

**SUFFOLK  
LIBRARIES**

**WHERE  
I BELONG**



# **BUILDING THE DEPARTMENT STORE FOR THE SOUL**

**Strategy 2022-2024**

# Foreword

We welcome the "Building the Department Store for the soul" strategy from Suffolk Libraries for 2023/24 and look forward to continuing to develop our strong partnership which together ensures a comprehensive libraries service is provided for the people of Suffolk.

Having a library service which meets the needs of its communities and seeks out opportunities for growth and development is a highly valued asset to our local community. A key strength of the service is the unique connection each library has built with its local community; their ability to provide an offering which responds to the differences and nuances of place, and the changing need of the people within it. Their ability to act as great bridging agents and one stop shops for support and wellbeing demonstrates a key theme running throughout this strategy. Libraries are so often the beating heart of our communities, a first port of call, a safe space, a trusted friend and their value cannot be underestimated.

We're particularly proud of the growth in the cultural offer Libraries has expanded in to. It's of huge credit to the team that Suffolk Libraries is one of only 16 library services to secure significant funding as a National Portfolio Organisation from the Arts Council to develop this service further. Seeing the Library service develop the 'Let's get creative' and online offers in addition to the diverse range of cultural and learning activities certainly challenges the dated preconception that libraries are just about books. With highly qualified and dedicated staff, Libraries form the backbone of our rich Suffolk community and cultural networks, demonstrating that they truly are a rich display of 'something for everyone'.

**COUNCILLOR BOBBY BENNETT,  
CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITY AND COMMUNITIES,  
SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**

Publication of this latest iteration of Suffolk Libraries' strategy builds on our unique blend of expertise and experience, developed over the past 10 years, to propel us into the future. The document sets out our priorities for delivering our charitable aims and meeting our contractual requirements with imagination and commitment. Suffolk Libraries' record in providing a responsive, caring and excellent service is a significant achievement and this strategy describes our continued ambition to deliver the extraordinary every day to communities and individuals across Suffolk.

**DEBRA REAY, CHAIR,  
SUFFOLK LIBRARIES BOARD**



# Context

## VISION – OUR LAST STRATEGIC PLAN 2019

We aim to provide safe, fun and inspiring spaces that expand knowledge, connect people, stimulate creativity and foster a sense of community.

We set four strategic pillars to underpin our vision:

- 1 Delivering the core offer to everyone**
- 2 Developing new partnerships and services**
- 3 Inspiring stakeholders and promoting our brand to wider audiences**
- 4 Establishing, measuring, monitoring our social impact.**

These pillars enabled us to continue to grow the service and achieve our single most important outcome of **enriching and improving everyone's quality of life; ultimately Making Life Better.**



As a result of Covid-19, Suffolk County Council (SCC) have chosen to defer the tender process for the contract to run library services in Suffolk until 2023. Suffolk Libraries will run the service until July 2024 when the new contract will start. We have devised this short-term strategy, that builds on the *Making Life Better* strategy that has shaped our work since 2019.

### WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2019?

Covid-19, Brexit and the continued pressures on local statutory services, especially in relation to health and wellbeing, now combined with the cost of living crisis means that the need for community resilience in all parts of the county is greater than ever.

Our role within the community has therefore become more pivotal and more urgent. We are well placed to support Suffolk County Council's four key objectives:

- 1. To promote and support the health and wellbeing of all people in Suffolk** through hundreds of non-clinical interventions every day and specifically through our dedicated wellbeing service
- 2. To strengthen the local economy** through access to millions of free books and resources, access to devices, Wi-Fi, and direct support through partners like Barclays and We Are Radikl
- 3. To protect and enhance the local environment** through decarbonising our buildings, business processes and supply chain and by building environmental activism within the community
- 4. To provide value for money for the Suffolk taxpayer** by saving £25 million of SCC funds in our first 10 years. The service now costs 34% less than in 2011 but has one more library, extended opening hours, hundreds more services and better reflects the diversity of Suffolk communities.

And perfectly placed to deliver Suffolk County Council's public health strategic outcomes:

- 1. Every child in Suffolk has the best start** through access to services that support emergent literacy, perinatal wellbeing and the development of social and life skills
- 2. People of working age are supported to optimise their health and wellbeing** through access to essential local support, information for living and access to a suite of wellbeing focused services
- 3. Older people in Suffolk have a good quality of life** through peer networks, specialist advice and support and volunteering opportunities
- 4. People in Suffolk have the ability to improve their mental health and wellbeing** through Suffolk Libraries dedicated wellbeing service that includes peer support, physical activity, outreach and advice and information.

# The Board's Strategic Pillars 2022-2024

To ensure that Suffolk Libraries is focused on what is important over the next two years the Board have developed three strategic pillars for the charity:

- 1 Deliver for communities:**  
Continue to deliver the core offer as specified by SCC and sustain the additional value-adding services we provide
- 2 Grow influence and reach:**  
Inspire increased engagement with the charity by building partnerships, developing services, and influencing key stakeholders
- 3 Evidence impact and increase user voice:**  
Enhance user voice and evidence (and communicate) our impact on Suffolk communities.

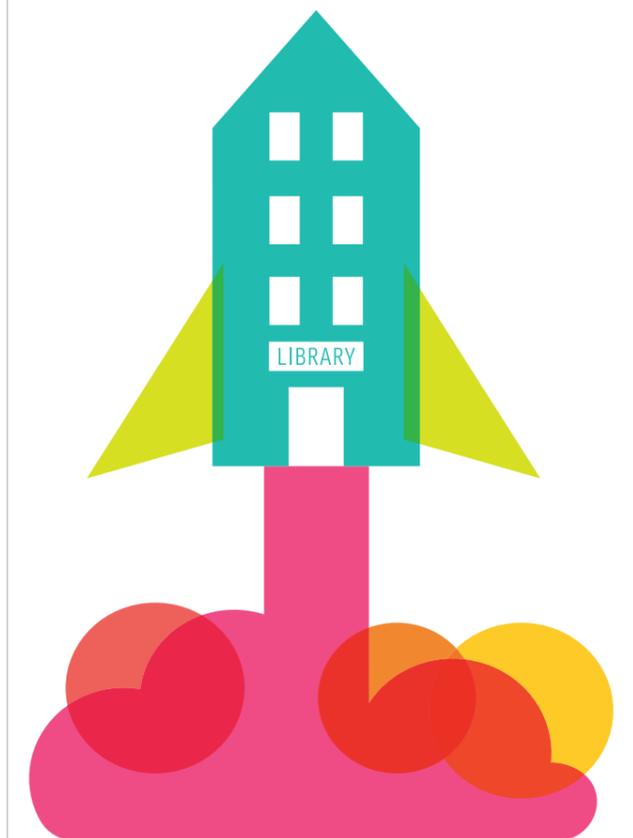
The pillars are fully consistent and aligned with SCC's objectives. They will enable Suffolk Libraries to further refine its approach and at the same time deliver for its communities, while growing wider understanding of its potential to improve and sustain public health. Underpinning frontline delivery will be a growing evidence base that supports Suffolk Libraries' role in improving health outcomes across the county.

**Suffolk Libraries is the only charity with a presence at the heart of every significant Suffolk community.**

To achieve the pillars and break down perceptions Suffolk Libraries has created the department store model to bring to life the way its services improve wellbeing and build community resilience. The model highlights the role libraries play in reducing stress which is the tipping point into serious mental illness. It also shows how Suffolk Libraries' many services can directly support people in need of an intervention, either through self-referral or via an NHS pathway like social prescribing.

# Our Vision 2022-2024: The Department Store

**Suffolk Libraries is the only charity with a presence at the heart of every significant Suffolk community.** Its offer is available to everyone and anyone, is flexible and agile and as a result meets hyper-local needs. The library service is often perceived in its traditional image as a book lender, but the organisation has a wider offer which needs to be seen and understood. There is no doubt that the service lends millions of books and other items every year, but the offer has evolved to become much more focused on experiences rather than transactions. This shift is best illustrated by Suffolk Libraries running over 14,000 events and activities attended over 200,000 times in the year prior to the pandemic. In a nutshell it is social prescribing on an industrial scale.



With this shift to experiences, Suffolk Libraries provides services that have a profound impact on the health and wellbeing of people in the county. Much of what the organisation does every day prevents and reduces stress by meeting basic emotional needs through non-clinical interventions. Ultimately, this approach contributes to preventing serious mental illness (SMI) and other health conditions. Non-clinical interventions include providing millions of physical and digital resources, running thousands of events and activities, providing information, insight, and signposting and through support from expert colleagues.

**THE DEPARTMENT STORE FOR THE SOUL MODEL**

We aim to be a place where everyone belongs and is supported in ways that meet their individual needs; a *Department Store for the Soul* with a boutique approach.

The Suffolk Libraries approach will be a person-centred one with every resident of Suffolk being able to access different departments within a wider offer. Library users will be able to tailor their experiences to whatever stage and level of help they're looking for empowering them to manage their wellbeing. As people move in and out of good mental health, they will have opportunities to access the right support for them to stay well and thrive.

The model is called the *Department Store for the Soul* referencing the libraries' ability to offer multiple solutions to mental health and wellbeing challenges for people in the community. The charity believes that if stakeholders and customers alike can understand its libraries as a place where everyone can belong and get support in a way that meets their needs then it can boost community resilience. The department store graphic below comprehensively illustrates how Suffolk Libraries intends to define their offer between 2022 and 2024.

**The *Department Store for the Soul* Model**

<b>Mental health continuum</b>	Stage	Departments			Support
	<b>SELF-REFERRAL</b> Stigma-free, safe, neutral community space	<b>SPACE TO BE</b> Multifunctional spaces at the heart of the community	<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b> PCs, Wi-fi and take-away devices	<b>INFORMATION</b> Signposting, information, and guidance	<b>UNLIMITED</b> Free, universal & everywhere
	<b>EARLY HELP</b> Early interventions and NHS pathways like social prescribing	<b>ENTERTAINMENT</b> Books, films, games, and magazines	<b>EDUCATION</b> Training, upskilling and literacy development	<b>BUSINESS</b> Networks, insight, and specialist advice/support	<b>PRACTICAL</b> Resources & content
	<b>FURTHER SUPPORT</b> Tier one support, direct referral, and signposting	<b>COMFORT</b> Experiences and escapism, e.g. reading lists, arts and culture etc.	<b>CONNECTION</b> Activities, events, and networks, e.g. Me, Myself and Baby, Open Space etc.	<b>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</b> Gentle movement and exercise, e.g. Jumpstart, Move It etc.	<b>EMOTIONAL</b> Activities, experiences & networks

Our 'store guide' of stories, voices, evidence and experiences demonstrates how Suffolk Libraries is a place where everyone in Suffolk can belong. As the 'store guide' expands the customer base throughout the county, these 'shoppers' experience the breadth of our services and we build community resilience that:

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**IMPROVES HEALTH AND WELLBEING**  
This literally means delivering against the needs of each community that we serve, reaching even more people through the continued evolution of our services and providing credible evidence of our impact, and particularly the outcomes we create to key stakeholders like SCC and the Integrated Care System

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**PROVIDES VITAL 'LIFE SUPPORT' AT A HYPER-LOCAL LEVEL:**  
This involves direct support like low-cost fresh produce, pop up food banks, as well as digital connectivity, signposting for debt advice, employment support, training and other essential help

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**BUILDS CONNECTIONS THAT CREATE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE AND IMPROVED CIRCUMSTANCES**  
Through better physical connections, peer support and engagement with those with shared experiences

**People Powered**

Our highly-skilled colleagues are at the heart of everything we do. They are often the glue that binds together their community by providing non-judgemental and stigma free spaces where people can come together for support, information and connection. They are empowered to develop services that meet local needs and work tirelessly to make a difference to people's lives. Ultimately, they will shape the future of our services by listening to their community and delivering on their needs.

**The Future: Integration and Partnership**

Suffolk Libraries is not resting on its laurels. The charity wants to become an integral part of the Suffolk health system and at the same time lead the way for other library services across the country. Embracing its role as a key part of SCC's public health strategy, Suffolk Libraries is committed to working with the Integrated Care System to ensure its offer continues to meet the needs of Suffolk communities at a hyper-local level.

There is a tremendous opportunity to develop partnerships with the health system to support the delivery of key priority areas like personalised care and social prescribing. Suffolk Libraries believes it already plays a key, and undervalued, role in preventative healthcare. It is ambitious to engage with system partners to increase capacity and reduce duplication to improve health outcomes through the power of its network. The departments will only grow and develop with these key partnerships making them a stronger offer for communities.

Suffolk Libraries will also continue to work closely with key partners and funders at DCMS, Arts Council England, Libraries Connected and CILIP.

**The ultimate outcome of this approach will be to build community resilience and improve health and wellbeing**



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By donating to Suffolk Libraries you can help us fund crucial additional services that reduce social, digital and rural isolation in our communities. For details visit [www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/donate](http://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/donate)

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