



News release - THE TRUTH BEHIND SCC'S DECISION TO TAKE LIBRARIES IN-HOUSE

A shock decision by Suffolk County Council is putting jobs and services at risk within the 45-strong network of one of the country's leading library providers.

Suffolk County Council announced it intends to take the contract away from the charity that has successfully run the county's libraries for the past 12 and a half years. In addition to the potential loss of jobs and reduction in the service offering, Suffolk Libraries is expressing deep concern that the move to bring the libraries in-house will incur substantial additional costs and does not reflect the best use of public funds. Suffolk Libraries currently runs the service for around £3m less a year than it cost the council back in 2011.

During its tenure, Suffolk Libraries has kept all libraries open and increased services and activities, whilst also successfully rolling out one of the most impactful and community focused public library offerings in the country. Under the stewardship of Suffolk Libraries, the county's libraries have been recognised as pioneers for change and are regarded as a leading force within the industry, successfully demonstrating the evolving role of libraries within the local community. Independent research* has shown that Suffolk's libraries generate **£41m worth of social value**, translating to **£6 social value for every £1** invested and **saving NHS services in Suffolk an amazing £542K every year (whilst managed by Suffolk Libraries)**.

Sylvia Knights, Chair of Suffolk Libraries said:

"SCC's intention to bring the libraries in-house will have an enormous impact on communities and people across Suffolk who have come to rely on the services and support that our library staff, volunteers and Friends groups provide, which will not be available in a service provided by the county council".

"This decision is a bolt from the blue and we believe it to be staggeringly short-sighted and that it will ultimately undermine and unravel the good work of our staff and supporters, along with the widespread appreciation people have for the value of libraries across Suffolk.

"We are still reeling from the council's pronouncement which was made public only 15 minutes after the leadership team at Suffolk Libraries was advised."

Suffolk Libraries has also questioned the reasoning behind the county council's decision, citing many inaccuracies and misleading claims about the funding of the library service** (for full details see attached notes).

Emma Freud OBE, journalist, film producer and broadcast presenter is a patron of Suffolk Libraries and is lending her support to a campaign to encourage SCC to reconsider:

"I was horrified and shocked to hear this news. I have been so impressed with the work Suffolk Libraries do since becoming their patron. It's amazed me how much impact the library service now has on Suffolk communities and how Suffolk Libraries has managed the service to increase the impact it has for anyone in Suffolk needing support. I hope this decision can be reversed."

Paul Clouting, Vice Chair of Suffolk Libraries added:

“Despite the council’s assertions, we want to make it clear to residents that the library service would be degraded by this decision, which we estimate will potentially cost taxpayers at least £1m in the first year and potentially more in the long term. It also puts many of our support staff at risk who have worked so hard and so passionately to save money and maintain our library services under such challenging circumstances over the past 12 years.”

Other key grounds for opposing the decision to take the library service back under council control include:

- The disappearance of many additional services since Suffolk Libraries has secured direct funding for several key projects including a long-term community arts programme and various other community and wellbeing services. Hundreds of thousands of pounds and activities across Suffolk could be lost
- The forfeiting of prison libraries that contribute over £100k profit every year, offsetting some of the back-office costs
- Suffolk Libraries raised over £400k of its own money through fundraising in 2023/24 and SCC’s ability to match this figure to support the service will be severely restricted
- Over £500k of rate relief on library buildings will no longer be available
- Tens of thousands of pounds of money raised by library friend's groups (and their time and support) could be lost by ripping up the current model

Taking the service back in-house will inevitably cost the county council more, when providing Suffolk Libraries with adequate funding would represent a far more cost effective and less disruptive way of maintaining what has been hailed as an example of best practice within the industry.

Ultimately none of what is being proposed aligns with SCC’s mission statement of:

- Looking after our health and wellbeing
- Strengthening our local economy
- Providing value for money for our residents

Suffolk County Council’s intended action will impact everyone in Suffolk and indeed will send out worrying signals to the nation regarding the future of libraries and their role outside of the traditional services within the community. Suffolk Libraries is urging the county’s residents (and beyond) to lend support to the campaign challenging this decision by contacting their local county councillor and MP.

Ends

Additional information

*A report into the social value created by Suffolk Libraries is available on [the website](#) where you can find more information and research on the [organisation’s impact](#).

**Please see the attached briefing which analyses and explains the misleading and incorrect information contained within the county council statements.

Please contact James Powell, Communications Manager at Suffolk Libraries via james.powell@suffolklibraries.co.uk and 0787 6554474 for more information.