

The background image shows a modern library interior. The ceiling features a series of blue, leaf-shaped pendant lights hanging from a wooden beam structure. The walls are made of light-colored wood. On the right, there is a large, hexagonal green shelving unit with a small blue book on one of the shelves. In the foreground, there are several colorful, cylindrical stools in shades of green, yellow, and orange. To the left, there is a round wooden table with a green chair. Large windows in the background show a view of a city street with buildings and a blue sign that says "ry".

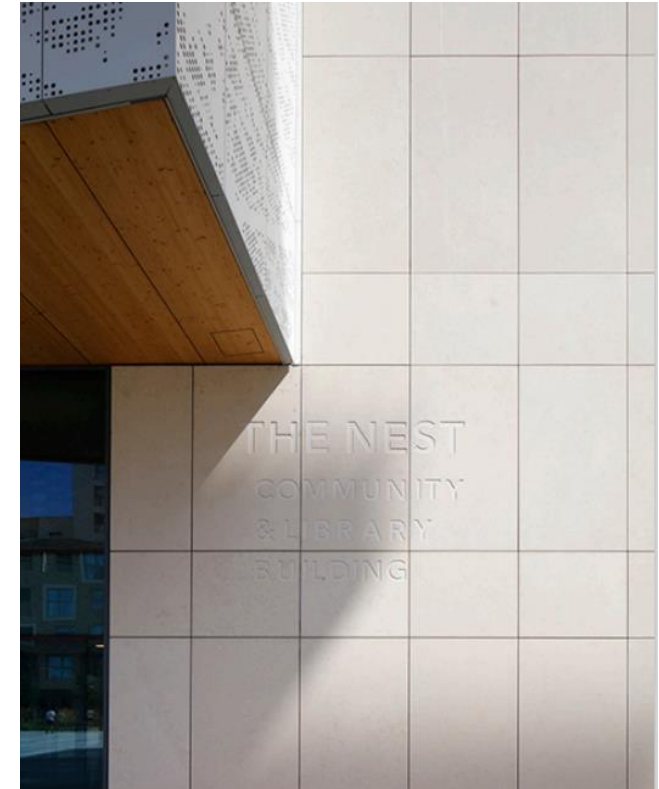
A LIBRARIES STRATEGY FOR BEXLEY

2025 - 2030

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, we launched the Bexley Plan to Make Bexley Even Better. This included a commitment to supporting residents to live the best lives possible and to reach their potential. Our libraries are core to this plan and our communities, providing welcoming warm spaces, supporting reading and literacy, enabling creativity and much more.



CRAYFORD LIBRARY WALKING GROUP



STORY TIME AT WELLING LIBRARY



The Library Strategy sets out the direction of travel over the next five years for Bexley Libraries, ensuring that the service is helping residents and businesses to navigate a rapidly changing society.

Libraries are recognised nationally as providing a significant role to communities in delivering a broad range of outcomes, including increasing wellbeing, literacy targets and community cohesion. In addition, their role as a service located within communities provides a rich selection of resources and materials locally and can offer a venue that facilitates a social space, events and shared working in creative and innovative ways.

Libraries are uniquely situated, as a trusted and valued service, to work with local communities in responding to changing needs and neighbourhood priorities.

Bexley is a vibrant, creative borough and its residents have many ideas about how best to use their local community assets – we need to capitalise on this wave of enthusiasm and explore the boundaries of what is currently available.

This strategy sets out what you told us, and what we will be prioritising over the coming five years. We are making commitments to our customers, underpinned by four priorities.



CRAFTERS AT CRAYFORD



VALUE AND LOCAL IMPACT

BEST VALUE

Local authorities have a Best Value duty, meaning they must consider how to deliver services in the most efficient and cost-effective way.

Over the next five years, we are committed to achieving the outcomes set out in this strategy. However, we will continuously review the way we deliver these services to ensure we are providing the best value for money, adjusting where necessary to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

OUR MODEL

The Library Service comprises six statutory council-operated libraries.

The Council also supports six community-operated libraries, located within neighbourhoods to address specific, hyper-local needs and interests.

RESPONDING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

We want to work with the community to respond to local interest and need so that the service is more reflective of the population it serves.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

BEXLEY HAS TWELVE LIBRARIES, SIX OF WHICH ARE COUNCIL OPERATED AND SIX THAT ARE RUN BY THE COMMUNITY.

We want to build on our existing model to consider how libraries can act as a vehicle for local change, for example - supporting people to be healthier and happier, improve child literacy, provide spaces for creative arts activity and to support local people to grow their businesses.

The Library Service in Bexley had 812,106 visits across 12 sites in 2023-24 and the number of 'issues' has largely recovered to pre-covid levels.

Two new libraries have also been opened to replace former premises:

SIDCUP STORYTELLER – COUNCIL LIBRARY AND CO-LOCATED CINEMA



THE NEST IN THAMESMEAD – COUNCIL LIBRARY, CO-LOCATED WITH COMMUNITY FACILITIES OPERATED BY PEABODY.



WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

The Council is clear that it wants to position libraries at the centre of its wider delivery framework. A strategy and action plan support the change required to bring about:

- **Libraries as multi-use hubs**
- **Collaboration with partners and delivery of wider Council services, specifically early help and public health**
- **Digital and AI enablers**
- **Integrated services for key groups**
- **Educational enablers**

This strategy is required, not only to ensure libraries keep pace with changing needs and technologies, but also to position libraries as essential, flexible assets within the broader public service ecosystem in Bexley. This forward-looking strategy sets libraries up as active community enablers.

STRATEGIC VISION AND OUTCOMES



LINKS TO NATIONAL STRATEGY

The key priorities proposed in the new strategy are inspired by the national Universal Library Offers; The Universal Offers were launched in 2013 to demonstrate the scope of what libraries do and the power they have to improve the lives of individuals and their communities.

Local libraries play a key role in supporting UK national strategies, aligning with government priorities including early help and prevention, public health, digital inclusion, lifelong learning and community well-being. This strategy positions our libraries to narrow the skills gap, enhance the local economy and help individuals navigate a rapidly changing society. With the UK government's ambition to lead the AI revolution, libraries are well-positioned to support AI adoption by offering accessible learning opportunities, workshops, and resources that equip communities with the skills to thrive in an AI-driven future, supporting initiatives like National Youth Strategy, AI Opportunities Action Plan and Plan for Change.

LINKS TO LOCAL PLANS

The priorities in this strategy are aligned to the [Bexley Plan 2022 – 2026](#), and is underpinned by its key [principles](#):

- We are driven to make a difference for our residents
- We stand up for Bexley
- We believe in a fairer Bexley
- We work in partnership
- We are committed to early intervention and prevention

Our mission in the Bexley Plan is to make *Bexley Even Better*, by supporting residents to live the best lives possible and to reach their potential. The Bexley Plan has [three priorities](#), each with defined outcomes for our residents and the borough.

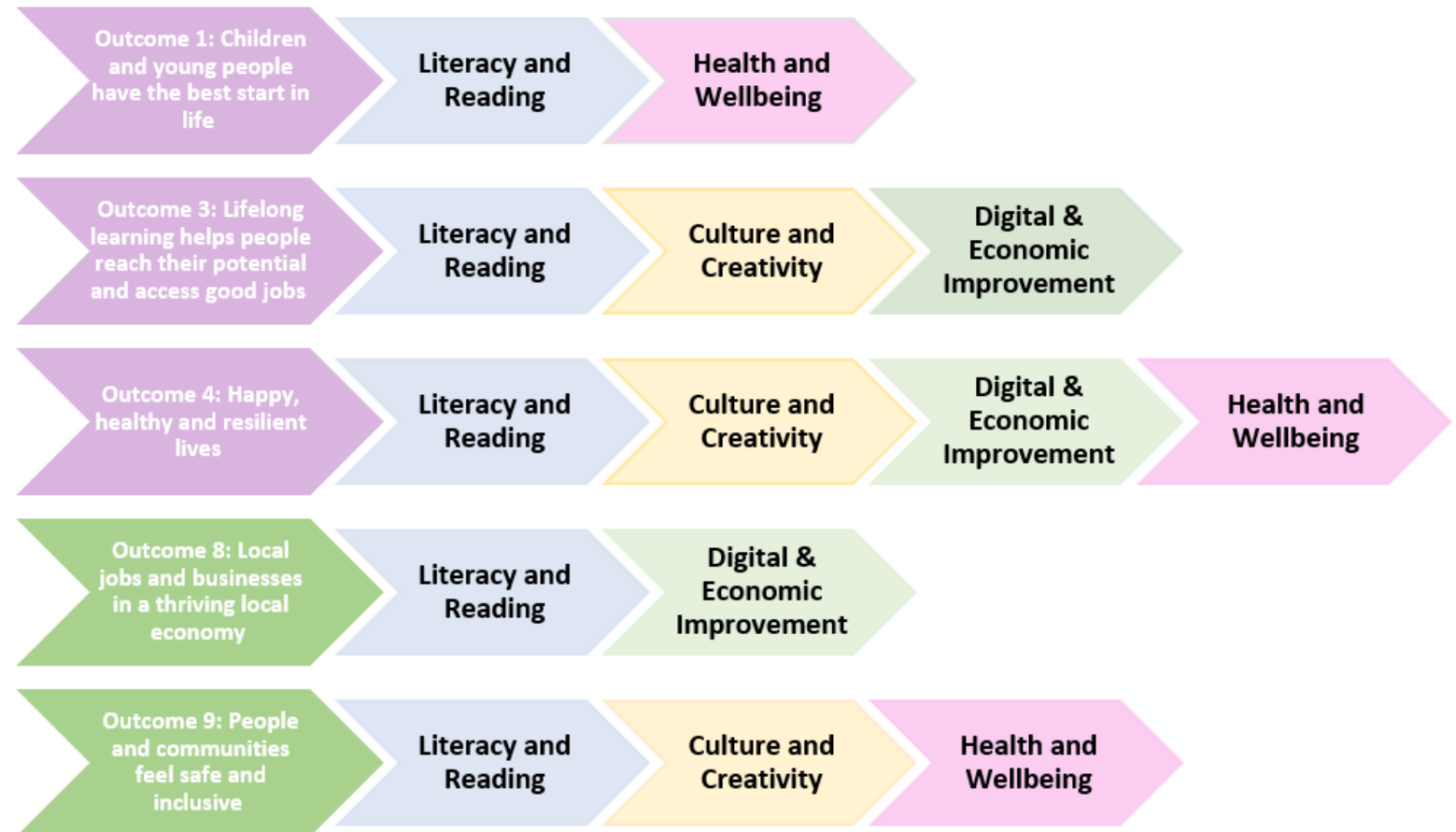
These priorities are:

- Aspiration for our residents
- Ambition for our Borough
- An efficient and effective Council



We see our Libraries as at the heart of the Council's interactions with residents and this strategy is helping to build the foundations for our Bexley 2050 vision that is currently being developed with our partners, communities and residents.

LINKS TO OUTCOMES OF THE BEXLEY PLAN





VISION

Libraries are at the heart of Bexley's growth. In the next five years, they will be dynamic hubs of opportunity for our local communities, where everyone can access the resources, culture, and information they need to thrive. Supporting the delivery of the Bexley Plan, our libraries will empower Bexley's residents to live vibrant, healthy, and resilient lives through bold, transformative services and programmes.

We are looking to maximise libraries' impact across Bexley by ensuring they not only serve as places of learning and creativity but also as key drivers of social inclusion, economic development and community connection. Libraries will evolve into essential, multifunctional spaces where partnerships can flourish, and local residents have access to support, digital opportunities, and personal growth.

PRIORITIES

PRIORITIES

LITERACY & READING

To promote reading through a wide range of books and other resources for children and adults.

CULTURE & CREATIVITY

To expand on the culture and creativity Bexley residents can currently experience and participate in within the Borough.

DIGITAL & ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT

Providing quality information and digital support to help individuals and businesses grow.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Promoting healthy living and early help through signposting and connecting with communities.

PRIORITY 1: LITERACY & READING

- We will work so every child receives library membership when they are born.
- We will develop collections to reflect what our changing communities want and need.
- We will promote the love of reading and ensure that all residents have free and equal access to books, eBooks and other reading resources. This means we will continue to invest in equipment and facilities.
- We will continue to invest in new library stock and resources to ensure our customers have the materials they need and want.
- We will embrace our role as an enabler of health and wellbeing benefits through providing access to books and information.
- We will work to improve access to our services for older people and people with disabilities.
- We will work with nurseries and school library services to promote library memberships to local children and families.



CASE STUDY: BENEFITS OF READING WITH YOUR BABIES AND TODDLERS

Bexley Libraries have a large selection of bright and colourful board books and picture books to share with your babies and toddlers – even the smallest babies will benefit from looking at the pictures and listening to stories.



Sharing books with your baby and toddler can:

- help with language development and learning new words.
- improve attention span and listening skills.
- help develop empathy and creativity.
- give them a good start towards a lifelong love of reading.
- positively impact on school attainment

It's never too early to sign up your baby as a library member!

PRIORITY 2: CULTURE & CREATIVITY

- We will offer a range of events and activities for individuals to connect & express themselves creatively through music, visual arts, literature, and performance.
- We will ensure our spaces are accessible, flexible and can accommodate many uses, such as quiet study areas, and space for activities and events.
- We will work with our partners to increase participation and engagement with arts, cultural and creative activities.
- We will use culture and creativity as a vehicle to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of adults, children and families.
- We will work with volunteers to facilitate creative activities in our spaces.



CASE STUDY: THE CREATIVE KNOWLEDGE PROJECT

The Creative Knowledge Project was launched in 2018 with funding from Arts Council England to produce a sculpture for the new Thamesmead Library, part of the Southmere redevelopment by Peabody Housing. The Library Service collaborated with Bow Arts to appoint residential artist Dunya Kalantery who worked with the community and local children to research and document life in the area, collaborating directly with local art studio Rima & McRae who fabricated the sculpture itself. The sculpture, named 'The Brightness of Juju', takes the form of eleven suspended columns comprised of a series of stacked disks, each cast from a clay model made by a local pupil at one of several school workshops run by Bow Arts, Dunya and Rima Patel from Rima & McRae. The disks are made from a translucent resin coloured to match items collected from around Southmere Lake by the schoolchildren and processed using chromatography.

Other works produced as part of the project include a series of local radio shows, podcasts and a book, also named 'The Brightness of Juju' - this was produced by Dunya and Rima with content written by local primary schools who took part in the workshops.



PRIORITY 3: DIGITAL & ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT

- We will invest in our ICT hardware and software to ensure that we provide a quality service including self-service kiosks, public computers, Wi-Fi, printing, digital resources.
- We will meet emerging digital needs by providing the right equipment and functionality for our residents to be digitally engaged and skilled, including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- We will be the place to access trusted information with the specialist resources needed to support residents.
- We will work with partners, such as The Engine House, to support businesses to grow and encourage residents to start up businesses.
- We will provide places that are conducive to study and work.
- We will work with volunteers and partners to provide specialist support and advice such as with digital skills.



CASE STUDY: THE PEOPLE'S NETWORK

BEXLEY'S PEOPLE'S NETWORK PROVISION HAS BEEN IN PLACE FOR OVER 20 YEARS – ONGOING INVESTMENT IN HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE HAS SEEN THE INITIAL PROVISION OF FIXED DESKTOP PCS EVOLVE INTO THE CURRENT SET-UP FEATURING:



MODERN DESKTOP PCS
EQUIPPED WITH A
RANGE OF SOFTWARE



FREE PUBLIC WI-FI OFFERING
INTERNET ACCESS TO
LAPTOP, TABLET AND
SMARTPHONE USERS



FAST, HIGH RESOLUTION
DOCUMENT SCANNERS
AND BLACK AND WHITE
AND COLOUR PRINTING
SERVICES

PRIORITY 4: HEALTH & WELLBEING

- We will position ourselves to be at the forefront of supporting families in the community, particularly to keep them safe, independent and support their emotional wellbeing through partnerships and projects.
- We will position ourselves to be at the forefront of supporting families with children with special educational needs and disabilities to foster a love of reading, access support and connect with others over shared interests.
- We will support our residents with Living Well and Ageing Well and work with our Community Managed Libraries to deliver programmes that respond to the needs of neighbourhoods across Bexley.
- We will open our Library Space to youth organisations and other key partners that deliver wellbeing focused activities in the evenings.
- We will seek external investment in schemes that combine wellbeing with cultural and artistic activity.
- We will work with our culture partners and communities to provide access to creative health opportunities i.e. addressing health outcomes through creative activity.



CHESS CLUB AT THE NEST

CASE STUDY: BAG BOOKS

Bag Books are multi-sensory stories, designed for children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, people with severe learning disabilities and young people on the autistic spectrum. They are also hugely beneficial to those with visual and hearing impairments and work well with children who have language delay and younger mainstream children with visual impairment.

Each bag book comes in an A3 box with a carrying handle and contains one story - each story is made up of separate page cards, each of which has an object for the children to hear, smell or feel. They are told interactively, through actions and emotions rather than words and pictures and are intended to capture the listener's interest and can be used for both leisure and learning.

Small selections of Bag Books are stocked at Central, Crayford, Erith, Sidcup, Thamesmead and Welling Libraries. Due to their size and format, they are stored away from public view, so just ask staff if you would like to see or borrow one.



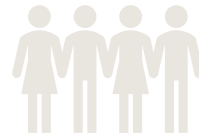
IMPLEMENTATION

HOW WE WILL IMPLEMENT STRATEGY

WE WILL DELIVER OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES THROUGH BOTH COUNCIL
MANAGED LIBRARIES AND COMMUNITY MANAGED LIBRARIES



All Council operated libraries will deliver a core offer - Literacy and Reading, Culture and Creativity and Digital & Economic Improvement.



All libraries, including community operated libraries (and our volunteer led home library service) will deliver on our Health and Wellbeing priority through a targeted approach, sometimes with external partners.



We have developed an action plan to deliver intended improvements across the four strategic priorities. We will update this plan annually and let you know how we are doing.

HOW WE WILL IMPLEMENT STRATEGY

WE WILL TRANSFORM OUR SPACES & FACILITIES TO SUPPORT THE AMBITION OF THIS STRATEGY



Resources which foster digital and AI inclusion



Buildings and spaces that are welcoming and fit for purpose



A workforce that seeks to welcome, support and inspire visitors



LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The London Borough of Bexley has a statutory responsibility (a duty set out by law) to provide a local library service in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

The Act requires each local authority to provide a library service that is “comprehensive and efficient for those that live, work or study in the area”. It is for local decision how the library service best meets this requirement practically, including how many libraries there are, where they are, when they are open, and what each one offers.

A series of white, overlapping geometric lines and polygons on a black background, located on the left side of the slide.

LINKS:

Consultation Outcome

EIA

Action Plan

POETRY APPRECIATION AT WELLING



SCAM AWARENESS SESSION AT THE NEST

