



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Bedford Borough Library Strategy

2026-31

Bedford Borough Library Strategy 2026-31

Foreword

For many people, libraries remain a place to borrow books, foster a love of reading, and spark creativity. However, they now offer much more than that. Libraries provide free access to information, technology, learning, culture and community connection. They offer safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces where people can study, develop new skills, connect with others and take part in activities.

Across Bedford Borough, our libraries support people of all ages and backgrounds. They help children and young people develop literacy skills, provide opportunities for lifelong learning, support digital inclusion, promote health and wellbeing, and help strengthen communities. As a public service that remains free to use and open to everyone, libraries continue to play an important role in creating opportunities and reducing inequalities.

This strategy comes at a time when Bedford Borough is changing rapidly. Population growth, increasing diversity and advances in technology are shaping how residents access information, services and opportunities. At the same time, communities face challenges including digital exclusion, health inequalities and increasing demand for education, skills and community activity.

Libraries have an important role to play in responding to these challenges. Over the period of this strategy, we will seek to strengthen partnerships, improve opportunities, make the best use of our library buildings and explore opportunities for Bedford Central Library that best meet the needs of a changing Borough.

This strategy sets out our vision for Bedford Borough Libraries between 2026 and 2031 and explains how we will seek to ensure that the service continues to meet the needs of residents, communities and future generations.

Strategy on a Page

Our Vision

Libraries at the heart of Bedford Borough's communities – inspiring reading, supporting learning, promoting wellbeing and connecting people with opportunities.

Why This Strategy Matters

Bedford Borough is:

- Changing rapidly
- Becoming increasingly diverse
- Experiencing educational and health inequalities
- Facing digital exclusion and social isolation in some communities
- Seeing increasing demand from an ageing population.

Libraries have an important role to play in helping residents and communities respond to these challenges.

Our Priorities

Inspiring Reading and Connecting People with Opportunities

Supporting literacy, learning, digital inclusion and lifelong skills development.

Reducing Inequalities and Improving Wellbeing

Helping residents access support, improve wellbeing and live healthy, independent lives.

Strengthening Communities through Creativity and Culture

Bringing people together through creativity, culture and community participation.

Sustainable Libraries for a Changing Borough

Providing accessible and sustainable library services that meet changing needs.

What Success Will Look Like

By 2031, Bedford Borough Libraries will be recognised as:

- Places that inspire reading and connect people with opportunities.
- Trusted and inclusive services that help reduce inequalities and improve wellbeing.
- Welcoming hubs that strengthen communities through creativity and culture.
- Accessible and sustainable public services that meet the needs of a changing Borough.

1. Purpose, Vision and Strategic Context

Why We Have Produced the Strategy

- 1.1 This strategy provides a framework for the development of library services across Bedford Borough between 2026 and 2031. It sets out our vision for the future of library services and explains how libraries will contribute to the Council's wider priorities.
- 1.2 The strategy is informed by evidence from the Bedford Borough Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), Census data, library service performance information and needs assessment, consultation feedback and national good practice. It will help ensure that future decisions are based on a clear understanding of local communities, their needs and the challenges and opportunities they face. It also establishes the priorities that will guide service development and resource allocation over the next five years, ensuring that these are targeted where they can deliver the greatest benefit for residents and communities.
- 1.3 Finally, the strategy provides a framework for measuring progress and demonstrating impact over its lifetime.

Why Libraries Matter

- 1.4 Libraries are one of the few public services that remain free at the point of use, open to everyone and accessible throughout life. They provide:
- Access to reading, literacy and lifelong learning
 - Digital access, information and skills support
 - Safe, welcoming and inclusive community spaces
 - Opportunities for creativity and cultural engagement
 - Support for health, wellbeing and social connection.
- 1.5 By providing free access to knowledge and opportunity, libraries help reduce inequalities, strengthen communities and improve quality of life.

Vision

Libraries at the heart of Bedford Borough's communities – inspiring reading, supporting learning, promoting wellbeing and connecting people with opportunities.

- 1.6 This new strategy for Bedford Borough Libraries sets out how the service will continue to develop over the next five years:
- **Places that inspire reading and connect people with opportunities** through literacy, learning, information, digital access and skills development.
 - **Trusted and inclusive services that help reduce inequalities and improve wellbeing**, supporting residents to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.
 - **Welcoming hubs that strengthen communities through creativity and culture**, celebrating Bedford Borough's cultural heritage and local identity.

- **Accessible and sustainable services** that continue to respond to the needs of a changing Borough and deliver value for residents.

- 1.7 Our libraries will continue to build on their traditional strengths while responding to the changing needs of residents and communities across the Borough.

Strategic Context

- 1.8 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires every library authority to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for all those who live, work or study in the Borough. While this statutory duty remains unchanged, public expectations of libraries have evolved significantly. Today's residents require more than access to books; they need digital connectivity, trusted information, opportunities to learn new skills, support to access services and welcoming spaces in which to study, work and participate in community life.
- 1.9 The Council is also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and must ensure that library services are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all communities.
- 1.10 This strategy is informed by national policy and sector frameworks developed by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Arts Council England and Libraries Connected. In particular, it reflects the priorities set out through the Universal Library Offers:
- 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.
- 1.11 The Library Service contributes directly to a range of wider Council objectives and strategies:

Supporting Children and Families	Improving school readiness, literacy and educational attainment, for example through Bookstart, Rhyme Time, Story Time, the Summer Reading Challenge and wider reading initiatives.
Health and Wellbeing	Supporting preventative health through information, partnerships, wellbeing initiatives and activities that reduce loneliness and social isolation.
Economic Growth and Skills	Providing access to digital technology, lifelong learning and support for employment, training and skills development.

Community Cohesion	Creating inclusive spaces where people can meet, learn and participate together, supporting integration, resilience and civic participation.
Culture and Creativity	Working with The Higgins Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives and local cultural partners to promote creativity and cultural participation, supporting the Cultural Vision for Bedford Borough 2025-30.
Regeneration and Place-Making	Contributing to the vitality of town centres and communities, including supporting opportunities for a future Central Library as part of Bedford's wider cultural and regeneration ambitions.

2. Understanding Bedford Borough

- 2.1 A comprehensive and efficient library service must be built around a clear understanding of the communities it serves. Bedford Borough is a growing, diverse and ambitious place. It is home to thriving communities, a rich cultural heritage and a strong sense of local identity. At the same time, the Borough faces a number of significant challenges, including educational inequalities, health inequalities, digital exclusion, social isolation and increasing demand for support services.
- 2.2 Libraries have an important role to play in helping residents respond to these challenges. As trusted, accessible and inclusive public spaces, they connect people with information, learning, technology, culture and community support.
- 2.3 This strategy is informed by evidence from the JSNA, Census data, library service information, consultation findings and wider research. Together, these sources help identify current and future needs and where libraries can make the greatest difference.
- 2.4 The evidence shows that libraries contribute to a range of Borough priorities, including improving literacy, reducing digital exclusion, supporting healthy ageing, tackling loneliness, and strengthening community cohesion.
- 2.5 The following sections summarise the key demographic, social and economic factors that will shape demand for library services between 2026 and 2031.

Population Growth

- 2.6 Bedford Borough is one of the fastest-growing areas in England. Between 2011 and 2021, the population increased by 17.6% to over 185,000 residents – the highest rate of growth in the East of England during that period. The Borough is now home to an estimated 195,000 residents (ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2024).
- 2.7 As new communities develop, libraries must continue to evolve to ensure services remain accessible, relevant and responsive to changing needs. This includes providing welcoming spaces where people can learn, connect and access support.
- 2.8 The Borough's geography also influences how library services are delivered. While most residents live in Bedford and Kempston, many communities are located in villages and rural areas. Libraries therefore play an important role in maintaining access to services and opportunities across the Borough, regardless of where people live.

Diversity

- 2.9 Bedford Borough is one of the most diverse places in the East of England. According to the 2021 Census, 64.1% of residents identified as White British, down from 71.5% in 2011. Around one in three residents identify as belonging to an ethnic minority group, with particularly diverse communities in Queens Park and Kempston. The largest ethnic minority groups are Other White, Indian, Black African, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

- 2.10 Bedford is also a multilingual community. In around one in seven households, English is not the main language spoken by all members, which can sometimes create barriers to accessing services and opportunities.
- 2.11 Libraries have an important role in reflecting and celebrating the Borough's diversity. They provide inclusive spaces where people from different backgrounds can access services, connect with others and participate in community life. Over the lifetime of this strategy, we will continue to ensure that our resources, activities, events and partnerships reflect the communities we serve, helping more residents to see themselves represented within their local library.

Children and Families

- 2.12 Supporting children and young people is one of the most important ways libraries can contribute to better outcomes for residents and communities.
- 2.13 The JSNA identifies early years development, educational attainment and wellbeing as key factors influencing future life chances. In 2021/22, 63.8% of children in Bedford Borough achieved a good level of development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, below both the national average (65.2%) and the average for comparable local authorities (65.5%).
- 2.14 Libraries help address these challenges through free access to books, learning resources and family activities that support language, literacy and communication skills from an early age. They also encourage reading for pleasure, one of the strongest indicators of future educational success, and provide opportunities for families to learn together. Programmes such as Bookstart, Rhyme Time, Story Time and the Summer Reading Challenge help establish positive reading habits and encourage engagement in learning from an early age.
- 2.15 Over the next five years, the Library Service will continue to support the Council's ambitions for children and young people, with a particular focus on:
- Early years language and literacy development
 - School readiness
 - Reading for pleasure
 - Family learning
 - Access to study space and learning resources
 - Supporting vulnerable children and families.

Inequality and Deprivation

- 2.16 While Bedford Borough benefits from economic growth and prosperity, the opportunities created are not experienced equally by all residents.
- 2.17 The Indices of Deprivation 2025 (IMD 2025) rank Bedford Borough as the 94th most deprived upper-tier local authority in England. Deprivation is concentrated in parts of Bedford and Kempston, with five neighbourhoods among the 10% most deprived areas nationally and a further twenty-five neighbourhoods within the most deprived 30%. Residents living in these communities often face greater barriers to education, employment, health and wellbeing.

- 2.18 The Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy highlights significant health inequalities across the Borough. People living in the most deprived areas can expect to live shorter lives than those in the least deprived areas, with a difference in life expectancy of around 8 years for women and 9 years for men.
- 2.19 Libraries have an important role in helping to reduce these inequalities. Previous analysis of library users found that:
- 25% of library users lived in areas experiencing significant deprivation.
 - Residents from deprived communities were over-represented amongst library users relative to their share of the Borough population.
 - 40% of residents who used libraries solely to access computers and digital services lived within significantly deprived communities.
- 2.20 This evidence demonstrates the importance of libraries as places where residents can access information, technology, learning opportunities and support that may not otherwise be available to them. By providing free access to these services, libraries help reduce barriers, boost health and wellbeing, improve access to opportunities and support better outcomes for individuals and communities.

Digital Inclusion and Access to Information

- 2.21 Digital access is increasingly essential for everyday life. Many services, learning opportunities and employment opportunities are now accessed primarily online. However, not everyone has the equipment, connectivity, experience or confidence needed to take advantage of these opportunities.
- 2.22 The JSNA identifies digital exclusion as an important issue affecting residents across the Borough. Library usage data highlights the important role libraries play in addressing this challenge, particularly for younger adults and people living in more deprived communities. Previous analysis found that residents living in the most deprived areas of Bedford were almost three times more likely than average to rely on library computers as their primary use of the service.
- 2.23 Libraries provide free access to computers, Wi-Fi, digital services and support for residents who need help using technology or accessing online services. As more services continue to move online, libraries will play an increasingly important role in helping residents through:
- Free access to computers and Wi-Fi
 - Digital services
 - Support to develop digital skills and confidence
 - Help accessing online public services.

Health and Ageing

- 2.24 Good health and wellbeing are essential to creating strong and resilient communities. The JSNA highlights a number of challenges facing Bedford Borough, including loneliness, mental wellbeing, health inequalities and the needs of an ageing population. Libraries can help address these challenges by providing welcoming and inclusive

spaces where people can access information, meet others and take part in community activities.

- 2.25 Around 16% of residents reported that they were not in good health in the 2021 Census. Health outcomes vary significantly across the Borough, with people living in the most deprived communities experiencing shorter life expectancy than those living in more affluent areas. Disability also remains an important consideration, with 15.5% of residents reporting a disability, rising to 16.3% when adjusted for age.
- 2.26 Health outcomes are closely linked to wider factors such as educational attainment, skills, employment and social connection. Libraries can help address these wider determinants of health through access to learning opportunities, supporting reading for pleasure, digital inclusion, community activities and information services. Libraries support health and wellbeing through:
- Reading Well collections for children and young people
 - Community activities and events
 - Information and signposting
 - Volunteering opportunities
 - Activities that reduce loneliness and social isolation.
- 2.27 The Borough's population is also ageing. Between 2023 and 2043, the largest areas of population growth are projected to be amongst residents aged 60 and over, particularly those aged 65 to 79. This is likely to increase demand for services that support independence, wellbeing and social connection.
- 2.28 Libraries contribute to healthy ageing by providing opportunities for lifelong learning, volunteering, digital participation and community engagement, as well as access to reading materials in a range of formats. For residents who are unable to visit a library independently, the Home Library Service provides an important connection to reading, information and the wider community.

Summary

- 2.29 The evidence presented in this chapter highlights the key factors that will shape demand for library services between 2026 and 2031. Bedford Borough's population is growing and becoming increasingly diverse, while educational challenges, health inequalities, digital exclusion and an ageing population continue to affect many communities. Together, these factors demonstrate the important role libraries play in supporting residents, reducing inequalities and improving access to opportunities.
- 2.30 Understanding these needs provides the foundation for the strategic priorities that follow. The service should respond to the needs of the changing Borough by:
- Supporting children and families from the earliest years
 - Promoting reading, literacy and lifelong learning
 - Connecting people to information, skills and opportunities
 - Reducing digital exclusion
 - Supporting health, wellbeing and healthy ageing
 - Celebrating Bedford's diversity and cultural heritage
 - Strengthening communities and reducing social isolation.

3. The Library Service Today

Overview of the Service

3.1 Through its network of libraries, outreach provision and online services, Bedford Borough Libraries connects residents of all ages to books, information, learning, digital resources, culture and community activity. The service comprises:

- Bedford Central Library
- Kempston Library
- Putnoe Library
- Bromham Library
- Wootton Library
- Mobile Library Service
- Home Library Service
- Arena Nova and shared digital services.

3.2 These services ensure that residents can access library services in ways that best meet their needs. Over the lifetime of this strategy, the focus will be on ensuring services remain accessible, relevant and responsive to the needs of Bedford Borough's growing and changing communities.

Library Network

3.3 The Borough's library network is designed to provide residents across both urban and rural communities with reasonable access to library services.

Main Library	Branch Libraries	Other Services
Bedford Central Library <i>Open 60 hours/week</i>	Kempston Library <i>Open 48.5 hours/week</i> Putnoe Library <i>Open 48 hours/week</i> Wootton Library <i>Open 45 hours/week</i> Bromham Library <i>Open 44 hours/week</i>	Mobile Library Service Home Library Service Online Services

3.4 Each library serves a distinct community while providing access to a core range of services, including:

- Information support and signposting from trusted staff
- Free access to a wide range of books and other material
- Free 24/7 access to online library services
- Supporting reading for children through Rhyme Time and Story Times
- Wi-Fi and public access computers
- Printing and photocopying

- Community and cultural activities and events
- Health and Wellbeing activities
- Volunteering opportunities and partnership working.

3.5 Libraries also support a wide range of activities and events that are delivered through partnerships with other Council services, community groups and local organisations.

Mobile and Digital Services

3.6 Alongside its library buildings, the service provides a range of outreach and digital services to ensure that residents can access library services regardless of their location or personal circumstances.

3.7 The Mobile Library Service helps maintain access to library services in communities where a static library may be less accessible, while the Home Library Service supports residents who are unable to visit a library because of age, disability, illness or reduced mobility, for permanence or temporary circumstances.

3.8 Library members can access e-books, e-audio, digital newspapers and magazines, digital resources and library account services online or through apps. Digital services enable residents to access library services at a time and place that suits them and extend the reach of the library network beyond its physical buildings.

4. Strategic Priorities

Delivering the Vision

- 4.1 The evidence presented in the preceding chapters demonstrates that while Bedford Borough's libraries are vital places where people can foster a love of reading, this core role has evolved. They are community assets that support learning, improve wellbeing, reduce inequalities, strengthen communities and connect people with opportunities.
- 4.2 Over the next five years, population growth, demographic change, technological innovation and economic pressures will continue to shape the needs of residents and communities. Libraries have an important role to play in helping people respond to these changes by providing access to information, skills, culture, support and community connections.
- 4.3 To ensure that resources are directed towards the areas where they can have the greatest impact, Bedford Borough Library Service will focus on four strategic priorities between 2026 and 2031.
- 4.4 Together, these priorities provide the framework through which the Library Service will deliver its vision of libraries at the heart of Bedford Borough's communities.

Priority 1: Inspiring Reading and Connecting People with Opportunities

Why This Matters

- 4.5 Reading remains at the heart of public library services and continues to play an important role in supporting literacy, health and wellbeing, learning and opportunity. Libraries help people develop the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to participate fully in modern life. Through free access to reading, information, technology and learning, they help residents improve their life chances and connect with opportunities that support education, employment and personal development.

Outcome

- 4.6 Residents of all ages and backgrounds have opportunities to read, learn and develop throughout their lives. Libraries are recognised as trusted centres of literacy, information and digital inclusion that help people improve their life chances and access opportunities.

Key Actions

- 4.7 We will:
- Promote reading, literacy and language development from an early age through programmes such as Bookstart, Rhyme Time and Story Time.
 - Encourage reading for pleasure and lifelong learning for people of all ages.
 - Work with partners to support literacy, educational attainment and skills development.
 - Provide free access to books, information, learning opportunities and digital services.

- Reduce digital exclusion and help residents develop digital skills and confidence.
- Ensure library resources reflect the interests, cultures and needs of Bedford Borough's diverse communities.

Priority 2: Reducing Inequalities and Improving Wellbeing

Why This Matters

- 4.8 Evidence shows that some communities across Bedford Borough experience greater levels of deprivation, poorer health outcomes, social isolation and digital exclusion. Libraries help address these challenges by providing trusted spaces, access to information and reading for pleasure, opportunities for participation and connections to support services.
- 4.9 As demand for health and social care services continues to grow, libraries have an increasingly important preventative role in supporting health, wellbeing and independence.

Outcome

- 4.10 More residents are able to access information, support and opportunities that improve their wellbeing and enable them to participate fully in community life. Libraries are recognised as trusted and inclusive services that help reduce inequalities and improve quality of life.

Key Actions

- 4.11 We will:
- Work with health and wellbeing partners to strengthen preventative support through libraries.
 - Promote health and wellbeing resources, health information and awareness activities.
 - Support residents experiencing loneliness and social isolation through activities, groups and community engagement.
 - Maintain and develop services that support older people, carers and vulnerable residents, including the Home Library Service.
 - Provide volunteering and participation opportunities that improve confidence, wellbeing and social connections.
 - Ensure services remain accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all communities.

Priority 3: Strengthening Communities through Creativity and Culture

Why This Matters

- 4.12 Bedford Borough is a diverse community with a rich cultural heritage and strong sense of local identity. By providing opportunities for cultural participation, creative activity, volunteering and community involvement, libraries help strengthen community cohesion, civic pride and a sense of belonging.

Outcome

- 4.13 Residents feel connected to their communities and have opportunities to engage with culture, creativity and community life. Libraries are recognised as welcoming community hubs that celebrate Bedford Borough's people, places and stories.

Key Actions

- 4.14 We will:
- Work with The Higgins Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives and local cultural partners to broaden access to cultural and creative experiences.
 - Support creativity through activities, events, workshops and other programmes.
 - Celebrate the diversity of Bedford Borough through inclusive programming and community engagement.
 - Provide opportunities for volunteering, participation and community leadership.
 - Work with local organisations and community groups to strengthen local connections and increase participation in community life.
 - Champion creatives, authors and community organisations.

Priority 4: Sustainable Libraries for a Changing Borough

Why This Matters

- 4.15 As Bedford Borough continues to grow and change, residents need library services that remain accessible, relevant and responsive to their needs. Effective use of resources and strong partnerships will help ensure that communities across the Borough can continue to access opportunities for reading, learning, creativity, wellbeing and social connection. This includes exploring opportunities to modernise facilities, including the future of Bedford Central Library.

Outcome

- 4.16 Residents across Bedford Borough can access welcoming and flexible library services that meet their changing needs, provide opportunities to learn, connect and participate, and remain at the heart of community life.

Key Actions

- 4.17 We will:
- Maintain an accessible network of library services across the Borough.
 - Explore proposals for the Central Library that expand opportunities for reading, creativity and community engagement.
 - Strengthen partnerships that increase the reach and impact of library services.
 - Seek external funding to support service development.
 - Use evidence, data and customer feedback to inform service planning.
 - Ensure limited resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Delivering the Priorities

- 4.18 These four priorities are interconnected and together provide a framework for the future development of library services in Bedford Borough. They reflect the evidence presented in this strategy and focus on the outcomes libraries can deliver for residents, communities and the Borough as a whole.
- 4.19 By inspiring reading and connecting people with opportunities, reducing inequalities and improving wellbeing, strengthening communities through creativity and culture, and maintaining a sustainable library service for a changing Borough, Bedford Borough Libraries will continue to play an important role in improving lives and supporting thriving communities.

5. Delivery and Performance

- 5.1 This strategy provides the framework for the development of library services between 2026 and 2031. Delivery will be supported through annual service plans that enable the Library Service to respond to changing needs, emerging opportunities and external funding opportunities while maintaining a clear focus on the strategic priorities set out in this strategy.

Evidence-Led Decision Making

- 5.2 The Library Service will continue to adopt an evidence-led approach to planning and service development. Decisions regarding service design and resource allocation will be informed by:
- Bedford Borough JSNA
 - Census and demographic information
 - Library Management System data
 - Customer feedback
 - Service performance information
 - Equality impact assessments
 - Consultation and engagement activity
 - National library research and best practice.

- 5.3 Using evidence in this way will help ensure that resources are targeted in the most efficient way and that services remain aligned with local needs.

Partnership Working

- 5.4 The delivery of this strategy will depend on strong partnerships. The Library Service will continue to work alongside schools, early years providers, Family Hubs, health and wellbeing organisations, The Higgins Bedford, cultural and creative partners, community groups, voluntary organisations and other partners.
- 5.5 These partnerships can help extend the reach and impact of library services and support the delivery of the strategy's four priorities:
- **Inspiring Reading and Connecting People with Opportunities** through partnerships that support literacy, learning, digital inclusion and skills development.
 - **Reducing Inequalities and Improving Wellbeing** through collaboration with health, wellbeing and community organisations.
 - **Strengthening Communities through Creativity and Culture** through partnerships that increase participation in culture, creativity, heritage and community activity.
 - **Sustainable Libraries for a Changing Borough** through collaboration that supports innovation, service development and long-term sustainability.

Making Best Use of Resources

5.6 Like all local authority services, libraries operate within a challenging financial environment. The Council therefore has a responsibility to ensure that resources are used effectively and that investment delivers value for residents. The Library Service will continue to improve efficiency through:

- Service modernisation and changes linked to need and opportunity
- Partnership working and collaboration
- Improved use of data and performance information
- Continuous review of service delivery.

5.7 At the same time, the Council remains committed to maintaining a comprehensive and efficient library service that responds to community need and delivers meaningful social outcomes. The Library Service will also seek external funding opportunities to support service development and maximise the impact of available resources.

Measuring Success

5.8 The Library Service will use a combination of measures to assess progress against each strategic priority.

Inspiring Reading and Connecting People with Opportunities

5.9 Measures will include:

- Active library membership
- Physical book issues
- E-book and e-audio borrowing
- Participation in children's and family activities
- Summer Reading Challenge participation
- Public computer and Wi-Fi usage.

Reducing Inequalities and Improving Wellbeing

5.10 Measures will include:

- Participation in wellbeing activities
- Usage of wellbeing resources
- Home Library Service usage
- Participation in community support initiatives
- Customer feedback from targeted groups and communities.

Strengthening Communities through Creativity and Culture

5.11 Measures will include:

- Participation in creative and cultural activities
- Cultural partnership activity
- Volunteering opportunities and numbers
- Attendance at community events and programmes.

Sustainable Libraries for a Changing Borough

5.12 Measures will include:

- Library visits and footfall
- Customer satisfaction
- Usage of study and community spaces
- External funding secured
- Partnership activity.

Reporting

5.13 Progress against this strategy will be reported annually through the Council's service planning and performance management arrangements. This will include:

- Reporting on key performance indicators
- Reviewing progress against annual service plans
- Updating priorities where necessary
- Celebrating achievements and success stories.

5.14 This review process will ensure that the strategy remains responsive to changing circumstances while maintaining a clear focus on the long-term outcomes the Library Service seeks to achieve for residents and communities across Bedford Borough.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Libraries play an important role in supporting residents, strengthening communities and connecting people with opportunities. As Bedford Borough continues to change, library services must continue to evolve to meet the needs of local communities.
- 6.2 This strategy sets out how the Council will ensure that libraries remain relevant, accessible and sustainable between 2026 and 2031. By 2031, we want Bedford Borough Libraries to be recognised as:
- Places that inspire reading and connect people with opportunities through literacy, learning, information, digital access and skills development.
 - Trusted and inclusive services that help reduce inequalities and improve wellbeing, supporting residents to live healthy, independent and fulfilling lives.
 - Welcoming community hubs that strengthen communities through creativity and culture, celebrating Bedford Borough's heritage, diversity and local identity.
 - Modern, accessible and sustainable public services that continue to respond to the needs of a changing Borough and deliver value for residents.
- 6.3 A key part of this vision is ensuring that library services remain accessible, welcoming and fit for the future. This includes maintaining a network of library services and exploring opportunities to develop the Central Library provision in a way that supports learning, creativity, community participation and the continued development of Bedford town centre. Success will be measured not only by service use, but by the difference libraries make to residents and communities.
- 6.4 By working with residents, partners, staff and volunteers, Bedford Borough Libraries will continue to be at the heart of community life and play an important role in supporting the Borough's future success.

Appendix A – Library Facilities Description

Library	Facility Details and Services
Bedford Central Library	Type: Central Library Age: 1972 Size: 2184m² Hours: Open 60 hours/week (mixture of staffed and self-service hours) Facilities: In addition to providing a comprehensive lending service, Bedford Central Library offers: • Public study space • Reference and information resources • Children's library facilities • Access to specialist collections • Community and family activities and events • Public ICT facilities • Opportunities for learning and research • Cultural and heritage activity • Meeting spaces • Ukelele library run with Bedford Music Service • Library of Things run by Share Bedford. Description: Bedford Central Library is the Borough's principal library and its busiest service point. Previous service data indicated that around 64% of all library visits took place at Bedford Central Library, reflecting its role as the primary library facility. Its central location and scale mean that it attracts a diverse range of users, including students, job seekers, families, researchers, workers and visitors to Bedford town centre. The Central Library also plays an important civic role. As one of the Borough's major public facilities, it contributes significantly to town centre activity. The future development of Bedford Central Library represents one of the most significant opportunities facing the service during the period 2026–2031.

Kempston Library	Type: Branch Library Age: 1960 Size: 448m² Hours: Open 48.5 hours/week (mixture of staffed and self-service hours) Facilities: In addition to providing a comprehensive lending service, Kempston Library offers: • Children's library facilities • Community and family activities and events • Public ICT facilities • Opportunities for learning and research • Cultural and heritage activity • Meeting space • Dedicated car park. Description: Kempston Library serves one of Bedford Borough's largest communities, with around 45,000 annual visits. The library is particularly important in providing local access to services and opportunities for residents of Kempston town and surrounding area.
Putnoe Library	Type: Branch Library Age: 1968 Size: 280m² Hours: Open 48 hours/week (mixture of staffed and self-service hours) Facilities: In addition to providing a comprehensive lending service, Putnoe Library offers: • Children's library facilities • Community and family activities and events • Public ICT facilities • Opportunities for learning and research • Cultural and heritage activity • Community garden • Car parking adjacent.

	Description: Putnoe Library serves a large residential catchment and remains one of the Borough's busiest community libraries, with around 42,000 annual visits. Its location within a significant residential area allows it to support a broad cross-section of the local community and contributes to the Council's aim of providing accessible services close to where people live.
Wootton Library	Type: Branch Library Age: 1983 Size: 219m² Hours: Open 45 hours/week (mixture of staffed and self-service hours) Facilities: In addition to providing a comprehensive lending service, Wootton Library offers: • Children's library facilities • Community and family activities and events • Public ICT facilities • Opportunities for learning and research • Cultural and heritage activity • Dedicated car park. Description: Wootton Library provides library services to residents within Wootton and surrounding communities. Like Bromham Library, the library serves a mixed catchment that includes families, older residents and commuters. The library receives around 19,000 annual visits. As population growth continues within southern areas of the Borough, the role of Wootton Library as a local community resource is expected to remain important.
Bromham Library	Type: Branch Library Age: 1976 Size: 100m² Hours: Open 44 hours/week (mixture of staffed and self-service hours)

	Facilities: In addition to providing a comprehensive lending service, Bromham Library offers: • Children's library facilities • Community and family activities and events • Public ICT facilities • Opportunities for learning and research • Cultural and heritage activity • Dedicated car park. Description: Bromham Library serves a growing village and rural catchment and provides an important local facility for residents who may otherwise face greater barriers to accessing services. Bromham Library attracts around 22,000 visits per year and remains an important community resource despite its smaller scale. The continued success of Bromham Library demonstrates the importance of maintaining library provision within smaller communities and ensuring that access to reading, learning and information remains available throughout the Borough.
Mobile Library	Type: Mobile Library Service Age: Current vehicle entered service in 2017 Range: Covers all wards within Bedford Borough Hours: Operate to a published timetable serving communities across the Borough Facilities: • Access to books and other library stock • Support with library membership and enquiries • Access to information and signposting services • Regular visits to rural communities and locations without easy access to a library building. Description: The Mobile Library helps ensure library services remain accessible across Bedford Borough by bringing books, information and library services directly into communities, particularly in rural areas and locations without easy access to a library building.