

Sustainability Impact Assessment

Rochdale Borough Libraries Strategy 2026-2031

Section One: Information about the proposal

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Department and service: Rochdale Borough Libraries, Townships & Libraries

Date of assessment: 23.02.2026

Lead officer approving the SIA (this must be an Assistant Director or Director): Rafael Martinez

Date of approval: 14th October 2026

Overview:

The new Rochdale Library Strategy is being developed to set out a modern, community-focused vision for the borough's library service, building on the foundations of the previous Library Service Strategy (2019–2022). The earlier strategy highlighted the vital role libraries play in providing **accessible spaces for learning, culture and enjoyment**, with 16 branches offering books, digital access, community events, and support services across the borough. It also demonstrated the library service's strong performance, including high customer satisfaction levels (96%), extensive partnership working with organisations such as GM Police, NHS, GMCA, DWP and CAB, and the delivery of key programmes such as digital skills sessions, early years activities, and summer holiday support. The new strategy is required to update this document, responding to ongoing financial pressures on council services, changing customer needs, and the need to ensure library buildings remain fit for purpose and in the right locations. The previous strategy emphasised the importance of aligning library services with wider council priorities—such as health, digital inclusion, cultural participation and lifelong learning—and the new strategy continues this alignment to ensure libraries contribute effectively to prosperous people and places within the borough.

Overall, the new Library Strategy provides the framework for how Rochdale will maintain, modernise, and enhance its library offer, ensuring it remains sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to community needs. This context is essential for understanding how the proposals within the strategy interact with sustainability goals and therefore informs the Sustainability Impact Assessment.

Decisions required:

Recommendations which are in the Strategy that this SIA relates to:

Approval of the revised strategic vision for the library service / Investment in digital infrastructure / Support for the expansion of literacy, reading engagement and lifelong learning initiatives / Confirmation that the new strategy will form the basis for future service planning and investment decisions,

Section Two: Impact on society

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
Poverty [SDG 1: No Poverty]	Positive	The new Library Strategy continues the strong commitment to reducing poverty by maintaining free access to digital resources, PCs, Wi-Fi, and skills programmes , which were central to the previous strategy's support for financially vulnerable residents. Participation in initiatives addressing holiday poverty—such as library-based support events—remains a key element of our offer.
Food security [SDG 2: Zero Hunger]	Positive	The strategy retains and supports seasonal programmes such as Fit, Feed and Read , now run by Your Trust, which previously helped to alleviate holiday hunger for families while offering safe places to be. The new strategy also aims to broaden partnerships with community food providers and embed food-related resilience activity in targeted branches. Examples of this are providing 2 libraries (Balderstone Library & Littleborough Library) as a collection point for food parcels (in local areas so no need to travel to Rochdale Centre) as library opening times are longer than the Food Bank. Also, a food donation point has been set up at Rochdale Central Library for ex service men and is delivered where the need is from a local central place.
Health and wellbeing [SDG 3: Health and Wellbeing]	Positive	Libraries will expand health and wellbeing support by continuing to provide safe, trusted spaces , self-help resources, dementia-friendly services, and working alongside NHS partners. This aligns with the earlier strategy's commitments to health improvement and Ageing Well, which remain core ambitions. The new strategy places increased emphasis on wellbeing events, social prescribing links, and reducing isolation.
Crime and community cohesion [SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions]	Positive	As safe and inclusive community hubs, libraries continue to support cohesion by welcoming all residents and offering constructive activities for young people. The new strategy continues the established partnership working with agencies such as GM Police,

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
		creating safe engagement spaces , combating misinformation, and strengthening community trust. Libraries offer ‘A Cuppa with a Copper’ where local residents can meet with their local Police Officers and raise any issues. All libraries have a close relationship with Community Safety Officers, who all have their own ward that they are responsible for, so any concerns with customers can be raised and dealt with if they are well known in the area.
Partnership working [SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals]		Partnership-driven delivery remains an important part to the new strategy. Building on the wide collaboration network highlighted in previous strategies—GMCA, NHS, DWP, CAB, Reading Agency, local cultural partners—the new strategy will look into how partnership pathways can be formalised by offering building spaces and also out of hours, expanding community co-delivery by again looking at locations and spaces , and to widen volunteer engagement to enhance service reach and sustainability by offering volunteer opportunities in local Libraries and supporting events and activities.

Section Three: Impact on the economy

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
Education and training [SDG 4: Quality education]	Positive	The new strategy strengthens lifelong learning by looking at how we can expand digital skills sessions, coding clubs, reading programmes, and learning-focused events. The existing strategy already demonstrates strong delivery in digital skills, early years support, and learning journeys, which the new strategy builds upon. This supports residents' employability and access to training.
Economy and employment [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth]	Positive	Libraries contribute to economic growth by working with partner services EG Work & Skills Team, by offering free digital access held in library buildings, and supporting skills development. The previous strategy recorded high PC usage and looking at strengthening partnership work with employment-related agencies (e.g., DWP) by offering PC's and spaces for sessions to be delivered by DWP staff. The new strategy further embeds employment support through stronger co-delivery with partners and expanded digital and employability programmes. Regular Work & Skills Roadshows are held in library buildings as they are safe spaces to use and people feel comfortable in their local library.
Industry and infrastructure [SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure]	Positive	The strategy supports digital innovation by maintaining and improving public access to technology (PCs, tablets), digital learning, and tech-focused events such as tech talks and fraud awareness talks delivered by local banking hubs. It aligns libraries with wider innovation agendas supported by Greater Manchester Combined Authority, ensuring that infrastructure remains modern, accessible, and community-focused. Customers prefer the

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
		traditional PC towers, keyboard and mice compared to tablets and usage is still high across libraries on the whole.
Housing and transport [SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities]	Positive	Libraries play a key role in sustainable communities by providing accessible local hubs within neighbourhoods. The existing strategy emphasises the need for library buildings to be “in the right location” and accessible for community use. The new strategy builds on this by ensuring libraries continue to support residents who walk or travel short distances to their local branch, enabling low-carbon access to key services.

Section Four: Impact on the environment

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
Quality of green space and the environment [SDG 15: Life on land]	Positive	While libraries are not land-managing services, the new strategy aligns with the council's commitment to creating accessible, sustainable community spaces. Libraries already act as neighbourhood hubs located in community centres and public buildings, many of which support wider wellbeing and environmental objectives by encouraging local access to services. The strategy's focus on maintaining accessible local buildings supports sustainable neighbourhoods and reduces the need for longer travel.
Renewable energy [SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy]	Mixed (potential for positive impact)	The existing strategy acknowledges the need for buildings to be "in the right location... delivering the right services," which includes ensuring they are efficient and fit for purpose. The new strategy will look at how to provide an opportunity to incorporate renewable energy considerations (e.g., solar feasibility, energy-efficient equipment) into future building refurbishment or modernisation. Libraries' shift to more digital services also increases the importance of energy-efficient ICT.
Reducing waste [SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production]	Positive	Libraries inherently support reuse and circular economy principles by enabling shared access to books, digital resources, and materials. The service already manages stock effectively and efficiently, with recognised strong stock management in the region. By using a stock software system, we can distribute to libraries where books are heavily used and have wear and tear, by using the stock from lesser used libraries (stock rotation where needed). The new strategy continues this by promoting digital borrowing, reducing paper use, and supporting recycling initiatives within library spaces, most recently with the mixed recycling waste legislation now in place to encourage more recycling of waste where possible.

	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / negative / mixed / none)	Actions and mitigations, and / or comments
Water supply and water quality [SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation]	None / negligible	Library services have minimal direct impact on water quality or supply. Standard mitigation is ensuring good building management practices continue through council estates teams. No additional environmental risk is expected.
Sea around Britain [SDG 14: Life below water]	None	The library strategy has no direct impact on marine environments. No mitigation required
Adapting to climate change [SDG 13: Climate action]	Positive	Libraries contribute to climate resilience by providing safe, accessible community spaces—important during extreme weather events—and supporting low-carbon access to services, as many users walk to local branches (evidenced in strategy consultation outcomes). Improving building efficiency, making use of digital services, and ensuring buildings remain fit for purpose all support the council's climate adaptation objectives.

Section Six: Carbon Assessment

Type of carbon emission	What will impact will your proposal have? (positive / neutral / negative / mixed/ unknown)	Mitigation activities and / or comments
Scope 1 emissions	Neutral to Mixed	The library service does not operate its own fleet, so direct transport emissions are minimal. However, buildings require heating systems which contribute to Scope 1 emissions. The previous strategy emphasised ensuring buildings are “in the right location... run by the right people and delivering the right services,” indicating future opportunities to improve energy systems in aging buildings.
Scope 2 emissions (Purchased electricity)	Mixed (potential for positive impact)	Libraries use a significant amount of electricity due to public PCs, digital resources, and lighting. The strategy highlights extensive digital access (e.g., public PCs used for almost 98,000 hours and digital events), meaning electricity demand is substantial. However, a shift toward more energy-efficient ICT and modernising buildings can reduce consumption. The new strategy will continue to look at how to expand digital services, strengthening the need for efficient equipment and monitoring energy use.
Scope 3 emissions (Indirect emissions from services, procurement, waste)	Positive to Mixed	Libraries inherently support carbon reduction through shared borrowing models , significantly reducing the need for individual book purchases and supporting a circular economy. Existing strategy highlights strong stock management and digital borrowing, which reduces material movement and waste. Many residents walk to their local branch (as shown in consultation feedback), reducing transport-related emissions. Continued promotion of local access, digital resources, and sustainable procurement practices will strengthen positive impacts. All waste at branch libraries now conform to the new waste recycling legislation ensuring more products will be recycled and less to go in non-recyclable waste.