

MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE CONSULTATION

September 2017



Essex County Council

FOREWORD

At Essex County Council, we know how much people value their mobile library services.

But we also know that in recent years, fewer and fewer people have been taking advantage of them.

Combined with other factors, such as vehicles which are coming to the end of their working lives, we have reached a point where the right thing to do is look again at how we provide these services.

This is why we are consulting you about how we create a new library service which is a better fit with people's lives across Essex.

We want a service which is available at a place and time which suits users. A service which is flexible enough to help volunteers set up a community library in a village hall, pub, sports club or shop. We want a service where volunteers deliver books directly to the door, and can stop to chat with the residents so that we contribute to ending social isolation. These services already work well in villages across Essex and we want to extend that provision. We want a service which is able to respond to different local needs and settings and to have books available to more people more of the time.

We don't want a service which wastes money by having mobile library buses parked in locations at times when no one visits, which is unfortunately what happens on some occasions now.

Most of all, we want you to get involved and have your say on our ideas and share your own.

I am very much looking forward to finding out what you think about our proposals, and reading your own ideas about how we can shape a better service in the future.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Barker".

Cllr Sue Barker
Cabinet Member for Culture,
Communities and Customer

INTRODUCTION

Essex County Council is reviewing its mobile library service, to ensure that it is relevant to people's lives and offers good value for the money it costs to provide.

We want your views on the changes we are proposing and what they will mean for you.

The council's strategic aims for 2017 to 2021 are to:

- Enable inclusive economic growth
- Help people get the best start and age well
- Help create great places to grow up, live and work
- Transform the council to achieve more with less.

To achieve these we need to look at all of our services and consider whether they represent value for money for people who live and work in Essex and whether there are better ways we could be doing things. That includes looking at how best to provide library services. Some libraries are developing into more active community hubs, we are encouraging more community involvement and more people are accessing libraries online. Three villages are trying out the idea of community libraries (see p8). Friends and Family membership and Home Library Service volunteers bring books and other items to people's homes.

Meanwhile, use of mobile libraries is falling (see p5) and most of the vehicles are old, unreliable and will soon become un-roadworthy. The council needs to consider whether renewing these represents value for money. Any savings made from this review will

help us invest in improving library services, including the mobile service.

We want to make sure our mobile libraries are cost effective for taxpayers and visit places where they benefit our customers most.

This document explains these issues in more detail. Once you have read it, please complete the accompanying survey online at essexinsight.org.uk or on the form at the end of this booklet and return it to us.

The deadline for responding is Monday 6 November 2017. Please complete the survey enclosed and return it to us using the business reply envelope provided. If you need help completing the survey, would like a copy in large print or braille, a copy of the children's version (for under 16s) or a copy of the EasyRead version, please call 0345 603 7628.

CONSULTATION TIMELINES

The consultation starts on Tuesday 19 September 2017 and ends on Monday 6 November 2017.

Information is available online at www.essexInsight.org.uk and www.essex.gov.uk and in all mobile libraries and libraries. It has also been sent to district, borough, town and parish councils and other stakeholders that might wish to comment.

PROPOSAL

Essex Libraries are proposing to review the mobile library service. We will use the criteria below to redraw the routes.

The proposed criteria for considering keeping a mobile library stop are:

- That the location is two miles or more from a library building
- That the stop is consistently used over the previous six months and
- That there are no other stops nearby serving the same community. Where two or more stops serve one community, the most popular and/or accessible stop will be kept.

Other proposals

At the same time we want to make sure we also improve the service to be as customer focused as possible.

- Each stop will last for at least 30 minutes.
- We are considering options for the frequency of service:
 - That mobile libraries visit each stop once every three weeks
 - That mobile libraries visit each stop once every four weeks.
- We will consider whether to change the days and times that mobile libraries will cover. They currently run five days a week, Tuesday to Saturday. Options are to add stops on Sundays, Mondays, later in the day or more on Saturdays, if there is substantial demand.

We will work with any mobile library users not able to reach a library or mobile library to offer alternative library services. These could include a Friends and Family card – which allows friends or family to collect and return loan items for them – or the Home Library Service, where volunteers bring books and other items to people in their own homes. We can also help people access e-books and magazines online.

We will work with groups that are interested in exploring other ways to provide library services in future, such as community-run libraries (see p8).

We will review the changes after six months to see how they are working. After that we will review the service annually to make sure it is still meeting the criteria above and take account of any changes in demand.

If local circumstances change, we will respond where we can to change the service to that area in a timely manner.

Why these changes are being proposed

The changes are being proposed because seven of the nine mobile library vehicles are old and will soon become un-roadworthy. It is not economical for us to continue to provide a service to stops that are consistently not used. Better value for money can be achieved by merging stops where there are two or more serving the same community. Nor is it good value for money to replace the old vehicles so we propose to reduce the fleet from nine to two. The two remaining vehicles are newer, larger, better equipped and more reliable.

We consider two miles is a reasonable distance for people to travel by public or private transport to the nearest library or other mobile stop.

Potential benefits

- Increasing the minimum stop time from 15 to 30 minutes will improve access to the remaining stops
- All mobile library users will have access to larger, newer vehicles which are more reliable and better equipped than the older vehicles
- Service will be more consistent because vehicles will be off the road for repairs less often
- Considering changing the hours or days the service operates will make it more relevant to people's lives

- There will be a saving to Essex Libraries which can help support the rest of the service
- A more flexible service will help communities and volunteers bring books to people’s homes and new venues.

Potential disadvantages

- A number of communities may no longer be served by the mobile libraries
- Some mobile library customers may have to travel to another library or stop, use a Friends and Family card or Home Library Service.

We know that, for some customers, the mobile library visit may provide social contact and support that is extremely important to them. We want to make sure these people do not lose social contact and are still able to use library services if they want them, so we will talk with them about alternatives available.

PROS AND CONS TO A THREE-WEEK OR FOUR-WEEK SERVICE

THREE WEEK SERVICE

PROS	CONS
Matches the three-week period for library loans so we can apply fees and charges consistently	Customers may have to take more books to last between visits than current fortnightly service
	It may make it more difficult to remember when the mobile library is due
	Could serve fewer stops than a four weekly service

FOUR WEEK SERVICE

Could serve more stops than a three weekly service	Customers may have to take more books to last between visits
	It may make it more difficult to remember when the mobile library is due
	Does not match the three-week period for library loans so fees and charges for mobile library loans will still have to be applied differently

Timetables are available on all mobile libraries and people can search the website for stops and times in their neighbourhood. Customers can borrow up to 14 items at a time. Customers can borrow or return items at any library so they could visit any other library between mobile library visits.

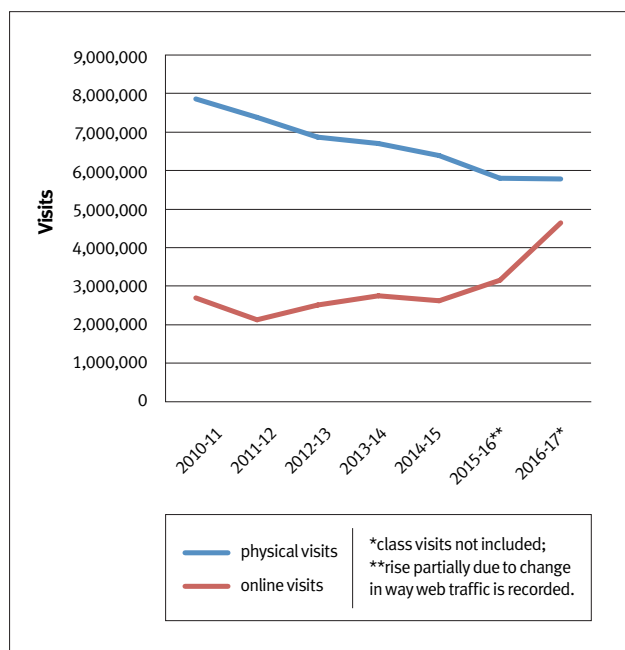
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Essex currently has 74 libraries and nine mobile libraries. Libraries receive 5.7 million physical visits a year, 4.6 million online visits and made 4.4 million loans of books, DVDs and other materials in 2016-17. People of all ages use libraries and the service offers a wide range of activities and facilities, from baby and toddler Rhymetimes and book groups to Code Clubs, work clubs, space for hire and online access to a wealth of knowledge and information.

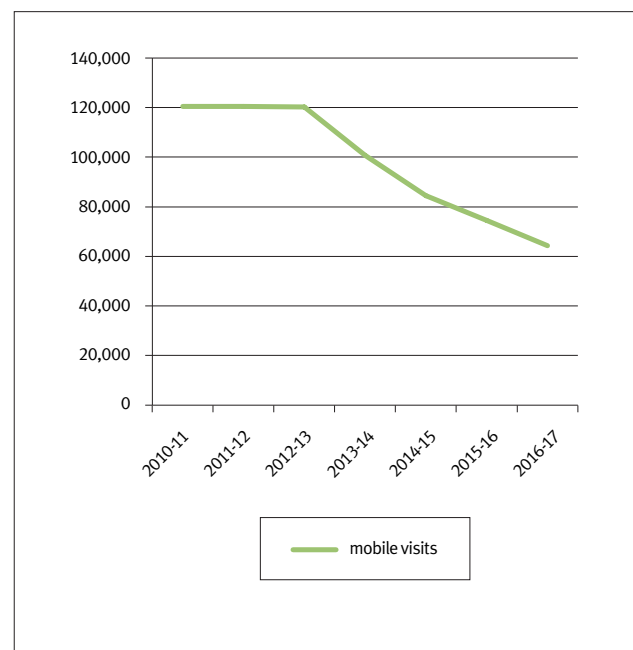
The objectives of the mobile library service are to provide library services to communities which are distant from a library, helping to ensure the majority of Essex residents can access library services at a reasonable distance from their home, place of work or study; to do so in a way that represents good value.

Essex Libraries have 246,118 active users, 17% of the total population of the county. However, while online demand is rising, the number of people visiting libraries is falling. Use of mobile libraries is falling more rapidly than the use of library buildings.

Library visits 2011 to 2017



Mobile Library visits 2011 to 2017



Sources: all facts and figures are drawn from Essex Libraries' monitoring of library use and its annual accounts. The number of visitors to mobile libraries was monitored for 12 weeks before the start of consultation and will have been monitored for at least six months before any decisions are made.

MOBILE LIBRARY KEY FACTS

All facts are for Essex for the financial year 2016/17 unless stated otherwise



557 MOBILE LIBRARY STOPS

THESE INCLUDE 90 AT CARE HOMES, SHELTERED HOUSING OR OLDER PEOPLE'S HOUSING COMPLEXES, AS WELL AS SOME SECURE SITES

VISITS FELL FROM 120,578 IN 2010/11 TO 64,289 IN 2016/17

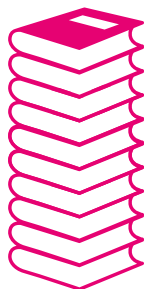


120,578
IN 2010/11



64,289
IN 2016/17

LOANS FELL FROM 252,646 IN 2010/11 TO 130,702 IN 2016/17



252,646
IN 2010/11



130,702
IN 2016/17



£511,000

COST TO RUN MOBILE LIBRARIES IN 2016/17



THE AVERAGE STOP LASTS 30 MINUTES

ONCE A FORTNIGHT

SOME STOPS LAST FOR 15 OR 20 MINUTES, A FEW LAST FOR OVER AN HOUR



4,695 ACTIVE MOBILE LIBRARY CARD HOLDERS

PEOPLE WHO JOINED AT A MOBILE LIBRARY AND HAVE USED THEIR LIBRARY CARD IN THE LAST YEAR



180 CURRENT STOPS

ARE WITHIN TWO MILES OF THE NEAREST LIBRARY



35 STOPS RECEIVED NO VISITORS

DURING A 12 WEEK MONITORING PERIOD



AVERAGE NUMBER OF VISITORS PER STOP IS

5.25

AVERAGE COST PER VISIT TO A MOBILE LIBRARY

£7.95

AVERAGE COST PER VISIT TO A LIBRARY

£3.83

COSTS AND BUDGET

The library service cost £22.4m to run in 2016/17. Of that, the mobile service cost £511,000 to run.

The cost of leasing and running a new mobile library vehicle is in the region of £60,000 a year.

We have calculated that if the seven older vehicles are removed from service and the criteria above are applied, the following savings could be made.

FINANCIAL YEAR	MOBILE LIBRARY SAVINGS
2017/18	£31,000
2018/19	£285,000
2019/20	£302,000

HOW WE REVIEWED OUR ROUTES

Current service provision

See the current timetable available with this booklet.

We looked at

- how the routes for the different vehicles cover the county
- whether each stop meets the criteria for providing a mobile stop:
 - That the location is more than two miles from a library building and
 - That it consistently receives visitors (over at least six months)
- Whether stops could be merged, for instance if more than one stop serves a community
- Which stops serve older people's settings, pre-school settings, schools or secure sites
- What we know about current mobile library card holders
- What we currently know about how mobile library users reach stops.

What we found

- 180 stops (32%) are within two miles of a library
- The current routes overlap in places (see map in needs assessment)
- 35 stops (6.3%) had no visitors during a 12 week monitoring period; 20 of these were more than two miles from a library
- 13 % of visitors travel to a mobile stop using their own transport
- 77% of visitors walk
- 2% use public transport
- The average number of visitors per stop is 5.25.

ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE

There are several other ways people can access library services.

- Use a nearby library or other mobile library stop – reaching them by using community transport/family or friends or their own transport
- Friends and Family membership allows friends or family members to collect and return books and other loan items on behalf of somebody who has difficulty reaching the library themselves
- Home Library Service volunteers can deliver books and other items to your home
- If you have internet access you can reserve books online for collection by you or family or friends at your nearest library or mobile library stop.

Community libraries

Three communities in Tendring district are currently working with Essex Libraries to pilot the concept of community, or ‘satellite’ libraries. These are small libraries that can be set up in any suitable venue, such as a village hall, community centre, village shop or local pub, and run by volunteers. We want to find out whether other communities are interested in running their own community libraries.

At **Beaumont and Ramsey** the community group will be responsible for setting up and running the library, using their own volunteers. They will decide when to open and will run their own membership and loans systems. They will also be responsible for advertising the library, and any events or activities. Library users will be able to request genres of books or particular titles but will not automatically be members of Essex Libraries.

At **Bradfield** a different model is being tried out, where the community provides the venue and an Essex Libraries staff member will run the library one morning/afternoon a week. If community volunteers are interested in opening the library at other times they are encouraged to do so.

In all cases, Essex Libraries will provide the stock of books, refresh it on a timely basis and provide training for volunteers and guidance to the group in how to run the library effectively and comply with the law.

We are keen to hear your suggestions for places in your community where small community libraries or drop-off and collection points could be set up, such as a village shop.

Needs and equality impacts

Two key documents, a Needs Assessment and an Equality Impact Assessment, are being produced to help to inform the decision. These two documents aim to ensure that we understand fully the needs of mobile library customers and the impact that our proposals may have on people with protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Drafts of these are available with the consultation pack. They will be updated to take account of responses to this consultation before a decision is made.

OPTIONS WE HAVE CONSIDERED

We considered ceasing the service completely. This was rejected because we wanted to ensure that library services continued to be accessible to the majority of Essex residents at a reasonable distance from their home, place of work or study.

We considered setting a threshold of five or more visitors per stop. This would have reduced the number of stops to around 120. We thought this was too few. We believe that the criteria proposed will allow the majority of residents to access the library service whether via a mobile library, one of our 74 library buildings or alternate services as outlined above.

We are still considering whether community-run libraries might help meet needs in some areas.

IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGES

Running a smaller, more efficient service will mean that communities that need mobile libraries can still access them. Money saved can be invested in improving other library services.

If people are interested in getting involved, more books can be delivered to people's homes and communities can be helped to set up their own libraries in village halls, shops or other venues.

See the current timetable for information about stop visitors and distances from a library. If the criteria were applied:

Current number of mobile stops: 557

Proposed number of mobile stops: 220-230. These are indicative numbers and could change, depending on the outcome of this consultation.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

It is important that we know the views of customers when reviewing or making changes to services.

- We want to hear your views on the criteria we would like to use when planning how to make best use of our mobile libraries
- We would like to hear your views on the other changes we are proposing
- We want to hear any other comments you have about our proposals

Your responses will all be used to inform the decision Cabinet Members will make on how we deliver this service in the future.

As a result of the consultation, the mobile library stop you currently use may be withdrawn from service. It may be merged with another one nearby. You may have to visit another stop elsewhere in your community or to visit a library nearby.

See alternatives above for other ways you can access library services. For more information contact your local library, <http://libraries.essex.gov.uk/library-locations-and-opening-times/>

There may be people in your community who are interested in setting up a community-run library, to provide a service in a village hall, community centre or other suitable location.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The consultation finishes on Monday 6 November 2017. Please complete the survey online or complete the form enclosed with this booklet and return it to us using the business reply envelope provided.

Your responses will be analysed and reported to the Cabinet Members making the decision. Our proposals may be amended in light of your responses. The draft Needs Assessment and draft Equalities Impact Assessment published as part of this consultation will be updated to take account of needs you have identified in the survey. They will inform the final decision that is made.

This report is issued by:
Essex Library Service

Contact us:
libraries@essex.gov.uk
www.libraries.essex.gov.uk
0345 603 7628

Essex Libraries Service
County Hall, Market Road
Chelmsford, CM1 1QH

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