



# Inspiring and Supporting

the people of Kent

Libraries, Registration and Archives  
**2013-2014**

# Introduction

I am delighted to introduce to you this celebration of the many ways that Kent County Council's Libraries, Registration and Archives Service (LRA) is helping people all over Kent.

Times are challenging as the country is facing a difficult economic environment. This has a double impact on our services.

The need for what we offer is even greater. Our support comes in many shapes and at every stage in all our lives. For example we help our customers get qualifications for a job; stay healthy; and avoid loneliness and isolation. All this helps them develop and retain their independence, and live happy and prosperous lives.

We start at birth registration by gifting Bookstart packs; advising parents how to support their children's reading; and linking them with the help on offer from Children's Centres. And you are never too old to learn. Through our Touch a New World programme, volunteers teach housebound customers how to use the latest information technology to find information, save money, and keep in touch with friends and family.

Our staff and volunteers are trusted by so many of you that libraries make the ideal place for you to seek the information that helps you stay healthy; and with reading for leisure a proven stress buster, many of you are borrowing mood-boosting books when you visit the library.

Libraries have always been about bringing people together. But now we have integrated LRA services we have not only saved money, we have also found new ways to help communities grow and prosper. Through our libraries, local history and archive services, and in the Citizenship Ceremonies we provide for new UK citizens, we help people understand and feel part of their communities.



But, like all parts of the public sector, we also have to reduce what we spend. In the last six years LRA alone has reduced KCC's annual spend by £6m.

We have done this in many ways, for example integrating LRA enabled us to reduce the number of staff at all levels, while improving our services – offering more birth and death registration appointments at more venues, and adding evening and Saturday appointments. By rolling out Library Self Service we also delivered a net saving of £1m per year.

But this will not be enough. We know we will have to be even more innovative to find ways to save more money and protect the services you value. We are totally committed to do this because we know how important these services are and we are determined to protect them for the long term.

So read on, and celebrate with us the many heart-warming stories of how our staff and volunteers have helped people at critical places in their lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cath Anley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

**Cath Anley**

Head of Libraries, Registration and Archives

## section 1

# Encouraging you to read and supporting those who want to develop their reading skills

Whether it's the latest fiction, biography or reference collection, we can provide a choice of books, e-books and audio books that will inspire you to read and learn more.

But it's not just about providing books, we are passionate that everyone should be given a range of opportunities to discover and enjoy a life-long love of reading.





# Inspiring young readers

Helping children to develop their reading at a young age is essential to boosting their confidence and igniting their imaginations. From an early age the library offers a vital building block for education and a key skill for life. Here's just a few ways in which we do this.

## Summer reading for children

From July to September 2013 our annual Summer Reading Challenge inspired more than 14,000 children to read more. The free challenge for 4-11 year olds was simple - read six or more books to explore a 'Creepy House' themed wall chart and win stickers, a medal and certificate at the end.

Libraries across Kent encouraged youngsters to take part with a range of events, including 'spooky' face painting, and mask making. Online stories and games were also available for children to take part in as their reading progressed.

The two month challenge saw 14,157 children taking part and 6,673 children completing the six book challenge.



*"The whole challenge really sparked my children's enthusiasm. They were begging me to take them to the library!!!"*

## Bookstart

Bookstart is a national programme that encourages all parents and carers to enjoy books with their children from as early an age as possible.

We provide Bookstart packs containing free books at two key ages:

Children 0-12 months receive a Bookstart Baby Pack when parents register the birth of their child at a Kent library.

Children 36-48 months receive a Bookstart Treasure Pack, usually through pre-school settings.

This year alone we have distributed more than 40,000 Bookstart packs to new parents.

*"We really enjoy looking at books together and I hope it has positively impacted upon our bonding. We've played with books from very early on when we received our Bookstart books."*



# Let the library come to you

Imagine how isolated you might feel if you couldn't leave your home due to ill-health, a disability or caring responsibilities.

Our Home Library Service (HLS) offers a vital lifeline for people in these circumstances by bringing the library to them.

The service is made possible by our friendly volunteers who call at people's homes bringing them books (including large print), audio books, films and CDs of their choice.

One such customer of audio books, delivered by the Home Library Service, who cannot visit her local library said:

*"Thank you so much. I am so very grateful. Your service is my lifeline. The tapes mean so much to me."*

Another elderly customer wrote to us to say:

*"Thank all your staff too because when you become housebound only two things make you able to cling on to life. 1, Public Libraries and 2, Radio 4."*





# Support for reading groups

Reading groups are a great way of meeting people and sharing views about books that you might never have imagined reading.

We support around 650 reading groups in Kent with a range of book collections and many of them meet in library spaces; but some groups need a little extra help to get off the ground.

That's why we support groups such as Walmer Readers which allows people with learning difficulties to meet weekly in their local library. As well as the books, we provide a safe and familiar place for members to sit, chat and read. Alec, a carer for the group said:

*"They really look forward to and enjoy their visits to the library, I have noticed their confidence has improved together with their communication skills."*



Another group for people with visual impairments meets regularly in the Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone where members, both young and old, meet and discuss audio books. A new member called Sarah recently told a member of staff:

*"The group has opened up a whole new world to me."*

## section 2

# Helping you to find information and developing your digital skills

Technology is constantly improving and giving us more ways to find information than ever before. But keeping up with the 'digital age' can be challenging.

That's why we're working hard to help you find the information you want and help you develop the skills to make it easier to find what you need in the future.





# Ask us for information

At the touch of a button our Ask a Kent Librarian (AKL) service offers you a simple and easy way to unlock the information you need.

From business and legal information to contact details and e-book technical support - our team of trained staff are helping people to find whatever they are looking for.

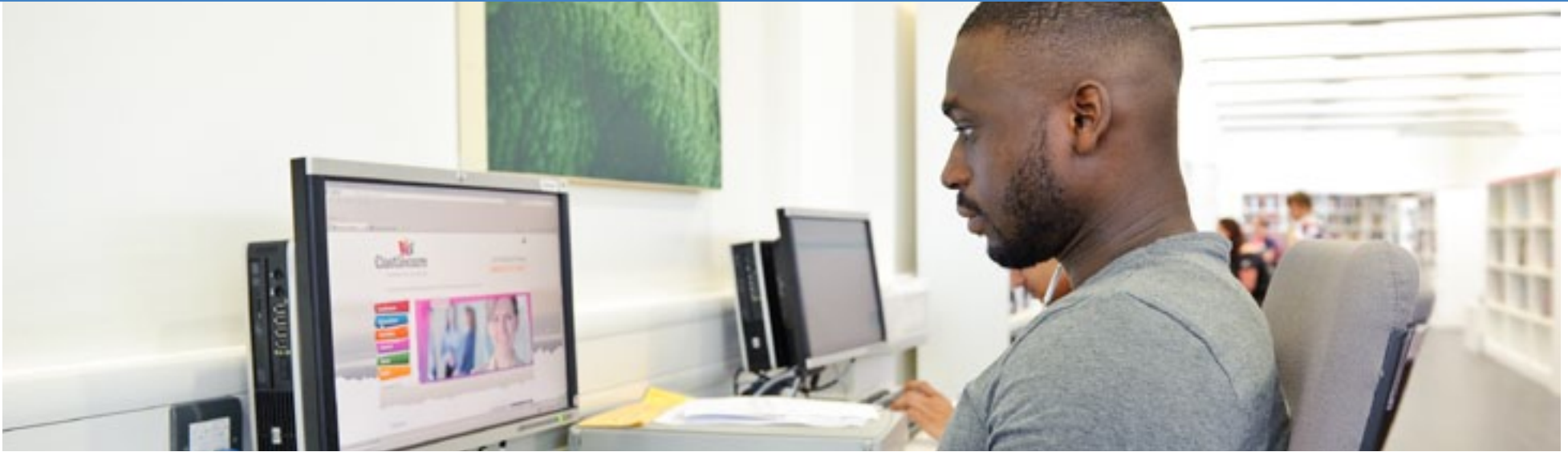
One such customer is Chris Raines. Chris used AKL to obtain research data for a promotional program to help regenerate the Folkestone economy. The team not only met his expectations, but exceeded them by customising the data to better meet his requirements.

Chris told us "It was excellent". Another customer is Madeline Jeffries who contacted the AKL team requesting business data. Madeline said;

*"The level of service provided by the AKL team has been exceptional and the response time to my request was particularly impressive."*

Customers can contact Ask a Kent Librarian in a range of ways that suit them including telephone, email, live web chat (available 24/7), text message and via our new mobile App.





## Helping you to find work

Unemployment can leave people feeling isolated and vulnerable, so to help we're giving people the tools and confidence they need to break out of this cycle and find a new job.

Our Work Clubs bring together jobseekers in places where they can access information and practical resources. Weekly sessions, normally run by volunteers, provide help with online job searching, creating or updating CVs, application form assistance, free printing, photocopying and postage for job applications - all within a comfortable space in their library.

Bill is in his early 50s and came looking for information on training courses and current vacancies after being made redundant from working in administration for 11 years.

He told us that the combination of good resources, informative staff and help in producing a strong CV has really boosted his self-esteem after struggling for so long on his own.

*"I learnt so much in just a couple of hours."*

# New ways to connect with your past



Keeping a record of our lives is a crucial way to understanding the past and maintaining the history of the people and places in the county.

The Kent History and Library Centre in Maidstone holds over 14 kilometres of historic records including manuscripts, volumes, charters, maps, prints and photographs. The centre is used by people from all over Kent and beyond, where our trained staff are happy to offer help and advice.

But you don't always need to come to us. We're working hard to get more and more material available online - so it's never been easier to get your historical research started. The online information currently includes catalogues and guides to the collections as well as digital images of some of our records.

We also provide the Certificate Centre for Kent, based at The Mansion House in Tunbridge Wells. The Certificate Centre holds all the completed registers for Kent and Bexley since 1 July 1837 and we can supply a certified copy of any Kent and Bexley birth, death or marriage entry from any register within our care.

But we're not just helping people to find out about the past or assisting with their family history, our work is changing people's lives for the better; one customer contacted us to thank us for helping his son to research the Tudor Rebellions for his final A level exams:

*"He secured an A grade and we were told that the extra information, research and references he used was a critical factor.*

*More good news is that he got the grades he needed to secure a place at Kings College London where he will be reading history.*

*Once again thank you so much for your kind assistance and guidance, I just wanted you to know that it is really appreciated and that it really made a difference."*



# Touch a new world

The Home Library Service (HLS) is a key way to preventing social isolation, but what about digital exclusion?

Answering this question prompted us to give customers the additional opportunity to learn new information technology (IT) skills in their own home.

'Touch a new world' is a trial initiative currently underway with HLS customers with the goal to ensure people have access to the information they need and to help them to develop the confidence to use IT and the Internet.

The trial works by providing one-to-one support, from trained volunteers, for people who have access to IT but are lacking the skills to use it. But we are also lending IT equipment, such as iPads, to those who don't have their own.

So far feedback about the benefits of the trial has been very positive with one HLS customer saying:

*"Before I was useless and now quite happy.  
The sessions were really good and I enjoyed them.  
I am more confident than I was before.  
My sons can't believe it! Thank you so much."*



# Read yourself well

Reading is one of the best ways to relax and even six minutes reading a day can be enough to reduce stress levels by 68% according to research.

That's why we're taking part in the 'Reading Well - Mood-boosting Books' scheme - a national promotion of uplifting novels, non-fiction and poetry selected by other readers.

To further support this, we're also taking part in the national 'Reading Well - Books on Prescription' scheme.

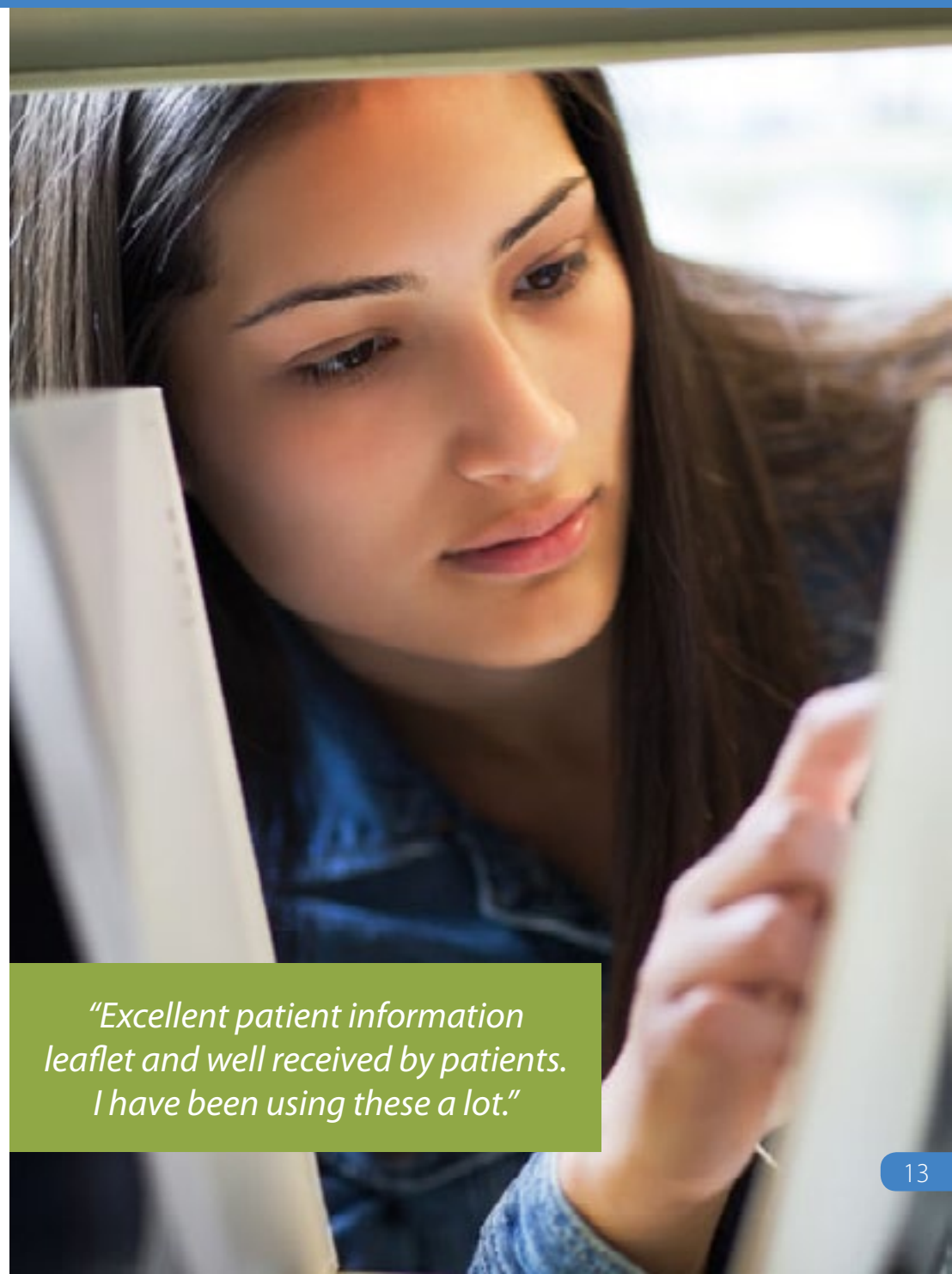
The scheme aims to assist people with mild to moderate mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, phobias and eating disorders by giving them access to information, before their problems overwhelm them.

The process is simple; GPs and other health professionals prescribe books, selected by mental health professionals, to patients. They can then go into their local library to borrow the recommended books and if the book is not immediately available locally, we will order it free of charge.

One customer told us how he has benefitted:

*"I have suffered mental health problems and referred to your books on eating disorders. I go to my library most days now and wouldn't know what to do without it."*

GPs are also praising the scheme for the benefits it has in preventing the need for more costly treatments later on:



*"Excellent patient information leaflet and well received by patients. I have been using these a lot."*

# Helping new parents to give their child the best start in life

Becoming a parent is an exciting experience but it can also be overwhelming for many people, particularly if they are isolated and on low incomes.

Finding information and support isn't always easy so we have teamed up with Children's Centres in Kent to run a pilot scheme in Tonbridge, Swale and Thanet districts, that gives parents access to the help they might need.

Registering births in Kent Libraries gives us the ideal opportunity to meet new parents, so after the formal registration of the birth of their baby, we talk to parents about Children's Centres and the sort of activities and support they offer. If a family is interested and gives their consent, we complete an online form and send it to the Children's Centre who will get in touch with more information.

Each Children's Centre offers a variety of services including childcare and early education provision, support for parents thinking about training or finding a new job, antenatal classes and baby clinics, services for children with special needs and disabilities, and links with voluntary agencies and local schools.

The aim is to help families by offering them support at the very earliest stage in their child's life.



*"I think the information is really useful and could help to re-enforce or help to identify more vulnerable families"*

**Children's Centre Manager in Thanet**



## section 3

# Bringing people together and strengthening communities

From weddings and citizenship ceremonies to baby rhyme time and homework clubs, our services bring people of all kinds together.

This is vital to help build strong communities, develop a sense of belonging and to give people the opportunity to meet and help each other.





## Bringing history to you

Knowing who we are, where we come from and how the world around us has changed is an important part of understanding our heritage and our history.

Documentarium is an art exhibition that uses Kent's varied collection of archives to demonstrate that history, in a colourful and exciting way.

The exhibition has been created by internationally-renowned artist Alan Kane, and features copies of some of the more unusual and fascinating archives held in the Kent History and Library Centre; from ancient documents to sketches, strange photos and old letters.

With the help of local community groups, Documentarium is touring the county's 12 districts throughout 2014, helping to build community cohesion along the way and a lasting legacy for people to enjoy.

To make this possible we secured £73,650 funding from The Arts Council's Strategic Touring Programme and are working in partnership with colleagues in Arts and Culture Services, Gravesham Borough Council, Trinity Arts Centre, Stour Valley Arts, Ashford Borough Council, The Turner Contemporary, Sheerness Gateway and Canterbury City Council.



# Welcoming new citizens

Each year we provide more than 118 citizenship ceremonies for people from all over the world who want to work, live and contribute to their new communities in Kent.

Around 3000 new citizens attend our ceremonies each year and our Volunteers regularly attend to welcome them, promote our services and present a souvenir picture book on Kent to them. Children attending also receive a copy of Eric Carle's The Very Hungry Caterpillar.

One new citizen told us:

*"It was one of the best days of my life."*





# Providing safe places to meet and relax within local communities

We offer a range of regular social activities and events for everyone to enjoy at their local library. For many, these activities offer a vital opportunity to make new friends and talk about shared interests and experiences. Here's just a few examples of how we make a difference.

## Bringing young families together

Parents with babies and young children are being given the opportunity to make friends and enjoy time in a comfortable place thanks to free events such as Rhyme Time, Story Time and Toddler Time at local libraries. The sessions, run across the county by our staff and volunteers, are great for family communication, social inclusion, children's developmental progress, boosting confidence and are great fun!

*"Harry's speech was delayed and coming to the singing each week has really helped him to be more confident talking in social settings. It's a really well-run session. Thank you"*

*"Story time saved my sanity and I am so glad it is on during the summer holidays when everything else stops"*



## Time to talk

Talk Time groups aim to bring people of all ages together, prevent isolation and improve their social lives. Most libraries host a weekly Talk Time group offering a variety of activities, speakers, quizzes, recreational activities or just tea and a friendly chat, so people can help each other.



One customer wrote:

*"I know how much this group means to everyone as my recently widowed mother aged 75 years old has moved here and felt like a fish out of water. She has now met so many new friends and found out so much information through just talking to various people, she has found a new lease of life."*



## Practise English groups

We're also helping people to improve their English with adult learning groups being held across the county. These informal sessions allow people, where English is not their first language, to meet up once a week to practise speaking English in an informal and relaxed setting. They are volunteer led and are promoted through local ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes.



## Dementia friendly libraries

Dementia is something that can affect any of us, so when evidence emerged that reading has a positive effect on people living with the condition, we wanted to help.

Now, in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society, Dementia UK, Age Concern and others, we have developed an innovative approach.

'Read Aloud' and 'Pictures to Share' sessions are now offered across Kent which involve using books with pictures, stories and poetry to stimulate memories, enjoyment and build connections between the people living with dementia and their carers or family members.

The scheme has been so successful that it was one of two runners-up for the Chartered Institute for Libraries and Information Professionals' (CILIP) Libraries Change Lives awards.

A customer living with dementia who attended a session at a dementia café commented:

*"Looking at the books evoked wonderful memories for everyone of the way things used to be - tickets on the bus, fashions, old games before computers were invented!"*



# Providing perfect ceremonies

From castles and stately homes to tree houses, windmills and lighthouses, we provide wedding and civil partnership licences to more than 200 venues across Kent and Bexley - including our own range of Register Offices.

We also deliver around 5,000 ceremonies a year in Kent and Bexley, including Welcomings and Renewal of Vows, attracting visitors from all over the UK and beyond. And with the average wedding now costing more than £18,000, we help to bring tens of millions of pounds into the county - boosting tourism and income for local businesses and suppliers.

One bride who held her wedding ceremony with us wrote:

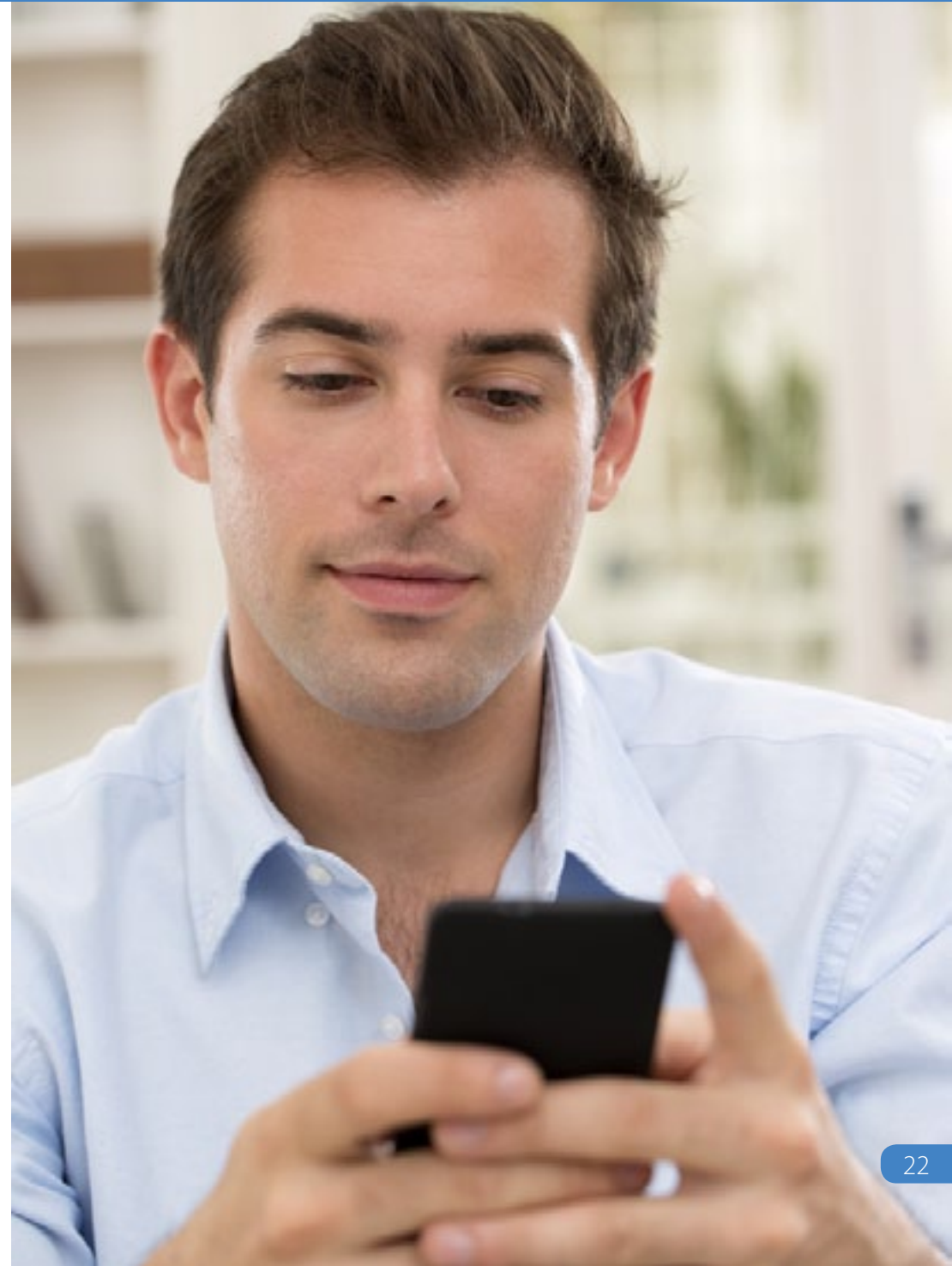
*"I was late and the wedding rings were lost. The staff were totally unflappable and calmly and efficiently dealt with it all. Thank you all the truly lovely staff at Ashford Register Office - you were wonderful."*



## section 4

# Saving you money and helping you manage your busy lives

In the modern world we know that you expect to access the services you need, when you want to. That's why we're using technology and innovation to provide our services in new, more convenient ways - saving you time and money.





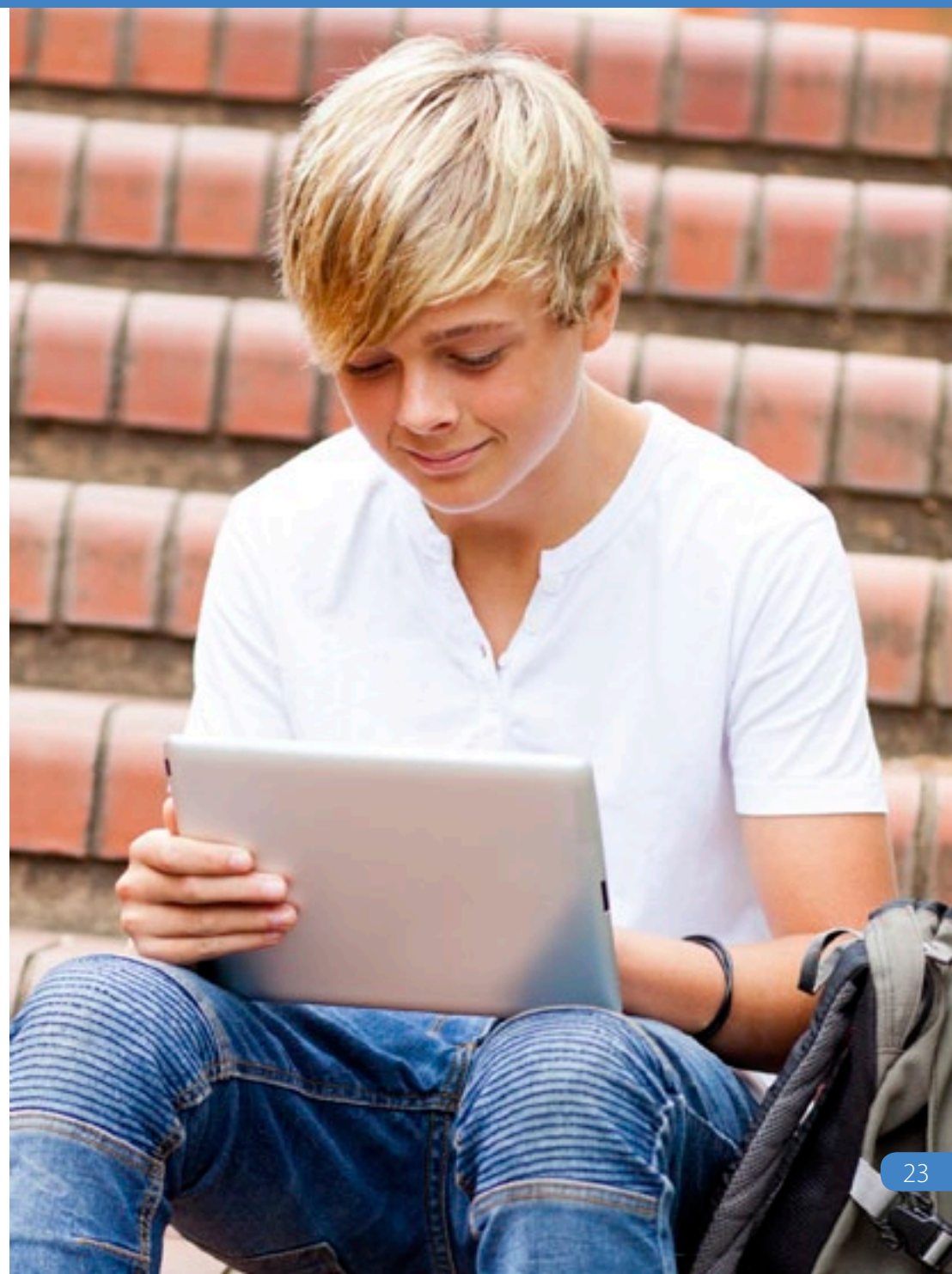
# Access your library from anywhere

Technology is making it possible for you to access a range of library services without needing to spend time and money coming to us. Instead, simply do it online or pick up the phone.

You can check opening times, book a library computer, browse our catalogue, as well as reserve or renew books online from any computer by logging into your library account.

Alternatively you can also use our new mobile App which will allow you to access the range of online services on your smartphone or tablet. In addition, the App makes it possible to join a library, scan the barcode of any book to see if we have it in stock, get directions to all our libraries, including up-to-date public transport information, browse library events and view our Facebook feed for news.

And if you can't get online, don't worry, as we now offer an automated telephone service too so you can call us 24 hours a day, seven days a week to renew your items. All you need is your borrower number and PIN number and we'll do the rest.





# E-Books and e-audio books

Borrowing the perfect book whilst sitting in your office, or even on the bus or train, is now a reality thanks to our virtual library service.

Simply by logging on to our website at [kent.gov.uk/libraries](http://kent.gov.uk/libraries), you can now access a wide range of eAudiobooks (digital versions of a recorded reading of a book) and eBooks (digital versions of traditional print books) which can be downloaded to your computer (for transfer to an MP3 player or eReader), smartphone or tablet.

The free virtual service is becoming increasingly popular with more than 18,000 eAudio books and 50,000 eBooks being downloaded in the past 12 months.



One customer emailed us to say:

*"This is an absolutely brilliant service, which allows me, my husband and my children to download books onto my e-reader, and to take all of our books with us everywhere"*

# Providing more convenient services to meet your needs

Change isn't always easy but we're thinking innovatively and doing things differently to make our services work for you. Here's a few examples:

## Avoid paying fines

Forgetting to return borrowed items to the library is easily done, but now you can be saved the expense of overdue fees thanks to a new automated service that sends you an email reminder three days before your items are due for return.

Anyone borrowing items from libraries can take advantage of the free service, which provides reminders for book, CD and DVD loans, as long they give us a current email address.

You can also opt to receive the alerts on a smart phone by loading the new library smart phone App, or you can renew items 24/7 online via the website. Here's what one customer had to say:

*"Very courteous, thank you for the reminder.  
Great service"*



## Register life events in more locations

Registering a birth or death is an important event in anyone's life, so we wanted to provide more registration appointments at the times and places that suit you.

Moving registration appointments out of register offices and into libraries was a sensitive issue but we knew that by integrating services we could deliver savings to you as a tax payer and improve customer service at the same time.

Since integrating registration and library services in 2012, we now offer appointments in comfortable, private spaces in over 20 library locations. Appointments are often available the next day and some can be made on weekday evenings and Saturdays.

## Helping you to do things more quickly

It's always good when services can be delivered quickly and efficiently, and that's why we installed self-service kiosks across many Kent Libraries.

You can put all your items in the kiosk at the same time and they will all be processed together - completing the transaction within a matter of seconds. It's quick and easy to use self-service to borrow, return, renew, view your account details and pay for things - giving our staff more time to offer help and advice in the library.

## Online certificate applications

We're committed to putting you in control and making services available at the touch of a button, and online certificate ordering is the next way in which we're delivering this promise to you.

From mid 2014, you will be able to search, order, and pay for any birth, death or marriage certificate in our care online - along with a choice of standard or express delivery options to suit your needs.

So whether you're based in Kent or in the furthest regions of the UK, you can get what you need quickly and efficiently.

For more information on the stories in this document, visit [kent.gov.uk/libs](http://kent.gov.uk/libs)

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