to begin to develop a forward plan and strategy for the future of the service. That is likely to be published for consultation by early spring 2019. In the meantime, investment in some buildings and improvements to the service will continue. Local ideas that volunteers can act on straight away have been passed to local library managers.

What we did

As a library authority, Essex County Council (ECC) has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof*. To be able to do that we need to understand who wants to use the service, what their needs are and how their needs are changing. We also have to monitor how well we are delivering the service to ensure it remains efficient as demands and resources change.

Libraries help meet the council's strategic priority to create great places to grow up, live and work. Libraries Connected (formerly the Society of Chief Librarians) have defined six universal offers and two promises that libraries deliver:

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
|  | Reading – providing a modern reading offer. |  | Culture – being places where people can experience diverse and vibrant cultural events. |
|  | Information – helping people access information and services. |  | Learning – being a space for lifelong learning. |
|  | Digital – offering digital skills, services and access. |  | Children's promise – starting children and young people on a journey of reading and learning and engaging with them as they grow. |
|  | Health – contributing to the health and wellbeing of communities. |  | Six steps – to provide a nurturing reading and learning environment for blind and partially sighted people. |

But are we and our users, clear about all that libraries offer, and what our core offer should be? We wanted to find out.

Our objectives in commissioning this research and engagement were to:

- Gather evidence to inform future decisions and further consultation if needed, about the shape of the library service
- Better understand public perceptions of libraries and library services
- Bust myths or misperceptions about libraries
- Increase public understanding of why libraries need to change and the challenges they face
- Gather ideas for what people need in their communities and from libraries
- Increase community involvement and identify some people who want to work with us.

Countywide survey

Independent research company, BMG Research, ran a postal survey of 25,000 households across Essex, selected at random, to find out the views both of users and non-users of libraries.

BMG Research drew addresses from Royal Mail's Postal Address File, the most complete list of residential addresses available, to provide a representative sample against deprivation across each Essex district. Any member of the household aged 18+ was able to take part, but responses were limited to one per household.

The survey was open from 12 February to 26 March and recipients could respond by post or online. It was not open to people other than the selected households, to make sure it was representative.

Questions asked about people's priorities for the library service, experience of using library services in Essex, the difference that libraries can make, library services in future, volunteering and getting

involved with libraries. It also asked respondents for information about themselves, such as employment status so that the responses can be analysed to help identify different needs.

Face to Face interviews

Researchers from ECC's Research and Citizen Insight team conducted in-depth interviews with library users at 22 libraries around the county. The libraries were selected to ensure we had a range of views from different types of libraries: large urban ones, small rural ones, libraries in small and medium sized towns and villages, and suburban libraries outside of town centres. Interviews were carried out during weekday mornings and afternoons and also on the weekend to attract as diverse a sample as possible. The interviews covered a similar range of questions as the survey, but allowed for more conversation and in-depth exploration of points the interviewees raised. In total, 273 people were interviewed between 5 February and 15 March.

Engagement events

Eleven public events were held across the county throughout March. All were held on weekday evenings, from 7 to 9pm and the primary audience for these was community leaders and groups. Invitations were sent to all town and parish, district, borough and city councils, partner organisations that work with libraries already and community groups that the library service had details for. The events were also open to the public and were advertised at libraries and through the service's social media feeds and e-letters. Voluntary sector umbrella bodies in the districts and boroughs were also invited to attend and have a representative on the panel at each event and they helped publicise the events to their networks and contacts.

At each event there was a panel of speakers, chaired by Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Customer and Corporate, or her deputy, Cllr Mark Durham. Make-up of each panel varied but included, where available, one of the two heads of service for Essex Libraries, the district/borough/city council cabinet member or committee chair with a community brief, a representative of the local council for voluntary service (CVS) or other voluntary sector umbrella and

a representative from the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE).

Attendees were invited to consider three key questions:

- What does your community need?
- What role can libraries play?
- How can you help make it happen?

After a panel discussion, attendees were invited to share and develop ideas within four zones:

Community heart: What assets does your community have, what is missing and what role can libraries play?

Getting involved: How are you currently involved with libraries and how would you like to be in future?

Innovation: An opportunity to rethink what libraries can be to meet the way people live in the 21st century.

Front door to services: What services do you have and need in your community? Can libraries be a place to access more services?

What you said

We already know a fair bit about use of our libraries and what users think from our records and a regular nationwide survey of library users. In 2017-18 there were:



5.3m

Visits made to Essex libraries



232,240

Active library members



4m

Loans of books and other items



74

Libraries in Essex



16%

Of Essex residents are active library users



1,200

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



25%

Public network computers are used 25% of the time available



31hrs

Is the average amount of time libraries are open each week



92%

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

Residents' survey

The countywide survey had 2,995 responses (12%); 73% were from households that use Essex Libraries; 27% were from non-users. Two thirds of responses (65%) were from women. We also know that females are more likely to be library users throughout their lives and that life changes such as having a child, becoming unemployed and retiring are triggers for using libraries more.

Key findings

- The quality and range of books was the top priority for libraries, among all respondents, whether they use libraries or not.
- Two thirds of respondents had used an Essex library in the previous year
- Not needing the service or not having time are the top reasons why people don't use libraries
- Two in five current users use more than one library building. Multiple use is more likely among people who live in a suburb, a small town or a village, or if their main library is only open part time.
- Book borrowing is by some distance the main activity Essex libraries are used for. More than a quarter of service users (27%) do this weekly or fortnightly.
- Access to free books and computers, a place open and accessible to all and a trusted source of advice and information are the main impacts libraries have, say users
- Adult learning, health information & advice and other council services were the top three suggestions for other things to use libraries for
- One in four would find a community centre or village hall a convenient location for library services but nearly half would not find any other location convenient
- Just over half (52%) of library users use the website: 11% to access e-books and magazines, 9% for online learning
- Nearly a quarter of respondents would be interested in volunteering for the library service and 15% would consider helping to run a community library.

Top 6 public priorities (% level of support)



89%

Quality and range of books
and other stock



70%

Well informed staff
or volunteers to assist



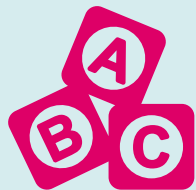
66%

A local library



62%

Convenient opening times



35%

A range of children's events
and activities



34%

Access to computers

Main reason for using more than one library? (% of people)



60%

Convenient location
of library



44%

To access the range of books
and/or other materials I am
interested in



30%

I use libraries near my home
and near my workplace



26%

Opening hours



11%

To access the range
of groups and/or
social activities I am
interested in



6%

To access the range
of computer and digital
facilities I want



5%

Assistance given by
staff and volunteers

What do you use your library for? (% of people)



90%

Borrowing books



37%

Reading newspapers,
magazines or books



30%

Borrowing DVDs,
CDs or audio books



27%

Library computers



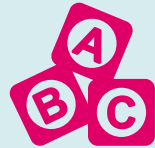
20%

Study space



18%

Library wifi on
own devices



16%

Baby, toddler or
children's activities



13%

Community activities



11%

Work space



11%

Social activities
including book groups



11%

Meeting space



11%

Using other
professional services



6%

Health and wellbeing
services



4%

Applying for jobs



1%

Applying for benefits

What else could your library be used for? (% of library services)



71%

Adult learning classes



55%

Providing health
information and advice



54%

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



55%

Groups/activities run
by the community

Interviews with library users

“You have all these groups of people from all walks of life. Everyone thinks the library is a safe place, and they respect it. The library should be the hub of the community, not just a building for books.”

Library user

“Ordering online – the service is brilliant and I get a follow up call to say books are in. [This is] helpful with a little library to have the catalogue and the range is great.”

Library user, Burnham-on-Crouch

“I read 3 or 4 books a week. They tell me the good books to read, and order them in for me. I haven’t got a computer.”

Female library user, aged 62, North Melbourne

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

Female library user, aged 55, Loughton

“I come here to study because it’s quiet and I can work uninterrupted. At home, my parents will ask me to watch my siblings, and they will be noisy. I like the availability of computers.”

Female library user, aged 16, Basildon

“I use the Wi-Fi for university work. Wi-Fi is fast, free and reliable. Easy to sign in and I get unlimited amount of internet.”

Male library user, aged 23, Brentwood

Introduction

Key findings

People value the service for multiple reasons

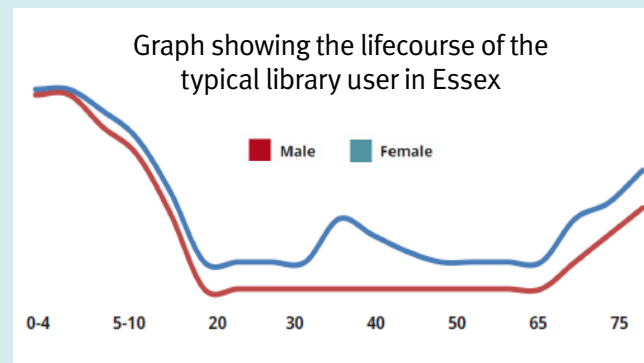
Library users value its books, its safety, its free services, the quiet space, the possibility to pass time, assistance and information, the access to support, socialisation and group activities, education and learning, encouraging independence, the children's activities and the shelter inside the library buildings.

What users value depends on their current needs and available free time

The range of library users is truly universal; the service is used by various age groups from different socio-economic backgrounds, with usage peaking at particular points in their life courses.

Lifecycle of the typical library user in Essex

People using the service at these different points in their life course will indeed require and prioritise different parts of the service depending on the time they have available and their particular need at that specific point in their life course. In addition to this



typical path, becoming unemployed at working age may trigger increased usage due to the need for job seeking or to pass time.

Some full-time students do not feel the library service accommodates their studies

The library service is perceived by many to serve mainly young children and older people. Respondents spoke passionately about the significant gap in provision for primary and particularly secondary school age children studying for their exams. Users feel that opening hours could be better alternated to cater for working people and for full-time students.

Younger generations use technology for everyday learning and reading

The younger generation of readers and learners are extremely tech-savvy and are encouraged to use technology at school, college and university as a part of their everyday learning. Therefore they feel that the library services should move with the times by providing more digital learning services and more young-people friendly options in their offer.

The layout of a library space is important

The layout of the library space is important to many users who feel that it sets the tone of how people use the space. People feel the layout of the libraries could be improved to offer more 'designated not segregated' spaces to encompass areas for more varied functions for all ages.

What children and young people said

Young people do not feel libraries are designed and delivered to meet their need, for example library opening hours do not extend to evenings. Young people prioritised the layout of libraries above anything else, desiring multi-purpose spaces for study, reading, games and chilling out. Key to meeting the needs of young people includes addressing the gap in provision of reading material for pleasure and studying.

Through the focus groups, we found strongly held views among young people that the current library service is designed mainly for babies, toddlers and elderly people. They did not feel that the service catered enough for the needs and priorities of young people particularly not for students.

“The library doesn’t extend the hours during exam time. The opening hours seems to be all catered for older people. Why can’t they shut during the day and open in the evening? It’s our future; the older population have had their careers.”

Young people focus group,
aged between 12-18 years old

“There is a gap [in library provision] for those in year 7 and year 10 when reading is not pushed as much (as in primary school). In secondary school reading is not cool.”

Young people focus group,
aged between 12-18 years old

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

Young people focus group,
aged between 12-18 years old

”Would like more study books like GCSE like KS3, KS4 and KS5 for teenagers.”

Face-to-face exit interview, Springfield

“What does the public library give me that Costa can’t?”

Young people focus group,
aged between 12-18 years old

Your community, libraries and events

Two hundred and fifty nine people came to the events. People did not have to give any more details than their name but some named the group or organisation they were representing. There were:



18

Town or parish councils



10

District, borough or city councils



9

Essex County Council members



4

Public agencies, such as health providers



8

Voluntary sector umbrella bodies



9

Voluntary organisations



16

Community groups



8

Library volunteers

Nearly 900 ideas or suggestions were made over the course of the events. Some recurring themes came up:

- **Need for better promotion and publicity:** This issue received more comments than any other. Many attendees felt that library users did not know about all the services you can access and things you can do in libraries and that outreach to people who don't use library services could be better.
- **Interest in hiring libraries for other activities when they are closed:** People could see the potential of these large and flexible spaces for rehearsals, performances, businesses and groups; there was also interest in use of space during opening hours for clubs, activities and advice services.
- **Reducing social isolation:** Attendees recognised the value of libraries as a safe social space where people could come to meet others, get help, some peace and quiet or just to keep warm and dry.
- **Extending the services offer:** Sharing the library space with specialist advice services, other public services or commercial enterprises.

- **Retaining focus on increasing skills & knowledge:** In other ways beyond just provision of educational materials.
- **Encouraging young library users AND bringing different generations together:** To stay relevant to users in future libraries need to appeal more to young people. Libraries were also seen as a place where young and old could learn from and help each other.

Community heart

It was obvious that across Essex there are some really strong community groups and networks and valued community buildings. There are more than 300 charity and voluntary groups in Chelmsford city area, Lorraine Jarvis, Chief Officer of Chelmsford Centre Supporting Voluntary Action told the Chelmsford event. Great Parndon Community Association was identified as a valued resource in Harlow, running several centres in the locality. Organisations such as U3A (the University of the Third Age) and Women's Institutes were mentioned as strong networks that are already involved with libraries but could be more so.

However, at some events participants were less sure about what community resources were available, such as village halls and some commented that libraries were some of the only public buildings left in places where banks, post offices and pubs had closed.

Libraries were seen as potential hubs for public functions, such as street parties, royal weddings, memorials and celebrations.

Public toilets and kitchen facilities would encourage people to spend more time in libraries and do different activities there. Someone also suggested having a central booking system and clear pricing policy for hiring rooms and spaces in libraries, to make them easier for groups and businesses to book.

Getting involved

An idea from the Epping Forest event was to have a book selection panel, made up of library users, to choose books and other media for libraries to purchase. The proposer felt this would involve people in a core library activity and make the service more democratic.

Clive Emmett, Chief Officer of CVS Uttlesford felt there was untapped volunteer capacity across the district and that libraries and CVS could work more closely to help match people with volunteering opportunities.

Attendees from eight communities were interested in finding out more about community libraries, to take information back to discuss with neighbours or colleagues in their parish council or community group.

Twenty seven people put their names down to get involved in helping to set up new activities or work more closely with their local library on initiatives in future.

Innovation

At seven events (Brentwood, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon and Rochford) people liked the idea of using the library for a community cinema or film club. People were inspired by hearing about Billericay and Writtle libraries already host successful community cinemas and thought it could be a novel addition for their town or village.

Creches were suggested as valuable additions to libraries, to make it easier for parents to visit. This came up at four events (Basildon, Braintree, Epping Forest and Rochford), most often suggested as a paid for service that would bring some income to libraries. One person also suggested a buggy park, that parents could pay 50p a time to use, would help parents and prevent buggies filling the library space.

Convenience and flexibility: to make it easier for people to access books at times convenient for them, Amazon-locker style pick-up points were suggested at the Epping Forest event.

Several suggestions were made about enhancing library membership to better promote libraries and bring new users in. These included offering loyalty card style rewards, recommend-a-friend membership, having a combined leisure and library card, and 'library plus' membership levels that could enable people to use their card to access the library when it was closed or receive parcel and online deliveries.

Front door to services

Libraries already help people access a wide range of local services, either by operating out of the same building, providing space for regular drop-ins or advice sessions, or by sign-posting people to other services.

Across all the events there was interest in libraries doing more of this. People could see the library as a safe place, at the heart of communities, where people would come for advice, information or to see other service providers such as local councils, Citizens Advice or job clubs.

There was a call at Saffron Walden for a Job Centre presence in the library. At the moment, people have to travel to Braintree to visit a job centre. However, it was acknowledged that a previous arrangement with the Job Centre had not continued.

Other suggestions for services that could operate from libraries, either all the time or on an occasional basis, were:

- Bank ATMs or Post Office counters
- Police or police community support officer drop ins
- Blood donor sessions
- Flu jab sessions
- Health advice
- Weight-management weigh ins and advice sessions.

There was also some appetite for libraries and other services to operate out of one shared building, including suggestions that libraries and ‘blue light’ services (police, ambulance and fire) could share buildings.

Some also suggested taking libraries out to other spaces, such as district council offices and supermarkets.

Ideas for more of the things libraries already do

More than 40 suggestions were about doing more arts and crafts in libraries. These included open mic poetry, creative writing, card making, teaching knitting to children, more Knit and Natter (already very popular), craft clubs, art exhibitions, photography groups, play reading and theatre and music performances.

Clubs were another popular suggestion, including chess clubs, Lego clubs, jigsaw and games clubs, virtual book clubs and creating a network of book clubs which could meet, share and support each other.

Libraries are valued as places to learn. Requests for more language classes, including English, came from Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Epping Forest and Harlow. They are also seen as places tutors can use and people suggested 11 topics they would either like to teach or learn in libraries, including life skills, first aid, adult literacy and numeracy. Essex ACL is the council’s adult community learning provider so there may be scope to explore these ideas with them.

Lego

Lego is popular with all ages. Many libraries already run ‘block builders construction clubs’ for children (we cannot call them Lego clubs if we have other makes of construction toy blocks donated). But people at Braintree also saw potential to use Lego for team building, or to have a building blocks library.

Significant local issues/ ideas

Be noisy or be quiet?

The potential conflict between running clubs, activities and entertainment and providing quiet spaces for reading, studying or relaxing worried some. The issue came up at Basildon, Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon and Rochford. At Harlow somebody suggested having a designated 'quiet library' within a cluster of local libraries. At several events people suggested having sound proofed booths for quiet study or confidential conversations, or designated quiet zones in larger libraries; people thought that would be more difficult in the smaller libraries.

Charging for space hire

In 2017 Essex Libraries introduced a sliding scale of charges for hiring rooms, spaces or whole libraries. This was done to cover the costs of providing the space and help meet the challenge of reduced funding for local government. Commercial, basic

and concessionary rates were introduced and library managers have discretion to give existing hirers six months to raise funds or make alternative arrangements. But some attendees were concerned that charges were a challenge for voluntary organisations, and unfair if the group was providing a service of social benefit, complementary to council services. One person at Maldon asked, "Why are voluntary groups charged to use or hire the library, when they are already charged for this service through tax?"

Another commented, "As somebody who runs an Essex wide charity we have had to hold back because we can no longer afford to use libraries."

Cllr Susan Barker replied, "If there are exceptional circumstances we won't charge. However, if an organisation is funded by Essex County Council, to provide them with free access to rooms within the library would be like providing them with a second grant. That would not be sustainable. It is a fine balance. We should look again at the charges and we need to look at how our libraries can be sustained, what uses can be made out of them."

Ethnic minorities and libraries

Some at the events voiced a perception that Essex Libraries' staff and users do not reflect the diversity of the local population. In fact just under 7% of the Essex population identify as Black, Asian or other ethnic minorities; just under 11% of Essex Libraries' active members do.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups were invited to the events but, apart from one individual, were not recorded as attending. The director of one network was interviewed separately and shared comments from members of other BME groups.

She said that visibility was the most important issue for BME people: if they could see other BME groups and individuals in libraries and if the library service was visible at BME events, black and minority ethnic people would feel more comfortable using libraries. A regular presence for a BME group, that people would get to know about, would help.

Books and materials in minority languages, such as Swaheli story books, and space for BME elders to play culturally relevant board games would also help.

Busy lives, lack of transport and cultural differences could be barriers to BME people using libraries more.

“I used to use the library for printing but this option is no longer readily available because most of the computers are in use all the time.”

BME library user

“If there was a coffee shop where you could read and relax that would be good.”

BME resident

“In the past I have run African storytelling and tales by moonlight in the library. I would love this to be continued, especially during Black History Month.”

African library user, Braintree

“Technology has taken over as you can now read books on your Kindle and children and young people are always on their Playstations etc.”

Witham library user

“More could be done to outreach to the Bangladeshi community to make the library more inviting.”

Colchester resident

“There is a lack of information about libraries, i.e. registration to make clear it is a free service.”

BME resident

Although no direct experiences of discrimination were cited, the comment below suggests that experience of discrimination elsewhere makes some parents wary of visiting libraries.

“Parents being over protective if they have experienced discrimination, hence keeping their children within safe boundaries at home.”

BME resident

Young people and bringing old and young together

Most of the attendees were adults but there were many suggestions for how to reach out to and better meet the needs of young people. An idea from Harlow was to do a schools survey to find out what young people actually want. A Colchester attendee suggested running a challenge prize – for young people or adults – to write and submit or perform a play describing their vision for the future of libraries. A chill out zone for young people was suggested at Chelmsford, while at Clacton somebody said libraries could be hired out to youth clubs in the evenings.

Ways to bring old and young together included offering mentoring and personal development services to young people, connecting them with older people; inviting young people to volunteer to teach IT skills to older people and other adults; and providing space for elders to meet and read to pre-school age children.

Community libraries

At Braintree, Clacton and Colchester there were attendees from villages interested in talking about setting up a volunteer-run community library. The council's Cabinet agreed to support groups interested in setting up these volunteer-run libraries when it agreed changes to the mobile library service. They are seen as an alternative option for places that don't have a library, or where the mobile library service has been withdrawn, as they can offer longer opening hours and do more to help reduce social isolation.

By June 2018 there were eight community-run libraries in the county. You can find links to them on the [Essex Libraries](#) website. Please note, the council is not able to respond to any new expressions of interest at the time of writing.

Questions about community libraries

| Question | Answer |
|--|--|
| How many books does ECC supply? | An initial stock of 200 is supplied. Titles depend on the genres chosen by the community library. They are refreshed every three to six months |
| What training is available? | Training and guidance is given on how to set up and run a library, how to manage membership, and legal requirements, such as equalities and data protection (GDPR) |
| What advice or other support is available? | ECC will signpost groups to sources of funding and other support, such as from the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE), which supports village halls. A named link officer at a local ECC library will keep in touch and provide additional advice |
| Where does the legal risk sit, with ECC or with the community library? | Community libraries are owned and managed by the community, so the risk is theirs, not ECCs. However, they would not be penalised if loss or damage to stock was within the normal range |
| Can an 'Essex Community Libraries' logo or brand be created to help with publicity? | ECC has no plans to provide a logo or brand but community libraries could get together to devise one themselves |

Southminster

At Maldon library a separate discussion was held with Southminster parish councillors and residents about the future of the library there.

Southminster is a growing village and participants felt that the library was a central part of the local community for all age groups.

The library there has been closed during cold weather for the last two winters because it shares a building with the old police station, now closed, and the heating is in that part of the building and cannot be accessed. Essex County Council is looking into possible solutions and talking to organisations in Southminster so the event was an opportunity to seek the views of Southminster residents.

Essex Libraries are following up on possible solutions with Southminster Parish Council and others.

Some comments from the events

“People are not using the library anymore as things can be assessed online at home. We could use the library as a centre for all sorts of activities in the evenings. Things like poetry, opera or other open and volunteer events. Voluntary groups could use it, such as U3A and they could pay a small fee. Bring people in from outside, draw in a crowd and make the library more alive with these things.”

Maldon resident

“The thing to do is make libraries bigger and introduce a commercial crèche, to earn some money from it.”

Braintree resident

What next?

Since the events we have started to look in detail at all the information and insight gathered. We will use this to help inform a comprehensive and strategic approach to shaping a fit for future, financially sustainable and community focused library service. We are involving library staff to help with this, as they know the service and their users very well.

We expect to be able to publish a draft strategy later in 2018 or early 2019, which we will then consult on before going ahead with it.

In the meantime we have set aside some money to continue investment we have already started in some of our buildings – for instance, a new children and young people's library opened at Chelmsford in March and an accessible room is due to open later this year. We will also carry on making improvements to the service that can be done before our strategy is finalised.

If you have an idea for an activity you would like to run in your local library or you want to volunteer to help out there, please contact your library manager or supervisor, or [apply online](#) to become a volunteer.

You can find out about our services, events and space for hire, and keep up with news about Essex Libraries at libraries.essex.gov.uk

Appendices

Events list

All events were held in libraries unless stated otherwise. All were open to people from any district.

5 March: Saffron Walden Library, Uttlesford

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Cllr Vic Ranger, Uttlesford District Council Cabinet Member for Communities and Partnerships
- Suzanna Shaw, ECC Director of Customer Services
- Clive Emmett, CVS Uttlesford, Chief Officer

7 March: Great Baddow Library, Chelmsford

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Cllr Mark Durham, ECC Deputy Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer
- Cllr Susan Sullivan, Chelmsford City Council Cabinet member for Safer Communities
- Sue Shepherd, Rural Community Council of Essex, Village Halls & Community Buildings Advisor
- Lorraine Jarvis, Chelmsford Centre Supporting Voluntary Action, Chief Officer
- Suzanna Shaw, ECC Director of Customer Services

12 March: Great Parndon Library, Harlow

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Cheryl Arthur, ECC Head of Telephone and Digital Access
- Jemma Mindham, Rainbow Services, Harlow, Chief Executive
- A panellist was invited from Harlow District Council but was unable to attend

13 March: Colchester Adult Community Learning centre

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Cllr Tina Bourne, Colchester Borough Council Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities
- Nick Shuttleworth, Rural Community Council of Essex Executive Director
- Kim Simmons, Community 360, Colchester Senior Engagement Officer
- Cheryl Arthur, ECC Head of Telephone & Digital Access

14 March: Rayleigh Library, for Rochford and Castle Point

Panellists:

- Cllr Mark Durham ECC Deputy Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Suzanna Shaw, ECC Director of Customer Services
- Victoria Marzouki, Rayleigh, Rochford and District Association for Voluntary Service, Chief Officer
- Panellists were invited from Rochford and Castle Point councils but were unable to attend.

19 March: Loughton Library, Epping Forest

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Councillor Helen Kane, Epping Forest District Council Cabinet Member for Leisure and Community Services
- Alex Garnett, ECC Head of Systems, Compliance & Customer
- A panellist from Voluntary Action Epping Forest was invited but unable to attend

20 March: Brentwood Library

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Cllr Chris Hossack, Brentwood Borough Council Chair, Community, Health and Housing Committee
- Cheryl Arthur, ECC Head of Telephone & Digital Access
- A panellist from Brentwood Council for Voluntary Service was invited but unable to attend

21 March: Basildon Library, for Basildon and Castle Point

Panellists:

- Cllr Mark Durham ECC Deputy Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Alex Garnett, ECC Head of Systems, Compliance & Customer
- Panellists were invited from Basildon Borough Council, Castle Point Council and Basildon, Billericay and Wickford CVS but were unable to attend

26 March: Clacton Adult Community Learning centre, Tendring

Panellists:

- Cllr Mark Durham, ECC Deputy Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Lisa Andrews, Community Voluntary Services Tendring, Deputy Chief Officer
- Cheryl Arthur, ECC Head of Telephone & Digital Access,
- Dan Land, Tendring District Council, Chair of Community Leadership and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

27 March: Braintree Library

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Alex Garnett, ECC Head of Systems, Compliance & Customer
- Councillor Peter Tattersley, Braintree District Council Cabinet Member for Health & Communities
- Kim Simmons, Community 360, Senior Engagement Officer

28 March: Maldon Library

Panellists:

- Cllr Susan Barker, ECC Cabinet Member for Culture, Communities and Customer (Chair)
- Sarah Laskar, Maldon & District Community Voluntary Service (CVS), Director
- Sue Shepherd, Rural Community Council of Essex Village Halls & Community Buildings Advisor,
- Cheryl Arthur, ECC Head of Telephone & Digital Access

How events were publicised

Posters were displayed at all libraries and in nearby shops and community centres. All district, borough, city, town and parish councils were sent invitations for their members or officers to attend. They were also asked to help publicise the events, as were the voluntary sector umbrella bodies for each district. We are grateful for the extra publicity they gave. The events were also publicised through ECC e-newsletters to library subscribers and volunteers and other potentially interested audiences. Finally, posts were sent out on Essex Libraries' and Essex County Council's social media feeds.

Questions we promised to answer after the events

Loughton: North Weald is open three days a week, why has the service offer reduced?

Answer: North Weald is open six days a week and the offer hasn't reduced: North Weald Parish Council run the library on Mon, Weds & Fri, so there is a limited service. (Mostly self service). Opening times: Mon 9:15am – 1:15, Tues 2pm – 5pm, Weds 9:15am – 1:15pm, Thurs 10am – 7pm, Fri 9:15am – 1:15pm, Sat 9am – 1pm.

Loughton: Why do you need to sign on to wi-fi using a library card?

Answer: International standards for IT networks recommend this as best practice. If you use your card no one else using the system can see you are logged on. It is more secure than simply using a password and protects you from others seeing what you are doing or hacking your device.

Loughton: What happened to recent initiatives such as seed swaps, repair club and music?

Answer: These were a few years ago as part of a project at Loughton to stimulate and encourage community use of the library.

There wasn't much interest in the seed bank and people took seeds but didn't replenish them.

The repair club wasn't popular enough to continue.

We are not sure what music activities the question refers to but music events do happen in libraries.

Since the project, more groups, organisations and individuals have used the library for community activities and we welcome new ideas.

Colchester: Are books still the priority?

Answer: Yes books are still the priority. However, the amount and type of stock on display varies depending on demand. We know that demand for non-fiction titles is falling, and the number of people coming in to libraries to borrow books is falling too.

People use libraries for other things to: as a first point of contact for information, help with searching for jobs or using computers and to access other services or events on offer in libraries. With continuing pressures on budgets, we need to respond to changing needs, be efficient and find new income to support the service.

Great Parndon: Are we meeting needs for different ethnic groups?

Answer: More than 150 languages are spoken in Essex. Libraries have different language books which can all be found on the catalogue but would be difficult

to provide in every language. Dual language children's books can be found in a small number of libraries. We buy books and materials representing a range of cultures and ethnicity and host cultural events and language classes. If you would like to order a book in a particular language or on a particular subject, or to book space in a library for a cultural event let us know.

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Braintree: What is the rationale for limiting the wi-fi? Why isn't it available 24/7? If we were to extend opening hours this would need to change?

Answer: The wi-fi is on the same network as the public computers and they are set to go off ten minutes before the library closes. Hirers can access the wi-fi if they use a library outside normal opening hours, for a small fee.

Maldon: Can we donate books to libraries?

Answer: Yes, we can accept donated books that are in good condition, up to date, in a format we stock, and in demand. If people donate other books we may sell them to raise money to buy more new books. We cannot guarantee to use donated books in a particular library.

Maldon: Who chooses the books for each library? There seem to be very few classics.

Answer: A central team selects new books and manages the stock but local staff and library users can feed into the process. If there is a title or genre you would like to borrow, let your local library staff know. If there are fewer classics it indicates that they are less popular.

Clacton: What is the age range of volunteers?

Answer: Volunteers range from 14 year olds who help with the Summer Reading Challenge to over 80 year olds who help in a variety of roles. There is no upper age limit.

Clacton: How do people know what is involved in volunteering?

Answer: Links to volunteering role descriptions are on the Essex Libraries website or you can ask staff for more details or to shadow an existing volunteer to find out more.

This information is issued by:
Essex County Council
Essex Libraries Service

Contact us:
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formats, on request.

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