

**December 2021**

# **Review of the Implementation of East Sussex Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23**

## **Contents**

Executive Summary of the Review of the Implementation of the Library Strategic Commissioning Strategy

Realignment of Resources to deliver the Strategy

Capital Projects

Activities supporting delivery of our Strategic Outcomes, 2018 - 2021

Accessing the offers

Achievement of Savings

## Executive Summary

A Review of the Implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy (referred to as the Strategy in this document) has been carried out to review progress on the implementation of the Strategy and evaluate the offers and services delivered by the Library and Information Service.

The Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy was launched in 2018 as part of a wider Libraries Transformation Programme designed to deliver a modern and sustainable Library and Information Service for East Sussex, based on current and future needs for the county. It was designed to address the challenges faced by the service, both in terms of less money, but also reducing demand for libraries. It also ensures that the Library and Information Service delivers offers and services that meet the needs of residents, particularly those who are most vulnerable. The current Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy covers the period 2018 to 2023.

Our Vision is to provide a Library and Information Service that promotes reading and knowledge as a route to leading fulfilling lives, prioritising our resources and expertise to support the needs of residents and communities in East Sussex to achieve four key outcomes:

- **improving child and adult literacy and numeracy:**  
we will provide a range of quality materials and personalised support for people's different needs, so they can enjoy the pleasure of reading as well as the better life chances that literacy and numeracy unlock for people. We will deliver a new Children and Young People's Literacy and Numeracy offer, working closely with other services for children and young people of all ages in all settings to encourage children and their families to use the library service
- **supporting the economy:**  
we will provide training and guidance for people of all abilities seeking to learn and to work, so they are able to build skills and confidence in a supportive environment
- **better health and wellbeing:**  
we will promote reading as a source of wellbeing, provide reliable information and services to promote good health, and support people to manage their own health and the health of those they care for
- **increasing digital inclusion:**  
we will provide free access to computers and Wi-Fi, and paid access to printers and scanners, training for people to use technology and the Internet, so they are able to independently access vital information and services and participate in the benefits of the digital world

The Review demonstrates that significant progress has been made in the delivery of offers that meet our four key outcomes since the launch of the Strategy including:

- increased support for our most vulnerable customers, including young people with mental health issues, people who need support to improve their literacy, isolated people and supported families
- increased borrowing of books by children and young people in 2019/20, which was higher than the previous two years, promoting a lifelong love of reading and supporting literacy
- the development and implementation of a new outreach offer focused on children and young people with the greatest need has supported vulnerable and isolated families to benefit from library services such as Rhymetimes where pre-school children can develop their speech and language
- an increased range of eBooks and eMagazines available online has resulted in a significant increase in usage; people who prefer to read eBooks and eMagazines can access them from home, 24 hours a day
- a focus on supporting people to improve their employment chances through informal and formal learning opportunities to gain confidence and qualifications has enabled jobseekers to find work or take a step closer to employment
- Partnerships and initiatives to support health and wellbeing have been developed with partners such as the NHS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Hygiene Bank, a community organisation that helps provide hygiene products for those who need them
- the introduction of new services to support digital inclusion such as a loan scheme for devices and IT for You at Home, a telephone support service to help people to go online is supporting digitally and financially excluded people to go online to access the services they need such as applying for Universal Credit and accessing health information

We have also identified some gaps where we can develop provision of services. These will be addressed in the updated version of the Strategy:

- we will codesign our offer for young people to support their study to ensure we meet their needs, and promote the offer
- we will extend our code club provision for children
- we will expand our Step into Reading service to help adults to improve their reading and increase opportunities for learning new skills and gaining qualifications
- we will develop our Jobs Pod offer which provides confidential space, a computer and support for people with online job interviews
- we will develop and expand our initiative to provide free period products in libraries

- we will promote the free access to computers and wifi in our libraries to improve digital inclusion
- we will improve the promotion of our support for schools to increase take up of services
- we will further develop and enhance our IT for You offer, where people are supported by staff and volunteers to use computers to go online.

## **Realignment of Resources to Meet Need**

To ensure effective delivery of the Strategy, the Service realigned resources to meet need and introduced new ways of working:

- The Service has focussed on support for the most vulnerable people since the launch of the Strategy e.g. young people with mental health issues, people who need support to improve their literacy, isolated people and supported families
- There is an increase in our outreach offer to communities with higher need, for example, We are working closely with children's centres in areas of the highest need, targeting schools in areas of the highest need and supporting the literacy work of the Hastings Opportunity Area
- The work of the Librarian Team has been re-assigned according to specific needs. Targets for this Team are constantly reviewed to ensure focus on delivery of the four Key Strategic Outcomes
- We continue to seek additional external funding and sponsorship and have successfully bid for funding to deliver initiatives which support the delivery of our Strategic Outcomes. For example, we secured funding and equipment from the NHS, South East Local Enterprise Partnerships, Digital Skills Partnership and the Good Things Foundation to increase digital inclusion. As part of our new culture offer, we submitted a bid to achieve funding from Arts Council England to deliver a project for Key Stage 1 children, bringing them to libraries for a puppet show about using the library and encouraging them to return with their family
- Spending on stock and resources has been profiled to reflect the Strategy, for example spending on eBooks has been increased to expand our eLibrary offer

## **Capital Projects undertaken**

- In March 2018, we completed an extensive £9.5m refurbishment of Hastings Library enabling customers to access a wide range of services from four storeys of the library, creating a Learning Centre for adults taking qualification courses in English, Maths and ICT and bringing the children's library into the same building.
- Over the last four years we have invested over £1.27m in our library buildings to configure our libraries to provide the best possible space and facilities to deliver our strategic outcomes. This includes the complete refurbishment of Battle, Crowborough, Lewes, Eastbourne, Heathfield, Uckfield and Hampden Park libraries. We have modernised and extended the children and young people's areas in all seven libraries, created a large study space on the mezzanine of Lewes Library in which we ran Study Clubs for 16-19 year olds in 2019, and created a new Learning and Information Suite for adults taking qualification courses in English, Maths and ICT at Eastbourne Library.

## **Review of Activities supporting delivery of our Strategic Outcomes, 2018 -2021**

In the three years since the launch of the Strategy in 2018, we have developed and implemented a wide range of activities in line with our strategic outcomes as the section below demonstrates. Many activities had to be suspended from March 2021 until July 2021 but were reinstated as soon as possible following the lifting of government restrictions.

### **Our offer for improving child and adult literacy and numeracy:**

#### **Provision of quality reading material**

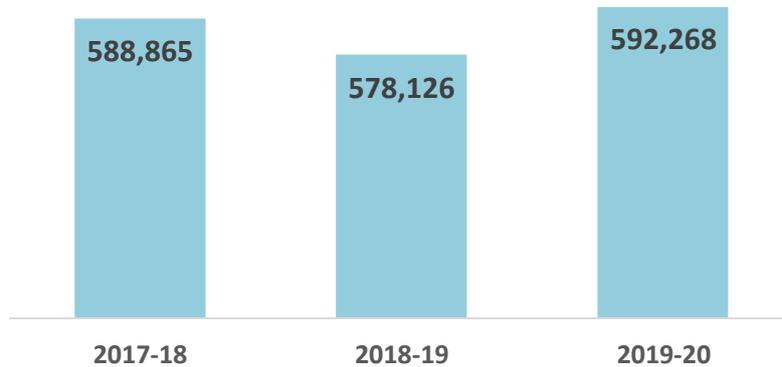
We have increased the percentage of spending on stock for children from 27% of the spend on lending stock in 2018/19 to 39% in 2020/21, and have continued to provide a wide range of reading material for adults and children since the launch of the Strategy.

Customer satisfaction with choice and condition of books increased between 2015 and 2018. In the national Public Library User Survey (PLUS) carried out in East Sussex libraries in November 2018, 77.7% of customers rated the choice of books as very good or good, compared to 77.1% in 2015 when the survey was previously carried out; 90.8% rated the physical condition of books as very good or good, compared to 88.7% in 2015.

Children's and family literacy are supported by a range of stock aimed at all abilities to encourage children of all ages to be find suitable reading materials. This stock is used to promote reading through a wide range of reading-based activities for children and families including the annual Summer Reading Challenge.

As a result of our offer for children and young people, we have seen an increase in the number of books borrowed by them in 2019/20, which was higher than the previous two years.

### Issues & renewals of children's stock



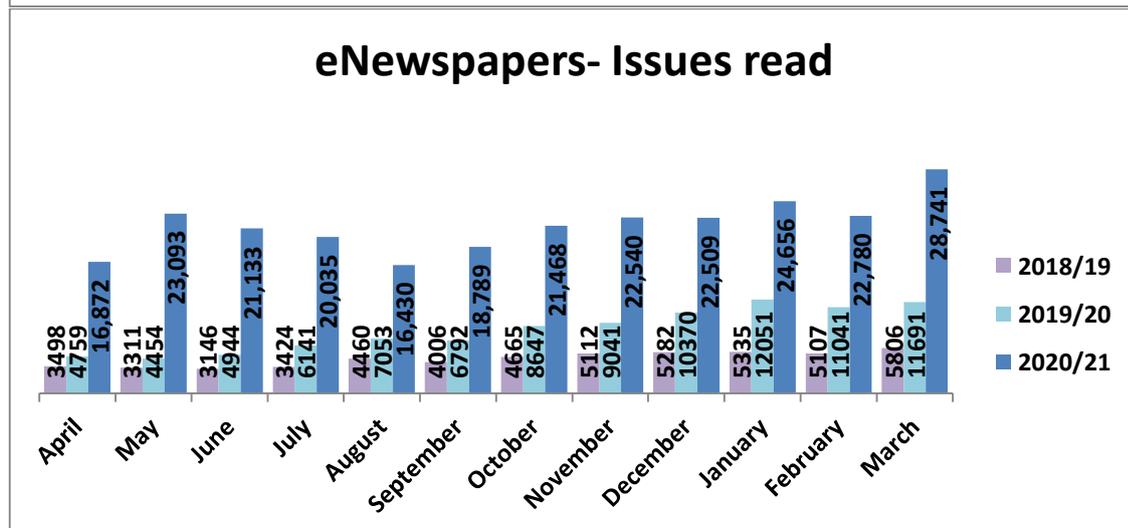
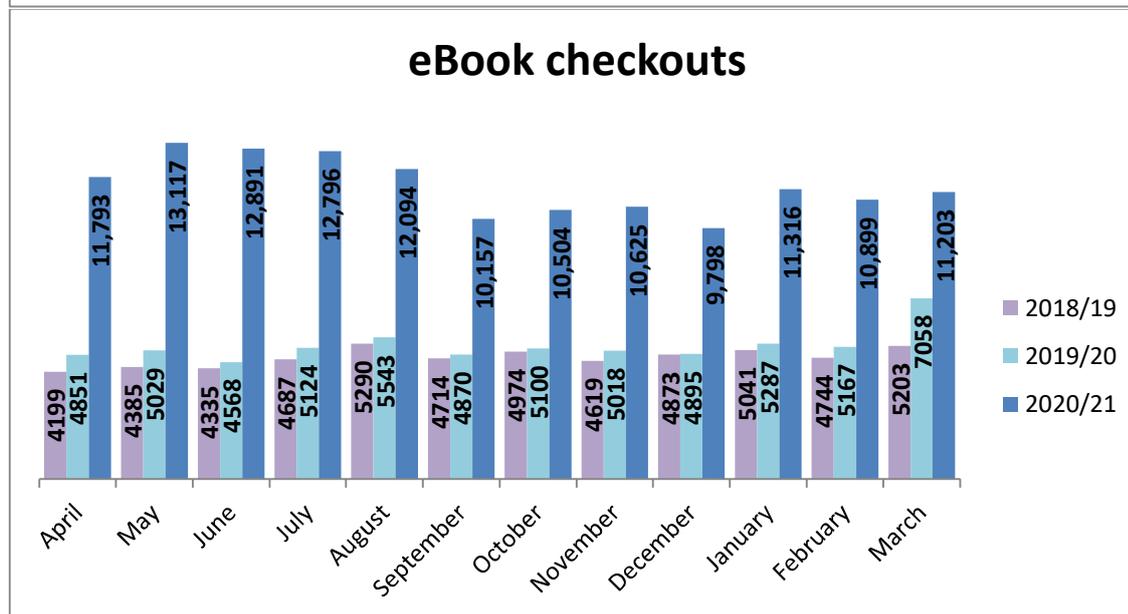
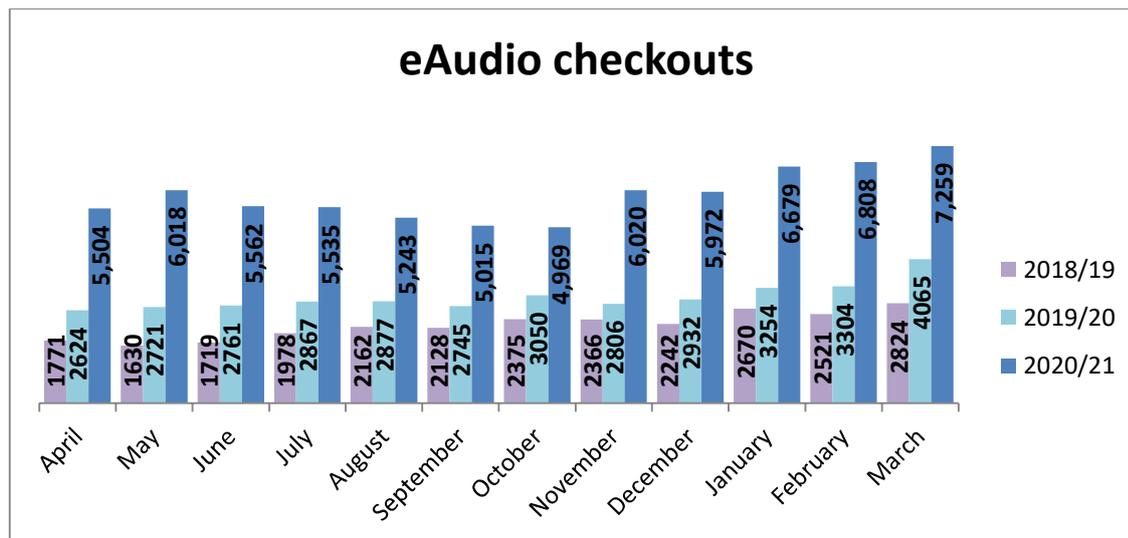
We have increased our stock to support the development of adult literacy by 400% in the period from 2018 to 2021. The stock has been used to support projects such as Step into Reading where volunteers assist people to develop reading skills in one to one sessions.

Wellbeing resources have been increased to 2,500 items in 2021 from 808 in 2018. These materials have been used to deliver Wellbeing boxes which were initially funded by external grant funding from Arts Council England and support families, young people and older people to improve their mental and physical health.

We have increased the choice and number of titles available from the eLibrary for both adults and children. In March 2021, there were 9,802 eBooks available, compared to 7,152 in March 2019 and 4,861 eAudiobooks compared to 1,962 in March 2019.

There has been a significant rise in the number of items checked out, including eAudiobooks, eBooks and eNewspapers.

The tables below show checkouts for the past three years, demonstrating the increase in usage since 2018 and the very significant increase in 2020/21 during the pandemic.



#### Digital Reading Group

In 2020, we established a digital reading group which allows simultaneous download of an eBook by an unlimited number of borrowers, providing the opportunity for people

from different backgrounds and experiences to come together to read a book and feel a sense of community, reducing isolation. It supports reading for pleasure and wellbeing.

We give readers the opportunity to talk about the book in a shared space, the Library Facebook page, and to communicate directly with the author in an online interview. The first book enjoyed by our digital reading group, was checked out 1,038 times by 857 borrowers.

### Rhymetimes and Storytimes for children

We have worked to provide as many rhymetime and storytime sessions as possible to support speech and language development for pre-school children as well as providing opportunities for families to get together to share books and stories. As a result we have seen a significant increase in the number of participants since the launch of the Strategy. Sessions are provided by both staff and volunteers and are well received by the children and adults who attend. Children's centre staff work with us to engage families from our most deprived communities.

- Rhymetime participants increased from 10,469 sessions in 17/18, 14,842 in 18/19 to 16,111 in 2019/20
- Storytime participants increased from 1,837 in 17/18 to 2,004 in 2019/20

### Feedback from customers for Rhymetime at Hastings Library 1/06/2019



We asked both children and adults to write their feedback about the Rhymetime session they had just attended on speech bubbles, for display in the library.

Comments include:

- "excellent"
- "fantastic time, so energetic and enjoyable"
- Super amazing, I'm exhausted!"

## The Summer Reading Challenge

This is a national initiative organised by The Reading Agency and run locally by the Library and Information Service to encourage children to continue to read over the summer holidays, promoting a love of reading and reducing learning loss.

In 2019/20

- 5,543 children participated in the Challenge, compared to 4,800 the previous year
- 49 schools were visited by our Librarian Team to promote the Summer Reading Challenge, an increase of 10 schools from 2017/18. Schools in the areas of highest deprivation were prioritised for visits.
- 393 attendees took part in Summer Reading Challenge events, an increase from 60 attendees in 2017/18
- Increase in class visits from 32 in 2017/18 to 69 in 2019/20 (1,871 children)

In 2020/21 the Reading Agency ran the Summer Reading Challenge as an online initiative only.

In 2021/22, we resumed local delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge, including visits to schools and events in libraries over the school holidays.

- 4,860 children participated in the challenge
- 69 schools were visited by our Librarian Team, and 27 of these visits were virtual
- 540 attendees took part in Summer Reading Challenge events



## East Sussex Children's Book Award

This initiative was devised and is managed by the Library and Information Service, running from January to June each year. It encourages children to read books, share their views and be part of the process to choose the winner from a shortlist. Children in years 4, 5 and 6 take part in a variety of activities including the opportunity to meet authors and discuss their books. Schools can pay to take part and we encourage schools in areas of highest deprivation to participate by offering a number of free places.

In 2019/20:

- 36 schools took part
- 620 children attended author events
- 266 children voted for the winning book
- 130 children attended the final event where the winner was announced.

We captured Teachers' comments as part of the evaluation:

*"Exposure to some great new authors"*

*"Inspires the children to read books and encourages them to talk to each other about them."*

*"Getting children talking about their reading together. A sharing experience."*

*"Children read a wider variety of genres and authors. They enjoy sharing each other's ideas and opinions about books and love meeting the authors."*

*"Encouragement for children to read at home and increased discussion about the books that they are reading. "*

*"Language enrichment, reading for pleasure, discussions between readers, commitment to reading, the 'trickle-down' effect across the year group as books are recommended and picked up by other children who wouldn't normally choose them."*

*"A range of good quality books, resources for book club sessions and the children loved the competitions"*

*"Introducing children to good quality texts and giving them the opportunity to take part in a book club in which they can share their thoughts and feelings"*

*"Children and staff being introduced to new, quality texts and the children love to meet a 'real' author"*

*"The opportunity for excellent discussion/activities around books as well as participating in something beyond our own school."*

*"Raising awareness of reading. Meeting real authors."*

*"The children get to read different books, they get to meet an author as well as giving us ideas to buy more books for our school library."*

*"Introducing children to new authors, meeting real life authors and being able to ask questions"*

*"Promotes reading, all our children were excited about reading the book"*

In 2020/21, due to Covid-19 restrictions and school closures we ran the East Sussex Children's Book Club instead of our annual East Sussex Children's Book Award, aimed at children around 8–11 years old. We selected six highlighted titles and promoted them on our Facebook pages and in the children's reading area on our website [East Sussex Children's Book Award | East Sussex Libraries \(spydus.co.uk\)](https://www.spydus.co.uk). This new approach allows any child to take part, either with their school or as an individual.

### **Between the Books Project**

A successful bid to Arts Council England for Funding enabled us to promote libraries to Key Stage 1 children and their teachers. The Between the Books Project was delivered in 2019/20. 890 Key Stage 1 children from 30 schools visited 16 of our 17 libraries to participate in a high quality, inspiring performance by "In the Bellows" who engaged both children and teachers with inventive puppetry and music.

The sessions were offered at no charge to schools and feedback was excellent.

- All teachers said the visit was excellent or very good.
- 100% of teachers agreed that the event was beneficial for their school to attend
- 100% of children said they wanted to visit the library again

### **Family Learning**

Approximately 1,000 participants a year take part in our Family Learning Courses which include Keeping up with the Children (Maths, English and English as an Additional Language), Get Ready for School, Employability, Money Matters, Healthy and Budget Cookery, Story Sacks, Parent and Child Signing, Family First Aid. The courses are designed in conjunction with colleagues in Children's Centres to support families, many of whom are vulnerable. Feedback from families is very positive across the range of courses.

Feedback for our Parent and Signing courses demonstrates the impact the course has for parents/carers and children:

*"My daughter who is deaf with cochlear implants is really picking up the signs quickly and using them, and it's helping my daughter with her frustration as normally she finds saying long sentences difficult".*

One of our Tutors said:

*"I had a little "rosy glow" moment, as one of the mums in the first session is a repeat customer. Apparently, I taught her 3 years ago when her eldest son was little and now she wants a refresher for her second baby boy. She said that it had really helped her eldest son, and he was speaking before many of his contemporaries, which she attributed to his signing abilities and his confidence with communication. She's a great ambassador for baby signing, and it was great that the other mums could hear her testimony."*

Feedback for our Family English, Maths and Language Courses shows their value for families:

*"I am home schooling my little boy at the moment due to his health issues and because he is extremely vulnerable in relation to Covid. The sessions have been absolutely amazing and have been extremely valuable for me..... I had no idea before these sessions what or how to teach my son and have just been muddling through! Ali (the tutor) is constantly giving new and exciting ideas and I feel like me and my son really need Ali in our lives for his learning to thrive!"*

We have delivered a joint action plan with children's centres including sessions in centres. 50 outreach sessions were delivered by Librarians at children's centres in areas of deprivation in 2019/20. The sessions introduce families to the importance of sharing books with young children to support speech and language development, encourage a love of reading and spend quality time together enjoying an activity.

### **Bookstart**

We have continued to develop Bookstart in East Sussex. Bookstart is a national bookgifting programme which was established in 1992 and is run by the reading charity BookTrust. The programme is funded by Arts Council England and the Welsh Government, as well as BookTrust's partners and donors.

Bookstart provides free books and resources to every local authority, who then work across public services to meet local needs. In East Sussex, the Library and Information Service manages and supports Bookstart. Children receive two packs containing books and an invitation to join the library, the first before they are twelve months old and the second when they are 3-4 years old. We work with our Health Visitor teams to gift the Baby packs and we send out the Treasure packs to slightly older children through our Early Years settings. Events and activities are organised in support of the scheme.

Bookstart packs are important in promoting a love of reading and encouraging families to visit libraries and they also help our Council teams build better relationships with each other and the community more broadly. The Book Corner programme which provides collections of books in childcare settings is one of the key ways we engage with some of our harder to reach families and is valued by nursery practitioners. We also work with Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability Services (ISEND), as well as EALS (English as an Additional Language) to ensure all children receive an appropriate pack. Dual language books and books for children with additional needs are supplied.

In 2019/20:

- **5,025** Bookstart baby packs were delivered to children under twelve months
- **5,210** Treasure packs were delivered to 3-4 year olds in East Sussex.

### **Support for schools**

As part of the implementation of the Strategy in 2018, we launched a new membership for teachers in primary and special schools, who can borrow up to 40 books for twelve weeks for their class from our special Teachers' Collection. Books are collected from a public library. Although we have promoted this service, take up has not been significant yet and we aim to improve promotion. In 2019/20, 27 teachers borrowed books. We aim to improve promotion and take up of this service.

### **Study clubs**

In 2019, study clubs (Study Zones) were piloted in two libraries during the GCSE and A Level exam periods. The rationale was to support students' literacy and attainment by providing access to library computers, Wi-Fi and resources during the crucial revision period. Weekly sessions on Wednesday afternoons (4.00pm – 7.00pm) were held in Hastings and Lewes Libraries, running from the beginning of May until the end of June.

The sessions were supported by Librarians and Volunteer Coordinators as part of their working hours and the initiative was promoted via local schools and colleges.

Student uptake was limited (35 young people) however we aim to relaunch this initiative again in 2021/22 in the light of changing need and with better promotional strategies.

### **Code Clubs for children**

Our Code Clubs are part of a nationwide network of after-school coding clubs for children aged 8–12 years old. Using specially created Code Club materials, the sessions are designed to build confidence and encourage creativity in 3 different

coding languages, helping children learn computing skills that could unlock a wide range of future career opportunities.

Code clubs were launched successfully in 2019 in 4 libraries – Eastbourne, Hastings, Lewes and Battle. There were 64 children participating each week, supported by 13 volunteers. We aim to extend our code club provision.

### **Literacy and numeracy support for children and adults with disabilities**

To support people with dyslexia, visual impairment or other reading difficulties, we continue to develop our offer of eBooks, eMagazines and eNewspapers which some find easier to read as the font size and other settings can be adjusted. We also have eAudio books and books on CD. We provide books from a dyslexia specialist publisher for children, young people and adults.

ProDigi and Eye Pal Solo reading aids are available in Bexhill, Hastings and Eastbourne libraries. These machines support those who have difficulty with normal print. They have a text to speech function as well as tools to enlarge print and change font colour.

All computers for public use are equipped with Supernova V.I software to support people with visual impairment, as well as adapted keyboards. They are accessible to wheelchair users.

We work with a wide range of partners such as Mencap, Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA), the NHS and Care for the Carers to engage people with health issues and learning disabilities with our sessions on gaining digital skills to access the internet for information and online services, known as IT for You.

In June 2019, in conjunction with Discovery College, we ran a 6 week creative writing course for 13-20 year olds who were receiving support for mental health concerns from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

The partnership developed from a pilot course we delivered in 2018, which ran for three weeks with three participants and produced a piece of work for our Wellbeing Bag scheme. The course was designed to introduce people to the library as well as giving them the tools to communicate and express themselves with creative writing and enhance their social skills. We began with a focus group to set the themes for the sessions, which were then completed by six participants.

Of these:

- 5 became members of the library, and 1 took out the maximum number of 20 graphic novels at every session he attended
- 5 attended a final event at which some of the participants performed, displayed, or read their work aloud and gave feedback on the course to over 20 peers and their families

At the end of the course one participant's mother gave feedback to the team stating that her daughter had really enjoyed the course and had made "leaps in her confidence and ability to socialise with others". The participant's mother was very grateful for the

course and the positive impact it had had on her child. Another participant expressed interest in becoming a peer mentor.

### **Home Library Service for isolated or vulnerable residents**

In 2019/20, 143 people were served by our Home Library Service by a similar number of volunteers. More than a hundred others received a Home Library Service from our partner organisation, Bexhill Caring Community, who deliver books on our behalf as part of the services they provide for elderly and isolated people who are unable to leave their homes. During 2020 and early 2021, we were unable to deliver our usual scheme with volunteers and our staff visited approximately 50 people, taking them books and providing social contact for many who were isolated.

## **Our offer for supporting the economy**

### **Supporting people into employment**

In 2020, we launched Jobs Pod, a new initiative for people seeking a professional, supportive environment for taking online interviews. People seeking jobs can book a fully equipped, private space at Eastbourne and Hastings Libraries free of charge, with support to prepare for the interview and to use the software. We will continue to develop this initiative.

### **Space to work and study.**

We offer free access to over 200 computers across our 17 libraries and each library also has free WI-FI, available to anyone who joins the library.

Recent library refurbishments have included additional space for people to use their own devices wherever possible.

### **Support for adults with low literacy and numeracy**

In January 2020 East Sussex Library and Information Service initiated a pilot project to support adult reading. The 'Step into Reading' project offers one-to-one reading support for people aged over 16 in Hastings Library. The need for this provision was revealed by the numerous referrals from organisations for basic reading support for adults in East Sussex. During project initiation, there were no known schemes in East Sussex for these individuals to be referred to.

The pilot project is based in Hastings Library as low literacy skills are often linked to areas of high deprivation and our needs assessment demonstrated that Hastings has several wards with high levels of multiple deprivation. Volunteer mentors use a phonics-based workbook to support reading sessions with learners. Learners meet with the same mentor for one hour every week and have so far been referred by Hastings Job Centre and SCDA.

We recruited 5 reading mentors and ten prospective learners initially and before sessions had to be suspended last year, 6 learners had taken part in the project. After they had attended six sessions, four learners scored their reading ability as higher. One learner wanted to be able to support her children and grandchildren in reading, and gain confidence in reading. She progressed from reading two letter words after her fourth session to being able to read three letter words after her eighth. She said,

*“I want to tell everyone about it because it is brilliant. I was nervous before I came but the one-to-one sessions really helped”*

We will continue to develop and expand this initiative.

### **Learning opportunities for adults**

Our Learning Services Team support people to study online and achieve qualifications in ICT, Maths and English and to develop the skills they need to get into work or further education. Learners achieved over 150 qualifications between April 2018 and March 2020. People can self-refer. Agencies and organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions also refer people to gain key skills and qualifications to build confidence and improve employment chances. Learners can study work from home or in Eastbourne or Hastings Libraries and are fully supported by a dedicated tutor. This means they can fit in learning with their everyday life, looking after the family or working full time. They can access their online courses 24 hours a day from wherever they are.

Liam, one of our learners said:

*“I attended the course in order to achieve a pass to progress to further studying at university. I hoped to gain a better understanding of maths in general & how I can use it to benefit my day to day life when dealing with mathematical problems. When beginning the functional skills course my general maths was very basic and I had very little understanding of how certain topics could benefit me. A few weeks into the course I started to see my mental maths pace increase, I was able to jump into questions rather than take time finding were to begin which immediately helped my confidence grow.*

*The course has allowed me to gain understanding of my weaknesses when it comes to exams and I have learnt how to overcome these obstacles. I have a great understanding of general maths.*

*The course has built confidence not only in maths but in myself. The tutor support throughout my learning has been outstanding, any issues or problems faced my tutor or somebody at the centre has been there for support. Working through online and offline worksheets has been a tough journey, however, I feel confident with the speed and pace of my work. I am confident with the language I use to explain my work and generally facing maths problems overall”*

### **Provision of online resources**

We have added new webpages, bringing together our offer to support people into employment by improving their skills and gaining qualifications, as well as providing business information. The offer includes free access to current copies of newspapers and magazines, business-related books and books to support job application, directories for company information and signposting to useful websites and resources such as careers advice.

[Employability | East Sussex Libraries \(spydus.co.uk\)](https://www.spydus.co.uk)

[Business and Jobs Information | East Sussex Libraries \(spydus.co.uk\)](https://www.spydus.co.uk)

### **A new Culture Offer**

We have engaged children and young people in cultural activities to support their health and wellbeing, as well as to promote library services which can improve their quality of life.

We have run creative writing sessions for young people in partnership with CAMHS to introduce young people to the library as well giving them the tools to communicate and express themselves with creative writing and enhance their social skills.

In 2019/20, we offered puppet shows to encourage Key Stage 1 children to visit the library with their family following a successful bid to Arts Council England for funding. The Between the Books Project saw 890 Key Stage 1 children from 30 schools visit 16 of our 17 libraries to participate in a high quality, inspiring performance by local arts group “In the Bellows” who engaged both children and teachers with inventive puppetry and music.

We are part of the partnership delivering the Everyday Creativity project. The project is funded by Public Health and provides support for groups who are finding Covid restrictions and impact particularly difficult. The project is funded by public health and aims to have a positive impact on the mental health of the groups participating by engaging them in creative activities delivered by local creative freelancers.

The Library and information Service is particularly engaged with the strand of the project to support people on furlough or unemployed, and will support other parts of the project by promoting and delivering our wide range of resources and services which support mental health and wellbeing e.g. Job Pods for confidential online job interviews, IT for You to use the internet to join in creative activities, eBooks to enjoy reading for pleasure.

We are also engaging online with authors on our website. We worked with a local author to promote online discussion about her book set in Eastbourne.

## **Our offer for better health and wellbeing**

### **Self-help materials and support for all ages and needs**

We have increased our stock of Wellbeing resources to 2,500 items in 2021 from 808 in 2018. These materials are used in Wellbeing Boxes for loan to families, young people and older people, and Wellbeing Bags available to young people on loan. They contain a range of books, leaflets and information. We also offer a collection of online tools to support mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

### **Health and wellbeing information for all ages and needs**

We have developed and launched a wellbeing page for the website [Wellbeing | East Sussex County Council](#), a collection of online tools to support mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. We have also extended our range of books and eBooks to support health and wellbeing and curated easily accessed collections, both hard copy and eBooks, for customers to borrow.

**Reliable sources of health information online and in all libraries with guidance to other services.**

Since 2018, we have worked in partnership with Adult Social Care to develop ESCIS, our community information service, to be more accessible and to become a useful tool for social prescribing for health practitioners. There were over 440,000 website hits on ESCIS in 2019/20, connecting people with a wide range of community-based activities and support to improve their health and wellbeing. Over 7,500 organisations are listed. In 2020, we added two new categories to ESCIS, Coronavirus Support & Information and Virtual Events to ensure residents had access to vital information. In 2020-21 there were 6,807 page views of the Coronavirus support & Information page and 2,437 page views of virtual events.

### **Physical and mental health support.**

We have developed our partnership with the NHS to provide opportunities for people to have Health Checks in their library, in a welcoming environment. In 2019, 85 people had Health Checks in libraries over 17 sessions and smoking cessation clinics were delivered in Hastings Library.

We are working in partnership with the Hygiene Bank, a community initiative to give hygiene, personal care and household cleaning products to those who need them across the UK. We launched the Periodbank in January 2021 at Eastbourne and Hastings libraries. From January to March 2021, over 120 bags containing free, donated period products have been taken by members of the public. Staff in both libraries have received positive comments from library customers. As well as providing free products, we are asking the public for period product donations to keep the project going and placing donation bins in Eastbourne and Hastings Libraries. We will continue to develop and expand this initiative to more libraries, including the provision of continence products.

We provide library services on a traded basis for HMP Lewes and offer a range of initiatives to support mental health as well as literacy. In 2020/21 an initiative called "Against the Current" was delivered there as part of the Pinned Up Festival, a literature festival created with, and for, prisoners which runs in a number of prisons. This unique initiative was aimed at offering prisoners, who were spending long periods locked in their cells with limited mental stimulation or educational opportunities due to the pandemic, a series of artistic challenges set by professional writers and artists and distributed to them through the prison library service. Over 9 weeks, a wide range of challenges was set covering poetry, non-fiction, conceptual art and TV/film reviews. Alongside this, prisoners were able to ask questions of well-known authors including Darren Shan, Kimberley Chambers and Courttia Newland.

Prisoner feedback was very positive:

*"During this difficult time of no education or work and virtual isolation it has helped keep my brain and creativity active. Something to look forward to every week. Pinned Up was too good to stop!"*

We have also run a Prison Library debate club in HMP Lewes with groups of up to 20 men attending the weekly debate sessions. Subjects are selected from the daily newspapers and volunteers talked for 5 minutes for or against a motion. Questions were then taken from the audience and a vote passed before and after the debates to see who had 'won' the argument. Debate subjects vary and have included issues like 'Is there free speech?' and 'Should prisoners have the right to vote?'.

Feedback from attendees:

*“Thanks for the Debate Club and all the help you gave me” Prisoner*

*“...nice to be able to discuss my point of view in a constructive and open way where people respected my opinion and listened” Prisoner*

*“...healthy, constructive debate” Officer*

*“...debates were very well conducted and everyone that took part was respectful to their peers. It encouraged the men to talk about subjects from a different point of view and to engage in constructive conversation.” Officer*

### **Outreach for isolated or vulnerable residents**

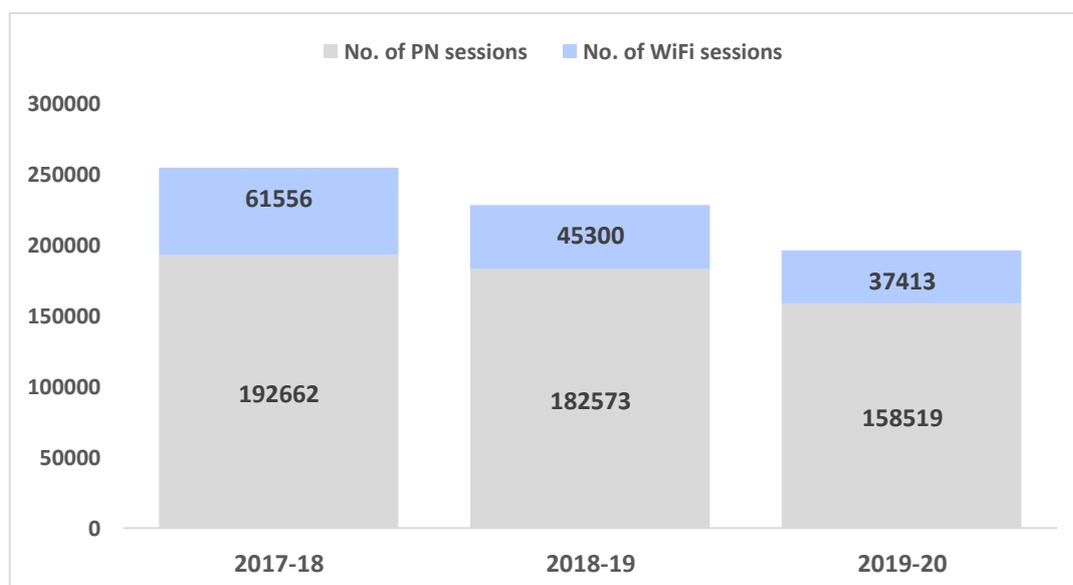
In 2019/20, 143 people were served by our Home Library Service by a similar number of volunteers. Over a hundred further people received a Home Library Service from our partner organisation, Bexhill Caring Community, who deliver books on our behalf as part of the services they provide for elderly and isolated people who are unable to leave their homes. During 2020 and early 2021, we were unable to deliver our usual scheme with volunteers and our staff visited approximately 50 people, taking them books and providing social contact for many who were isolated.

## **Our offer for increasing digital inclusion**

### **Access to computers and Wi-Fi**

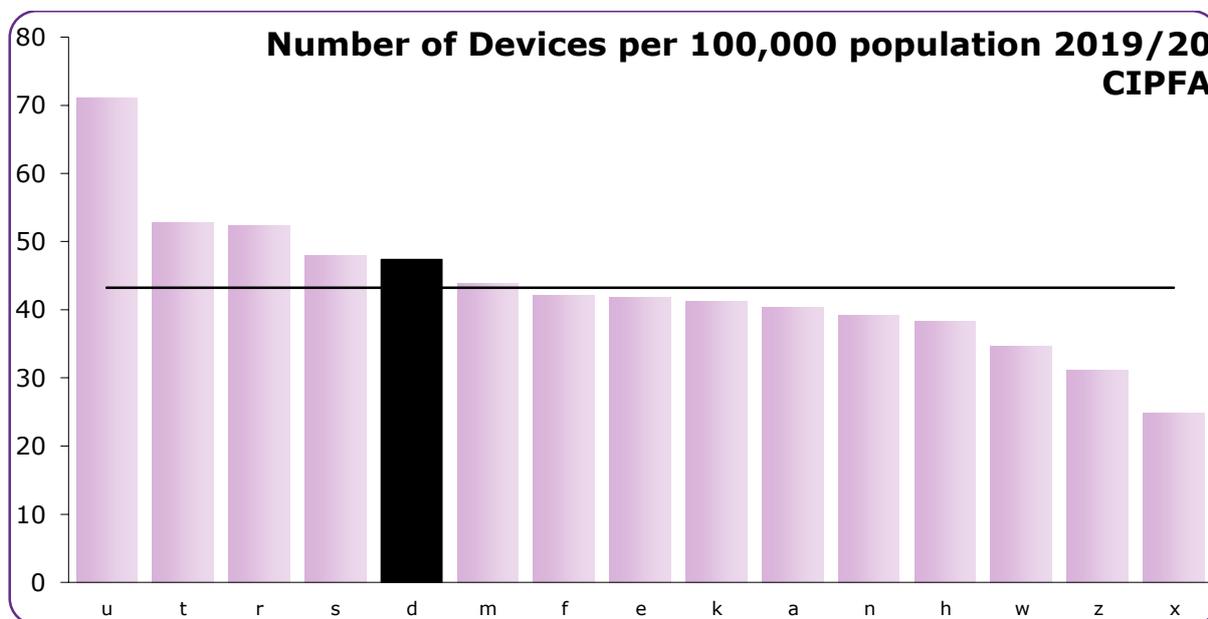
We continue to work to support people who are digitally excluded; all 17 of our libraries offer free access to computers and Wi-Fi. We work with a range of partners and initiatives including Wealden District Council as part of their Street Learning Programme, Get Online Week, Ageing Well, Make A Noise in Libraries and Volunteer Week.

In 2019/20 there were 158,519 sessions by over 25,000 residents on our computers and 37,413 sessions by over 6,000 residents on our Wi-Fi, provided free at every library, a total of 195,932 sessions.



There is still significant need in East Sussex for free access to computers and the internet. On average, there are 3,812 sessions per week taking place in our libraries. We will increase promotion of this offer to help combat digital exclusion.

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) benchmarking shows we have good provision of computers, compared to our statistical neighbours.



### Support to use technology and the internet

In 2019/20, 1,995 people were supported in 10 libraries by 25 volunteers to improve their skills using computers and the internet through our successful IT for You initiative. We will continue to develop and extend this offer to support people to use online services.

In March 2020, we launched a new pilot initiative to lend tablets with a Sim for data to people who are isolated and need access to services, such as repeat prescription services, registering for Universal Credit and keeping in contact with friends and family. This service has operated on a referral basis from internal and external partners including Adult Social Care, Children’s Services, DWP and Sussex Community Development Association. We ensure they can access NHS information and advice so they can keep up to date with the most recent, comprehensive guidance on keeping safe and finding financial support. This initiative has a high impact for participants, one of whom said, *“Being able to send and receive emails is keeping me up to date with hospital appointments as well as with friends and family, the world outside the windows. The tablet helps to reduce my loneliness.”*

We continue to seek funding to support digital inclusion and have built up a bank of devices we can lend to vulnerable and disadvantaged people, securing funding/devices over the past six months from the Good Things Foundation, the South East Digital Skills Partnership (part of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership) and the Department for Work and Pensions (to support participants of European Social

Fund projects). We continue to work closely with colleagues in Adult Social Care and the Employability & Skills Team to identify people most in need, as well as taking referrals from other agencies and organisations such as Department for Work and Pensions. We are also working with East Sussex County Council Sensory Impairment Reablement Team, Eastbourne Blind Society and East Sussex Hearing Resource Centre to pilot the loan of tablets with adaptive peripheral equipment and apps.

At September 2021, we had supported over 120 people, many of whom have physical or mental health issues, including mobility issues. Many shielded during the pandemic and had no access to online services for information or social support.

We are funded by NHS Digital Skills to work in partnership to deliver new outreach projects and services to support digital inclusion in the community, delivering training in care homes, sheltered accommodation and other settings. The focus is helping people to go online to access health and wellbeing digital services such as the NHS App.

We partnered with the East Sussex Seniors' Association to celebrate the Ageing Well Festival 2020 (formerly Older Peoples' Day). Throughout September and October 2020 our IT for You at Home volunteers offered telephone support with essential online skills to help digitally excluded people over 50, who had a device but were not able to use it, to keep in touch with friends and family, use email, access the latest community and health information and more.

## **Accessing the offers**

As set out in the Strategy and based on the evidence of need, we have continued to provide a range of different ways to access our services, but with an increasing focus on online provision and library services delivered in other settings (for example other service locations, community venues and people's homes). This has enabled us to meet a wider range of needs.

Since the launch of the Strategy there has been significant development and improvement of our eLibrary website, as well as development to improve accessibility of our East Sussex County Council website pages. We have regularly promoted the eLibrary and other online resources in our monthly newsletter.

### **Space in library buildings**

We undertook a Property Assessment for all of our library buildings and were able to secure partnerships within the Council to locate or deliver other services in some libraries as part of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy. There were further opportunities for partners to use space within other library buildings to provide services or for office accommodation. This would increase the potential of the library service to offer an increased range of services, delivering shared outcomes with partners and creating further savings.

Operational bases for parking enforcement staff have been provided in Hastings, Eastbourne and Lewes libraries from July 2018, with the Library and Information Service delivering some of the functions of the three Parking Shops from these libraries. This joint venture enables parking services to be delivered at a lower cost

due to the sharing of overheads and other operational costs, as well as generating income for the Library and information Service.

We have also let space in our buildings to a range of partners including Citizens Advice in Uckfield Library and the NHS in Heathfield Library.

## Achievement of identified savings

The implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy delivered an estimated saving of £653,000 through a combination of shared efficiencies by co-locating library services with other County Council services, income generation, and the reduced provision of library buildings, the Mobile Library and other services. All identified savings were achieved.

Identified saving	Value of saving
Closure of buildings, including frontline staff	£172,000
Management savings associated with closures	£137,000
Income generation from buildings and building efficiencies	£171,000
Additional reduction in stock fund	£100,000
Cease Mobile Library provision, including staff costs	£73,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£653,000</b>

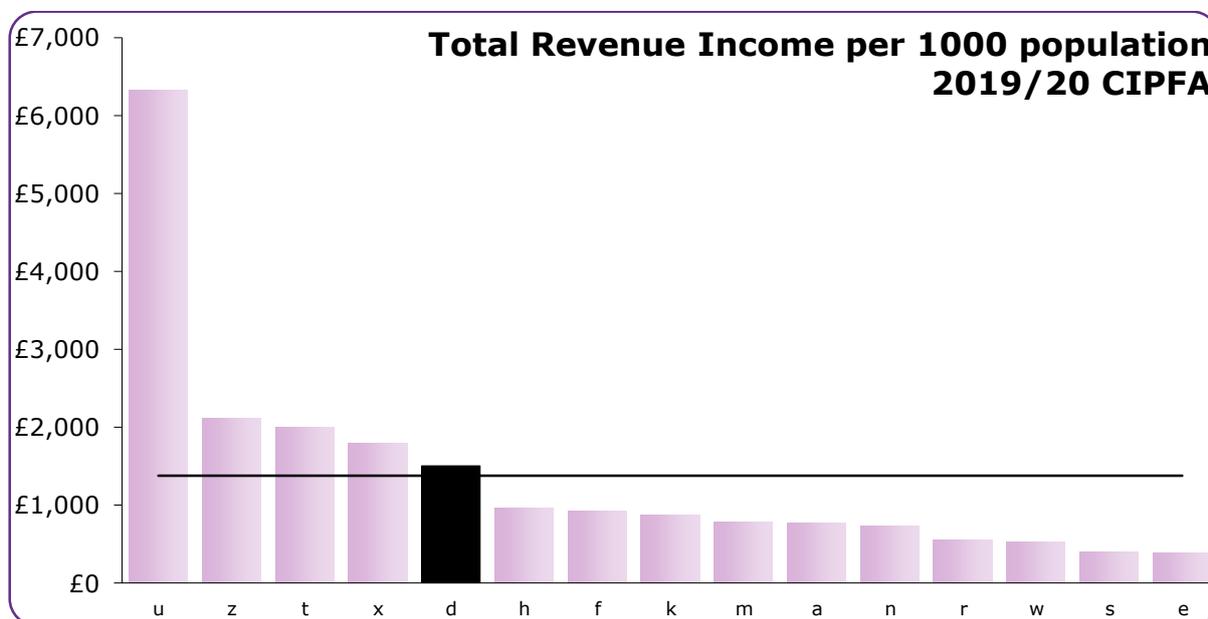
The closure of buildings, including frontline staff, was implemented in the financial year 2018/19 as planned, as were the management savings associated with the closures, the reduction to the stock fund and the cessation of mobile library provision. We also achieved the planned income from buildings and building efficiencies.

In 2018 we implemented the Parking Partnership at Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings libraries, generating income for the Library and Information Service by providing back-office space for Parking Services staff and welfare facilities for Civil Enforcement Officers, and through delivery of some parking services such as purchase of parking permits by Library and information Service staff. In September 2020 civil parking enforcement was implemented in Rother District and whilst no office space is required, library staff now deliver some parking services from Battle, Bexhill and Rye Libraries.

We have subsequently let space in our buildings to a range of partners including Citizens Advice and the NHS, generating further income for the Library and Information Service. Citizens Advice have leased underused space in Uckfield Library and will provide free, independent, confidential advice on issues such as money, benefits, housing and employment from the library. People who come to the charity for support have access to library services such as free internet access and Wi-Fi, courses and advice, while library users can also benefit from having Citizens Advice

in the same building. This service will be offered when restrictions allow. We have also let underused space in Heathfield Library to the NHS.

We compare well for income generation per 1,000 population against our nearest statistical neighbours.



## Benchmarking

In November 2018, we carried out the Public Library User Survey (PLUS). This is a CIPFA survey carried out every three years to give a broad understanding of how customers rate Library Services. This took place before the end of the first year of delivery of the Strategy and provides useful insight.

Headline results, compared with results for 2015:

- 67% rated opening hours very good/good compared to 88% in 2015
- 88% rated the attractiveness of library inside very good/ good compared to 84%
- 94% rated customer care very good/good compared to 98%
- 78% rated the choice of books very good/good compared to 77%
- 91% rated the physical condition of books very good/good compared to 89%
- 91% rated their overall levels of satisfaction with libraries as very good/good compared to 92%

The Public Library User Survey also showed that nearly half (49%) of adult visitors to libraries in East Sussex are aged 65 and over. Almost two thirds (65%) of adult library users visited a library to borrow, return, renew or reserve a book. The next most common reason for visiting (23%) was to access the public computers or Wi-Fi. This compares to 74% and 19% respectively in 2015 when the last survey was conducted, demonstrating the increasing role of libraries for computer and internet access.

## **Benchmarking with comparable library services**

Each year we submit data to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) which allows us to benchmark our performance against other English authorities. In particular, we examine how our service costs and performance compare to our nearest statistical neighbours, which for 2019/20 data are Norfolk, West Sussex, Hampshire, Worcestershire, Somerset, Suffolk, North Yorkshire, Lancashire, Dorset, Devon, Warwickshire, East Sussex, Kent, Essex and Staffordshire. Nearest Neighbours are identified by CIPFA using a range of demographic and socio-economic indicators to help councils identify the most appropriate authorities to benchmark against and to drive improvement. We have used CIPFA data to inform this review.



### **Visits to libraries**

In 2017/18, there were 1,258,096 visits to our 17 libraries and in 2019/20 there were 1,020,804.

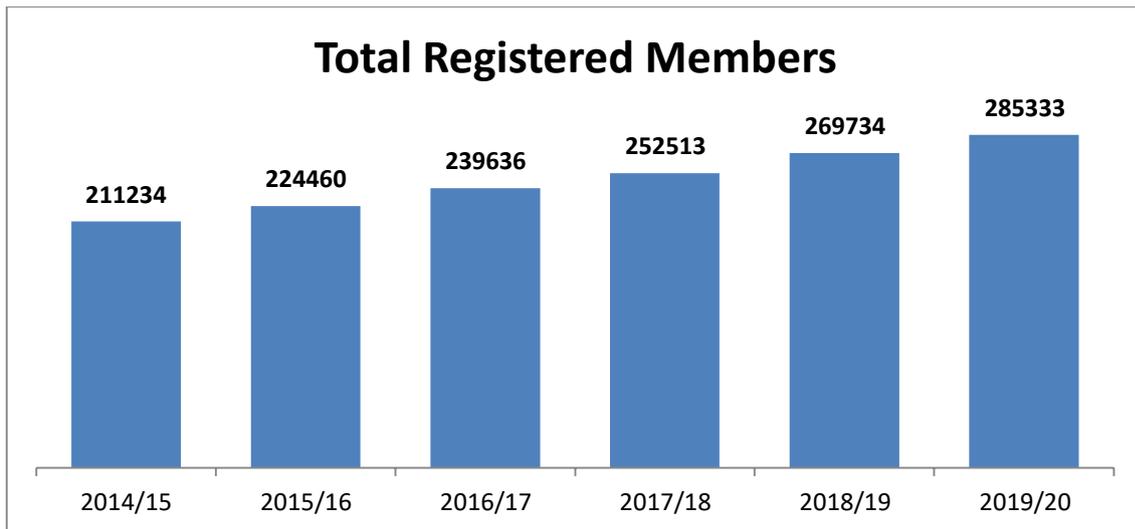
There is no single reason why visits to libraries nationally are decreasing and it is likely that a number of factors are influencing the trend including changes in customer behaviour, particularly channel shift from print to digital, increased competition with a wider range of leisure time options and the lack of a national marketing approach.

The decrease in library visits nationally was 5% between 2018/19 and 2019/20, whilst in East Sussex it was 7%. However, we carried out major refurbishments in three of our libraries in 2019/20 which required either complete closure of the building to allow work to be undertaken or part closure with a resulting reduction of service offer. The three libraries where we carried out improvements to facilities and decoration were Heathfield, Lewes and Eastbourne, which is our busiest library.

### **Membership**

Membership of the Library and Information Service is free to everyone who lives, works and studies in East Sussex.

Registered members are customers with a current library membership. Customers have to re-register every two years to ensure their details are kept up to date. The increasing number of registered members shown in the chart below reflects customers who join the library to use computers and/or Wi-Fi or to use our eLibrary for eBooks, eAudiobooks, eMagazines or other online resources which require sign in with a PIN.



Active members are customers who have borrowed an item over the previous 12 months. Although useful as a general indicator, this figure does **not** include people who use library services for other purposes, such as using library computers, borrowing eBooks only or visiting a library to consult resources without borrowing. The reduction in active members reflects the way the service is changing to provide more online services and resources, and that customers are moving to this offer.

