

# Suffolk Libraries

# 2020 Strategy

Our vision for our future



# Introduction

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We've come a long way in a few years. Back in 2011 protests across Suffolk against proposed library closures led to a radical and innovative way forward for the county's library service. All 44 Suffolk Libraries have remained open and we're now looking to the future with a strategy to take us forward.



We believe we are pioneering a successful model for a modern library service. We have maintained and built on the value of our service at a time when many other counties are struggling.

This is a satisfying achievement and all our staff and volunteers are to be congratulated for their contributions, but we don't want to stand still. We are already leading in areas such as community engagement and eBook lending but we want to develop an innovative, modern library service which has importance and relevance to people of all ages and from all sections of the community. We want to place libraries at the heart of their communities, delivering more diverse services to an increasing number of people.

We have developed a comprehensive strategy and business plan which sets out how we will achieve this – our vision for the future. This document is a summary of that vision.

## How did we get here?

Our vision has been developed over the last year and has been inspired by our research and conversations with many different people - customers, people who don't use libraries, staff, volunteers, our members, Suffolk Libraries Board, Suffolk County Council and other stakeholders.

This has helped us shape the future direction and the actions which will help us to achieve this vision.

## So far we have:

- ✓ carried out consultations with customers, staff, volunteers, our community groups and key stakeholders
- ✓ commissioned and learned from some market research which was targeted at key groups who do not currently use library services
- ✓ reviewed best practice elsewhere in the library world
- ✓ researched and consulted on future business opportunities and service growth
- ✓ researched and consulted on the skills library staff will need in the future.

Learning is a continuous process, so we won't stop talking, listening and consulting on what happens in the future. Far from it. We want our library service to be valued, relevant and reflect local priorities. As our communities and customers change, so must we.



# The challenges

We know that local government funding will be squeezed more and more in future. Suffolk Libraries will need to be continuously opportunistic and find new business which will bring in extra income, supporting the core role of libraries around learning, information and reading.

Digital developments have transformed how people communicate and read a book. New products and equipment are arriving all the time so it's essential that we keep up by offering modern facilities and by supporting people to make the most of our online services.

We already help learners, job seekers, researchers, entrepreneurs and families. In the future we will find ways to expand this help, using our skilled staff, resources (print and digital) and our improved IT offer.

There is increasing competition in the areas which have traditionally been 'our' business. The number of people visiting us for borrowing or researching has been affected by the increasing popularity of eBook readers, large numbers of discounted titles and cheap bestsellers in supermarkets, greater internet access and music downloads.

We know there are many people out there who may not use the library service and we have been carrying out specific research to give us an insight into how we can reach out to them.

Suffolk's population is also changing. There will be a greater number of people over 60 across the county, with some pockets where there is greater growth among young people. We also have an increasingly diverse mix of people coming to live in Suffolk.

We are already piloting the lending of eReaders



## How do we stack up?

- ✓ Our eBook lending is growing every year and we are now lending over 40,000 every year. In 2012/13 Suffolk had the fifth highest number of eBooks available for loan amongst a group of 16 similar sized library services
- ✓ Our Summer Reading Challenge figures have been breaking records with 2014 the busiest ever with 8,000 children taking part. This broke the previous record of 7,800 in 2013
- ✓ In 2012/13 over 82,400 volunteer hours were given to support our library service. This was the most of any county library service. This represents the increased activity and engagement with our libraries' community groups and none of these volunteer hours replaced any paid positions
- ✓ Our mobile libraries visit more than 200 villages, making 475 stops and in 2013/14 covered nearly 31,000 miles
- ✓ All the new stock added to the library catalogue in 2013/14 would fill a library shelf two miles long
- ✓ All 44 libraries now have their own community or 'friends' groups who are members of our Society.

*"Love the range of eBooks."*

Suffolk Libraries vision: "Suffolk Libraries will transform lives through access to knowledge and resources, promote lifelong learning and strengthen communities by meeting their evolving needs."

## What we believe – our three core values

1

**Suffolk Libraries will inspire learning, literacy and access to information, knowledge and opportunities.**

We'll do this by:

- ✓ Providing the best resources and facilities we can
- ✓ Talking to people about what they need and how we can help
- ✓ Bringing people together and offering personalised learning opportunities

2

**Suffolk Libraries will guarantee that libraries are safe, welcoming, supportive and accessible places for everyone.**

We'll do this by:

- ✓ Supporting our staff to understand the different needs of people and how we can help them
- ✓ Promoting libraries as inclusive, safe and welcoming places
- ✓ Working with the most vulnerable people in society to help them find the opportunities and support they need

3

**Suffolk Libraries will strengthen communities by bringing them together in a number of ways.**

We'll do this by:

- ✓ Hosting and initiating creative events to encourage people to come to the library for new experiences – ie music, arts, meeting new people and exploring new activities
- ✓ Bringing diverse communities together to promote understanding and tolerance

## What our customers think

Of course, whilst talking of the future it's vital that we reassure our traditional customers that we will still continue to provide the core services that they treasure. We carried out a customer survey towards the end of 2013 which collected more than 1,500 responses from library customers. 93.2% of people told us they felt the library service had been maintained at the same level or even improved since Suffolk Libraries took over the service. 92% of people also said library staff were excellent or good.

We have also carried out a survey of mobile library customers which also gave us some very positive results about how valued the service is: **"Staff always helpful, libraries are essential in villages especially ones not on bus routes."**

**Felixstowe Library is fantastic, the staff are so lovely and I used to take my baby to the Friday sing along group. I order a lot of books online to pick up from the library, it is just a wonderful service and I'm so glad it's kept going – thank you!**

# Our staff



**“The staff in my library are VERY helpful to me.”**

Library customer

*“I particularly appreciate the motivation, mission orientation and manner of the staff. Rather than lament the statutory changes they have just got on with it, determined that the library will survive and flourish as a local institution. Hugely appreciated.”*

Library customer

Library staff are at the heart of our business. They are hugely valued and trusted by their communities and our member groups.

Suffolk Libraries is committed to ensuring that our staff have the skills and competencies they need to help deliver our future vision.

*It remains a privilege to work as part of this service and to serve the local community.*

Staff member

Our 2014 staff survey gave us a vital snapshot of how our staff were feeling. It showed that they are highly motivated, enjoy their jobs and feel that they have a lot to offer. They understand and endorse the future direction for the library service and they appreciate the added dimensions brought about by the community governance of the Society.

*I am enjoying the activities and events we are now able to organise without constraints. We are able to provide so much more for the community and make money using our entrepreneurial skills.*

Staff member

*I love being part of a forward thinking organisation.*

Staff member

## We consulted library staff about what skills they thought should be a priority to develop

- ✓ Enhanced financial and commercial skills and awareness to assist income generation and applying for grants
- ✓ Marketing, advertising, promotional and event-planning skills
- ✓ Creative thinking and innovation skills
- ✓ Inter-team and partnership working
- ✓ Digital knowledge and expertise
- ✓ Enhanced customer service and negotiation skills
- ✓ Public speaking and presentation skills.

We have developed an action plan based on the staff survey findings and both this and our training plan have been developed to include these priorities. We will continue to review our staff development plans to ensure we can keep up with changing needs. We also realise the importance of motivating and acknowledging the efforts of staff and introduced a new pay and reward scheme in 2014.





# Market Research

## – reaching out to new groups

In mid 2014 Suffolk Libraries commissioned Cultural Intelligence to undertake a wide-ranging piece of market research to enable the organisation to better understand the needs of people in the community and why some people don't use the library service.

The project focused on some key groups who are either seen as a key priority or who are under-represented among regular customers. These were:

- ✓ Unemployed people
- ✓ People who may be considered vulnerable or who had experienced 'tough times' in their lives – ie people with a mental health issue or those in poverty
- ✓ Young people (up to 25)

Cultural Intelligence had an innovative approach to their research – setting up the 'Future LibraryLab.' This went beyond traditional questionnaires and discussions by asking those involved to talk to other people in their peer groups and visit libraries to report on their perceptions and ideas about what the service could offer them.



## The work drew out some themes for a future library service:

- ✓ Those taking part see libraries as a supportive setting which helps to shape people's lives, discover new things and make new connections
- ✓ With the growth of online services and technology, libraries have a unique role as places where people, information and resources come together in one place
- ✓ Libraries should be a social space where things happen and connections are made
- ✓ Libraries should have a strong local identity and reflect local community pride.

## Some of the specific ideas have included:

- ✓ Providing more comfy social space and 'cosy corners' where people can spend time together or on their own
- ✓ Let young people 'run' the library - giving young people the freedom to design services and activities at the library, rather than us doing it for them
- ✓ Proactively meeting and greeting customers to find out how we can help
- ✓ Hosting events and activities that surprise – we are already running a wide range of events but there is so much more we can do!

# Libraries as part of the wider Suffolk scene

Suffolk Libraries is an organisation that already generates significant 'social capital.' We provide a service at the heart of the community that many groups and individuals rely on and trust in their day to day life. The Office of National Statistics assesses social capital by looking at:

- Levels of trust
- Membership
- Networks.

We rate highly on each of these, being a well-regarded and supportive service with a membership of around 100,000 people and a wide partnership network which includes a large number of organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

## Suffolk Libraries Round Table

On 14 February 2014 we held a round table event which brought together a wide range of decision-makers from statutory services and the voluntary and cultural sectors. The day's discussions helped to support our emerging future vision and gave us new ideas and guidance which have helped to develop our new strategy and vision.



## Setting the pace in Suffolk and beyond

As the first library service in the country to be transferred to an Industrial & Provident Society, Suffolk's model has attracted an increasing amount of interest both from other library services and those looking at library services on a national level.

Suffolk Libraries was one of eight library services chosen to contribute to a piece of research commissioned by The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Arts Council England, OPM and Locality. This looked at the challenges library services across rural England have faced and the impact of the subsequent changes. The resulting report reflects the greater innovation, flexibility and diversity of activities that the Suffolk Libraries model has achieved.

Suffolk Libraries has also been in discussion with William Sieghart, who has led the government's independent review of public library services.

Speaking at our AGM in September 2014, Mr Sieghart said: "You're doing something utterly remarkable," and "You're not just the present, you're the future."



# Our future focus

## Groups who need additional support

Libraries are already seen as safe and welcoming places which regularly offer opportunities for people who might be classed as vulnerable to access information and support which can make a difference to their lives. We want to build on this and improve on what we already offer to people who are unemployed, experience mental health issues, have a disability or experience exclusion or 'tough times' in their lives.

As well as the core library service there are four areas we plan to focus on between 2014 and 2020. These are:

- ✓ The digital future
- ✓ Income generation
- ✓ Services for groups needing additional support
- ✓ Making the service relevant to young people.

## The digital future

Early in 2014 Suffolk Libraries won the 'Digital' award at The Edge conference in Edinburgh. This reflected the success of our 'Get Connected' programme to engage more customers in our digital services.

All our libraries will soon have Wi-Fi, we are updating our public computers, offering free digital music tracks, an increasing catalogue of eBooks and eAudio books and run a range of courses to improve customers' IT skills. Whilst these are all significant developments we are conscious that there is much more we need to do to in order to drive digital library services and anticipate new trends. In doing this we also need to reassure more traditional library users that we will not be leaving them behind.

## Income generation

The ever-challenging nature of funding public services means it's vital for us to find new ways of generating income so that we can sustain and improve our services. Our community groups have helped to raise money through a huge range of local fundraising activities and there is also a need for Suffolk Libraries to work creatively to secure other sources of income such as hiring library space and applying for funding for projects. We recently secured over £99,000 of funding from Arts Council England which will help us to host an innovative arts programme across libraries.



Two sponsored cycle rides raised over £1,000 for Elmswell Library in 2013 and 2014



## Making the library service relevant to young people

We've known for some time that this is a key group as young people are under-represented amongst our customers but they will form the next generation of library users. Some libraries have already had success such as Gainsborough Community Library in Ipswich with its Club 4 Teenz group which is an integral part of the library community. Young people have been a focus of our market research project and we have some new ideas on the way young people view the library service and how we might engage with them better and change their perceptions of us.



# The developing library offer

Suffolk Libraries is committed to delivering a wide range of services for people and communities which will add value to their lives and bring them together in a range of ways.

What we will focus on delivering can be summarised into six key offers:

- ✓ **The core offer** – library loans (books, eBooks, sound and vision), free computer access etc
- ✓ **Enabling learning, skills and employment** – learning courses, working to support people back into work
- ✓ **Libraries as the cultural broker for the community** – providing a range of arts activities and bringing people into contact with cultural opportunities
- ✓ **Libraries at the centre of the community for wellbeing** – through our Mental Health and Wellbeing Service and a range of events and partnership projects
- ✓ **Libraries as business enablers** – working to establish business hubs within libraries which will support the established and emerging business people of Suffolk
- ✓ **Libraries as supporters of community life** – libraries act as community hubs; places where people socialise, volunteer, access vital community services through partners and exchange information and ideas.



Welcome to  
our library

*We are a pre-school and are often invited to have story time and songs every term. The children look forward to it and it encourages parents to visit more often. We also borrow different books each term. We are very lucky to have this service.*

# A role for everyone

## The importance of staff

Staff are our most important asset and it's vital they are involved in the ongoing development of our library service. The wide range of events and activities already on offer in Suffolk's libraries is a reflection of the great ideas and energy our staff have had and our customer survey results show how highly regarded they are.

Suffolk Libraries has set up a new rewards scheme for staff and a Staff Advisory Group. We want staff to be involved in the evolution of Suffolk's library service and for everyone across the organisation to feel they have a voice and are empowered to share their views and shape the future. As our staff survey highlighted (see page 5), the nature of working in a library is changing with new skills and new technology becoming more important.

## Volunteers

Our many volunteers provide a vital role in supporting and enhancing the library service. It is important to Suffolk Libraries that volunteers do not replace paid staff but work alongside them. There are a wide range of roles including delivering the home library service, helping to run activities and supporting the summer reading challenge.

In the past few years we have been further bolstered by the support of our community groups who are helping to develop new activities, organise fundraising events and secure new equipment for their library. We want to make sure our volunteers are valued and that they get something really worthwhile from the time they give us.

## Community Groups

Our community groups are key to the success of Suffolk Libraries' operating model. All of our 44 libraries have community groups and many of these groups include the same people who campaigned to keep libraries open. Our Board is also made up of elected representatives from these groups.

Community Groups have helped us to support, sustain and enhance the services provided by their libraries and we will continue to work closely with them to harness their ideas and enthusiasm.



The Friends of Glemsford Library helped to support a Summer Reading Challenge art activity

# Our actions

## – how we will deliver our key offers

**Our core offer (library loans and accessing information)** - We will build on the core offers of reading and access to information and provide more innovative solutions to delivering these services. For example, loaning eReader devices and providing new services such as our Freegal free music downloads and streaming service.

**Learning, skills and employment** - We will work with skills and employment organisations to improve outcomes for people and also provide less traditional learning opportunities.

**Our cultural offer** - Libraries will bring cultural experiences to people, particularly those unlikely to otherwise access them. Libraries will also be a place where people can create their own cultural experiences.

**Our health and wellbeing offer** - We will work with health organisations to provide services for communities and develop the vital role of our Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator.

**Our enterprise offer** - We will develop enterprise hubs within libraries and enable creative opportunities for future entrepreneurs.

**Our community life offer** - We will work to develop libraries as the social hub of their community where people can meet and socialise. We aim to offer something different to customers to keep them interested and engaged.

**Partnership development** - We will build strong, local partnerships to deliver excellent services for local communities and work with national organisations to better deliver services to local people.

**Space and place development** - We will develop libraries into modern, fresh, flexible spaces where people can easily find the information and resources they need.

**Staff skills development** - We will train and support staff so they feel valued and represent the best of what a modern library is and will deliver the best service to everyone who comes through the door or contacts us.

**Volunteer development** - We will recruit more volunteers who feel valued with roles which are well matched to their skills and interests.

**Stock development** – Library stock will be modern, fresh, available in a range of formats and displayed in a pleasing and professional way.

**Marketing development** – We will work to get our messages out to everyone in Suffolk and support staff and community groups to communicate effectively and publicise their activities.

**Young people** - We will change young people's perceptions of the library and contribute to their educational outcomes and learning journeys.

**Income generation** - We will work to find new sources of funding for the organisation and support community groups in their local fundraising.



# Suffolk Libraries



"My library is a welcoming environment with a colossal amount to offer."

"You're doing something utterly remarkable."

William Sieghart

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**This document is a summary of our vision and the full version of the Suffolk Libraries Strategy is available on request.**