

24 February 2025

An open letter to Suffolk residents

Dear Suffolk resident

Today Suffolk County Council has made an important announcement about its plans to protect Suffolk's library service by bringing it back into the care of the county council.

With these plans, we are committing to keeping all 45 libraries open, maintaining opening hours, investing £200,000 in replacing Suffolk's aging mobile libraries and a further £157,000 for new books and to replace public computers in libraries across the county.

Subject to a formal decision of our Cabinet on 18 March 2025, staff running Suffolk's library service – along with their years of experience and love for libraries - will transition to the direct employment of the council on 1 June 2025. It will very much be business as usual.

These proposals follow an attempt to secure an external provider for a new six-year contract (with the option to extend for up to a further six years) which had to be abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.

Following the end of the procurement process, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries (the current provider) to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. The intention was to secure the immediate future of the library service from 1 June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.

In addition, serious concerns about the viability of Suffolk Libraries also surfaced. The concerns included their proposal to reduce opening hours by 30% and issues with the financial stability of the organisation. There is also concern about the cost of their head office, including senior managers, which equates to 33% of their annual staffing costs. Suffolk County Council believes that more of the library budget should

be invested in frontline services.

These issues are unacceptable to Suffolk County Council, which is why we're taking action. We are responsible for libraries in Suffolk and this is the right thing to do to protect them and the services they provide to you as residents.

We appreciate that this may come as a surprise to some, but want to assure you that this is happening to protect our valuable community libraries and the wide-range of services they provide.

For those who would like more background on this, we have included more detail at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Suffolk County Council

Background

- Suffolk's library services have been delivered by Suffolk Libraries IPS since 2012, with the current contract ending on **31 May 2025**.
- Suffolk County Council is the main funder of the service, with an agreed budget of £5.9 million a year. In 2023/24, Suffolk County Council increased the annual budget by £720,000 to £6.6 million a year.
- The contract to operate libraries in Suffolk had to be put out for competitive tender in 2024 as it had reached its maximum legal length.
- The procurement was abandoned due to difficulties in aligning submissions with the service requirements and budgets.
- Following the end of the procurement, Suffolk County Council entered negotiations with Suffolk Libraries to reach agreement on a shorter-term contract. This was with the intention of securing the future of the library services from 1 June 2025, while the longer-term future was considered. However, Suffolk Libraries were unwilling to accept those terms and proposed different terms which were not acceptable to Suffolk County Council and would have breached procurement law.
- In addition, Suffolk Libraries IPS declared the need to cut opening hours by 30% to balance their budget. At the same time, Suffolk County Council became aware of serious concerns about Suffolk Libraries' financial sustainability.