

Essex County Council
Future Libraries Services Strategy
Final Equalities Impact Assessment

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Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been prepared to inform political decision-making about Essex County Council's (the Council) strategy for the Delivery of Library Services in Essex between 2019-2024.

A draft strategy setting out the proposals for the future of library services in Essex was published for public consultation on 29 November 2018. The consultation closed on 21 February 2019 and the results of this, as well as other evidence such as active library card users, and community activities that take place within individual libraries across Essex, have been used to inform this EIA.

What is the future libraries strategy?

The Strategy proposes to ensure that the Council continues to run a comprehensive and efficient library service, containing both Council-run libraries and community libraries. The Strategy proposes that the Council works with community organisations to run some libraries themselves, with support from the Council including one-off payments, book loans, and training.

How did we engage with the public on the future of libraries?

- Consultation was carried out via a number of formats; a survey available online, on paper, in large print, to complete over the phone and in an easy read version for people with learning disabilities or communication difficulties.
- The survey was suitable for completion by adults, children and young people 16 or under (with parental consent), families with children under 11, and organisations.
- It was widely publicised in Essex media and via the Council's website, social media and e-bulletins. The proposals generated more than 600 items of media coverage, the bulletins reached 127,000 subscribers and social media posts reached 273,000.
- All active library user households (library members who had used their library card in the year to 29/10/2018) were notified by letter or email, as were c700 user groups, partner organisations and other stakeholders.
- All county councillors and borough, city and district councillors were invited to briefing sessions at the start of the consultation.
- Information drop-in sessions were held at each of the 74 libraries run by the Council, for people to ask questions and get help to access the survey (not to gather feedback). These were attended by an estimated 2,500 people.
- The survey asked for respondents' views on the Draft Strategy's ambitions, evaluation criteria, proposed ways people could access library services in future, proposals for community libraries and proposals for outreach as well as their preferences for library opening hours. It also asked people to give information about themselves, in confidence and voluntarily, in relation to the nine protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010.¹ This was requested because such detailed identity information is not being routinely collected by the library service. Without it, it would be difficult for the Council to assess the equality impacts on people with those protected characteristics. This data has been used to inform this EIA.
- 21,961 responses were received, 16,642 (76%) from individuals, 4,901 (22%) from families with children under 11 years old, 328 from organisations and 90 unidentified.
- In addition, more than 1,000 items of correspondence were received, 844 of which contained comments and suggestions about the proposals or the consultation (the rest were seeking information).
- A report on the analysis to the consultation is at appendix 1 of the cabinet report.
- Prior to launching the consultation, the Council conducted research and engagement in spring 2018 into Essex residents' views and use of libraries and their priorities for them in future. This research informed development of the draft strategy and has been further

¹ The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

considered in preparing this EIA. A summary of that research and engagement can be viewed here.

What is the purpose of this document?

By law, the Council, as a public body, is required to pay due regard to equality, as set out within section 149 the Equality Act 2010. More details of the equality duty is set out in the report to the Cabinet.

To have due regard means that, in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities, the Council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

In order to pay due regard and meet our legal requirements, an EIA has been written. This takes into account the proposed changes in the Future Libraries Strategy and aims to assess how these changes may impact people with the nine protected characteristics and how any adverse impact could be addressed. This is an important document as it outlines how these people may be affected by the proposals, and what can happen to ensure that the impact is limited.

Overview of Essex

Please be aware when reading the tables below that percentages have been rounded. Percentages for consultation responses relate to the number of people who answered the relevant question, not to the total number of survey respondents.

Protected Characteristic	Essex Population	Active Library Users	Consultation Responses
Total	1,468,200 (2017) ²	221,640 active members (15% of Essex population)	21,961 (1.5% of Essex population)
Age	16 or under: 21% (2,017 estimate) ²	16 or under: 40%	16 or under: 3%
	Over 60: 20% (2017 estimate) ²	Over 60: 27%	Over 60: 47%
Disability/Impairment - learning disability	2% (2017 estimate) ³	Data not collected	1%
Disability/Impairment – mental health issues	20% (2017 estimate) ³	Data not collected	1%
Disability/Impairment – physical impairment	6% ³	Data not collected	8%
Disability/Impairment – sensory impairment	6% ³	Data not collected	3%
Gender/Sex	Female: 51% ²	Female: 59%	Female: 67%
	Male: 49% ²	Male: 37%	Male: 30%
Gender Reassignment	0.5-0.7% estimated to experience gender dysmorphia	Data not collected	0.5% indicated that their gender does not match their sex registered at birth
Marriage/Civil Partnership	51% aged 16+ in marriage/civil partnership. ⁴	Data not collected	63% in marriage or civil partnership
Pregnancy/Maternity	Total fertility rate: 1.91 ²	Data not collected	4% were currently pregnant or pregnant within the last year
Race	9% Black, Asian and minority ethnic ⁴	10% Black, Asian and minority ethnic	3% Black, Asian and minority ethnic
Religion/Belief	65% religious ²	Data not collected	66% religious
	4% religious minority (non-Christian) ²		3% religious minority (non-Christian)
Sexual Orientation	Estimated 4-10% define as not heterosexual. ²	Data not collected	2% define as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

² ONS

³ POPPI/PANSI

⁴ 2011 Census

Conclusion

The completion of this revised Equalities Impact Assessment has drawn the following conclusions set out below. Please note that a blank section in the table means that the assessment has not found a potential significant impact.

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.

In the event of a community group taking control of a library, a separate Equalities Impact Assessment will follow for that specific library before any decision is taken.

Protected Characteristic	Impact	Comments and Response
Age		
Disability/Impairment - learning disability	A community organisation may choose to run a community library from an inaccessible building. This would have an adverse impact on some people with a disability and may make it difficult or impossible for them to access the library.	The Council will ensure that there is a requirement for community libraries to be hosted in accessible locations.
Disability/Impairment – mental health issues		
Disability/Impairment – physical impairment		
Disability/Impairment – sensory impairment		
Gender/Sex	See impact on all users below	
Gender Reassignment	None	
Marriage/Civil Partnership	None	
Pregnancy/Maternity	See impact on all users below	
Race	See impact on all users below	
Religion/Belief	None	
Sexual Orientation	None	

Protected Characteristic	Impact	Comments and Response
<p>All users (note that children, mothers, women. People from BME communities and older people are more likely to use libraries than the generality of the population, so any adverse impact on library services will have a greater impact on these groups.</p>	<p>There is a perceived risk that Community libraries may have shorter opening hours than council run libraries.</p> <p>There is a perceived risk that there may be reduced stock in a community library compared with council run libraries.</p> <p>There is a perceived risk that customer service levels may decline if community libraries are staffed by community groups rather than paid employee.</p> <p>Community libraries may potentially lose or have reduced digital access including the use of computers.</p>	<p>The Council will ensure that there is a minimum number of opening hours in each community library.</p> <p>Community organisations will be given a regular refresh of stock from the Council, and they will also be able to order specific books from the Essex Library Service.</p> <p>The Council will ensure that all library volunteers including those in community libraries will be given customer service and equalities training.</p> <p>A digital offer will be decided by the community library itself. The Council will provide grant funding to community libraries and the funding could be used to purchase or fund public computers and internet access. This impact will be assessed on a case by case basis via subsequent EIAs.</p>