

Libraries Strategy

2024-28



June 2024

Introduction

Located within the heart of communities, Cheshire East libraries provide a rich selection of free resources and support in welcoming accessible and social spaces, that facilitate events and collaborative working. Funded by local government, library services are determined at a local level by the priorities of the council however as part of a national network, the Libraries Taskforce reporting to the Department of Culture Media and Sport provides leadership and advocates on behalf of the sector.

This strategy has been developed following the library service review in 2023 when feedback from the public consultation demonstrated that libraries are vitally important to Cheshire East residents however unprecedented financial challenges have meant that reductions in the budget for libraries will require the service to be run in a different way to maintain this valued offer where it is most needed across the borough.



What we do

"Libraries not only provide access to books and other literature but also help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, bring people together, and provide practical support and guidance"

Libraries Deliver:
Ambition for Public Libraries in England, DCMS



**Libraries
Connected**



Mission

To connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity.

Universal Library offers:



Health and Wellbeing **Healthier, Happier, Connected**

To support the health and wellbeing of local people and communities through services that inform, engage and connect.



Reading **Engage, Imagine, Discover**

To build a literate and confident society by developing, delivering and promoting creative reading activities in libraries.







Information and Digital **Inform, Inspire, Innovate**

To ensure local communities have access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills and to feel safe online.



Culture and Creativity **Explore, Create, Participate**

To enable local communities to access and participate in a variety of quality and diverse arts and cultural experiences through local libraries.

	Users need	Libraries deliver
 Early Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Digital literacy • Family activities • Life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bookstart • Rhymetime • Summer reading challenge • Code clubs • Volunteering
 Active Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study space • Connectivity • Careers • Information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Wi-Fi & Computers • Free study space • Books & E-resources • Homework clubs • Social spaces • Reading ahead & quick reads
 Active Citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • Business support • Family activities • Learning • Health & Wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Wi-Fi & Computers • Local information • Business & IP centres • Books & E-resources • Job clubs • Health advice
 Active Ageing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Digital literacy • Family activities • Health & Wellbeing • Social activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Wi-Fi & computers • Health information • Books & E-resources • Events & activities • Social spaces • Home library service



Strategy development - guiding principles

In developing the Strategy we have considered best practice guidance as published by Libraries Connect and have used the following design principles so that it:

- Meets statutory requirements
- Is shaped by local need, supported by consultation and engagement
- Has a clear focus on public benefit and delivers a high-quality experience for residents that will help the service maintain provision where it is most needed
- Makes decisions on service provision informed by evidence
- Support the delivery of the universal offers for public libraries in England
- Promotes partnership working and enterprise and innovation and;
- Delivers the service in the most cost effective way whilst being well positioned to secure future investment funding.

Strategy objectives

To align the library service's future potential with the Corporate Plan objectives, and other strategies already in place across the council into which libraries already play a role in delivering against, the service has worked collaboratively with colleagues from the council's customer services, public health, adults and children's and families teams and the council's leisure provider to devise a set of objectives.

The objectives of the strategy are as follows;

- To offer a library service delivered in partnership with local councils, communities and organisations with similar aims;
- To maintain the service offer for all and enhance it through the introduction of other complimentary council services focused on enabling customers and public health and wellbeing - in locations where it is needed the most;
- To actively promote the service, increasing visitors and becoming more accessible to residents through the use of new technologies and;
- To ensure that the service continues to be affordable for the residents of Cheshire East

Our new strategy will ensure Cheshire East can deliver a high-quality library service sustainable into the future while remaining relevant to the changing needs of residents.

We will work in close partnership with communities to ensure our libraries remain closely aligned to local needs. As proposals progress, appropriate consultation will be undertaken and any identified equalities issues addressed.



Tier System

The Cheshire East Libraries Service will be delivered through a tiered system, branded and promoted in four distinct tiers. This approach aligns to the Corporate Plan priority of **“enabling a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation”** while also considering the increasing service demands and local needs, in the context of different delivery approaches.

Tier 1 Library Hubs

Centrally located in the largest towns in Cheshire East. These libraries will offer the broadest range of both enhanced library and wider council customer and health and wellbeing services, retaining the current longest opening hours. They will be modelled on “Community Hubs” focused on supporting people to help themselves and each other, working with them to solve their problems and build knowledge, understanding and resilience. These libraries will be the initial focus of investment to maximise their potential to provide spaces for the benefit of complementary community usage as well as income generation.

They will provide the existing core library service offer plus offer free support around:

- **Employment, Skills and Education** - basic literacy and numeracy, digital inclusion
- **Personal finances** - debt advice, fuel poverty, food aid
- **Community services (third party)** - banking hubs, Post Office services
- **Health** - social prescriber, blood pressure checks, NHS support

They will provide opportunities for co-location delivering the likes of Family Hub Connect services. With investment, it is intended to expand the commercial offer at these libraries.

The Tier 1 sites would include – Congleton, Crewe, Macclesfield, Nantwich and Wilmslow.

Tier 1 Usage stats 2023/24

Site	Visitors	Issues	Customer Enquiries	Registered Members	Computer Use	Adult Event Attendees	Children's Event Attendees
Tier Total	653,545	854,698	18,753	64,899	21,609	11,397	53,764
% of borough's use delivered within Tier 1's site	57%	53%	57%	58%	67%	43%	47%

Tier 2 Local Libraries

Located in smaller towns, offering core library and customer services, with opening hours aligned to the periods of highest demand. The libraries will deliver the current core library and customer service offer plus some aspects of the Community Hub offer at specific sites defined by the need for that area.

The Tier 2 sites would include – Alsager, Holmes Chapel, Knutsford Middlewich, Poynton and Sandbach.

Tier 2 Usage stats 2023/24

Site	Visitors	Issues	Customer Enquiries	Registered Members	Computer Use	Adult Event Attendees	Children's Event Attendees
Tier Total	388,145	607,301	12,949	36,788	8,522	11,421	42,736
% of borough's use delivered within Tier 1's site	34%	38%	39%	33%	26%	43%	37%



*Prestbury Library is considered as a tier 2 site but as it is independently funded is not considered within the data sets.



Tier 3 Community Libraries (Community managed libraries)

Located in smaller communities and villages these sites will be staffed by Cheshire East Council employees for a maximum of 1.5 days per week to offer customer service access point and a small range of activities. Communities will be encouraged to compliment this offer through working with either individual or multiple town and parish councils and other community groups located in their area to facilitate self-service access to library services. This would include the issue and return of books, information and e-resources, access to IT, study spaces and community use space. They will provide a venue for events facilitated by the community and for Council pop-up helpdesks as and when the need arises.

The Tier 3 sites would include – Alderley Edge, Bollington, Disley and Handforth.

Tier 3 Usage stats 2023/24

Site	Visitors	Issues	Customer Enquiries	Registered Members	Computer Use	Adult Event Attendees	Children's Event Attendees
Tier Total	99,810	150,271	1,360	11,003	2,157	3,889	17,616
% of borough's use delivered within Tier 1's site	9%	9%	4%	10%	7%	15%	15%

Tier 4

Libraries Direct

Delivered by the existing mobile library, the most rural localities in the borough will have access to a timetabled library service stopping in their community on a 3 weekly basis. This service will provide access to books and information and some customer service point functions.

The Home Library Service – co-ordinated by library staff and delivered by volunteers – will continue to deliver books and information to those who can no longer leave their own homes.

Online services

Our online library service will continue to be always available providing easy access to information, online reference resources, the downloading of e-books, e-audio books and e-magazines and for ordering hard copy resources via the library catalogue.

Volunteers

Cheshire East Libraries currently use volunteers to support several parts of our service. The Home Library Service is delivered entirely by volunteers, the Summer Reading Challenge for children relies heavily on volunteer support, and we have recruited volunteer 'IT Buddies' in many of our libraries to support customers in using our PCs and their own devices. We will continue to recruit and train volunteers, either directly or by working in partnership with local community organisations to support the delivery of library activities.



Supporting the wider objectives of the Corporate Plan 2021-25

This strategy will direct the evolution and adaptation of the library service in Cheshire East to better support a much broader range of the council's priorities as identified in the Corporate Plan 2021-25.

Listen, learn, and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation

Many of our libraries are Cheshire East Council customer service points offering 'face to face' support and signposting for those who require it, while promoting council services.



Work together with our residents and our partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.

Libraries help keep residents informed by providing them with access to a wide range of information both in hard copy and digitally, ranging from online sources eg Which, access to research and ancestry through to consultation documents.

We provide spaces for people to meet, access to free Wi-Fi and computers and offer Basic ICT support, if required. We host a range of 'pop-up' helpdesks enabling partner organisations and those commissioned by Cheshire East to offer 'face to face' advice and guidance in an easily accessible place. Library staff are trained to signpost residents to further help when required.



Reduce health inequalities across the borough.

Libraries provide a wide range of resources that residents can use as “self-help” to manage medical conditions. These include the nationally recognised Books on Prescription collections selected by GPs as additional support for a variety of medical conditions.

Library staff facilitate an extensive programme of events that aid wellbeing and can be accessed by all residents without the need for a referral, examples of these include: Mindfulness, Bibliotherapy and Colouring for Relaxation. Free access to ICT enables those who are digitally excluded, to access digital channels of communication e.g. NHS app to book appointments or order prescriptions. Working in partnership with Springboard, we offer work clubs in several Cheshire East libraries supporting residents with job searching, new qualifications, CV writing and interview skills.



Support all children to have the best start in life.

Libraries help support children from birth onwards by providing high-quality book stock to encourage early language and literacy and foster a love of reading. We deliver an extensive programme of activities for all ages, examples include Baby Bounce; Rhyme times; Lego Clubs; school readiness activities, a range of STEAM skill activities.

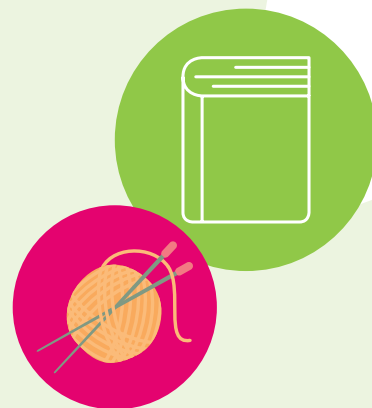
Our libraries provide a safe space for tutors to teach excluded pupils and we provide volunteering opportunities for young people aged 12 years+ to gain valuable experience. We are working in partnership with the Family Hub collaborative to ensure we complement both services' offers by maximising the support and facilities to children and families where it is needed most and are exploring options around co-location as part of the Family Hub Connect model. This has been considered in respect to establishing the tiers.



Reduce the reliance on long-term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services.

The service helps support older and vulnerable people to live safely and maintain their independence by providing a safe and accessible place for them to visit to socialise or to seek advice as frequently as they wish. Library staff are available to assist with enquiries, help access resources or to signpost to other sources of help if necessary.

Our programme of low-cost activities, including Knit & Natter, IT and Tea, community coffee mornings and Crafternoon, are open to all and help mitigate loneliness while providing an opportunity to learn new skills. The Home Library Service delivered by library volunteers to residents across the borough helps combat isolation, while ensuring those who are unable to leave their own homes don't miss out on access to a regular supply of reading material.



Implementation and continuous review

As part of the council's commitment to ***“providing a high-quality accessible library service, that remains relevant to the changing needs of Cheshire East residents and delivers value for money”*** we will continue to ensure we are aware of the changing needs of residents and provide opportunities for them to be actively engaged in future service design by:

- Encouraging feedback on our service
- Evaluating events and activities
- Monitoring our mobile library stops every 6 months to check viability.
- Conducting a library survey every two years to see what library users and non-users think about our libraries, the results of which inform future library strategies.

We will measure our performance using a range of key performance indicators as well as qualitative feedback through regular user surveys. We will continue to benchmark our service within the national sector using data provided by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Libraries Connected and will report on progress annually to the council's environment and neighbourhoods committee.

Delivery of the Library Strategy will be incorporated into the annual Neighbourhood Services Plan, which runs from April to March each year and the associated annual revenue budget for the library service. Improvements to the service will be introduced as opportunities and resources allow. We will develop a proactive communications plan to make residents aware of how they can benefit from the library offer. This will be developed in support of and alongside the implementation of the strategy and will include marketing via traditional methods, social media and through partner organisations.

