

Equality Impact Assessment

Reference: EQIA215166609

Submitted: 08 June 2020 14:34 PM

Executive summary

Title of policy or decision: Phased reopening of Essex Libraries

Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision): This assessment accompanies a Cabinet Member Action that seeks authority for the Director, Customer to be authorised to reopen 60 libraries in two tranches during July 2020, and to keep the further 14 libraries under review in order to find a way to safely reopen them if social distancing measures are relaxed or government guidance otherwise changes. It also discussed the need to maintain flexibility, as it may be necessary to temporarily close libraries in order to avoid a risk of coronavirus spread or to comply with government advice. It also discusses changes to library opening hours in order to maximise the number of libraries that can be staffed safely.

What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve?: Enable inclusive economic growth, Help people get the best start and age well, Help create great places to grow up, live and work

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Enable inclusive economic growth: Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help people get the best start and age well: Help keep vulnerable children safer and enable them to fulfil their potential, Enable more vulnerable adults to live independent of social care, Improve the health of people in Essex

Which strategic priorities does this support? - Help create great places to grow up, live and work: Help to secure stronger, safer and more neighbourly communities

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

Assessing the equality impact

Use this section to record how you have assessed any potential impact on the communities likely to be affected by the policy (or decision): In normal circumstances Essex libraries service a population of 1.5m through 74 library buildings and 2 mobile vehicles, 7 volunteer run community libraries and a volunteer supported home library service. Over 200,000 people in Essex are classed as 'active' library members, i.e. they have used their cards in the last year. Library use is not equal across the population – users are more likely to be children, or older people and female. Data is not collected on library members race, religion or whether users have a disability, but anecdotal and sector wide data suggests that libraries are important for people with physical, sensory or learning impairments. Engagement and consultation carried out in 2018 found that residents value libraries highly and particularly free access to books and neutral community space.

Libraries were closed in Essex from the 21 March, and the government confirmed that all libraries must be closed from 23 March. Given the usage levels indicated above, the reopening of libraries is likely to have a positive impact on residents in Essex generally and particularly on library users.

There are some ways in which libraries will be different, where the impact on particular groups of people does need to be considered to ensure the overall impact of this decision is still positive rather than negative – this is

discussed below.

It will be important to keep a focus on people who continue to be unable to access a library, because they need to remain at home for health reasons, either for themselves or a member of their household. There will also be people who are unable to access a library because their nearest or usual branch is not in the first 60 to be reopened; or because they are reluctant to use public transport to access a library.

For those who cannot access a library, once the first 60 are open:

The service will keep in touch with vulnerable library users through newsletters and in some cases via phone calls and on or before 6 July, will be reintroducing a home library service for those who cannot get to a library.

The online library service provision and promotion of this will continue at its current enhanced level. New ebook and eaudio stock is being purchased continually, newspapers and magazines are available, and ideas for reading and creative activities posted daily.

The service already offers a 'friends and family' ticket to enable people to borrow items on behalf of others and this can be proactively signposted so people can access physical books, particularly items like large print for older customers or those with visual impairments.

The remaining 14 libraries will be kept under review and opened when it is safe and practicable to do so, e.g. when more staff become available or social distancing measures are relaxed.

For those who do use the re-opened service, they will find there are some differences to normal service which could have a small negative impact on protected groups if not well managed – these are discussed under the relevant section below

Does or will the policy or decision affect:

Service users: Yes

Employees: Yes

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

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

Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?: Yes

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

Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies?: No

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

Please describe the steps you have taken to meet the digital accessibility requirements:

Please describe the steps you have taken to test the accessibility of the website, system or application:

Please describe the steps you have taken to maintain accessibility once it has gone live:

Description of impact

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

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

have considered the potential impact on all of the protected characteristics

Age

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Children and young people will mostly benefit from libraries reopening. However they may benefit from some targeted communications to help parents explain why their library is different to manage their expectations.

Older people will benefit from libraries reopening, where they are able to access them in person. They may require some support with accessing self-service technology to loan and return books and this will be provided, with staff maintaining social distancing and good hand hygiene. Where older people are unable to attend the library in person, friends and family can borrow and return items on their behalf. The service is working towards getting a home delivery service for customers live again by 6 July; this is discussed in the recovery plan.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: Impact will be kept under review and actions and support adjusted when necessary and possible to do so.

Disability - learning disability

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: In general the reopening of libraries represents a positive step for people with these learning disabilities as it will mean that they potentially have the opportunity to visit a library again, or if they are shielding, for a friend, family member, carer, library staff member or volunteer to select items of their behalf. The service can promote the 'friends and family' ticket that is already available to support this.

Transactions to be carried out wherever possible via the self-service terminals – staff will need to be mindful of any impairments or barriers that prevent customers from using the terminals and step in to assist if necessary, whilst maintaining social distancing and good hand hygiene, and asking the customers to handle the books they wish to borrow or return.

People may also need support to follow new signage and guidance in the library reflecting social distancing and hand and surface hygiene – staff will be mindful of customer requirements.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: See above.

Disability - mental health issues

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Generally it is expected that for most customers, and for staff, the reopening of libraries will have a positive impact on their mental health. This will bring an element of 'normality' that many people are lacking and mark the end of one phase of uncertainty. Accessing books and reading, seeing people face to face (at a distance) will help people who may be feeling isolated to reconnect. Reading as an activity has proven mental health benefits, including stress reduction, empathy development and improving cognitive function. However it is recognised that the uncertainty continues and for many people the reopening of services and venues, including libraries, introduces a level of anxiety around their personal, and the wider community risk of increased virus transmission. This includes library staff. Library managers are aware of the potential impacts on staff anxiety levels and will offer appropriate guidance and support.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: The impact for some will be improved mental health but it is recognised that for many their mental health will continue to suffer. Communications about service changes will be sensitive to this and there will be continued signposting to useful information to support improved mental health.

Disability - physical impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: In general the reopening of libraries represents a positive step for people with physical impairments as it will mean that they potentially have the opportunity to visit a library again, or if they are shielding, for a friend, family member or carer, library staff member or volunteer to select items of their behalf. The service can promote the 'friends and family' ticket that is already available to support this.

Transactions to be carried out wherever possible via the self-service terminals – staff will need to be mindful of any impairments or barriers that prevent customers from using the terminals and step into assist if necessary, whilst maintaining social distancing and good hand hygiene, and asking the customers to handle the books they wish to borrow or return.

People may also need support to follow new signage and guidance in the library reflecting social distancing and hand and surface hygiene – staff will be mindful of customer requirements.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: See above

Disability - sensory impairment

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: In general the reopening of libraries represents a positive step for people with sensory impairments as it will mean that they potentially have the opportunity to visit a library again, or if they are shielding, for a friend, family member, carer, library staff member or volunteer to select items of their behalf. The service can promote the 'friends and family' ticket that is already available to support this.

Transactions to be carried out wherever possible via the self-service terminals – staff will need to be mindful of any impairments or barriers that prevent customers from using the terminals and step into assist if necessary, whilst maintaining social distancing and good hand hygiene, and asking the customers to handle the books they wish to borrow or return.

People may also need support to follow new signage and guidance in the library reflecting social distancing and hand and surface hygiene – staff will be mindful of customer requirements.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: See above

Pregnancy / maternity

Nature of impact: Positive

Please provide more details about the nature of impact: Research conducted by Essex Libraries and Shared Intelligence highlight the benefits of library service provision for new parents in terms of lifting their mood,

reducing stress, and supporting them in bonding with babies which in turn has recognised positive impact for infants and young children. Because libraries are unable to reintroduce rhyme time and storytime events or allow parents to meet and congregate there may be a negative impact to parents of the reopening. The service will continue to mitigate these impacts where possible by offering rhyme time and other activities online, and by providing the book lending service – this should mean that parents are able to access new materials to read with their children at home, at no cost, which will support both child development and adult mental health improvement.

Extent of impact: Low

Please provide more details about the extent of impact: See above

Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

Does your EqIA indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups?: No

Details of person completing the form

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

Date EqIA completed: 08/06/2020

Name of person completing the EqIA: Catherine Barton

Email address of person completing the EqIA: catherine.barton@essex.gov.uk

Your function: Corporate and Customer Services

Your service area: Customer

Your team: Libraries

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

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