

2018 –  
2023

# *‘Communities First’*

A 5 year strategy for development –  
Thurrock Library and Community Hub  
Programme supporting a growing  
community

*Placing libraries and hubs at the heart of the community*



**Contact details:**

**By post:**

Thurrock Council  
Community Development and Equalities Team  
Civic Offices  
New Road  
Grays, Thurrock  
Essex, RM17 6SL

**Email:** [community@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:community@thurrock.gov.uk)

**Website:** [thurrock.gov.uk/libraries](http://thurrock.gov.uk/libraries)

**Contents**

Vision for Thurrock.....	2
Introduction .....	4
Evolving not Closing .....	5
Our Vision .....	6
At the Centre of the Community.....	7
Libraries supporting public sector delivery.....	8
Our Staff, Our Service.....	9
Investing in our Infrastructure .....	9
Developing our library & community hub offer – existing and future.....	11



## **Cllr Deborah Huelin**

### **Portfolio Holder for Communities**

This strategy reflects our ambition and commitment to unlocking the huge potential that libraries have to support communities and deliver local priorities. Nationally, libraries are evolving to survive – we want Thurrock’s library service to thrive within strong neighbourhoods and develop to meet the needs of a growing community. We will work side by side with community hubs and organisations to take this forward. This is the first library strategy for Thurrock. It consolidates our vision and plans to develop a series of modern, accessible and digitally enabled learning centres within neighbourhoods, providing communities with the resources they need in a growing borough.

## **Vision for Thurrock**

Thurrock’s vision was agreed by Full Council in January 2018:

*"An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future"*

*Our priorities are:*

### **People**

A borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay

- High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
- Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
- Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

### **Place**

A heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future

- Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
- Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
- Fewer public buildings with better services

### **Prosperity**

A borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

- Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
- Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
- Commercial, entrepreneurial and sustainable public services

Thurrock has one of, if not the largest and most ambitious growth programmes in the country with six major growth hubs. The council and our partners are strengthening the identity of Thurrock: the place. However, “Place” is not just about buildings: It is about people. The council is ambitious on behalf of its residents and businesses, keenly aware of the careful balance needed for growth and investment whilst ensuring improved quality of life.

We are committed to ensuring our approach to regeneration is shaped by those that live and work in the borough. We want to make a difference and recognise the scale and impact of our growing and changing communities and the importance of our role in place shaping and community leadership.

Libraries are at the heart of the community. The ‘Communities First’ Library Strategy sets out our plans for evolving libraries. By working alongside and enabling community led activity, and supporting access to self-help and services when needed, our libraries will provide the very foundation we need to support communities help themselves.

### Did you know?

- ✓ Thurrock has 9 branch libraries and one self-serve library at Purfleet Community Hub
- ✓ There were 778,177 physical visits to Thurrock libraries in 2016-17
- ✓ 198 housebound customers were supported by volunteers in 2016-17
- ✓ The number of active borrowers who used their library ticket in 2016-17 was 28,856
- ✓ 363,673 books were issued from Thurrock Libraries in 2016-17
- ✓ Volunteers contributed over 276 hours to Thurrock Libraries in 2016-17 – 12,235 hours were contributed to Community Hubs
- ✓ Public computers were used in libraries for 71,824 hours in 2016-17



# Introduction

Thurrock Library Service has a central library in Grays and eight branch libraries around Thurrock. One self-serve library is based at the Purfleet Community Hub.

In 2012, Thurrock Council partnered with local communities and the voluntary sector, led by Thurrock CVS, to create a series of Community Hubs. Four are co-located within library branches. The development of this programme has helped to demonstrate the power of libraries to be at the centre of their local neighbourhoods, facilitating resilient communities alongside their core function of providing equality of access to accurate and up to date information achieved through provision of printed material and increasingly, access to information online. This strategy builds on that partnership and contributes to our vision of connected communities, enabled to help themselves and to influence the decisions that affect them by working with community hubs and the voluntary sector. In an area facing unprecedented growth, this function has never been more important to ensure libraries meet the needs of existing communities as well as new ones, helping people to integrate and connect as Thurrock becomes a location of choice.

## How did we get here?

We have consulted with residents to inform this strategy which is inspired by conversations with partners, benchmarking with other services, research, members and people who do not use a library service. A full report of the consultation held Summer 2018 can be found at: <https://consult.thurrock.gov.uk/portal/tc/library/lsr18>

## So far we have:

- ✓ Consulted with over 800 residents
- ✓ Targeted engagement in areas without a branch library service
- ✓ Engaged with volunteers, staff and partners who support Community Hubs
- ✓ Commissioned and learned from the results of a series of library reviews
- ✓ Reviewed best practice and alternative library models across the country
- ✓ Consulted on the skills library staff need for the future

## Evolving not Closing

Thurrock remains committed to keeping its existing number of libraries open and we will look to extend opening hours – this may require self-service although we recognise the value of staff support, especially for those involved in studying. No libraries will be closing as part of this strategy.



Where possible we will co-locate the service and share costs helping to achieve the priority of fewer public buildings with better services.

Over the next five years, we aspire to be more self-sufficient by increasing income and seeking out new external funding. We will develop an investment strategy for the Library Service and Community Hub programme that will seek to increase resources. Each branch will develop an individual business plan with partners where a hub model exists which will help meet local community requirements.

We will invest in necessary resources and as new technologies develop, we will phase out less popular ones. We will always ensure the service is the first port of call for residents wanting to know about new technologies that support access to information, learning and entertainment.

Funding for the future service will require a mixture of council investment and exploring income generation through different means.

We are committed to exploring new services that have potential to generate income and meet local need. All fees and charges applied and collected through the library service will be ring-fenced as income to the service to help develop future provision

Our recent consultation indicated support and ideas for diversifying our income. The most significant opportunities will come from co-locating services and sharing costs as with the Aveley Hub development. However we will explore new ideas including vending machines, acting as collection points for deliveries, providing space for hire for local small businesses, hosting events and including retail opportunities where space allows without compromising the library service and hub activity.

91% of responses to our latest consultation had visited a Thurrock library in the previous 12 months. Many who have not visited a library in the past 10 years have a very traditional view of the service on offer and we need to refresh our marketing and outreach to help people know about the full range of support on offer. Even amongst library users, many are still not fully informed about the range of e-books and on-line learning available – or the range of community activities that may be accessed including craft clubs, support groups and leisure opportunities to name a few.



## How are we doing?

- ✓ Thurrock Libraries came top out of a comparator group of 14 authorities for the number of active customers per 1,000 population\*
- ✓ In the same comparison, Thurrock Libraries are the first for the number of physical visits to libraries\*
- ✓ We are the 4th library service for computer use per 1,000 population\*
- ✓ Thurrock's Summer Reading Challenge reached more young people than our comparator unitary authorities in the Eastern Region\*
- ✓ In the summer of 2018, 745 hours were given by young people volunteering to support the Summer Reading Challenge. The value of seeing older children supporting young readers and showing praise for their efforts cannot be underestimated and all volunteers are awarded a certificate by Thurrock's Mayor

\*Data source CIPFA library statistics 2016-17

## Our Vision

Nationally, the Department of Culture, Media and Sports Task group has published its 'Ambition for Public Library Services 2016 – 2021'. This outlines 7 specific outcomes that are 'critical to individuals and communities' along with 7 design principles.

Locally we have adapted and consulted on the outcomes and are committed to embedding the following strategic aims across the service:

### Culture

- Help deliver Thurrock's Cultural and Heritage Strategy
- Host cultural events and activities to increase participation
- Celebrate local heritage, hosting artefacts and encouraging cohesion through a shared understanding of local heritage as our borough grows

### Reading

- We will continue to embrace, promote and encourage participation in the annual Summer Reading Challenge
- We will support the creation of reading groups to promote the enjoyment of reading from Baby Rhyme Time to adult circles across a range of genres
- We will encourage literacy support through reading and discussion especially for those for whom English is a second language

### Learning

- Thurrock Libraries will continue to support learning through small groups and new approaches to learning (STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), Fun Palace etc.
- We will encourage progression to further learning through local providers and seek to encourage new learning opportunities in partnership with others
- Grays Central will seek to develop as a learning centre and we will support dedicated learning spaces in branches where possible

### Digital

- We will continue to provide free Wi-Fi and up to two hours free access to PCs
- We will continue to support learning to access IT in response to resident interest

- We will invest in and promote e-learning and e-resources including new resources that underpin learning and leisure, supporting staff and residents to up skill in these areas

### **Well-Being**

- We will promote campaigns that raise awareness of issues of health and well-being, and encourage services that residents want to see locally such as eye clinics, hearing tests etc.
- We will train staff to support residents who are exploring issues related to health and well-being to help sign-post and self-refer to community led and public services
- We will promote and support the use of digital platforms and the use of technology that supports health and well-being

### **Communities**

- We will seek to develop libraries as community hubs and co-locate services into modern buildings when opportunities arise such as in Aveley
- We will work with local organisations to use libraries on days they are closed to enable self-service
- We will recognise the role libraries can play in building integration and providing safe places to meet, develop and promote local network.

### **Prosperity**

- We will explore income generation opportunities to so that money can be invested in the library service, creating a sustainable service for the future, developing shared business plans where we co-locate with partners
- We will promote help into employment and reskilling as a path to prosperity
- We will promote opportunities to share resources, save and budget effectively so that residents can make their money go further

## **At the Centre of the Community**

89% of those who participated in our consultation over Summer 2018 want to see more community activity delivered in partnership with libraries.

Library involvement with the Community Hubs programme has seen a growth in community led action around local priorities. There are more opportunities for people to meet locally to socialise, or access IT support. Hubs have spurred a huge increase in the range and type of activity in libraries which already support self-help groups, reading circles, art groups and heritage groups to take place.

Four libraries have provided the physical base for hubs to develop - Aveley, South Ockendon, Chadwell St Mary and Tilbury. The degree of partnership between hubs and libraries has improved over time and in two hubs, the role of co-ordinator is shared with a library supervisor role.

Partnering with hubs can benefit communities. Co-located services benefit residents although we understand the need to ensure the core library service is not compromised, especially when supporting self-led study. In smaller libraries, hub activities may be better suited to the days when libraries are traditionally closed, supporting access to self-serve. This approach works well at Tilbury every Wednesday and South Ockendon every Saturday afternoon and will be explored in other areas too.



Many different voluntary sector organisations, public sector services and small businesses want to provide more local access around Thurrock. We will explore opportunities for these organisations to work from library buildings, especially on the days when libraries are closed to improve access to facilities on a self-serve basis.

Thurrock Libraries recognise and endorse the principles of the Stronger Together partnership and fundamentally recognise that more can be achieved by working together for the benefit of residents rather than as a single service. For further details on Stronger Together, please see: <http://www.strongertogether.org.uk/>

### **Enable social action**

The Community Hubs Programme seeks to galvanise residents around local priorities, helping people to find their own solutions to local issues, supporting each other in connected communities. Libraries are at the heart of their community and they will work with hubs to support this important role locally.

### **Your Place Your Voice**

As Thurrock grows, community engagement to help people influence the type of growth we embrace will be key to successful regeneration. Libraries will support the opportunity to influence decisions and to shape the opportunity for current and future residents from our regeneration programme. As Thurrock grows, we will review the location and openings for new provision through development opportunities.

### **Changing communities**

Thurrock's demography is changing and will continue to do so. We will provide a service that reflects the growing cultures in Thurrock and builds pride and understanding of new communities.

Libraries, and the positive environment they foster through shared resources and safe public spaces, are well placed to support integration between existing communities and new residents, using our heritage to bring people together. We are a cradle to grave service and will continue to facilitate activities to cater for young children, families, students, working adults and older people.

Libraries are inclusive and encourage people to think differently, they are committed to providing a diverse offer and supporting diversity for the benefit of all.

We welcome and embrace the difference staff and trained volunteers can bring to complement the service and will seek to develop new opportunities where this adds value.

## **Libraries supporting public sector delivery**

Libraries engage with around 1,500 residents per day. There is huge potential to unlock the ability libraries have to support wider public service delivery.

Increasingly, access to services is facilitated through digital means. Libraries will continue to support a personal service through face to face interaction. This is especially important for residents who are unsure about what support is available or where best to seek help and guidance.

Face to face support in neighbourhoods reduces the demand on the Civic Offices as well as helping people live their lives well in the areas they live rather than having to travel to Grays whenever support is needed.

Engagement with library staff has identified two particular areas where there are opportunities to develop more support for residents through direct engagement. They are skills development – especially digital skills, and health and well-being.

## **Our Staff, Our Service**

An overwhelming number of comments received through consultation complemented the skill and expertise of library staff when assisting residents with a wide range of enquiries from book recommendations, research, getting on line or accessing training. The quality of the library service in Thurrock is a credit to the dedicated staff teams who are committed to providing the best they can for local residents. Their input and skills will be crucial to implementing this strategy for the future.

We will continue to involve volunteers in key projects such as Home Link and the Summer Reading Challenge, and will seek to work more closely with hub volunteers, supporting training and the skills needed to assist residents.

We will explore apprenticeships within the library service.

### **Opening hours and Self-Serve**

43.20% of those who responded to the consultation held over summer 2018 wanted to be able to visit their library on a Saturday afternoon. Many of the comments in support of this were from students or parents that worked.

Currently, only South Ockendon Hub is open on a Saturday afternoon, supporting self-serve access. As a future commitment, we will seek to explore Saturday afternoon opening at Grays Central and the larger branch libraries.

Many residents commented that, as a rule, they disliked self-service. However, there was a recognition that this could help to increase the hours of access to the service to complement staff support. Thurrock Library Service will not seek to reduce current staffed hours, and will explore self-serve to expand access borough wide.

## **Investing in our Infrastructure**

Whilst our ambition for supporting communities is high, some of our buildings are old and some do not fit with current and future community led requirements. Some branch libraries are very small and restrict the offer we can provide locally.

Where possible we will co-locate services and will explore delivery from modern buildings. In some areas, the location may need to change to increase accessibility. Also, as Thurrock grows, we may need to consider provision in new areas, supporting new communities to benefit from the library service too.

When – and where – our physical buildings develop will often depend on the opportunities presented through partnership working. As the borough grows, we expect new developments to open new possibilities and this may mean that we change the location of existing libraries, or consider new provision alongside health or other community services.

We will use the capital funding available for community hubs to develop hubs where this appetite exists. We cannot do everything at once. Our current view on the phases of development looks like this:

<b>Phase 1 – From 2018</b>		
<b>Library</b>	<b>Current Position</b>	<b>Resource</b>
East Tilbury Phase 1	Following the fire in 2017 we are currently redeveloping the library with some improvements to the design. The new facility will open spring 2019	Capital budget and insurance funding.
Aveley Community Hub	Aveley Community Forum campaigned to secure s106 to develop a purpose built, local resource centre. The library will move into the new hub. Works start in November 2018 and the centre will open in January 2020.	S106 and Capital fund – Community Hubs
Chadwell St Mary Refurbishment	A redesign of the existing space is desperately needed to increase the capacity for community led activities supporting health and wellbeing.	Capital fund – Community Hubs
Grays Central Library	We will be bringing forward options for the Thameside to create a stronger cultural hub for Grays and Thurrock with investment in the theatre along with additional space for other cultural activities. This includes testing the scope to separate uses in the tower from the main building and re-purposing the tower for alternative uses, including residential'	Resources will be considered as part of the wider business plans for the Thameside Complex
Corringham	One of our larger sites - Corringham Library - has the potential to develop a community hub aligned to a strong offer from community partners already active. Staff who work remotely wish to see increased support for agile working in the east of the Borough. Redesign options and a supporting business plan will be developed in 2019.	Capital fund – Community Hubs
Tilbury Community Hub	The Hub, including the library service, will move into the Integrated Medical Centre by 2021.	IMC Capital Investment – Council and Health

Whilst we are fully committed to improving other branches, the opportunities for development are at a much earlier stage and more work will be needed to scope possibilities whilst engaging with local communities.

<b>Phase 2</b>	
Blackshots	A much loved branch library, Blackshots is too small to develop community activities. The Friends of Blackshots Community Group has expressed ideas for the site. A full options appraisal will be scoped starting 2019.
Stanford le Hope	Friends of Hardie Park are looking to redevelop their base. There may be an opportunity to co-locate the library service and therefore increase the opening hours through self-service.
SOC Phase 2	The development of supported housing and health and well-being services at the Whiteacre site are looking to include a new community hub in this area.
Purfleet	The Purfleet Regeneration Scheme includes provision for new community space. This may provide an opportunity for the library service to expand from its current self-service offer within the community hub.
East Tilbury Phase 2	A growing community, East Tilbury Welcom Forum and Bata Heritage Museum are developing plans for a community hub within a purpose built centre to support current and future residents.

We recognise that not all community led provision is within the existing community hubs programme. The Library Service remains committed to exploring opportunities with all partners, and developing access to service points where a branch library does not exist e.g. by looking to install the 'People's Network' in more locations.

Individual business cases will be developed for the above proposals.

## **Developing our library & community hub offer – existing and future**

### **Reading offer**

The ability to read is vital for success in this modern world. The library service will continue to support residents to improve literacy skills and benefit from the rest and relaxation reading a good book can give by providing:

- A wide range of books and other stock meeting the needs of all residents from cradle to grave
- Early Years offer to families and children, gifting book start packs, rhyme and story times
- Family reading activities throughout the year and Summer Reading Challenge for children 0 – 18
- Class Visits to Primary Schools including the Time to Read book gifting for reception children.
- Two reading events per year for secondary schools, Carnegie Book Award and Kids Lit Quiz
- For adults, Quick Reads collections for adult emergent readers and support for reading groups throughout the borough

We will seek every opportunity to widen our offer e.g. participating in the Reading Friends programme currently being piloted in 5 authorities across the country.

## **Learning Offer**

Libraries' learning offer supports residents of all ages to learn both informally and formally through the provision of:

- Up to date information books and online resources
- Quiet study space wherever possible
- Coding and Robotic sessions for children and young people, recognising that understanding of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects will be key skills for the future
- Informal skills sharing through the Fun Palaces initiative and other opportunities
- Partnership working with local colleges and other learning establishments. e.g. ESOL classes for speakers of other languages

## **Well Being and Community Offer**

Libraries support residents' health and well-being by:

- The provision of accessible and local venues where lonely and vulnerable residents receive a warm, accepting welcome, stay as long as they wish without the need for expenditure and feel part of the community
- Hosting a range of social weekly activities e.g. Knit and Natter, Scrabble, Chess groups
- Running Baby Rhyme Times benefitting maternal mental health
- The provision of accurate health information and signposting to local support groups/agencies
- Providing specialist health collections, Reading Well, Books on Prescription supporting adults and children with mild to moderate mental health conditions, adults with long term conditions and families caring for loved ones with Dementia.
- Managing a Homelink service providing books and other resources for all residents unable to access a library
- Offering volunteering opportunities building self-confidence. E.g. Digital Champions, Homelink and Summer Reading Challenge young volunteers 13 – 18 years

## **Culture and Arts**

We recognise the benefits of arts and cultural activities for residents and community cohesion. We will continue to support the Arts by:

- Providing a range of theatre and other arts events in local libraries e.g. Librarian Theatre performances in two libraries each year
- Offering author talks, general and heritage based
- Working with local arts groups to expand provision
- Ensuring refurbished buildings are designed as flexibly as possible to accommodate arts events
- Collecting and maintaining the Local History collection and providing free access to residents
- Support the display of heritage artefacts from collections into the community

## **Digital offer**

So much of our lives now require access to on-line services. In order to participate equally, residents require:

- Free access to PCs and WiFi
- Access to the skills needed to get on-line safely and with confidence
- Access to printing and scanning facilities
- Information about developing skills through self-study or adult education

Often, people learn well when collaborating with a peer group – our current approach to e-learning in groups is well received and we will develop this model to support more communities to increase their digital skills.

Our latest consultation placed access to a printer, scanner or photocopier ahead of access to PCs (45% of respondents valued these services as most important). This reflects our experience that people are using their own devices more.

Working with other agencies, we will continue to provide digital literacy sessions for families and individuals ensuring residents can keep themselves and their families safe online.

New initiatives include working with the Home Office so residents can submit paperwork and provide biometrics for renewal of Visas locally rather than having to travel to London from December 2018.

### **Our Future Commitments**

- ✓ To deliver the library service in collaboration with community hubs and partners
- ✓ To co-locate with other services where possible
- ✓ To explore Saturday afternoon opening in larger branches
- ✓ To develop a sustainable service reinvesting income generated back into the library service
- ✓ We will develop a 5 year Investment Plan for the library and hub service which aspires to become more self-sufficient. In doing so we will develop individual business plans for each base in consultation with the local community. To produce these, we will recruit to a fixed term 2 year post to assist with the development of these plans.

