SUFFOLK LIBRARIES

Libraries: The **First Place** for levelling up local communities

July 2021

WHERE I BELONG

Introduction

WHERE I BELONG

As we emerge from the pandemic that has touched every life and every community in the UK, we have a real opportunity to take a fresh, transformative approach to the way vital local services are delivered and integrated with key national policy initiatives. Libraries can be the glue that connects communities, local public sector infrastructure and nationally led programmes across preventative health, digital inclusion, economic and social development and so much more.

This paper draws upon our actual, proven experience of delivering and co-producing a wide range of services with Suffolk communities, both before and during the pandemic. It reflects our vision of libraries, and how they partner with other agencies, institutions and private companies to bring about a transformative solution to many of today's big social issues.

This will build a strong and level foundation for inclusive community growth in the short and longer term, with the library network as a physical and digital hub and the gateway to opportunities for all.
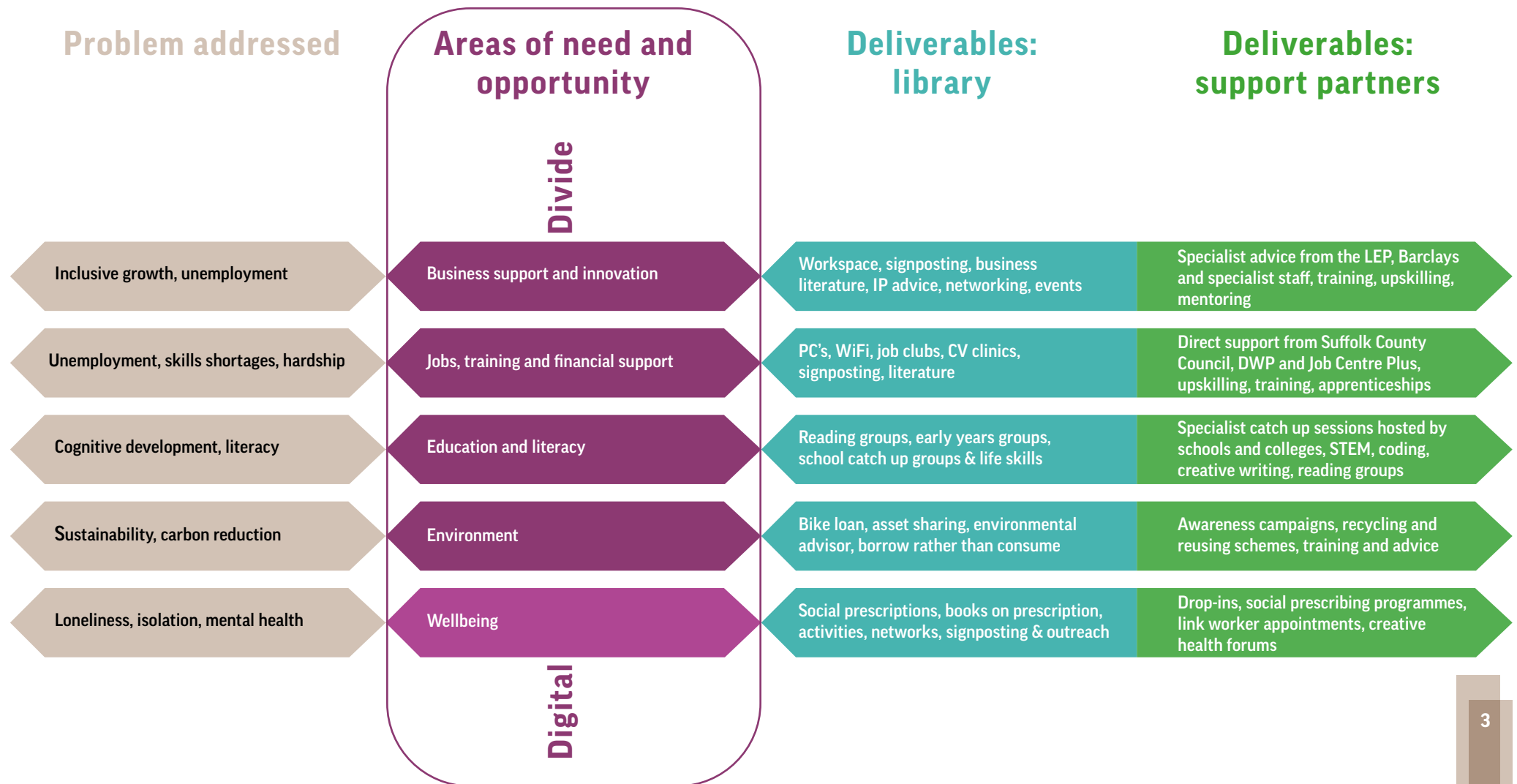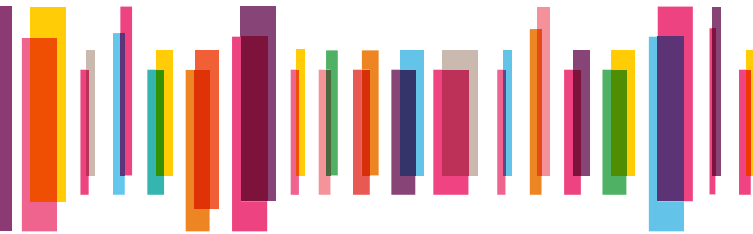
Why should libraries be the *First Place?*

Libraries as the *First Place* is a new approach designed to provide hyper-local support, guidance and opportunities that draw on, and feed into, key strands of local, regional and national policy. Libraries as the *First Place* can avoid wasteful duplication of provision, increase community capacity and save time and resources for a range of social funders and deliverers. There is a tremendous opportunity to further scale this approach nationally for the delivery of an integrated range of support services, tailored to local needs.

'Levelling up' should not just be about geographical boundaries but should start with a people-centered focus – and the very real needs they have: to improve their opportunities, their health and wellbeing and their economic situation. It is about taking an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach and leveraging established and trusted community assets i.e., libraries to kickstart hyper-local placemaking. Libraries are the one and only resource with nationwide coverage that can drive positive change at this hyper-local level.

Libraries as the First Place: A solution focused framework

Problem addressed

Areas of need and opportunity	Deliverables: library	Deliverables: support partners

Divide

Problem addressed	Areas of need and opportunity	Deliverables: library	Deliverables: support partners
Inclusive growth, unemployment	Business support and innovation	Workspace, signposting, business literature, IP advice, networking, events	Specialist advice from the LEP, Barclays and specialist staff, training, upskilling, mentoring
Unemployment, skills shortages, hardship	Jobs, training and financial support	PC's, WiFi, job clubs, CV clinics, signposting, literature	Direct support from Suffolk County Council, DWP and Job Centre Plus, upskilling, training, apprenticeships
Cognitive development, literacy	Education and literacy	Reading groups, early years groups, school catch up groups & life skills	Specialist catch up sessions hosted by schools and colleges, STEM, coding, creative writing, reading groups
Sustainability, carbon reduction	Environment	Bike loan, asset sharing, environmental advisor, borrow rather than consume	Awareness campaigns, recycling and reusing schemes, training and advice
Loneliness, isolation, mental health	Wellbeing	Social prescriptions, books on prescription, activities, networks, signposting & outreach	Drop-ins, social prescribing programmes, link worker appointments, creative health forums

Digital

3

Why Suffolk Libraries?

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It has been recognised that other kinds of organisations besides local government, whose organisational aims are also about serving the community, **can play a leadership role in place-shaping.**[1] That is, cultivating the unique strengths and assets of a local community and meeting its specific needs and concerns.

Suffolk Libraries already plays such a leadership role. We believe that our existing network of 44 library branches across the county provides a ready-made infrastructure to deliver even more local impact at a relatively low cost. We have adopted an innovative and needs driven approach to delivering a wide range of services before and during the pandemic, and are ready, willing and able to widen our role for the benefit of the communities we serve as we move into recovery.

A time for action

The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the importance of physical and mental wellbeing in underpinning all aspects of our lives. The Centre for Mental Health in England has predicted that up to 10 million people – almost a fifth of the population – will need mental health support as a direct consequence of COVID-19, with 1.5 million of those expected to be children and young people under 18.

Supporting positive wellbeing at a grass roots, community level should be the bedrock from which we build a joined up, and integrated approach to the provision of key social services, supporting the NHS's strategic focus on preventative health.

Our own experiences in providing wide ranging and innovative services and support to local communities before and during the pandemic have highlighted the huge potential of libraries to make pre-preventative interventions. This approach was evaluated by the independent research commissioned by us in 2019[2] which clearly demonstrates the social value and material change that our libraries can deliver.

Much has been written about the potential role of libraries in recent years,[3] and Suffolk Libraries have contributed to that body of work. However, we feel it is time to take action.

The social issues communities face are urgent and will become more critical as we move out of lockdown and start to see the impact of the lifting of government support in areas like the Job Retention scheme and the potential removal of the Universal Credit supplement.

[1] Arts Council England. (2017). Rewriting the Story: The Contribution of Public Libraries to Place Shaping.

[2] Moore Kingston Smith. (2019). Suffolk Libraries: A Predictive Impact Analysis.

[3] Department for Culture, Media & Sport. (2014). Independent Library Report for England.

Libraries: a unique offer

- **Easily accessible and a 'truly local' part of the community fabric**
- **Supported by trained staff enabling direct support and signposting**
- **Crossing the digital divide**
- **Safe, trusted, neutral**
- **Cost effective**

> "
> *The research for this report has resulted in a fervent belief among the panel members that the future of libraries as community hubs is essential for the well-being of the nation.*
>
> *Independent Library Report for England*
> "

Libraries as the *First Place:* the opportunities for a hyper-local future

The 2017 Arts Council England report[4] on libraries as community hubs acknowledged that 'two types of community hub are not mutually exclusive – a public sector orientated hub can still have spaces for voluntary sector organisations to run services and provide activities; and similarly, many community run hubs have partnerships with their local authority.'

In other words, the format of libraries as the *First Place* is flexible, the key is that they are embedded in the heart of the community and deliver services and activities that meet local needs. This creates a virtuous circle with libraries as the *First Place* growing, evaluating and developing key areas of national policy designed to meet the needs of communities. Importantly, the network is already there and offers massive potential to reduce costs that are created by building from the ground upwards as is often currently the case. This makes our pilot scalable with a strong focus on future cost savings and efficiency.

> **Libraries have reach and physical presence which most local services have never had, or no longer have. The ability to provide well-known, high-footfall physical settings for periodic engagement with communities or on-going services or events is something few other services can provide.**
>
> *Independent Library Report for England*

4 Arts Council England. (2017). Rewriting the Story: The Contribution of Public Libraries to Place Shaping.

Our request and what will happen

We propose to devise and run a menu of targeted activity in Suffolk across five key themes to meet the urgent social and economic needs described above to establish an evidence base for libraries as the *First Place*. The pilot will run for 18 months which will allow for the set-up of activity and services and establish a robust evaluation process. This will also include identifying key partners and working directly with local communities to co-produce services to ensure meaningful engagement.

The five key themes, including the headline offers to be developed during the pilot are:

Business support and innovation:

- Establish free co-working space for fledgling businesses/entrepreneurs at 4 sites.
- Host Business Centres (created in partnership with Barclays) to advise, support and develop fledgling businesses in our 3 largest libraries.
- Mobile device loaning with 4g Wi-Fi dongles.
- Establish innovation and entrepreneurship clinics with the New Anglia LEP.
- Establish the 'right mind for business', in partnership with Suffolk Mind, through our established wellbeing service.

Education and literacy:

- Create a 'LiterART' scheme, through our existing Arts Council funded BLOC programme, designed to engage and inspire children between 4 and 12. This would use creativity and self-expression as a route to enhanced literacy. This will feed the literacy hubs, that are being developed in partnership with the National Literacy Trust and other key local partners.
- Grow our adult literacy and reading programme 'Discovereads' to engage the widest possible audience.
- Establish a school catch up programme, targeted at primary age children, with a strong focus on literacy.
- Grow our established early years offer so that it expands key programmes targeted at enabling the home learning environment and school readiness such as 'Hungry Little Minds'.
- Develop a 'life skills' programme for children aged between 10 and 17.
- Build our catalogue of online educational resources and promote this to key audiences identified by our partners at Suffolk County Council and DWP.

Jobs, training and financial support:

- Develop referral pathways with the DWP to create a 'soft landing' and additional support for new job seekers who may be unfamiliar with the benefits system. This will see libraries set up and host regular job clubs, CV clinics and forums to highlight upskilling opportunities for those out of work or in insecure employment.
- Establish 5 physical gateways to support the roll out of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee.
- All frontline staff fully trained to provide Universal Credit and other benefit support.
- 'Warm Handover' pathways established to partners at food banks, financial support and housing providers building on work already underway with Suffolk County Council.
- Digital skills training available at every site.
- Jobseeker wellbeing checks, through our established wellbeing service, with triage to primary care or voluntary sector partners.

Health and wellbeing:

- Personalised referrals to community-based wellbeing support via our 'Discover More' platform allowing pre-preventative healthcare interventions.
- Partnership with Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System to connect local social prescribing initiatives to the library events and activities programme.
- Outreach programme designed to engage rurally and socially isolated communities through pop up events and activities.
- Expansion of 'Move It' fitness equipment loaning scheme to cover more sites.
- Digital programme of activities designed to increase activity, promote mindfulness and support wider health outcomes.

Environmental:

- Every site will offer a bicycle loaning scheme enabling greener travel and promoting movement and exercise.
- Suffolk Libraries marketing will focus on the environmental credentials of borrowing i.e., borrowing a book rather than ordering from Amazon hugely reduces the carbon footprint.
- Each site will host a 'community asset share' where everyday items are shared to promote recycling and reduce wastage.
- Every library will host volunteer 'environmental advisor' who will galvanise local people to get involved in supporting that locality to develop a more sustainable future.

We will gather data during the 18 months of operation on the performance of the programme, using criteria agreed with the different government agencies, and report back on our findings and recommendations.

In other words, this is not another desk research report.

This is action; trialing a real-world approach based on research already gathered over the past 7 plus years and developed through experience and the recognised priorities of communities and government.

Funding

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Our approach is fully scalable and has enormous potential to provide huge efficiencies by taking advantage of existing infrastructure. After initial investment for the pilot, we would anticipate that in the medium term there will be cost savings in adopting this approach through the pooling of assets and resources as well as the significant social value created through the process.

Examples might include delivery of social prescribing programmes, dedicated support for job seekers and interventions designed to alleviate social isolation which will draw preventative initiatives together in one place for the first time thus avoiding expensive duplication. This will be evaluated as part of our post pilot report.

Long term funding

We recognise that there will be a need to explore different funding allocation methodologies, or even the use of direct funding from central government. This may require consultation, as in the case of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's consultation on funding allocation methods for the new domestic abuse duty, so is outside of the scope of this Paper. However, this programme will provide the necessary evidence base on which to explore a longer-term funding model.

Our supporters and partners

We are ambitious but we realise that we cannot succeed without the support and involvement of the following organisations:

National partners

DfE, DWP, HSC, DCMS and DBI&S

National Literacy Trust

Libraries Connected

Arts Council England

CILIP

Local Government Association

Library Mutuals (Devon, Notts & York)

Barclays

Local partners

Suffolk County Council

New Anglia LEP

Suffolk Chamber of Commerce

University of Suffolk

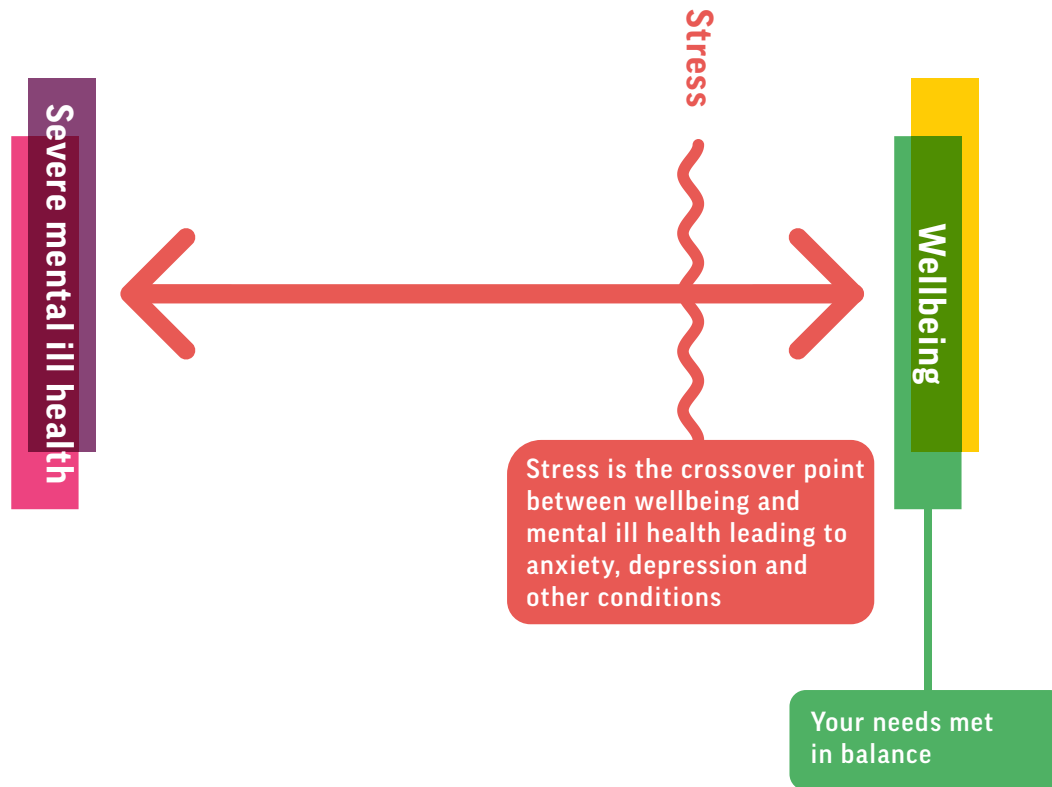Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care System

Suffolk Mind

We have strong relationships with all of the local partners and many of the national partners and see this as an opportunity to build on those relationships to create a focused, co-ordinated and collaborative approach.

Pre-prevention and why positive wellbeing is our foundation

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Our approach is underpinned by building positive wellbeing. In line with the NHS's preventative health agenda, we provide services that enable people to cope better, feel less stressed and become more receptive to dealing with challenges and opportunities. This ultimately creates less of a burden on primary and secondary care. At the heart of creating positive wellbeing lies the meeting of basic emotional needs, and our libraries offer an excellent opportunity to do this on a significant scale.

Working with Suffolk Mind, we want to embed their approach of meeting basic emotional needs in everything we do. This enables us to support people in understanding the best ways to keep themselves happy and healthy. This non-clinical approach, developed from a clinical methodology, means that we can make pre-preventative interventions in the community, reducing the burden on the NHS.

Stress

Severe mental ill health

Wellbeing

Stress is the crossover point between wellbeing and mental ill health leading to anxiety, depression and other conditions

Your needs met in balance

Bridging the digital divide

We are already a recognised place for access to free Wi-Fi and computers/tablets, as well as being a base for technology focused courses or a source of advice (e.g., for online form filling). We have been involved in outreach programmes delivering 'Devices to the Door' during the pandemic and see further opportunities to take this to the next level. This will include the provision of more Tech access points (tablets, PC's) and coordinated support with our partners (e.g., with courses or one on one training and support). This is an important part of the levelling up programme and crosses all five of the identified needs / opportunities areas.

Conclusion

We are passionate about the opportunities this approach offers in delivering transformative change: creating a firm foundation for inclusive growth, a level playing field and the efficient delivery of integrated services based on truly local needs.

The widening of our traditional remit which began before the pandemic and grew during it has shown to us at a hands-on, grass roots level what can be achieved and how libraries can be the *First Place* for an even wider range of local services.

Together with our partners we are ready to take a leadership role in this next step, to learn from the pilot, and to provide a framework for a national model that delivers on service and cost, to the benefit of all.

Bruce Leeke
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Appendices

1. Evidence of impact

The case for public libraries becoming the *First Place* for leveling up local communities is compelling not just from a social aspect but also from a 'return on investment' perspective. As previously outlined, with significant infrastructure already in place, and strong collaboration already existing between libraries and public/private partners, moving towards this integrated model would be relatively quick and very cost effective.

In their extensive report 'Public Libraries - The case for support', co-authored by CILIP and the Big Issue, in August 2019 the following data is referenced which provides strong evidence of the beneficial impact of libraries:

The ACE Evidence Review of the Economic Impacts of Libraries (ACE, 2014) highlights three 'categories' of economic impact for local public libraries:

- As economic actors in their own right (economic impact)
- As institutions that facilitate the creation of economic value in the adjacent area and local economy
- As organisations that deliver a wide range of services, most of which are valued by both users and non-users when set against their cost of provision (benefit-cost/total economic value approaches)

Economic impact studies outside the UK consistently find a high direct and indirect ROI for Local Authorities from public libraries. In Spain, for example, the economic return is calculated at EUR2.80 to EUR 3.83 for every EUR1 invested in public, academic and research libraries.

The table opposite sets out economic ROI estimates for public library services from different nations (source: Public Library News)

Nation	Estimated ROI from public libraries
Australia	£1 spent on libraries generates an ROI of £4.30
Canada	$1 spent on libraries generates an ROI of $5.63
New Zealand	£1 spent on libraries generates an ROI of at least £4
USA	£1 spent on libraries generates an ROI of £3.89 - £5.48

Using a slightly different methodology, the 2014 ALMA UK report 'The economic value of library services' found that "the estimated value per user visit is over 6 times greater than the cost of provision in Northern Ireland, over 5.5 greater in Scotland and over 7.5 times greater in Wales".

Providing evidence of the 'halo' effect of libraries for local businesses (in which library users also spend money locally as an incidental part of their visit), the same ALMA UK report calculates the "value per visit at between £18.43 and £35.32 (factoring in money spent on travel and local purchases).

Libraries provide services and signposting which improve digital and health literacy, support self-care and community prescribing and save the NHS at least **£27.5m** per year in reduced usage of health services (although the real saving is likely to be much higher).

Public libraries are part of the local ecosystem of health and social care provision. They alleviate pressure on local health and social care budgets and provide a much-needed frontline for community-based support for people's health and wellbeing.

The British Library's pioneering Business and IP Centres programme demonstrates how we can build on the existing public library network to accelerate startups and enterprise across the UK.

The Business & IP Centres have helped to launch **12,288** new businesses, 47% of which are located in the Northern Powerhouse. With a GVA of **£78m**, the initiative has generated a return of £6.95 for every £1 invested.

Of the Business & IP Centre users who went on to start a new business, 55% were women (65% in London), 31% were from a black and Asian minority ethnic background (44% inLondon) and 17% had a disability.

Libraries also deliver a wide range of digital skills initiatives, helping to close the UK's digital skills gap (which costs the economy an estimated £63bn per year).

£27.5m per year

Amount Libraries can save the NHS through reducing use of health services

Moore Kingston Smith – impact report

In 2019 Suffolk Libraries commissioned independent consultants Moore Kingston Smith to examine the social impact of three of Suffolk Libraries' services. The impact report - Suffolk Libraries a predictive impact analysis - estimates that every £1 spent on just three of Suffolk Libraries' services creates £8.04 in 'social value'. This is based on a study of three key activities – early years sessions for under-fives (Baby Bounce and Tot Rock), Top Time sessions for older people and Open Space groups. The report found these three activities alone generate just under £2m of social value every year.

A more recent study also by Moore Kingston Smith focused on Suffolk Libraries Lifeline service, supported by Suffolk County Council and the East of England Co-op, as a response to the first lockdown to help lonely and vulnerable library customers. Between March 2020 and July 2020 library staff made over 6,700 calls to 'check in' on library customers and have a chat. The reach of the library service's network enabled staff to focus on older people and those who are particularly isolated or vulnerable. The service has continued during subsequent lockdowns and has now made over 10,000 calls.

The social impact team at Moore Kingston Smith carried out research into Lifeline which calculated a return on investment for the service of over £4 for every £1 spent.

The research also outlined the impact of the calls and particularly their ability to create material change for people by delivering the following outcomes:

· Increased feelings of being cared about, valued and of belonging to the community

· Reduced feelings of loneliness

· Improved mood and reduced anxiety

Escape from the tough reality leading to increased feelings of respite, improved coping skills and more positive mental health

2. Libraries as the *First Place* for hyper- local: Our joined-up and person-centred model

As the *First Place* for the delivery of joined up support and advice across the five key areas of need and opportunity we have identified, libraries - in collaboration with key partners - can create a hyper-local experience designed to meet specific individual needs. As well as creating cost efficiencies and dynamic collaborations, libraries have the unique ability to deliver true integration of fragmented policy agendas as a national network delivering locally. In summary, our collaborative model delivers the following across all five of the identified areas of need and opportunity:

Spaces

Safe space
Workspace
Quiet space
Meeting space
Private space

Skills

Upskilling
Training
Literacy
Life skills
Catching up on education

Support

1-2-1
Peer networks
Specialist information and signposting
'Warm handovers' to specialist support
Specialist partnerships

Services

Free Wi-Fi and tech
Scanning and printing
Printed and digital resources
Physical and online outreach
Trained staff

3.   Libraries as the *First Place* benefits summary

The *First Place* for accessibility and flexibility

*   Hyper-local, physical spaces
*   Safe, trusted and neutral spaces that are universally embraced
*   Libraries well situated in areas of significant need
*   Free access to quality information and support materials
*   Free access to PC's, Wi-Fi and other digital devices
*   Access to printing and scanning services
*   Ability to quickly shift delivery to remote models (online, email, telephone etc.) should changes to national or local restrictions mean physical delivery and access is not possible
*   Flexibility to provide specialist embedded services where they are needed on a branch-by-branch basis across the county

The *First Place* for skills and knowledge on the doorstep

*   Upskilling and learning opportunities through partners or directly through the library
*   Strong links to existing resources like business support organisations, IP centres, job clubs, mental health and wellbeing partners with a presence on site either permanently or on a regular basis
*   Strong links to DWP, employment schemes and opportunities such as Kickstart and apprenticeships
*   Resources and networks to support education and literacy from early years to older adult

The *First Place* for life improving and enhancing opportunities

*   Trained library staff to offer first tier support and signposting across different areas of need / opportunity
*   Wrap around support and links to services from other organisations e.g., Citizens Advice Bureau, food banks, housing associations etc. with mechanisms for 'warm handover' referral
*   Outreach through mobile libraries and pop-up libraries

The *First Place* for meeting practical and emotional needs to create positive wellbeing and build community resilience

*   Mental health and wellbeing support
*   Specialist perinatal guidance, support and advice
*   Networks, groups and experiences that increase connectivity and drive peer support

The *First Place* for recovery and building back better

*   Easier access to information and support through a 'one stop' shop
*   Quicker responses to issues and opportunities
*   Integrated support provides for a more complete 'joined up' service

4.   Findings from past reports

The big picture benefits

The report 'Re-writing the story. The contribution of public libraries to place-shaping' [commissioned by Arts Council England] recognised that:

'library services help ensure economic growth benefits for everyone - where positive outcomes are shared fairly among all demographics and all communities. This is also known as inclusive growth.'

The benefits envisaged by the other Arts Council 2017 report** included the following:

• Efficiency in the use of assets and reducing costs through bringing services together in one place
• Supporting a more local and devolved approach to service delivery linked to the localism and community rights agenda
• Promoting community involvement and enabling communities to take action in their local area through providing physical spaces and the connections to start up new activities and services
• Providing services in a more accessible and seamless manner for residents, including making it easier to signpost to other sources of support

Since being written in 2017, we believe all of the above remain valid and we can see the following additional benefits:

• Speed of access to services, support and signposting ['hyper-local First Place']
• Focus on wellbeing and addressing the key issues of loneliness social isolation
• A platform for bridging the digital divide

Types of services and activities

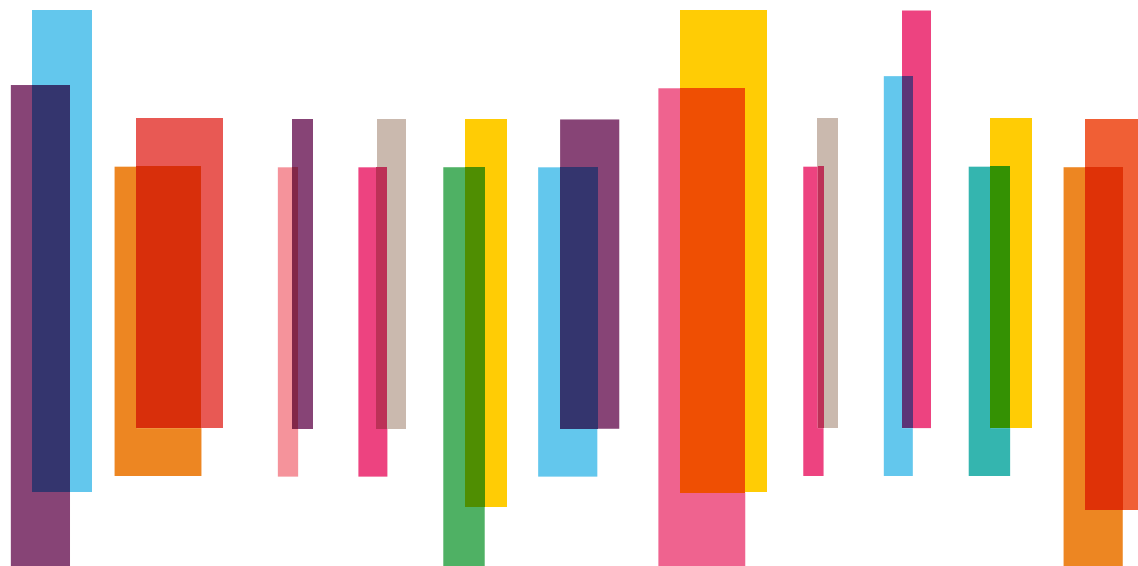|	
Health and wellbeing:	• GP/health centre • Access to health and social care information and advice (public health, or VCS organisations) • Signposting to specialist services • Group activities for the community
Employment:	• Access to jobs and employment support • Job Centre Plus • Skills development programmes/training • Flexible workspace/start up space • Enterprise hub • IT access
Children and young people:	• Children's centres/nursery • Career services • Reading groups and activities • Youth volunteering • Links to colleges/local uni
Culture and leisure:	• Museums/art galleries/performances space • Gyms
Other council services:	• Face to face counter services (benefits, parking, housing, signposting to other council services)
Other organisations:	• Cafes • VCS organisations • Citizens Advice • Post Office • Police

User impact study

The aspects of libraries that are particularly valued – such as being open, inclusive, safe spaces, and providing much needed free IT for access to benefits, and job applications - were given a lot of prominence in the case study discussions, with co-location having a particular impact in the following ways:

- Through a wider range of services and activities, attracting a cross section of the community, ranging from children and families coming in for particular activities in the children's library, young people using studying space, and older people reading newspapers
- Helping more vulnerable users to discreetly access other services, avoiding the need for people to be sent elsewhere, and supporting self-help through the range of advice on offer
- A variety of different professionals being on hand to support those using IT – from customer service advisers, to more specialist employment provision

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