

Rochdale Borough Libraries Strategy 2027-2032

Public consultation summary

Hubs of Opportunity

Our vision

Rochdale libraries will be Hubs of Opportunity: trusted and welcoming places where everyone can explore, read, learn, create, connect and live well.

Libraries at the heart of our communities

Libraries have always opened doors to opportunity. In Rochdale, they are part of our cooperative story and our belief that learning, shared knowledge and people working together can improve lives.

This strategy sets out how our 16 libraries will develop from 2027 to 2032. Books, reading and learning will remain at their heart. Libraries will also provide welcoming local places where people can get online, build skills, enjoy culture, meet others and find information or support.

What we want to achieve

- Keep a strong, inclusive library service that is open and welcoming to everyone.
- Help children, young people and adults enjoy reading and build skills for life.
- Make it easier for people to get online and use essential digital services.
- Connect residents to wellbeing, learning, employment and community support close to home.
- Make library buildings more accessible, flexible and sustainable.
- Work with residents and partners so each library responds to its local community.

What local people have told us

Residents value friendly staff, books, safe spaces, reliable digital access, and activities for children and families. People also want more promotion of what libraries offer, more accessible services, and greater use of library spaces for community activity.

Why libraries matter

Libraries are free, trusted places that help people throughout their lives. They support reading and information, but also help people learn, feel connected, use technology, enjoy culture and find support before problems become more serious.

Our service today

16 libraries	13,036 active members	7,346 new members	208,245 items issued in 2024/25
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Public engagement found overall satisfaction of 90%. People described libraries as safe, welcoming and inclusive and praised the knowledge, friendliness and commitment of library staff.

How libraries make a difference

Reading and learning

Books, early language, literacy, study and lifelong learning.

Health and wellbeing

Social connection, warm and safe spaces, trusted information and activities.

Skills and work

ESOL, job search, employability, enterprise and routes into learning.

Digital inclusion

Free Wi-Fi, computers, online resources and practical digital help.

Children and families

Story times, Bookstart, family learning, holiday activities and study space.

Culture and community

Creative activity, local heritage, events, volunteering and meeting space.

What residents want us to protect and improve

- Protect the basics: good books, helpful staff, welcoming buildings and reliable opening information.
- Offer more activities for children, families and young people.
- Improve access for disabled people, SEND residents, older people and people facing language or digital barriers.
- Promote services more widely so residents understand everything libraries provide.
- Use library spaces for more community, cultural and partner activity where this can be done safely.

Think libraries first

When the Council or a partner needs a trusted local place for information, engagement, learning, digital access or community activity, libraries should be considered first.

Our nine priorities

The priorities keep reading and learning at the centre while making better use of libraries to widen opportunity and reduce inequality.

1 Reading, literacy and lifelong learning
Helping people of all ages enjoy reading, build confidence and keep learning.

2 Live Well, health and wellbeing
Offering friendly local spaces for connection, everyday support and wellbeing.

3 Information, digital and customer access
Helping people get online, find trusted information and use essential services.

4 Employment, skills and enterprise
Connecting residents to learning, skills, job support and enterprise opportunities.

5 Culture, creativity and heritage
Bringing arts, creativity, local history and cultural experiences into neighbourhoods.

6 Community, volunteering and neighbourhoods
Supporting resident-led activity, volunteering and stronger local networks.

7 Green and climate action
Helping people learn about sustainability, reuse resources and take local action.

8 Inclusive, accessible and future-ready
Removing barriers and designing services with the people who use them.

9 Children, young people and families
Helping improve life chances, learning, wellbeing, confidence and aspirations.

How we will work

Community-led: we will listen, involve people and shape activity together.

Place-based: each library will reflect the needs of its area.

Data-informed: we will use evidence and feedback to improve services.

Sustainable: we will care for buildings, resources and partnerships for the future.

Our pledges

These pledges explain what we propose to do under each priority.

Priority 1 - Reading, Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Helping people of all ages enjoy reading, build confidence and keep learning.

- Provide a diverse, inclusive and relevant book stock for all ages and interests.
- Deliver reading programmes including Summer Reading Challenge, Reading Ahead and shared reading opportunities.
- Support early language and literacy development through rhyme times, story times and family learning activities.
- Offer access to learning resources, online courses and informal learning opportunities.
- Work with schools, colleges and community organisations to improve literacy outcomes and reduce educational inequalities.

Priority 2 - Live Well, Health and Wellbeing

Offering friendly local spaces for connection, everyday support and wellbeing.

- Provide free, warm and welcoming community spaces where everyone can belong.
- Support mental health and wellbeing through Reading Well collections, social activities and community connections.
- Work with health and wellbeing partners to offer information, advice and outreach services.
- Reduce social isolation by creating opportunities for people to meet, participate and connect.
- Promote healthy lifestyles through events, information and signposting.

Priority 3 - Information, Digital and Customer Access

Helping people get online, find trusted information and use essential services.

- Provide free access to computers, Wi-Fi and digital resources.
- Support residents to develop digital skills and confidence.
- Help people access online council, health, education and government services.
- Promote trusted information and tackle misinformation.
- Ensure staff and volunteers can provide customer-focused support and signposting.

Priority 4 - Employment, Skills and Enterprise

Connecting residents to learning, skills, job support and enterprise opportunities.

- Support job seekers with access to technology, training and employment resources.
- Work with partners to deliver careers advice, skills development and adult learning opportunities.
- Promote employability workshops, CV support and interview preparation.
- Provide spaces and resources that support entrepreneurs, freelancers and small businesses.
- Connect residents with local opportunities for training, volunteering and work experience.

Priority 5 - Culture, Creativity and Heritage

Bringing arts, creativity, local history and cultural experiences into neighbourhoods.

- Deliver a varied programme of arts, culture and creative activities across the borough.

- Support local artists, writers and creative practitioners.
- Preserve, promote and improve access to local history and heritage collections
- Celebrate the diversity of Rochdale's communities through cultural events and exhibitions.
- Bring cultural opportunities into neighbourhoods through partnerships and outreach activity.

Priority 6 - Community, Volunteering and Neighbourhoods

Supporting resident-led activity, volunteering and stronger local networks.

- Develop volunteering opportunities that are meaningful and inclusive.
- Support community groups to connect, collaborate and grow.
- Provide spaces that encourage community participation and civic pride.
- Empower residents to lead activities and share their skills.
- Build strong partnerships that address local priorities and inequalities.

Priority 7 - Green and Climate Action

Helping people learn about sustainability, reuse resources and take local action.

- Promote environmental learning and climate awareness.
- Encourage recycling, reuse and sharing through library services and activities.
- Support community-led environmental projects and local action.
- Reduce the environmental impact of our operations where possible.
- Work with partners to help residents make sustainable choices.

Priority 8 - Inclusive, Accessible and Future-Ready

Removing barriers and designing services with the people who use them.

- Design services that are inclusive, welcoming and easy to access.
- Listen to underrepresented communities and remove barriers to participation.
- Improve accessibility across our buildings, resources and digital services.
- Embrace innovation and new technology where it improves customer experience.
- Continuously adapt services to meet changing community needs.

Priority 9 - Children, Young People and Families

Helping improve life chances, learning, wellbeing, confidence and aspirations.

- Support early years development through books, play, language and learning activities.
- Encourage reading for pleasure and educational achievement.
- Provide safe spaces where children and young people can learn, create and socialise.
- Work with families, schools and community partners to improve life chances.
- Create opportunities that build confidence, resilience, aspirations and skills for the future.

What people can expect

Every library will be part of one borough-wide service. Activities may vary by location, but residents should recognise a clear and consistent core offer through buildings, online services, outreach and doorstep support.

Reading and literacy

Free membership, books and digital reading, Bookstart, reading groups and events.

Health and wellbeing

Welcome Spaces, Safe Places, Reading Well, social activities, information and partner sessions.

Culture and creativity

Workshops, exhibitions, local history, storytelling, community arts and heritage.

Information and digital

Free Wi-Fi and computers, printing and scanning, digital help, device lending and supported access.

Learning and skills

Study space, ESOL, digital skills, employability, adult learning and enterprise support.

Community and volunteering

Community information, meeting space, voluntary sector activity, volunteering and resident-led groups.

Making the strategy happen

- Local plans: each library or local cluster will use community feedback and local evidence to shape priorities.
- Buildings and technology: investment will focus on accessible, welcoming, flexible and digitally connected spaces.
- People: staff and volunteers will be supported to develop the skills needed for a modern library service.
- Partnerships: libraries will work with schools, Family Hubs, health services, employment and skills teams, cultural organisations and community groups.
- Communication: the service will promote activities, reach new users and explain the difference libraries make.

Our five-year journey

Years 1-2: Build the foundations

Listen, review access and buildings, create local plans, build partnerships and agree how progress will be measured.

Years 3-4: Grow what works

Expand successful reading, wellbeing, digital, skills, cultural, volunteering and inclusion activity.

Year 5: Review and plan ahead

Share the impact, learn from residents and partners, and agree the next steps for the service.

By 2032, we want to see

- More people using libraries and enjoying a consistent, high-quality service.
- More children, young people and adults reading, learning and developing confidence.
- More residents able to get online and use essential digital services.
- More people finding support, social connection and wellbeing activities close to home.
- More residents helping to shape library activity and taking part as volunteers.
- More cultural, creative and heritage opportunities in local communities.
- More inclusive, accessible and environmentally sustainable library buildings and services.
- Clear evidence of the value libraries bring to residents, communities and public services.

Our Commitment

Books, reading and learning will always be central to Rochdale libraries. This strategy builds on that foundation so libraries can open more doors to knowledge, opportunity, creativity, support and connection for everyone.