



Lancashire

County
Council



Lancashire Libraries Strategy

2026 – 2028





Foreword



County Councillor
Ella Worthington
Cabinet Member for Civic Pride
May 2026



Libraries are trusted community hubs where all generations of Lancastrians from all parts of the County can meet and socialise, develop their skills and where creativity and learning is celebrated.

We want our libraries to be attractive and welcoming spaces, showcasing local talent and giving residents access to technology facilities and training to enrich their lives.



Our vision for Lancashire Libraries is a flourishing service at the heart of our communities and cultural life - making a difference through reading, access to information, skills development, digital support, health and social interaction, and fostering creativity and engendering civic pride.

Our values

- Supportive
- Innovative
- Respectful
- Collaborative

Working together

- With residents
- With partners
- With councillors
- With colleagues

Being accountable

- Managing performance
- Delivering our priority programmes
- Balancing our budget





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Executive Summary

Lancashire Libraries are inclusive, collaborative, creative community hubs, responsive to resident needs – bringing people together and giving access to services that support people to thrive. Located within the heart of communities, Lancashire libraries provide a rich selection of free resources, activities and events in welcoming accessible and social spaces that facilitate collaborative working.

While Lancashire Libraries are widely used and valued, we recognise that many residents do not fully understand the breadth of services available through their local library. Increasing awareness and participation is therefore a central focus of this strategy.

Over the next three years, we will take a more proactive, visible and targeted approach to ensure that libraries are recognised as essential community assets that support learning, wellbeing, digital inclusion and opportunity for all.

From 2026-28 we will focus on a fit-for-purpose, innovative library service, embedded and flourishing at the heart of Lancashire communities. Each library will make a difference to its community's life through reading and cultural activities supporting health and wellbeing, access to information and digital facilities, and skills and learning opportunities. This will include new approaches to communicating our offer, ensuring that more residents encounter and understand the role of libraries in their everyday lives, supported by data driven campaign-led activity and local engagement.

Lancashire libraries have identified four strategic goals which support the Council's vision and resonate with the Cultural Services Strategy.

Goal 1 - Community-Focused, Inclusive, and Creative Libraries

Goal 2 - Libraries at the Heart of Council Services

Goal 3 - Libraries supporting Health, Wellbeing, and Resilient Communities

Goal 4 - Innovative, Sustainable, and Future-Ready Libraries





Introduction

Lancashire's extensive and interconnected network of public libraries is a cornerstone of cultural, educational, health, and economic wellbeing across the county. Our libraries are embedded within local communities, offering universal access to safe, neutral, and trusted spaces that support people of all ages and backgrounds.

Funded by local government, library services are determined at a local level by the priorities of the council and reflective of the needs of residents. Libraries deliver against Lancashire County Council's ambitions of: Better Lives For All, Economic Ambition, Stronger Communities, Thinking Differently.

The DCMS recognises that local libraries provide a unique 'cradle-to-grave service', offering significant reach into local communities and a cost-effective way of ensuring that people are connected to local services.

DCMS has a statutory duty to superintend and promote the improvement of public library services provided by local authorities and provides leadership, advocating on behalf of the sector.

Lancashire County Council has a legal duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who live, work or study in the county.

Arts Council England (ACE) is the national development agency for libraries in England, and in this capacity, it offers support to the development of public libraries through funding, advocacy, and collaboration.

Libraries Connected is the national sector support organisation for public libraries in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, partly funded by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS).

ACE identify libraries as the 'the country's most widespread and well-used cultural spaces, sitting at the heart of communities and often providing the first point of access to cultural activity. They help to build stronger, happier communities, support social prescribing, develop readers and promote digital literacy.'

If you're into it, read into it.

Discover more at goallin.org.uk



**GO
ALL
IN.**

National
Year of
Reading
2026

In developing this strategy we have considered ACE's investment principles, alongside the council ambitions, to enhance libraries impact and relevance in the community, and the strategy will position libraries to:

- be ambitious and committed to improving the quality of services and experiences
- be inclusive and relevant, reflecting the diversity of the local area and community, engendering civic pride
- be dynamic and able to respond to the changing needs of communities and the cultural landscape
- be environmentally responsible and lead the way in our approach to reducing their carbon footprint through energy efficiency and promoting sustainability.

This strategy has been developed to build on the success of the past, and to enable the service to respond to the future challenges and opportunities facing the people of Lancashire.



Context

In 2025/26 Lancashire Libraries visitor footfall was over 2.7million visits with 58,989 new members. Almost 2.8 million books were issued, with an additional 3.6 million E-book, E-newspaper and E-magazine downloads. 33,326 events were delivered throughout 2025/26 in libraries, including 244 adult learning courses. There are now 37 'Friends of' libraries' groups supporting and funding activity.

The main aim of this strategy is to understand the barriers to library use and to increase the footfall in our library spaces, through an offer that meets local need. Residents aren't always aware of what is on offer, this lack of awareness is a significant barrier to increasing participation. While the library service is well used, there remains substantial untapped potential to reach new audiences who would benefit from access to digital support, learning opportunities, health and wellbeing activity, and community connection.

With an extensive network of libraries embedded in communities across Lancashire, the service is well placed to increase participation if awareness and visibility can be improved.

Literacy levels across many developed countries are declining or stagnating, with average reading performance noticeably lower than it was a decade ago. Libraries play a key role in a society-wide response to drive and support reading for all ages. They also provide additional support for children living in poverty.

The Government has announced that 2026 will be The National Year of Reading. This campaign aims to address the steep decline in reading amongst children, young people and adults through engaging new audiences in reading and changing the national reading culture. This presents a real opportunity for Lancashire Libraries.

Libraries are uniquely placed to meet resident needs into the future: enabling digital access (from basic skills to advanced technology) and facilitating social interaction. Library programmes offer free access to digital infrastructure, skills sharing, support for businesses and community activities, and promote this to drive up footfall.



Social and technological change, including developments in AI and social media is reshaping how information is created and shared. Whether or not someone has access to digital technology determines whether that person has access to knowledge, services, support for their wellbeing, and economic opportunities. Lancashire Libraries need to promote and expand their digital and learning offer.

A reimagined library service offers the opportunity to further develop the workforce with skills to address the challenges identified: digital skills; community engagement; skills to build new partnerships and diversify income.



What do we do

Lancashire libraries aim to provide everyone access to quality resources, knowledgeable and customer-focused staff and a welcoming library space through our objectives:

- enable people to live their best life across Lancashire by providing a vibrant and modern library service
- have a positive impact on people's lives; through the information we provide and the experiences we offer both virtually and face-to-face
- support and encourage the growth of local businesses by providing a range of free online resources offering practical help and guidance
- offer information, inspiration, and connectedness and to strive to create opportunities for all.
- reduce digital inequalities by providing free access to computers, connectivity and tailored support, enabling residents to build confidence, develop essential digital skills and access vital online services



"Libraries not only provide access to books and other literature but also help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, bring people together, and provide practical support and guidance."

*Libraries Deliver:
Ambition for Public Libraries in England, DCMS*



Figure 1: Library services deliver against 7 Outcomes: Ambition document

Ref: [Strategic planning of library services: longer-term, evidence-based sustainable planning toolkit - GOV.UK](#)



What we do is known as “our core offer” and Lancashire Libraries provide safe, accessible, welcoming, and creative spaces where our communities can connect, be active, take notice, learn and share, with access to:

- A wide range of books and digital resources available for all ages to borrow or download at no cost
- Advice and guidance from knowledgeable, trained staff on a range of subjects from recommending reading materials, to help getting online or accessing local history resources
- Access to reputable sources of information and help to navigate these, from trained staff able to signpost to other sources of help and advice
- Free access to computers, WiFi, devices and personalised digital skills support from trained staff
- Free 24/7 access to online library resources, including a range of books, digital resources, eBooks, and other materials
- Free 24/7 access to verified online sources of information to support, develop and grow local businesses
- A request service for items not available locally
- A range of information, activities and events supporting reading, learning, and health and wellbeing
- Affordable creative and cultural activities and events for all ages
- Volunteering opportunities

Our Home Library Service will:

- Offer full access to the whole of the library service’s books and audio-visual material
- Provide a request service
- Be provided free of charge if people are unable to get to a library building because of age, disability, ill-health, or caring responsibilities

Our Mobile Library Service will provide:

- A service which serves Lancashire’s more isolated communities
- Full access to the whole of the library service’s collections including books and audio-visual material suitable for all ages
- A request service

Our additional services provided include:

- The School Library Service which provides bespoke resources to support curriculum and children reading for pleasure to schools across Lancashire, including the unitary authorities of Blackburn and Blackpool, based on Service Level Agreements
- The Prison Library Service which serves all five of the prisons in Lancashire





Libraries have an offer for a range of different user groups including families, working people, retired, and vulnerable people in our communities.

The below table gives examples of the Library Offers matched to groups and linked to the strategic goals. A more detailed table is located in the appendix.

Strategic Goal	Who We Support	Key Needs	How Libraries Respond
Community-Focused, Inclusive & Creative Libraries	Children, families, young people	Literacy, creativity, early years development	Reading programmes, cultural activity, family sessions, access to books and creative opportunities
Libraries at the Heart of Council Services	Learners, job seekers, active citizens	Skills, employment, access to services and information	Free digital access, study space, learning support, signposting and partnership delivery
Health, Wellbeing & Resilient Communities	Older residents, vulnerable groups, SEND communities	Wellbeing, inclusion, social connection	Safe and welcoming spaces, inclusive provision, wellbeing programmes, social activity and support
Innovative, Sustainable & Future-Ready Libraries	Rural communities, schools, wider population	Access, connectivity, future skills, sustainability	Mobile and digital services, outreach, education support, workforce development and modern library environments



Cultural Services Strategic Objectives

Lancashire Libraries will work to deliver the five strategic objectives set out in the Cultural Services Strategy, 2025-2028, which will help to meet the County Council's vision.

- Create lifelong learning opportunities to enrich lives and to benefit from cultural services.
- Improve the inclusivity of our cultural offers enabling everyone to engage as audience, participant, or creative producer.
- Empower people to lead healthier and fulfilled lives through access to high quality information, a wide range of activities and positive social interaction.
- Inspire young people through a cultural offer enriching their lives and creating opportunities for personal development.
- Ensure our collections are accessible, contributing to Civic Pride and a sense of belonging for all communities.

Increasing participation will be a key priority for Lancashire Libraries over the life of this strategy.

We will take a more proactive, visible and targeted approach to promoting our services, moving beyond traditional communication methods to ensure that libraries are seen, understood and used by a wider range of residents.



We will:

- Develop a campaign-led approach to promoting library services, with a focus on attracting non-users
- Use real resident stories and experiences to demonstrate the impact and relevance of libraries
- Increase the visibility of libraries in local communities through targeted activity and partnerships
- Work with partners such as schools, health services and community organisations to extend our reach
- Use data and insight to identify underrepresented groups and tailor our approach accordingly
- Align library messaging with wider county communications and place marketing activity

This work will be supported by pilot activity to test new approaches, build evidence of what works, and inform future delivery.



Our Service and the National Public Library Framework

Our core offer is underpinned by the Universal Offers set out by Libraries Connected to keep our services relevant and accessible. Lancashire Libraries ensure that these are embedded across our libraries, and all staff fully understand the offers and connect work programmes to the Universal Offers.

The Universal Offers demonstrate the power of libraries to enrich the lives of individuals and their communities, and aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy, and cultural activity. Each offer is underpinned by the Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise developed by Share the Vision and The Children's Promise developed by Libraries Rising to aim for all aspects of public library provision to be accessible.

Culture and Creativity	Enabling local communities to enjoy high-quality arts and cultural experiences through libraries.
Health and Wellbeing	Supporting the health and wellbeing of communities through services that inform, engage and connect.
Information and Digital	Ensuring communities can access quality information and digital services, learn new digital skills and feel safe online.
Reading	Building a literate and confident society by developing, delivering and promoting creative reading activities in libraries.

Strategic Goals

Lancashire libraries have identified four strategic goals which support the Council Plan 2025-2030 including Moving the dial on our priorities 2026/27: Building a better Lancashire, and the Cultural Services Strategy.

Strategic Goal 1

– Community-Focused, Inclusive, and Creative Libraries

Lancashire libraries will deliver a community-centred service that is well resourced, accountable, and imaginative, in line with the County Council's ambition to build thriving places and resilient communities.

- We will champion the Libraries Connected Universal Offers (Reading, Information & Digital, Health & Wellbeing, Culture & Creativity) to ensure every resident can access opportunities for learning, enjoyment, and growth.
- Libraries will provide inspiring reading experiences, study spaces, and creative programmes that improve literacy, foster a love of reading, and support lifelong learning.
- Libraries will use our expertise to provide communities with access to high quality, varied and accessible books and resources, for lending, reference and enjoyment, and develop our special and local history collections
- We will reflect the diversity of Lancashire's communities, ensuring our services are inclusive, accessible, and representative.
- By actively promoting and demonstrating the benefits of libraries, we will expand participation and empower people to fulfil their potential through creativity, culture and connection.
- We will ensure that our services are presented in ways that reflect how residents experience libraries in their daily lives, making them more visible, relevant and accessible to a wider audience.
- Explore opportunities for rebranding and promoting library services differently, such as through the National Year of Reading 2026

Strategic Goal 2

– Libraries at the Heart of Council Services

Lancashire libraries will be recognised as a trusted first point of contact for information, signposting, and support, embedding them at the centre of council and community service delivery.

- In line with the County Council Plan's focus on partnership and collaboration, we will work with local services, voluntary organisations, regional and national partners to co-deliver programmes that meet community needs, and explore the potential for co-location of services, social enterprise, business support hubs, rentable workspace.
- Libraries' neutrality and accessibility will continue to build trust, enabling us to act as a bridge between residents and public services, and engender civic pride.
- By demonstrating the breadth of what libraries can offer, we will strengthen their role in delivering council priorities such as health, education, employment, and digital inclusion.





Strategic Goal 3

– Libraries Supporting Health, Wellbeing, and Resilient Communities

Lancashire libraries will be central to creating resilient, healthier, and better-connected communities, supporting the County Council's vision for wellbeing and opportunity for all.

- Through the Health & Wellbeing Universal Offer, libraries will provide safe, welcoming spaces that reduce isolation, support positive mental wellbeing, and encourage active lifestyles - an important role of early intervention and prevention.
- We will expand digital opportunities to ensure no one is left behind, responding to developments in AI and social media and tackling digital exclusion and enabling access to online services.
- Working with learning and skills partners, libraries will deliver courses, training and business support, to help residents secure employment, develop workplace skills, and flourish in a changing economy.
- We will support volunteering for adults and young people, connecting with Library Friends groups and Lancashire Volunteer Partnership.
- By embedding wellbeing and resilience into our library programmes, we will contribute to improving lives through culture and creativity.

Strategic Goal 4

– Innovative, Sustainable, and Future-Ready Libraries

Lancashire libraries will be flexible, adaptable, and environmentally responsible, ensuring they remain relevant and resilient in the face of change.

- We will carry out an asset review to ensure our buildings and service delivery are modern, welcoming and fully fit for purpose
- We will undertake service planning, scope funding and investment opportunities, identify development opportunities and innovative service delivery
- We will future-proof our services, staying responsive to national and local trends while maintaining a deep understanding of community needs.
- Libraries will contribute to the County Council's sustainability commitments by embedding efficiency and value for money into service design, operations, and programming.
- We will invest in our workforce, ensuring staff have the skills, confidence, and creativity to deliver high-quality services.
- By attracting and nurturing diverse talent, including opportunities for young people, we will build a workforce that reflects Lancashire's communities and support developing a skilled and diverse cultural sector.



Strategic Goal	Libraries Connected Universal Offers	Arts Council England Priorities	Lancashire County Council Plan 2025–30
Community-Focused, Inclusive, and Creative Libraries	Reading, Culture & Creativity, Information & Digital	Improving access to culture for all, Promoting literacy and learning	Better lives for all, Thriving places, Resilient communities
Libraries at the Heart of Council and Community Services	Information & Digital, Health & Wellbeing	Strengthening partnerships across culture and public services	Partnership and collaboration, Delivering services locally, Economic ambition
Libraries Supporting Health, Wellbeing, and Resilient Communities	Health & Wellbeing, Information & Digital, Learning	Improving lives through culture and creativity, Reducing inequality	Stronger Communities, Wellbeing and opportunity for all
Innovative, Sustainable, and Future-Ready Libraries	Information & Digital, Culture & Creativity	Developing a skilled and diverse cultural sector, Environmental responsibility	Thinking differently, Climate commitments, Best possible workforce



Delivering Our Goals

To ensure our library service is relevant and responsive, we will build robust data collection and analysis to demonstrate responding to evidence of need.

In creating this strategy, we have considered guidance and principles published by Libraries Connected utilising best practice to:

- Comply with statutory requirements
- Prioritise public benefit delivering high-quality experiences for residents
- Be informed by resident's needs, through research, engagement and consultation
- Undertake data driven and informed decisions for service provision
- Deliver the Universal Offers identified by public libraries in England
- Work collaboratively and in partnership to promote the library offer, supporting innovation and enterprise
- Deliver a cost-effective service well positioned to secure funding and investment

To reach audiences we will engage through community partnerships, collaborative working across council departments and improving promotion to target groups.

The library service currently undertakes promotional activity through social media channels, web pages, event listings and e-newsletters.

This approach will be strengthened through a more coordinated, visible and targeted communications model, ensuring that promotion is consistent and focused on reaching new audiences.





Libraries are key collaborators in expanding cultural outreach and fostering participation in the arts. Working closely with Lancashire's cultural sector, they host creative residencies, performances, and exhibitions, while opening up grassroots access to arts and culture in ways unmatched by any other infrastructure for reach, accessibility, and trust. This role is crucial in a county shaped by rural landscapes and transport challenges. Libraries bridge the connectivity gap - physically, socially, and digitally.

To ensure our library service is relevant and responsive, we will build robust data collection and analysis to demonstrate responding to evidence of need.

To support this approach, we will:

- Develop consistent messaging and materials for use across all libraries
- Create opportunities for local storytelling and community participation
- Pilot new approaches to engagement in selected areas
- Share learning across the service to inform future activity



How we will measure performance

We will gather feedback from users and non-users to better understand residents needs and utilise a data driven approach to adapt services to remain relevant and inclusive. We will monitor and aim to increase library membership and people accessing our services in libraries and online.



Each year we will:

- Produce annual operational plans that set out how we will deliver the outcomes of this strategy. This will ensure that we deliver a service which is relevant to the individuals and communities of Lancashire.
- Produce an annual report.
- Measure against key performance indicators for all areas of our strategy and which will be regularly reviewed.
- Undertake a peer review to compare our performance
- Monitor our services by using both data and the experiences of our communities.
- Monitor our financial budget.
- Review progress and make any additional actions needed to implement the strategy.

Appendices / Background papers

Appendix Table

The following table provides examples of how the library offer supports different audiences. It is not exhaustive and will evolve as services develop.

Example Library Offer by Audience Group

Audience	Key Needs	Library Offer (Examples)
Early Years, Children & Families	Reading, digital literacy, school readiness, family activity	Storytimes and rhyme sessions; Library Explorers and Reading Trail; Bookstart programme (including SEND); Summer Reading schemes; Code clubs; School visits; Reading Well programmes
Teens & Young People	Independence, wellbeing, skills, engagement	Volunteering opportunities (e.g. Culture Hacks); Reading groups; Digital resources (BorrowBox, comics, magazines); Driving theory access; Lancashire Book of the Year; wellbeing reading programmes

Audience	Key Needs	Library Offer (Examples)
Learners & Job Seekers	Study space, connectivity, careers, access to information	Free Wi-Fi and computers; Study space; Homework clubs; Printing; Books and e-resources; Adult learning courses; Careers and information support; Local history resources; Business and Intellectual Property drop-in session
Small and medium businesses, entrepreneurs and start-ups	Access to information, tailored support	Free online reference materials providing access to trusted sources of information including workshops relating to employment, legal, financial, marketing, exporting, British Standards and health and safety advice
SEND Communities	Accessibility, inclusion, wellbeing, tailored support	Accessible buildings and facilities; Dyslexia-friendly and large print materials; Adaptive equipment; Quiet hours; Adapted sessions; Social stories; Home education support
Rural & Isolated Communities	Access to services, connectivity, social interaction	Mobile library service; Home library service; Digital library resources; Community outreach; Volunteering opportunities
Active Citizens & Communities	Social connection, local activity, enterprise, wellbeing	Community spaces; Reading groups; Friends groups; Cultural events and performances; Health checks; Local information and signposting; Digital library resources for small businesses
Older Residents / Active Ageing	Wellbeing, social activity, digital skills, lifelong learning	Dementia-friendly activities; Seated exercise sessions; Digital support; Social spaces; Reading Well for Dementia; Adult learning; Volunteering; Local history
Schools & Education Settings	Literacy, curriculum support, access to resources	School Library Service; Book loans and artefacts; Workshops; Book awards; Library design advice; Mobile book bus; Subscription services
Prisons	Literacy, education, rehabilitation, wellbeing	Books and resources; Literacy support programmes; Reading initiatives (e.g. Shannon Trust, Six Book Challenge); Community spaces; Legal resources; Cultural activity

Background Papers

This strategy has been informed by and supports the message and ambitions of the following key documents:

- The Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS): Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England in 2016-2021
- Strategic planning of library services: longer-term, evidence-based sustainable planning toolkit 2017
- The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) We Are CILIP Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2027
- Lancashire County Council Library Strategy 2022-25
- Lancashire County Council, Council Plan 2025-30
- Lancashire County Council Cultural Strategy 2024-28
- Lancashire County Council Digital Strategy 2025-29
- Lancashire County Council Growth Plan 2050
- Lancashire County Council Remade Cultural Investment Strategy (Creativity Unlocked) 2025 – 2035
- Arts Council England Let's Create: Our Strategy 2020 – 2030
- Arts Council England Strategic Framework 2026
- The Lancashire Way Education Strategy 2025–2028
- Moving the dial on our priorities 2026/27 Building a better Lancashire
- Libraries Connected Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027
- Vision and Print Impaired People's Promise developed by Share the Vision





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