

Report of	Assistant Director For Communities	Author	Jo Besant ☎ 506943
Title	Response to Essex Future Library Services Consultation		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Essex County Council are seeking views on their Future Library Services Consultation for the proposed Future Library Services Strategy.
- 1.2 The consultation proposes changes to the number of libraries across the borough resulting in an estimated overall saving of £2m to Essex County Council.
- 1.3 Essex County Council published their Future Library Services Strategy for the period 2019 – 2024. A consultation was launched on the 29th November 2018 to last 12 weeks until 20th February 2019.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To respond to the consultation paper as proposed in Appendix 1.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 The consultation provides the Council with the opportunity to influence the proposal made by Essex County Councils Future Library Services Strategy.

4. Alternative Options

To choose not to respond. However, by not responding Colchester Borough Council would lose its opportunity to influence the outcome of the consultation and the future of Essex libraries.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The strategy outlines a reduced demand for Library services both nationally and locally. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18 loans from Essex Library Services fell by 43% and use of public network computers fell by 22%. Only 16% of Essex residents (241k) are active users i.e. used their library card in the last year. However, over the same period online loans of eBooks, eAudio and eMagazines rose by a staggering 205%.
- 5.2 ECC provides 74 public libraries and two mobile libraries. The strategy proposes an enhanced eLibrary service, a focus on outreach, greater community involvement, smart libraries and fewer but better library spaces.

4.4 Colchester Libraries

Proposed Tier	Library	Opening Hours	Proposal	CBC Councillors
1	Colchester Library & Community Hub	Mon – Fri 9am-6.30pm Sat 9am-5pm Sun 1-4pm	Core offer. Managed by ECC with volunteers. Open at least 40 hours per week	Barlow / Crow / Laws
2	Greenstead	Mon & Tues 9am-6pm Weds Closed Thurs 9am-5pm Fri Closed Sat 9am-1pm, 2-5pm Sun Closed	Core offer. Managed by ECC with volunteer support. Open between 16 – 32 hours per week	Bourne / Young / Young
3	Stanway	Mon 9am-1pm Tues 1-5pm Weds Closed Thurs 1-5pm Fri Closed Sat 9am-1pm Sun Closed	ECC would seek community partner to run. If no offer, then further consultation on future	Dundas / Maclean / Scott-Boutell
3	Tiptree	Mon 2-5pm Tues 1am-1pm, 2-5pm Weds Closed Thurs 10am-1pm, 2-7pm Fri Closed Sat 9am-1pm Sun Closed	As above	Elliot / Loveland / Wood
3	Mersea	Mon Closed Tues 9.30am-12.30pm, 2-7pm Weds Closed Thurs 9.30-12.30pm, 2-5pm Fri 9.30am-12.30pm Sat 9.30am-12.30pm, 2-5pm Sun Closed	As above	Davidson / Jowers / Moore
3	Wivenhoe	Mon Closed Tues 2-7pm Weds 10am-12.30pm, 1.30-4pm Thurs 2-7pm Fri 10am-1pm Sat 10am-1pm, 2-5pm Sun Closed	As above	Cory / Liddy / Luxford Vaughan
4	Prettygate	Mon Closed Tues 9am-6pm Weds 9am-6pm Thurs Closed Fri 9am-5pm Sat 9am-5pm Sun Closed	Library proposed to be closed although it may be possible for a community / partner to run if suitable proposal is received	Buston / Davies / Lissimore

5.3 Two Colchester libraries are proposed to offer a core service. Opening hours yet to be confirmed. It is unclear at this stage how the proposal would affect CBC services located in the Library and Community Hub and how the proposal will impact the Tamarisk Way development.

- 5.4 4 libraries will be offered by ECC to be run by the community – 6-month window for proposals or a further consultation will be triggered on their future. 1 library site to be closed, although proposals will be considered for the site to be run by the community.

Therefore, in Colchester 2 sites will remain, with a further 5 sites at risk of closure.

6. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 The proposed reduction in library service provision for Colchester has potential Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications as set out in the proposed response.
- 6.2 People see libraries as a safe place to go. All 7 libraries in Colchester signed up to the Keep Safe Scheme providing vulnerable people with a place of refuge. The removal of these premises could potentially increase their vulnerabilities.

7. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

The duty requires us to have regard to the need to;

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations

The EqIA indicated that the proposals made by ECC will not have a disproportionately adverse impact of people with a protected characteristic.

8. Strategic Plan References

- 8.1 This decision links to the council's priorities around Responsibility and Wellbeing, specifically linked to encouraging residents to get involved in their communities and to identify solutions to local issues. To target support to the most disadvantaged residents and communities, encourage belonging, involvement and responsibility.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 Most of the questions asked in the consultation are aimed at individual users of libraries or personal views and this report focuses on providing a response to the 'any other views or comments' section of the consultation questions.
- 8.2 The consultation is being carried out by Essex County Council. Reoccurring themes from previous consultations show; -
- A need for better promotion and publicity
 - Interest in hiring libraries for other activities when the library is closed
 - Reducing social isolation and loneliness
 - Extend the service offer at libraries and share the space with specialist services
 - Retain the focus on increasing skills and knowledge
 - Encourage young library users

10. Publicity Considerations

- 10.1 Residents can respond to the consultation online or by visiting a drop-in session at any Essex library until 20th February 2019. Colchester Borough Council's response will be collaborated with other responses in summer 2019.

11. Financial Implications

11.1 The recommended proposals will deliver an estimated saving of £2m to ECC.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 No Health and Safety Implications identified.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Essex Future Library Services Strategy

<https://libraries.essex.gov.uk/media/1015667/draft-essex-library-services-strategy-summary.pdf>

The strategy has been developed against the backdrop of an Essex wide needs assessment, taking into account distance between locations, usage, population size, deprivation and social isolation. The output of the needs assessment then prioritises the provision into one of four tiers:

Tier 1 – Hub library, at least one, in each district. Will provide a core offer, be managed by ECC with volunteer support. Open at least 40 hours per week, instead of current 48-59 hours. Libraries in tier 1 will be in areas of higher population density.

Tier 2 – Library sites in locations that rank highest on the needs assessment, these libraries will be managed by ECC, with volunteer support where possible, and will provide a core offer and a range of opening hours between 16 – 32 hours per week instead of current 16-50 hours a week.

Tier 3 – Library sites where ECC considers that it is not necessary to provide library services but believes there would be benefit in providing library services if suitable arrangements could be made within the community. ECC would seek community interest to be confirmed within 6 months of adoption of strategy. If after 6 months suitable partners cannot be found, then such tier 3 libraries will be subject to a further consultation on their future.

Tier 4 – Library sites where the needs assessment identifies that a library service is not required. These libraries will be closed although it may be possible for a community library to be run in these places if a suitable proposal is received.

Tier 1 and 2 sites are identified as providing a comprehensive and efficient service which satisfies ECC statutory duty, whilst tier 3 and 4 sites are not required to meet ECC's statutory duty.

The view of Colchester Borough Council is that libraries are an important community asset. Whilst most libraries are now multi-purpose venues (information hubs, work clubs, Children's Centre points, IT skills help etc.) the librarian operated libraries with actual books, quiet space for reading or research, should not be diminished.

It is proposed that tier 1 and 2 libraries will offer a core service. Colchester Borough Council is not clear on how the proposed changes will impact on the current community hub model and other proposed hub locations such as Tamarisk Way.

Tier 3 and 4 libraries in Colchester offer recycling facilities, computer courses, online support, rhyme time, book groups, knitting groups and stretch and tone class. Citizens Advice Bureau provide a skeleton library service alongside their advice services, one day per week at Wivenhoe Library. These groups alone, attract a range of vulnerable residents who need local support and community engagement.

Appendix 2 Colchester Library Services data (attached)

Health & Wellbeing

- Libraries provide a local community-based space that supports and contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for the residents of Colchester. Community groups and individuals can use these spaces to meet up, make new connections and socialise which in turn contributes to reducing social isolation and loneliness. Community

based activities, groups and clubs are generally supported by local volunteers and research suggests activities and groups within communities are the best approach, providing valuable community cohesion. The Your Communities, Libraries and You report highlights that members of the public would like the libraries to be used for adult learning classes, health, information and advice, access to other council services and access to activities run by communities.

- Young people can do their homework in a library (and improve their life chances as a result) which isn't always possible at home for many reasons. People who don't have a computer or only have limited access, can become digitally excluded. People who have literacy / numeracy issues can develop those skills in a safe space within a library.
- A proposed reduction in the existing library service provision coincides with key programmes of work in Colchester and North East Essex looking to maximise existing community assets and resources, whilst exploring opportunities to deliver services in a trusted and accessible community setting. These programmes of work have identified the value that both providers and service users place on the hyper local. Any subsequent or proposed reduction in hyper local provision appears at odds with these findings and the potential for the existing libraries to contribute to and support this emerging programme of work needs to be fully explored and understood before any changes are implemented.
- As an example, the weight management model (delivered in community locations by community organisations and members) is an example of how a health-based service can be delivered in a non-clinical, easily accessible setting and there is potential for other initiatives that support improved wellbeing outcomes to be delivered in a similar way. Through weight management being delivered in 4 libraries across Essex there have been 62 new library memberships although it is noted that this model is not as yet being delivered in Colchester library locations however it would provide added social value, more footfall and potentially less social isolation.
- 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. An example of this is evidenced at Wivenhoe Library where Citizens advice Bureau provide a skeleton library service alongside their advice service every Wednesday. People see the library as a safe place to go. Each library in Colchester signed up to the Keep Safe scheme which is aimed at residents with learning difficulties. The scheme provides residents with a safe place (such as a library) if they feel anxious or unwell, lose their wallet or bag, or feel threatened. Keep Safe venues allow residents to use a telephone or will make a call on their behalf. The potential reduction in Keep Safe venues will increase the vulnerability for people with learning difficulties, as there are a few trusted non-commercial public spaces left, where someone can stay all day for free should they so wish. Libraries are at the heart of our communities, where people go for advice, information or to see other service providers such as local councils, Citizens Advice or job clubs.

Reduced Accessibility

- Reduced opening times would be less accessible for all, but residents who work during the day and residents looking for something to do or somewhere to go at a weekend would see the biggest impact. Visits to the library are free and this is likely to impact on those residents on a low income particularly young families with children. Some libraries have been used for several different purposes including having members of the public as 'key holders,' so space can be used when the library is shut. This would provide out of hours access for the working population.
- The 2011 census shows that West Mersea residents are one of the highest average age populations in Colchester. The proposal to close the library in Mersea will have an adverse effect on this group of users, some using the service to interact and feel part of their community. Evidence shows that social isolation is a big issue in this locality and for this specific cohort of people. qualify it by saying that we know isolation is an issue in this locality for this specific cohort of people
- Colchester has a high population of students with most residing in Wivenhoe and St Andrews. The 2011 census shows that these wards alongside Shrub End have the lowest average age. Students use the library in Wivenhoe for study time, study reference books and use of online learning materials. Removing this resource would have an impact of this group of users.

Prettygate Library

- The needs assessment identifies that Prettygate library service is not required. The library will be closed although it may be possible for a community library to be run in its places if a suitable proposal is received.
- The population of Prettygate sits at 10,389. Research shows a 40.8% increase in the population in Prettygate between 2011-2017. Over 6,000 being aged 40 years and over.
- This library has a higher usage amongst 0-9 years (28%) compared to the Essex Library average for 0-9 years (23%). Additionally, Prettygate Library also has a higher usage amongst 0-19 years (43%) compared to the Essex Library average for 0-19 years (37%)
- Within the library sits Colchester Toy Library which is based on the first floor. The Toy Library offers a relaxed and welcoming space for anyone to play with toys, enjoy their soft play area and have some fun! Colchester Toy library is a local charity that has been running since 1984. The aim of the Toy Library is to lend toys to all families around the Colchester area promoting play, community and sharing of resources. Opening hours are Tuesday 10-12.30, Wednesday 10-3pm and Friday 10.30-11.45pm.
- Baby and Toddler Rhymetime run 2 sessions every Tuesday morning.
- Prettygate reading group meet on the last Tuesday of every month.
- Other prominent community assets near Prettygate Library are Prettygate Baptist Church, Prettygate Junior and Infant Schools, Home Farm Primary School. Several community groups (WW, U3A, Counselling sessions and NHS) use the facilities at the Baptist Church, which include an onsite café, but this only opens twice a month.

- Home Farm Primary School has hireable space, a hall, classrooms, library, playing fields, dance studios, swimming pool and a kitchen. There may be potential to use this asset as an alternative library and community space.
- Straight Road Community Centre, Kingsland Church and St Leonards Church Hall are all in proximity and could provide alternative community space.

Appendix 3 – Essex County Council Cabinet Papers – meeting 22 November 2018

<https://cmis.essexcc.gov.uk/essexcmis5/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/4035/Committee/36/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx>