

**SUFFOLK  
LIBRARIES**

**WHERE  
I BELONG**

## **Rural Powerhouse:**

**Supporting vulnerable residents  
in rural areas of Suffolk**

**Krystal Vittles, Deputy Chief Executive Officer**



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## **WHO ARE WE?**

**Public service  
mutual which runs  
the statutory service  
on behalf of SCC**

**45 static libraries,  
3 mobiles, 3 pop-ups  
and 12 prison libraries**

**A huge offer that stretches across many areas**

**Community owned and  
our friends groups are  
the basis of the model**

**All libraries run by  
trained, professional  
staff**

**The only library  
service with a  
dedicated, in-house  
MH&W service**

**We were one of the  
first library NPOs**

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**Scale**

**45 LIBRARIES  
& 3 POP UPS  
ACROSS  
SUFFOLK**



## **An overview of rurality in Suffolk**

**40% of the county lives in rural areas and Suffolk has 50 miles of coastline. County has poor infrastructure in rural areas: public transport, broadband, statutory services, shops etc.**

**An ageing population with associated increases in health risks, and rural deprivation affect Suffolk more acutely than many parts of the country.**

**The local economy is characterised by low unemployment but below average pay. Much of this is driven by underemployment in agriculture industries.**

# MEETING COMMUNITY NEED

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**BUILDING THE DEPARTMENT STORE FOR THE SOUL**  
Strategy 2022-2024

- 1 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
- 2 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
- 3 BUILDS CONNECTIONS THAT CREATE SUSTAINABLE CHANGE AND IMPROVED CIRCUMSTANCES**  
Through better physical connections, peer support and engagement with those with shared experiences

- Offer there to help and support everyone in the community
- We combine the core and the stretch to create rich experiences
- We centre our offer on wellbeing and everything leads to this outcome
- We're hyper aware of the impacts of rurality and we stretch to cover as much as we can
- We're for everyone, but more often than not, libraries are supporting some of the most vulnerable people in communities

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## Traditional library offers

- Most libraries are in rural areas – smaller and more community focused. Strong relationships forged in these libraries
- Libraries have free computers, IT, tech loaning etc
- Small villages and other settlements will have access to our 3 mobile libraries (500+ stops)
- Outreach to care homes and other provision
- Home Library Service – heavy use in rural areas
- *Explore Together*: a phone-a-friend service for people feeling isolated





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## **Beyond the transactional**

- Rural library services provide a surface transaction: books, IT, printing, activities etc
- Human connection sits underneath all of these and makes this transaction rich
- Isolation and disconnection issue in this country, felt acutely in rural areas
- HLS: volunteers will drop off books, but they'll also have a chat & get to know that person
- Lifelines for so many people



## **Meeting rural specific need**

Library offers can be differentiated to meet local need

Our managers have freedoms to create offers/events/activities as they see fit

Working with a range of partners to create quality experiences to meet that need

E.g., libraries are also hubs for banks/building societies and SL runs a post office from one library in a rural area



## Case study: digital inclusion



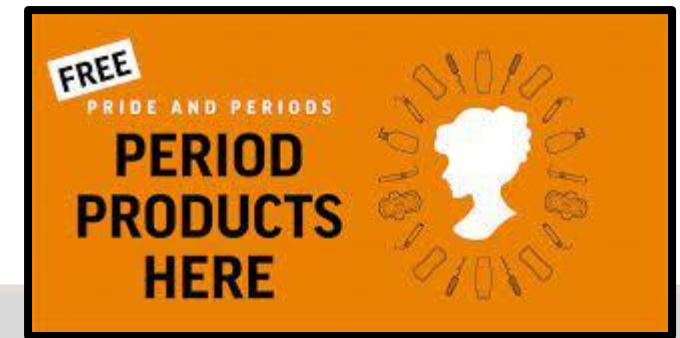
- Digital skills are low in the county and many people excluded in myriad ways
- A core member of the county's digital inclusion strategy and action groups
- Have created a role to specifically get this in order in libraries
- Creating a cohesive digital skills offer across the county using a mix of staff and volunteers
- Now the county provider for the Data Bank scheme
- Loaning a range of tech inc. laptops, tablets

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## Case study: mental health & wellbeing

- We're a wellbeing focused service with many commissioned sub-brands
- Linked in strongly with early help and health services to meet needs
- Baby weigh scales in libraries – many rural locations as people do not have means of access
- Running exercise classes in libraries inc. small, rural ones to bring experiences to all parts of our communities
- Health service pop-ups, loaning blood pressure cuffs
- Using libraries as safe spaces which are becoming rarer in communities



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## Case study: cost of living

- Our winter campaign is called *Warm Welcome*
- A wide offer including hot drinks, snacks, activities
- Kindness Racks where people bring warm clothes/coats and people can help themselves
- Plus, our general offer of a warm place to be: safe and stigma free
- Some libraries have food parcels and other food initiatives
- A massive uptick in visits during the winter

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WARM WELCOME

Keep warm with a hot drink

suffollibraries.co.uk

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.suffollibraries.co.uk/donate](http://www.suffollibraries.co.uk/donate)

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## **A CALL TO ACTION**

Look at community assets like libraries when service planning – anchor institutions

Take time to understand the potential for libraries – the art of the possible

Advocate for libraries esp. those in rural areas as they're a lifeline to so many

Pilot projects, try new things, and make use of skilled and compassionate staff to help build resilient communities

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**Let's chat**