

Response to Essex Library Consultation

Over the life of this strategy we have set five key ambitions

- Have books and reading at the heart of our library service offer
- Have a class-leading eLibrary and embrace digital technology
- Have a smaller number of libraries more effectively focused on meeting the needs of communities
- Work in partnership with our communities to run and improve library services
- Offer a consistently good customer experience.

Q7. To what extent do you agree or disagree that our five ambitions (above) are the right place on which to focus our limited resources?

Strongly agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree/Don't feel able to say

Basildon Council supports the 5 key ambitions in principle, however it is felt that these ambitions should be broadened as they do not reflect the evolution of library services and the role that libraries now play in modern society. Through formal and informal consultations with residents and local library users, it is clear that a significant proportion of residents use libraries as community hubs and not just places to access reading material. Libraries host a range of community activities such as job clubs, baby rhyme time, knitting clubs to name but a few. They also provide a quiet space for learning and accessing computers. It would appear ECC's ambitions are to move library services in a different direction, one that does not take account of the social value and contribution that libraries now retain. This seems contrary the broader responsibilities of ECC and its priorities as set out in the Essex Vision. ECC should be seeking to use the library service and its proximity to the local community as a base for the further co-location of community support activity. It is evident from our engagement with the local community and library users that activity is taking place in our libraries that benefits ECC. For example, the libraries provide a safe and inviting environment for mental health and child support worker to meet their clients. Local schools that do not have their own library use these libraries providing children an opportunity to access valuable resources. Libraries are used to access jobs clubs, carers meetings and baby groups. They also provide a quiet community space that may not be available at home to study or engage with other members of the local community.

Basildon Council feel a more holistic view of the library service and its contribution to local communities should be adopted and that this in turn will have broader benefits to other aspects of the ECC's responsibilities, specifically regarding social care and education.

This consultation process fails to take account of the existing service offer and the role libraries now play in local communities, which goes beyond the provision of books. It could be argued that there is a legitimate expectation that the range of other services currently provided from the libraries in both Vange and Fryerns should have featured within this consultation process and Basildon Council would be keen to work with ECC to ensure such valuable community resources continue to be available in the locality.

The five criteria are listed below, with the weighting for each in brackets:

- **Location:** Proximity to other libraries. Libraries clustered within a two mile walk of each other will be ranked at lower need (30%).

- **Usage:** the number of active users (members who have used their library card in the last year) the library has **(25%)**
- **Population:** The number of libraries per head of population in each district. Based on current figures, not projected growth. Districts with more people per library ranked higher for need **(25%)**
- **Deprivation:** The deprivation level of the lower-layer super output area (LSOA) the library's postcode is in, as identified in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) **(15%)**
- **Social isolation:** Prevalence in the district of new parents (measured by fertility rates) and % of residents over 65 as indicators of higher risk of social isolation) **(5%)**

Q8. To what extent do you agree with the evaluation criteria we propose to use to assess need?

Strongly agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree/Don't feel able to say

Basildon Council have specific concerns regarding the weighting and measures used within the evaluation criteria. Our concerns are set out below:

- Using District level data masks the significant disadvantage experienced in communities supported by both Vange and Fryerns libraries and does not provide a true representation of the needs of these areas. The lack of locality based Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) further increases the risk of decisions being based on unrepresentative data. Greater effort should be made to use data available at a Lower-layer Super Output level, where this is available and where this is not, ECC should be proactive in obtaining relevant insight and intelligence i.e. collecting protected characteristic data as part of library membership.
- **Usage** - Only recognises those with a membership card that have taken out a book or accessed wifi in last 12 months. This does not capture the true footfall of the service nor does it accurately reflect library usage, given the breadth of services that now makeup the library offer.
- **Location** - whilst a 2 mile walking distance has been used as a measure of proximity, this again does not give due consideration to those barriers that exist that would prevent residents accessing other library services. Too much emphasis has been placed on library location without considering broader factors that would impact access and no attempt has been made to understand the prevalence of such barriers within affected communities. For example, in the EIA ECC advise that data is not collected on the number of library users with a disability. Similarly, we know that some libraries such as Vange and Fryerns have a higher than average membership of user's age 0-9. Walking further to access alternative services may not be feasible and therefore cause further hardship. The needs assessment used by ECC also assumes that 78% of households in the borough have access to one or more car or van. In reality, the figures are likely to be much lower in the areas identified for library closures. Using Acorn segmentation data it is predicted that only 66% of Vange residents and 69% of Fryerns residents would have access to a car further illustrating how borough wide data can mask the extent and impact of deprivation experienced within communities in a borough, in particular in Vange and Fryerns. In addition, lower levels of income may also act as a barrier to using public transport.
- **Population** – The assessment only captures the current figure for libraries per head of population, giving a higher score where there are more people per library. It does not provide additional weighting where the proposals will further increase the ratio of people per library. The

needs assessment uses the CIPFA 2017 library benchmarking results to determine a national average library offer per head of population as 22425. Based on this average, Basildon Borough has a managed library for every 26728 residents. This means the borough's libraries already serve a higher number of residents than the national average, thereby achieving a maximum score for this aspect of the assessment. However, the assessment fails to attribute further points where the proposal put forward will further negatively impact on the library offer per head of population, meaning Basildon borough is further disadvantaged by the assessment criteria. In other areas of Essex, libraries serve much lower numbers of residents (Maldon – 15987, Epping Forest -16497, Braintree – 16959). Using the calculation adopted in the needs assessment, it can be assumed that the further loss of 2 libraries in the borough means the borough will have a managed library for every 37419 residents. This means more residents per library, both above the national average figure and 5,000 residents per library more than the county of Worcestershire's¹ average (which had the highest level of residents per managed library in the CIPFA population per library comparator English counties 2016-17). No recognition is given where further disadvantage will occur as a result of the proposals.

In addition, assumptions have been based on current population figures which do not reflect that Basildon (the 3rd youngest borough in Essex) will grow in population far more rapidly than other areas in Essex, nor does it consider the projected increase in population anticipated as result of the Local Plan.

- **Deprivation** – A total value of 15% for this element of the assessment is too low and dismissive of the negative impact deprivation has on the life chances of those living in such communities. Libraries provide an important service in communities already materially disadvantaged. The wards of Fryerns and Vange have a low percentage of children who are ready for school, have higher than average persistent secondary school absenteeism, high rates of children in care, high rates of child poverty and fewer pupils than average that aspire to go to university. Both wards rank in the most deprived 5% of wards in Essex (Vange 3rd and Fryerns 11th out of 258 wards in Essex). By not attributing suitable weighting to this element of the criteria, ECC is not recognising the existing differences in levels of deprivation experienced across Essex nor is it seeking to address such disadvantage.
- **Social Isolation** – A further indicator of the risk of social isolation is the number of pensioners who live alone. 32.2% of Basildon borough pensioners live alone (worse than the England average of 31.5% and the Essex average of 29.9%). Again, when this is considered in the wards affected by proposed library closures the figures are much worse, with 41% of pensioners living alone in Vange and 34% in Fryerns. Likewise, taking into consideration the level of under 5's living in an area would also give a broader understanding of the potential for social isolation. In Essex the population estimate for under 5's is 5.9%². In Vange this figure is higher at 7.6% and 8.1% in Fryerns. This would suggest that there are more parents with young families in these communities and potentially a greater risk of social isolation.

In addition, the weighting is too low given the consequences to local authorities and communities of contributing to increased social isolation through service reduction.

Q9. Are there any other criteria you think we should use to assess need?

¹ 32394.44

² ONS mid-2017 population estimate

An assessment of the social value contribution of existing library services should be included in the criteria and weighted accordingly. This would capture the breadth of other activity delivered from libraries and the social return on investment achieved from the library service. Gathering such information may also inform a more collaborative approach across ECC with regards to the future of local libraries.

Q10. To what extent do you agree that our proposals provide a reasonable range of different ways for people to access library services according to their needs?

Strongly agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor disagree/**Disagree**/Strongly disagree/Don't feel able to say

It is unclear at this stage whether the services that remain will be accessible to existing users of Vange and Fryerns libraries due to a lack of accurate user data as set out in the Equality Impact Assessment.

Q11. Has your organisation used any of the following libraries in the last 12 months, or has someone used any of them on your behalf? (Please select all that apply)

n/a

There are no question 12 and 13 for organisations.

Q14. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to invite community groups or other organisations to run 19 libraries in tier 3 locations, to maximise the number of libraries remaining?

Strongly agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor disagree/Disagree/**Strongly disagree**/Don't feel able to say

There are no libraries identified as tier 3 in Basildon so this would not affect us as an organisation, however careful consideration should be given to the capacity of local communities to undertake such a commitment. We have sought to explore the capacity of local communities to run both Fryerns and Vange libraries (both tier 4) as a means to continue their survival. It is evident that capacity is significantly reduced in communities facing multiply challenges when compared to communities that have the capacity to organise, such as those that have a Parish council. This is evident in the many news stories of activism across Essex that have emerged in response to this consultation. It should not be assumed that all communities are willing or able to take on responsibility for service provision and delivery where the local authority is no longer willing or able. The circumstances of each community should be a key consideration in the viability of such proposals.

Q15. To what extent do you agree with the idea of some library services being available in places other than libraries?

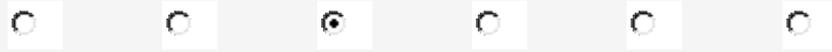
For example children's storytimes in village halls or community centres; or the ability to pick up library books from a local shop or leisure centre

Strongly agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor disagree/**Disagree**/Strongly disagree/Don't feel able to say

Whilst this has merit in principle, the proposal is reliant on the availability of suitable locations within communities. In deprived areas it cannot be assumed that village halls, community halls, leisure centres or even shops exist or have capacity to accommodate the service. This should be investigated and

be open less on weekdays, unless volunteers or smart library tech were available to increase overall opening hours)

Improved eLibrary so I can access library services any time I want



Having longer opening hours would be a priority for those libraries in the borough identified as tier 1 and 2. Given the potential closure of 2 libraries in the borough, it would seem sensible and necessary to increase the accessibility of remaining libraries by increasing open hours and extending this across the weekend.

Our eLibrary

Q 17. Are you aware of or has your organisation used any of the following digital (online) services provided by Essex County Council ?

N/A

Getting involved

Q 18. Would members of your organisation be interested in finding out any more about any of the volunteering roles, either on an occasional or regular basis?

- Baby and Toddler Rhymetime Volunteer
- Code Club Volunteer
- Computer Training Volunteer
- Computer Support Volunteer
- CreatorSpace Volunteer
- Customer Services Volunteer
- Home Library Service volunteer
- Library Activity Volunteer
- Library Ambassador (for 13 to 18 year olds)
- Mobile Library Support Volunteer
- Sensory Wall Volunteer
- Work Club Volunteer

Would the council wish to promote these opportunities with Staff?

Q19. Would you like to add anything else about the Council's proposals that has not been covered above?

(The responses under each question will be presented in this section)

Please give us any other ideas you may have for improving the service or reducing the cost of the service.

Section 3 - For organisations

Q 20. Does your organisation currently do any of the following?

	Yes	No	No, but would be interested in this in the future
Share a library building	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use space in a library for regular service delivery/activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use space in a library for occasional service delivery/activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide space in your building to ECC for an ECC-run library or library activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Provide space in your building to ECC for an ECC run library or library activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q 21. If the library service was withdrawn from your nearest library/libraries would it have an impact on...

	Yes	No	Not sure
Your organisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The people your organisation represents/ serves



Q 22. If you answered yes to Q21, how would it impact your organisation or the people it serves?

As previously stated, Vange and Fryerns are two of the most deprived areas in Essex. It is felt that the withdrawal of a library service in these areas will have adverse effects on the local communities. Access to digital technology, cars, books and a safe work environment is significantly lower in deprived areas, which will inadvertently affect education, attainment, employment opportunities, community cohesion, happiness, and social isolation. The proposal also appears to disproportionately impact on groups with protected characteristics including older people, children/young people and pregnant women/new mothers who make up a significant majority of existing users. There also appears to be a lack of insight on the part of ECC on how the proposals will impact on those with a disability or from a BME group.

Q23. Does your organisation primarily work with or represent people with any of these groups of people?

- Older people
- Children/ young people
- Disabled people
- Transgender people
- Pregnant women or new mothers
- Black and ethnic minority people
- Religious or faith community/ies
- Women
- Men
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual people

Q24. Would your organisation be interested in partnering to support the delivery of library services run by Essex County Council in tier 2, 3 or 4?

??? Yes or No