

OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022

INSPIRING, CONNECTING AND
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Prepared by the Department of Rural
and Community Development, the County
and City Management Association and the
Local Government Management Agency.



A bright, attractive, trusted, welcoming, civic space

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1.

FOREWORD



The public library is a trusted and valued community asset at the heart of the community. It is a catalyst for change, facilitating social, economic and cultural development and supports communities to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them by a modern society. Our public library service is much changed since 1998 when we published the first national strategy for public libraries, **Branching Out**. We have a public library service that is increasingly progressive, innovative and responsive; that delivers world-leading services; and is supported by committed staff.

While **Opportunities for All**, the public library strategy for 2013 to 2017, was delivered in socially and economically challenging times, it delivered some very significant innovations for the service, including a national library catalogue supported by a national delivery system. Public libraries continue to deliver a local service – and I believe this is critical to the long-term sustainability of the library service – but it is now a local service with a national reach.

Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities is an ambitious strategy to develop the public library service over the next five years. Building on technological and service innovations of recent years, it focuses on improving access, use and visibility of the public library and establishing it as the go-to place for a range of sustainable, integrated public services.

While the library is clearly seen as an essential community service – one the public would like to be available more often – we face a challenge to bridge the gap between the public's perception of the library's importance and their actual use of libraries. I am confident that library management and staff will rise to this challenge in the coming years and we will develop the library service as a relevant, modern and high quality service available and accessible to all.

My Department will underpin the strategy with continued investment, developing high quality library buildings that reflect the quality of services available, improving access and opening hours, and enhancing ICT capacity.

I welcome this ambitious public library strategy which I am confident will establish the library service as a relevant, modern and high-quality service available and accessible to all.

I want to thank everybody who helped us to develop the strategy over the last year. It strongly reflects the feedback from the consultations – many thanks to all who participated including library staff, local authority elected members, City and County Librarians and the more than 200 respondents to the public consultation process.

Finally, thank you to the Libraries Development Committee and the working group members for shaping a strategy to support the development of a public library service to inspire, connect and empower our communities over the next five years and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Ring". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the name.

Michael Ring T.D.

Minister for Rural and Community Development



The public library service is provided to the public by the 31 local authorities across the country. It is a long established integral element of local communities, providing a wide range of services and supports to its members and membership is open to everyone. In the past five years, under **Opportunities for All**, the public library strategy 2013-2017, a significant amount of progress has been made in developing and expanding the role of libraries. There is still considerable potential to increase membership and usage, make libraries more relevant to a broader audience and enhance the role of libraries in the delivery of local services.

Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities has been developed to realise this potential. The strategy is progressive and ambitious for the development of the local authority

library service. Its delivery requires the commitment and support of local and central government to ensure that the library infrastructure is fit for purpose and that library staff are equipped to deliver the various programmes and initiatives.

The strategy will focus on the core functions of the library service, bringing greater structure and consistency to the library's role in literacy support, supporting lifelong learning opportunities and establishing the library as the key place for accessing reliable and authoritative information. It will support the library staff, who are central to the successful delivery of library services, to develop and enhance their skills. **Our Public Libraries 2022** will also draw on the capacity of our 330 libraries to deliver these services in partnership with other local agencies, development bodies and community groups.

As Chair of the Libraries Development Committee, which has the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of **Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities**, I am looking forward to working in partnership with all local authorities, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Local Government Management Agency and all stakeholders in its delivery. Over the next five years, I am confident that the measures undertaken with the implementation of the strategy will deliver an enhanced library service, more integrated, more visible and more accessible in the local community.

Tom Enright

Chair, Libraries Development Committee

2.

**OVERVIEW – DEVELOPING
A MODERN PUBLIC
LIBRARY SERVICE**

Value of the Public Library Service

A modern and well-resourced public library contributes to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of communities. The public library supports people and communities through its civic presence. It provides information, supports learning and culture and is a focal point for a growing number of public services.

The library is a trusted space, integrated into the local community and accessible to all. It supports and facilitates education and skills development. Through the promotion of literacy supports, the library complements mainstream education and provides a space for children and adults to learn and develop. It is a resource for developing digital skills and literacy, it provides cultural and educational outreach programmes that empower communities, facilitates community cohesion, reduces isolation and contributes to pride of place.

A modern 21st century library also supports economic development and the delivery of important local services. It works in partnership with local agencies supporting business, enterprise and employment creation, linking people with jobs by developing employability skills and sharing job seeking supports.

The value of the public library service to people and communities is reflected in the recent survey of library services in Ireland and the UK, ***Shining a Light***, commissioned by the Carnegie UK Trust in 2017¹. Libraries clearly remain very popular among local communities with almost 80% of people stating libraries were important to their communities.

Nevertheless, given the level of perceived importance, there is clear potential to encourage significantly greater use of the library by the public. While library users are, by and large, satisfied with the service provided, the public consultation shows that even those users who say they are very familiar with the service may be unaware of some of the important innovations of recent years.

1 Shining a Light, Carnegie Trust UK (2017), <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/shining-a-light/>

Public Libraries – A Brief Background

Each local authority is responsible for managing and delivering the public library service in its administrative area. The *Public Libraries Act 1855* provided the foundation for the development of public libraries in Ireland, empowering local authorities to levy rates for the provision of public library services.

In 1947, *An Chomhairle Leabharlanna* was established under the Public Libraries Act – its functions included assisting and supporting local authorities and advising the responsible Minister on the strategic development of the public library service. These functions were transferred to Libraries Development, Local Government Management Agency in 2012.

The *Public Library Grants Scheme* was introduced by the *Minister for Local Government* in 1961 and provided an exchequer subsidy on loans raised by local authorities to fund new libraries. In 1988, a new *Public Library Buildings Capital Programme* was launched, providing up to 75% grant aid to the cost of developing new libraries. The programme invested significantly in new libraries; however, it was clear that a national investment programme needed to be underpinned by a planned strategic approach.

The first public library strategy, ***Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*** was published in 1998 and focused on providing equal access for all to information, support for life-long learning and community-based support for literacy training and reading. It was followed by ***Branching Out: Future Directions*** in 2008.



Attracting users of all ages

The **Branching Out** strategies provided a framework to modernise the public library service and develop a service closer to that offered in similar countries across the European Union (EU). Between 1998 and 2012, some €131 million was invested by the exchequer in library buildings; this was co-funded by local authorities and delivered 95 libraries nationwide. There was investment in ICT and increased spending on stock, while online public access was provided to catalogues, resources and digitised local studies content. This investment led to considerable growth in the use of the service – stock issues increased by 55% and between 2008 and 2012, visits to libraries grew by 15%.

Opportunities for All, A Strategy for Public Libraries 2013-2017 set out an ambitious approach to further develop and deliver a library service to meet the information, learning and cultural needs of individuals and communities. The strategy was developed in the context of the economic downturn and of government drivers of economic growth and stability. It built on the success of previous strategies and identified three strategic themes: economic, social and cultural development. Investment continued on a smaller scale than previous strategies, while new and innovative services continued to be developed. It focused on developing services that could be provided by public libraries to respond to the needs of communities.

Opportunities for All sought to develop a network of libraries that could contribute to the country's economic recovery by delivering information, learning skills and creativity, and guiding access to quality information, ideas and knowledge. Secondly, it aimed to support social development, building individual self-worth, community wellbeing and community cohesion. Finally, it sought to develop libraries as agents of cultural development and a focus for cultural identity in the community, preserving and embracing diverse cultures and providing opportunities for creative development and collective cultural experience.

Between 2013 and 2017 there were 45 new or re-developed libraries delivered – 29 of these delivered jointly by central government and local authorities, and the remaining 16 solely by local authorities.

Expenditure on book stock increased by 15%, from €7.7 million in 2012 to €8.8 million in 2016; while the number of visits to libraries increased by almost 500,000, from 16.8 million in 2012 to 17.3 million in 2016.

By 2017, library members and users had access to 330 library branches and 31 mobile libraries across 31 local authorities. They can now access over 12 million books through the national catalogue and stock delivery service.

The Public Library Service in 2017

The public library –

- ➔ is now a free service for everyone in all libraries across the country,
- ➔ is a local service with a nationwide reach – members can use all library services, including borrowing and returning items at any library in the country,
- ➔ offers a national public library catalogue supported by a nationwide delivery service – items can be ordered online or in person and delivered quickly to the local library – **the first such national service anywhere in the world,**
- ➔ provides access to a large collection of free online resources, with more than –
 - 400 e-learning courses and 80 online language courses,
 - 17,000 e-books and 7,000 e-audio books, and
 - 300 international magazine titles and 1,300 accessible newspapers,

CURRENT PROFILE OF LIBRARIES

330
library branches &
31
mobile libraries
across 31
local authorities



754,748
members
in 2016

45
new or
extended library
branches between
2012 and 2017



Expenditure on stock has
increased

15%

from €7,678,118 in 2012 to
€8,819,676
in 2016

- ➔ delivers a national literacy and reading programme – **Right to Read** – through a core set of services and resources,
- ➔ delivers a national **Work Matters** programme of services for business and employment supports for locally based entrepreneurs, start-ups and job seekers,
- ➔ operates under a set of **Public Library National Standards and Benchmarks** which guide the development of the library service,
- ➔ delivers the **Healthy Ireland at Your Library** initiative – developing health information in public libraries, providing book-stock, e-books, e-audiobooks and e-magazines on health and wellbeing, as well as talks, discussions and workshops with a focus on physical health, mental health and health literacy, and
- ➔ has a significant cultural role, for example, delivering and co-ordinating both the **Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022** and **Creative Ireland 2017-2022**.



17,983,358
items issued in 2016



17,270,751

Visits to libraries in 2016

In 2016, library members were able to access

over 12 million books

that were available as part of the national catalogue and delivery system.



Our Public Libraries 2022: Public Library Strategy

Substantial progress has been achieved under each of the three previous strategies – **Branching Out**, **Branching Out – Future Directions** and **Opportunities for All** – with common threads across the three strategy periods. Each strategy built on the progress of its predecessor, seeking to develop a library service that embraced technological opportunities, was more responsive to user needs and more accessible to people and communities.

Much has been achieved since the first strategy was published in 1998, but continuing societal change, technological advancements and growing expectations of members and users means that libraries need to continuously evolve to remain relevant and meet the expectations of an ever changing society.

The new strategy looks to build on the momentum of achievements under previous strategies. **Our Public Libraries 2022** maintains the focus on developing the library service as an evolving 21st century public service at the heart of communities, while also keeping faith with the general approach of previous strategies. It focuses on three strategic programmes – *reading and literacy development, learning and information, and community and culture*.

Loughboy Library, Kilkenny



CONSULTATION

The *Strategic Programmes* and *Strategy Enablers* reflect the output of extensive consultations.

This included public consultation between December 2017 and February 2018. More than 200 responses and submissions were received and these are reflected strongly in the strategy. The public consultation sought views and input on key priorities for the library service, changes required, resources, barriers to use and accessibility. The strategy was also shaped significantly by outputs from –

- ➔ **ten public focus groups** designed to capture the views of key public user groups,
- ➔ **four library staff workshops** open to all public library staff – these were complemented by staff consultations in individual local authorities,
- ➔ **three regional workshops with local elected members** facilitated by the Association of Irish Local Government,
- ➔ three workshops with **public library and local authority senior managers**.

A report on the consultation process is published separately.

Vision

Public libraries are attractive and welcoming spaces where all members of the community can access knowledge, ideas and information, and where people can reflect, connect and learn.

VALUES OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Consultation on the strategy identified key values and principles that staff and users associated with the library service:



Values

The public library service is a civic resource rooted in our communities. The library supports community life and individual self-development. The library service has identified a set of values that form the foundation of the public library service.

Minister Michael Ring, Carrickphierish Library Launch





Our Ambition

Over the next five years, we will build on our strong and trusted brand. We will strengthen the public library at the centre of the community to –

- ➔ firmly establish the library as a welcoming, *go-to-place* locally with skilled staff providing guidance and support across a range of areas, including –
 - reading and literacy,
 - lifelong learning for all ages,
 - business and employment, and
 - healthy living and wellbeing.
- ➔ reinforce the local library as a trusted place at the centre of the community, with access to communal spaces, services and resources for all people and communities at the times that suit them most,
- ➔ secure equitable access for all by removing barriers, streamlining the process for joining and improving access to services for all communities,
- ➔ improve user experience, technology, resources and opening hours to provide a better service to more people, and
- ➔ increase library use and grow active membership from the current level of 16% of the population to 30%.

Investing for the future

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Ireland's public libraries should be viewed in the broader international context which has seen contrasting fortunes for national library services.

Some areas, including the United Kingdom and parts of the United States, have experienced severe cuts to their library services over the past decade. These have resulted in reduced library use and book lending, library closures and reduced opening hours. In some cases, libraries are operated as passive venues with little staff intervention, while community libraries run by volunteers have been introduced with reduced resource and funding support from central and local government.

Other countries have had a mixed experience. In Germany, user participation has increased over the last several years, however, there has been no similar increase in funding resulting in a service that more people use but with limited capacity to support them. The Netherlands is seeing a new investment in libraries, but as part of a solution to the problem of closed community centres across the country.

Norway and Finland have seen growing importance and use of their libraries, although with differing emphases. Norway has targeted reading and digital literacy as areas of their greatest focus, while Finland is emphasising the library's role as a community space.

IRISH CONTEXT

The library service in Ireland is a significant local and national asset with committed central and local government support and funding to develop the service. While this puts the library service in a very strong position, it still faces a number of challenges in the coming years.

There is significant potential to grow membership which currently stands at 16% of the population. There is a good library network of 330 branches across the country, but many library buildings need to be rebuilt, expanded or redeveloped and there are some gaps in service provision nationwide. Staffing levels and workforce skills deficits resulting from the economic downturn are in the process of being rebuilt. Resource issues have hampered public libraries' ability to keep pace with user needs, libraries have had limited capacity to adopt new user technologies, and there is now unevenness in infrastructure, ICT and services across local authorities.

POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH

Our public library service is built on a very solid foundation. It is a world leader in many ways and remains a strong and trusted brand. It is a valued community resource offering free access across all libraries and mobile libraries. It is underpinned by a committed national workforce structure that has seen staffing levels increase each year under ***Opportunities for All***. New and innovative services and resources have been introduced and important national and local relationships have been developed to support delivery of these services and resources. Despite a low active membership, there has been an annual increase in user visits from 16.7 million in 2012 to 17.2 million in 2017. Most importantly, there remains strong local and central government commitment to support, develop and resource the service as a modern multi-functional service at the heart of communities.

DEVELOPING THE SERVICE

While the library service faces a challenge to respond to changing needs of society, it has considerable potential to develop over the next five years as a modern, relevant and high-quality service. Exploiting this potential and providing a service that meets the needs of all users will require –

- ➔ skilled, knowledgeable and confident library staff,
- ➔ library buildings that are fit for purpose and reflect the quality of services on offer,
- ➔ a library service with no barriers to access and use, and
- ➔ libraries with the technological capacity to deliver services and resources demanded by a modern society.

VISION FOR OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022

A **bright attractive, trusted, welcoming, civic space**



Self-service with **extended opening hours**

Centrally located, **accessible and visible**



Leading edge digital technologies to enhance the service and available for users with support from staff

A **focal point** for all public services



Free service, no fines or lending charges

Valued by and **essential to communities**



friendly, skilled staff, actively supporting and guiding users throughout the library

Attracting users of **all ages** in large numbers



A **wide range of resources and services** for work, leisure, learning and creativity, online and in-library

A **meeting place,** informally and formally



Workstation facilities for hot-desking

The go-to place locally, with **national reach**



Attracting and benefiting **local residents and users**

Places for **creativity and culture**

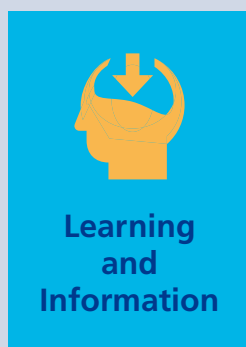
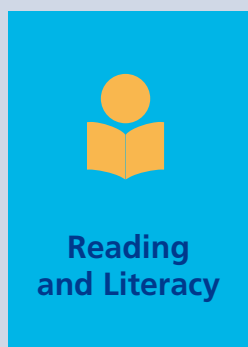


Over the next five years, we will –

- ➔ support our library staff to develop their skills and deliver services that enhance the user experience,
- ➔ invest in our library infrastructure to realise our ambitions for the public library service,
- ➔ develop new funding programmes to support the delivery of library services and resources based on the most up-to-date technology,
- ➔ remove fines and lending charges for all library members and users,
- ➔ strengthen relationships with key partners, locally and nationally, to deliver more co-ordinated, impactful and sustainable library services,
- ➔ invest in promoting the library service at national and local levels to strengthen the library brand, and
- ➔ work with local partners to promote the range of services and resources on offer to communities, particularly the most disadvantaged and marginalised.

STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES AND ENABLERS

The strategy sets out **three strategic programmes for service development:**



The implementation of these is **supported by six strategy enablers:**



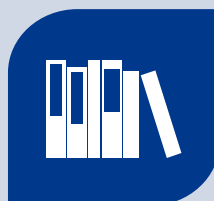
Infrastructure and Service Delivery



Library Team



Promotion and Marketing



Collections



Research and Development



Funding

Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities – Our Libraries in 2022

The strategy focuses on developing the library service as a modern 21st century public service while building on established library functions and best practice.

At its core are **three Strategic Programmes** identified through an extensive research and consultation process that looked at best practice internationally and took into account the views of the public, elected representatives, library staff, local authority management and stakeholder government departments and organisations. These strategic programmes build on progress under **Opportunities for All**, expanding the role of the library as an essential community service and supporting communities to grow and develop so they can meet the challenges posed by modern society.

The *Strategic Programmes* are underpinned by **six Strategy Enablers** reflecting the areas to be developed if programme objectives and strategic ambitions are to be realised.

Carrickpherish Library, Waterford



4.

THE STRATEGIC PROGRAMMES

The three *Strategic Programmes* – Reading and Literacy, Information and Learning, and Community, Culture – reflect the public library’s established role in these areas and frame our strategic goals for the next five-years.

1. Strategic Programme – Reading and Literacy

Strong literacy skills provide long term social, educational and economic benefits. Public libraries have always been at the forefront of supporting and developing literacy skills, reading, creativity and innovation, and helping people realise their potential.

It is important to retain and enhance reading and literacy development as one of the core functions of the public library service. The new strategy seeks to bring structure and consistency to the library’s role in supporting literacy and to build on the work started under the **Right to Read** literacy initiative.

We will –

- 1** Firmly establish the library as the centre for reading and literacy development in the community.
- 2** Promote the benefits of literacy and reading development for all ages and provide opportunities for people to develop as literate and informed individuals.

Encouraging children and adults to read / read more. To create a place of refuge, to relax, to contemplate, escape our busy lives and screens!

Audrey Mc Cormack





Tipperary Library Service

RIGHT TO READ – A LOCAL CROSS-GOVERNMENT LITERACY INITIATIVE

Right to Read is a collaborative cross-government initiative that provides a nationally coordinated framework for literacy support and reading development in all local authorities. It is funded primarily by local authorities and implemented through *Right to Read Action Plans* in each city and county. *Right to Read* supports literacy development for individuals, families and children and provides core services, resources and initiatives for a range of user groups.

DONEGAL RIGHT TO READ PROGRAMME 2017

In 2017, Donegal County Library Service focused on support for children and families – its *Right to Read Action Plan* included *Spring into Storytime* sessions with more than 280 participants, the *Summer Stars Reading Programme* during the summer months with 2,300 participants, and the *Wainfest Arts and Books Festival* enjoyed by an audience of over 7,100. Other projects with network partners included *Bookworm Babies* and *Creating Lifelong Readers with Lifestart*, as well as programmes with local schools such as *Battle of the Books* and *Bite Size Books*.

2. Strategic Programme – Learning and Information

Public libraries support and facilitate learning, provide access to information and support the acquisition of new skills. These services are available to every member of the community through their local library branch. Providing access to information and guiding individuals in their information seeking is a central role of the library service. The library team are expert guides and can ensure that information accessed is appropriate, relevant and supports users pursuing lifelong learning, job and business advice and healthy living.

LIFELONG LEARNING

The public library is ideally suited to support ongoing learning in literacy, including digital literacy, through the provision of programmes and access to essential information and communications technology. The library can contribute significantly to the lifelong learning aspirations of users through the provision of both formal and self-guided courses.

The age profile in Ireland is changing. For example, the proportion of people in Ireland aged 65 years and over is expected to increase to 20% of the population between now and 2036². Lifelong learning provides significant benefits for an ageing population, resulting in improved quality of life, not just for the individuals, but also for the people around them.

We will –

- 3** Provide opportunities for all users to engage in lifelong learning through the delivery of services developed in collaboration with national and local partners.

A place of peace, connectedness and learning.

Patricia Lyons, Tara Book Company

2 Age Action Ireland Strategic Plan 2016-2018
https://www.ageaction.ie/sites/default/files/attachments/age_action_strategic_plan_2016_-_2018.pdf



CORK CITY LIBRARIES – AT THE HEART OF THE LEARNING CITY

For the past 125 years Cork City Libraries have been a key resource for learning in the city. As lifelong learning becomes more important in the 21st century and learners' needs become more diverse and personal, Cork City Libraries have evolved to meet the learning needs of children and adults. Expert staff, extensive collections and accessible learning spaces provide the people of the city with the knowledge and information skills they need in the 21st century, and the workplace skills they need for their own advancement and for the economic development of the city. These skills begin with literacy in all its forms – digital, cultural and information – plus communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation.

Cork City is designated a UNESCO City of Learning, one of only three in Europe. In September 2017, Cork hosted the *UNESCO International Conference on Learning Cities* – the first time this event was held in Europe. Cork City Libraries hosted sessions and special events. They continue to be major participants in many of the City of Learning activities: the *Lifelong Learning Festival*, the *Bealtaine* festival for older people, and a range of adult education initiatives which support lifelong learning. Libraries provide space and supports for classes organised by *Centre for Adult & Continuing Education*, *University College Cork* and the *Cork Education & Training Board*.

INFORMATION

Providing access to information and guiding people who are seeking information is an essential support for learning, development and wellbeing. This is a core function of the library service, but it is a function that needs to be reimagined, especially if the library is to help users find their way through the myriad learning and information sources available today in hard copy and online.

LIFELONG LEARNING

By end of 2014,
the Irish participation rate
in **lifelong learning** was

7.3%

among adults aged
between 25 and 64.

The EU has set a benchmark
for **adults aged between
25 and 64** of

15%

**lifelong learning
participation³ by 2020.**

We will –

- 4** Firmly establish the library as the 'go-to-place' for information and information-seeking skills.
- 5** Support users to become self-sufficient in information-seeking and research, offering informed recommendations and enabling access to research resources.

WORK MATTERS: BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Work Matters is an innovative service provided by libraries in all 31 local authority areas. It provides support (together with local partners) to people seeking employment or developing small businesses. Local partners include the **Local Enterprise Office** (LEO), the **INTREO** service, the **Education and Training Board** (ETB) and **Citizen Information Centres**. The service is managed by a *Work Matters* co-ordinator in each local authority.

The key elements of **Work Matters** include –

- ➔ dedicated, branded spaces with computers, broadband and Wi-Fi, printing and scanning facilities,
- ➔ book-stock and online resources to support employment and business activities,
- ➔ expertise of library staff providing support through the relevant resources and sign-posting to local information, and
- ➔ events and programming on business and work-related topics.

3 SOLAS report on Lifelong Learning among Adults in Ireland, Quarter 4 2014.
<http://solas.ie/solaspdf/library/lifelonglearningq42014May2015.pdf>

The personal and economic gain for users is significant, feedback on the service from users has been excellent and the service continues to grow in all areas.

WEXFORD WORK MATTERS PROGRAMME



The **Wexford Work Matters Programme** supports business in four areas – infrastructure, resources, expertise and events. This is underpinned by staff training and development. Library staff are actively engaging with users of the programme.

Work Matters is heavily promoted in community and business settings with attendance at: *Bank of Ireland Enterprise Week*, *Local Enterprise Office* business courses, *Chambers of Commerce* events and the *Wexford Business Expo*.

The success of the programme is founded on strong local partnerships with the *INTREO* service, the *LEO*, Enterprise Centres, the *Waterford Wexford ETB* and other partners.

Use of online resources has steadily increased with 16,000 reports, documents and business records accessed through the Wexford libraries' various platforms. Almost 400 people attended *Work Matters* events in Wexford Library in 2017. Sessions covered CVs, interview skills, starting your own business, the regulatory environment, market research and business planning.

We will continue to develop the *Work Matters* and other supports to –

- 6** Provide relevant information on business, job seeking and other work-related topics to those who need them.
- 7** Ensure users have access to resources that support employment, enterprise and business creation and development.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Improving health and wellbeing for people in all communities throughout Ireland is a national priority and public libraries are well positioned to support Government policy in this area.

Healthy Ireland is the Government's national strategy to improve health and wellbeing, placing a focus on prevention, individual awareness and keeping people healthy for longer. Public libraries deliver the nationwide *Healthy Ireland at Your Library* programme, providing valuable health and wellbeing information to communities. Funding is provided by the *Healthy Ireland Fund* for health and wellbeing resources (both digital and hardcopy), staff training to support the service and library hosted events and promotion.

We will –

- 8 Enhance current health information by providing new book-stock and online collections on health and wellbeing, and support users in information-seeking.
- 9 Provide resources, information events and programmes to support individuals in healthy living.



Ballina Library, Mayo

3. Strategic Programme – Community and Culture

The library is a centre of community and cultural activity. It is a catalyst for the imagination, encouraging and inspiring creativity within communities and among people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. It provides a welcoming and inclusive space for individuals and all communities, including new communities that may not yet be fully integrated into Irish society. It is a truly democratic service, accepting and supportive of all individuals, regardless of age, ability, culture or personal circumstance.

The library brings people together, enabling social sharing among peoples and cultures, celebrating diversity and encouraging harmony. It facilitates personal development for all people, providing a range of supports which reduce marginalisation of all types, including language learning supports; social and cultural activities; and support activities for digital technology learning, reading and literacy.

There is significant potential to develop targeted outreach initiatives for hard to reach individuals and groups. The local library provides a social space for the isolated in urban and rural communities and collaboration with local agencies and community groups can develop and support initiatives that encourage people to use the library.

The public library helps to preserve our cultural identity. The library service has a longstanding and important role in promoting literature and the Irish language. It provides access, not only through extensive collections, but also through an increasing range of festivals and events across the network of branches. Nowhere is this more evident than in the central role of public libraries in delivering the *Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022* and *Creative Ireland 2017-2022*⁴. The library also provides a welcoming community space where we can share diverse cultural experiences and perspectives as our society embraces new communities and cultures.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Over the course of the strategy the public library will develop as a vibrant focal point of the community.

We will –

- 10** Work with local and national partners to establish libraries as a central community, civic and cultural space within their local areas.
- 11** Support connected and informed communities and promote civic participation by all sections of our communities, including new communities.
- 12** Consolidate the role of public libraries as the public face of local authorities.

Libraries should be living places – places where writers are interviewed, where books are read aloud, where discussions are held around new writing, where short stories are read aloud at weekends, where young writers can test their work, and where the power of the human voice is explored, since it is the instrument that brings words to life.

Senator Marie-Louise O'Donnell

4 <https://creative.ireland.ie/en/local-plans>

DLR Lexicon, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown



LOCAL STUDIES AND DIGITAL LIBRARIES

The public library is a curator of memory and is responsible for creating, storing and sharing local culture and historical records. The library continues to enhance physical and digital collections, promoting access in Ireland and abroad.

We will –

13

Collect, explore and celebrate the cultural memory of local people and communities, and develop and promote local studies collections and archives through a national programme for enhanced digital access.

5.

**OUR PUBLIC LIBRARIES 2022 –
STRATEGY ENABLERS**

Actions under the three Strategic Programmes will be facilitated by six Strategy Enablers –

1. Infrastructure and service delivery.
2. Library team.
3. Promotion and marketing.
4. Collections.
5. Funding.
6. Research and development.

1. Strategy Enabler – Infrastructure and Service Delivery

Renewed investment in library buildings, technology and other equipment is essential for libraries to deliver quality services, to increase membership and attract new users, and to maintain the relevance of the library service. High quality library services must be complemented by attractive and fit-for-purpose library buildings. Investment in the latest ICT, equipment and software is crucial to developing the library as a provider of digital services, technology and digital skills development for communities.

The public library service must meet the needs of a diverse range of individuals and communities, facilitating inclusion and participation by all. All users should have equal opportunity of access to public library buildings, library services and library resources. This should be delivered through a more systematic approach – in the first instance by building on good practice across the library network; secondly by ensuring existing and new services take account of the full range of user needs; and thirdly by building on existing and developing new relationships with local agencies and groups to facilitate greater engagement with hard to reach, marginalised and disadvantaged communities.

The focus should be on the local library as a hub and a hive for every age.

Library Member

LIBRARY BUILDINGS

Delivering a progressive library service that meets the expectations of users requires library buildings that are fit-for-purpose and reflect the quality of services being delivered. It is important that library buildings have the appropriate space and layout to accommodate the full range of facilities, equipment and technologies required to underpin library services and support all types of users – for example, study spaces, adult learning zones, assistive technologies, innovation spaces, digital suites and hot-desk facilities.

We will –

- 1** Ensure that national *Public Library Standards and Benchmarks* are adhered to and delivered in accordance with the needs of a modern society.
- 2** Expand the capital building programme to deliver our vision for *Our Public Libraries 2022*.

OPENING HOURS

The public library must be open and accessible to provide its core services. Many respondents to the public consultation process called for additional opening hours for users at times that suit them best. Our library staff are also central to delivering accessible and flexible library services. Enhanced staffing, a wider range of opening hours and smarter opening hours, both staffed and under the *My Open Library* service, will give greater access to services for a broader section of the population.

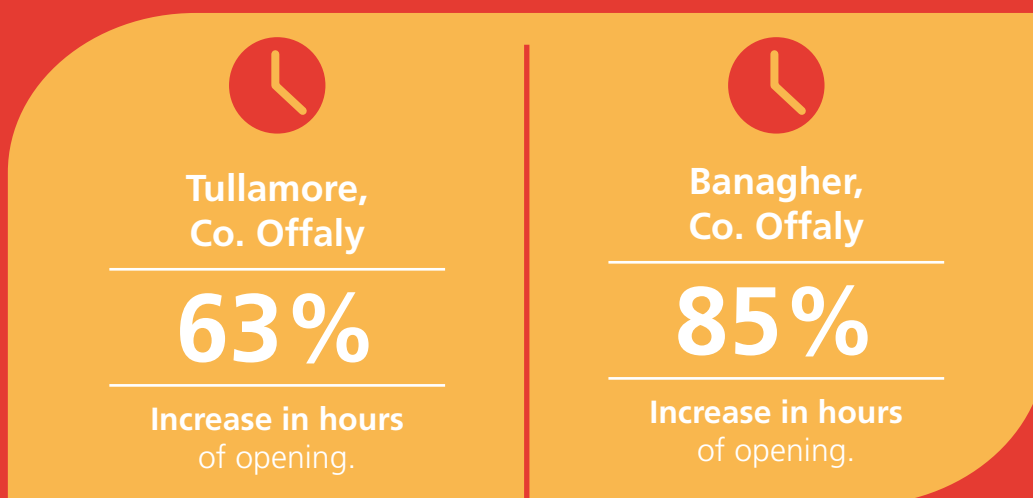
The suitability of the opening hours needs to be continually reviewed to ensure libraries are keeping pace with changing user needs. Suitable opening hours, supported by enhanced staffing, will be important to achieving the target membership of 30% of the population by 2022.

We will –

- 3** Ensure each library provides optimum user friendly staffed opening hours to meet the changing needs of the community.
- 4** Expand *My Open Library* to at least **100** library branches around the country, with the goal of reaching 200 library branches over the next decade.

MY OPEN LIBRARY SERVICE

Since the first full year of the service in Offaly in 2015, visits during My Open Library hours increased by 183% in Banagher Library and increased by 76% in Tullamore Library.



Self-service with extended opening hours



The Open Library is the best facility to come to Banagher in recent years.

Sinead Sarah McDonagh

MY OPEN LIBRARY

My Open Library offers extended opening hours to library members on a self-service basis outside normal opening hours, seven days a week, from 8am to 10pm, 365 days a year.

My Open Library is currently available in Banagher and Tullamore Libraries in Offaly and Tubbercurry Library in Sligo. A full range of services are available including book borrowing, meeting facilities, study spaces and ICT facilities. Users have access to the library at times that suit them best and the library is strengthened as a focal point for community engagement.

The library is fully staffed outside My Open Library hours.

Tullamore Library, Offaly



ACCESS

The library is a free lifelong resource that should be available to all without barriers or charges. Library charges and fines have been shown to have a detrimental effect on library use by children and the disadvantaged.⁵ Moreover, there is little evidence to show they ensure timely returns – rather they may actually dissuade members and users from returning long overdue items.⁶ Joining the library should be simple, straightforward and open to everyone. This could be achieved by introducing a mechanism to allow for membership registration to be an automatic process, for example on the first day at school.

5 DeFaveri, Annette, *Breaking Barriers: Libraries and Socially Excluded Communities*, (2005). <http://www.libr.org/isc/articles/21/9.pdf>

6 Meg Johnson Depriest, *Removing Barriers to Access: Eliminating Library Fines and Fees on Children's Materials*, 2016.

We will –

- 5** Remove fines and book charges for library users while exploring non-monetary options for ensuring the timely return and preservation of book stock.
- 6** Introduce an automatic system for universal library membership registration.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT

The digital divide generally describes inequality in access to the internet and other information and communication technologies. Bridging this divide is a priority of the *National Digital Strategy*⁷. The public library helps to bridge the digital divide by developing digital learning centres, offering **STEAM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) and coding workshops. It plays an increasingly important supporting role, showcasing new digital technologies and providing access to interactive digital technology and learning opportunities.

In the first decade of the century, investment in internet access, computers and staff training established libraries as an important local centres supporting digital skills development. However, the economic downturn resulted in a drop-off in investment in ICT with many libraries now relying on outdated equipment and software to deliver modern services and resources.

Society is undergoing a fourth industrial revolution. During this time, society needs to adapt to new ways of working and communicating. A lack of understanding of the current technological shift poses a danger to some sections of society falling behind and not being able to navigate their way in world ruled by big data... more resources are being digitised. The form of presenting information and culture is changing from the written word to audio, video, animation and infographics. Letting people be part of the newest innovations and training them in using new digital tools helps them feel confident and useful to society at large.

Beata Molendowska

Our Public Libraries 2022 will establish the library as an important enabler of digital services and facilitator of digital skills development. Investment in ICT, equipment and software is essential if the public library is to support the growing digital and technological demands of a modern society.

By providing access to the latest technologies including 3D printing, virtual reality and digital drawing technology supported by knowledgeable staff, the public library can be a centre of creativity and innovation. Free access to these technologies will create familiarity, while also inspiring users to experiment, create and innovate.

⁷ Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, *Doing More with Digital, National Digital Strategy for Ireland Phase 1 – Digital Engagement*, (2013). <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/publications/Documents/63/National%20Digital%20Strategy%20July%202013%20compressed.pdf>

Leading edge digital technologies to enhance the service and available for users with support from staff



We will –

- 7** Implement a programme of ICT infrastructure upgrades and developments to underpin the development and roll-out of new and innovative services.
- 8** Develop digital learning centres and innovation spaces in suitable libraries in collaboration with local and national partners, and provide users with access to training in the latest technologies.
- 9** Coordinate with designers, software experts and manufacturers to provide training to staff in the use of innovative technology, as well as tutorials to the public.

Digital learning centres in libraries can provide an environment for the community to come together to learn, work and create in an interactive, collaborative way.

Equipped with the latest technologies, they can provide a space for users to experiment and innovate with 3D design, printing, web and graphic design, computer coding, circuit making and game design. Digital learning centres also offer a space for less confident users in the community to try out technology, explore its functions and become comfortable in its use.

LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

Ireland is now an international leader in terms of service delivery and access to a national public library collection. The *Library Management System* underpins the introduction of new services that enhance the user experience, including a single membership card that can be used in any public library in Ireland and a national delivery service that delivers and collects items to and from libraries. Other services, including a mobile App, will be developed to enrich user experiences over the timeframe of the strategy.

We will –

- 10** Improve accessibility and ease of use of the *Library Management System*, including a more responsive and functional website, streamlining the user access experience and providing the same functionality across ICT platforms.



LIBRARY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

The National Library Management System is now a world leader in the provision of library services, enhancing resource sharing, delivering efficiencies and transforming the way the public interacts with the library service. It has involved the transition from 31 stand-alone library management systems to a single system providing members with access to resources nationwide.

The online system allows users from any of the 31 local authorities to reserve and borrow any of the 12 million titles available across the library network. Users can reserve titles when visiting a library or request titles online.

The LMS is supported by a national delivery service that delivers and collects physical items (books, DVDs, etc.) to and from libraries on a twice weekly basis – reserved items typically arrive within a week.

Users can collect their reserved items from their preferred branch within any of the 31 local authorities – they can also return their borrowed items to any branch across the country.

2. Strategy Enabler – Library Team

The library team is central to delivering the service, implementing the strategy and delivering on the vision for ***Our Public Libraries 2022***. The library service was sustained, and indeed enhanced, with the commitment and contribution of staff during the economic downturn. Frontline library staff take great pride in the service and there is considerable optimism for development of the service in coming years.

Over the lifetime of the strategy, there will be a strategic focus on customer engagement. Staff will be supported to develop and enhance their skills, and to develop the confidence and capacity to be leaders both for library users and for their fellow team members.

Effective communication within the library service was identified as a vital requirement for successful implementation of the strategy during consultation workshops with library staff. As a critical element of the library service, the library team needs to be informed and included in developments during the implementation stages.

We will –

11 Continue to develop and implement a comprehensive programme for library team leadership and workforce development for library staff and management.

12 Establish a flexible structure for communication across the library team.

3. Strategy Enabler – Promotion and Marketing

It is important that libraries continue to promote their services in new and engaging ways. Although the public library service has undergone significant change in the last 20 years, moving away from the traditional book lending service, the *Shining a Light* survey shows that the public has an increased appetite for changes and improvements to the library service.⁸

The impact of new services, resources and technologies will be limited if people are not aware of them. Communities, members and users need to be informed of the potential benefits of library use in a captivating and effective manner. The library service has developed strong relationships with local stakeholders, for example, through the delivery of strategic programming on literacy, business and health and wellbeing. Public libraries can build upon these, while also developing new relationships, to pursue inclusive partnership approaches and promote the library as a community resource available to everyone.

National programme identities have been developed under *Opportunities for All*, including *Libraries Ireland*, *Right to Read*, *Work Matters* and *Healthy Ireland at Your Library*. These programmes have garnered media attention and their standardised design and logos make them easily identifiable. This is a strong starting point for promoting the library service generally, reaching everyone in Ireland and encouraging library use nationwide.

We will –

13 Develop a national and local promotion and marketing plan.

14 Develop new relationships and build on existing ones with local communities and organisations to promote local libraries as vibrant centres of community, culture and learning for all communities.



⁸ Shining a Light, Carnegie Trust UK (2017), <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/shining-a-light/>

4. Strategy Enabler – Collections

The range of services provided by libraries continues to grow and providing access to literature and other quality reading materials remains a core function. The collections in Irish public libraries should be of the highest quality and must continue to develop to adapt to innovative technologies and the needs of the population.

There is a wide disparity in terms of annual spend on collections across the local authorities. In some areas this may be as low as 50 cent per head of population, while the *Public Library Standards and Benchmarks* set a target per capita spend of €3.77. A sustained annual investment by all local authorities is required to ensure the quality and relevance of Irish library collections and to expand digital collections.

LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

Access to the content of **1,367** newspapers

Over **400** eLearning courses



A collection of

17,453

e-books

7,330

digital e-audio books

Over **300** international magazine titles

Over **80** online language courses

We will –

- 15** Put programmes in place to meet a book fund annual spend target of €4.00 per head of population in the lifetime of the strategy.
- 16** Establish service-wide policies for collections development and acquisitions.
- 17** Expand access to digital resources, including eBooks and online resources, to include a greater number and variety of options in all libraries.

ASK ABOUT IRELAND

Askaboutireland.ie provides a gateway to and a resource for local studies content in public libraries in Ireland. It includes:



Collections of local content from each authority



eBooks and newspapers



School resources



Historical maps



Collections of national datasets, including Griffith's Valuation



Collections of digitised environmental resources



Statistical surveys



5. Strategy Enabler – Funding

Funding from both local and central government will be critical to successfully implementing the strategy. Although local authorities have primary responsibility for managing and developing library services, delivery of capital projects often depends on central government funding.

Significant investment will be required to bring public library buildings up to modern standards – investment is required for new libraries, extensive renovations and extensions.

Rolling out *My Open Library* also requires significant investment to facilitate implementation across almost 200 library branches. **Our Public Libraries 2022** will see this initiative introduced on a more mainstream basis across the library network with full roll-out achieved by the end of 2027.

Finally, new technologies are essential for delivering a modern library service. Considerable investment is needed in ICT, equipment and software to facilitate this. The last significant programme of investment in ICT took place under the **Branching Out** strategies. Since then local authorities have invested in ICT and equipment on an ad hoc basis as resources allowed.

We will –

18 Secure appropriate funding from local authorities, under the *National Development Plan 2018-2027*, and from other sources for buildings, technology and service development.

19 Explore and exploit the potential for philanthropic support.



Mountmellick Library, Laois

6. Strategy Enabler – Research and Development

The public library service must continually evolve to keep pace with societal changes and public demands. This requires it to be innovative and flexible in the design and delivery of services, and also to understand and be aware of changing needs of users. Ongoing research, analysis and development is essential if the public library is to keep pace with changing demands.

BENCHMARKS AND STANDARDS

The national *Public Library Standards and Benchmarks* were published in 2015. They are a series of performance measures that seek to secure a high standard of infrastructure and service development across the library service. They cover core elements of the service including access, development of core services, optimum opening hours, staffing, service delivery and performance. The objective is to ensure development is consistent, monitored and sustained. Each local authority is required to measure the performance of the local library service against the relevant standards and benchmarks.

We will –

- 20** Review *Public Library Standards and Benchmarks* and assess the impact of these on the quality of library buildings, services and resources.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS, DEVELOPMENTS AND COOPERATION

Engaging at international and EU level highlights and informs best practice. It can also influence and inform policy direction, as well as shape new and innovative services across the library service.

We will –

- 21** Inform, develop and share models of good practice in service development by collaborating in EU and international networks and contributing to international research.

6.

MONITORING AND PROGRESS ASSESSMENT

Implementing the Strategy

Our Public Libraries 2022 is an ambitious strategy. It is also a realistic strategy that will draw on the significant strengths of the library service. Its ambition reflects the need for public libraries to expand their appeal, develop more relevant services and resources and meet the increasing demands of a more technologically savvy society. It also reflects a growing optimism in Irish Society and seeks to draw on a more favourable economic outlook to increase investment in the service.

The partnership approach underpinning the successful delivery of **Opportunities for All** will continue for the new strategy period. Accordingly, the strategy will be implemented by local authorities, supported by the Local Government Management Agency and the Department of Rural and Community Development, while the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government will continue to play a central role as we seek to optimise staffing of the library service. We will also draw on the important national and local relationships developed in recent years – strengthening these and developing new relationships – to deliver more coordinated and integrated public services.

Assessing and Monitoring Progress

Ongoing assessment and monitoring provides for an objective appraisal of implementation progress and overall delivery. Measurement across the programmes and enablers allows us to determine impact and to review the ongoing appropriateness of the Strategic Programmes over the strategy period.

Appropriate mechanisms will be required to monitor progress. The *Libraries Development Committee*, Local Government Management Agency, is the most appropriate mechanism for ongoing monitoring and progress evaluation. It comprises local authority Chief Executives, City and County Librarians, Libraries Development (LGMA) and the Department of Rural and Community Development. The Committee brings together the perspectives, expertise and experience of the key partners, and oversees and guides the strategic development of the public library sector.

External review and reporting arrangements can complement internal monitoring and ensure a more robust process. To this end, the *Libraries Development Committee* will develop an outcomes framework, with appropriate outcome and output performance indicators. The Committee will report and account annually on progress against these indicators to both the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the City and County Management Association.

A formal review of the strategy will be carried out as part of preparing the next library strategy in 2022.

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**APPENDIX 1: LIST OF
MEMBERS OF THE
COMMITTEES**

LIBRARIES DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Chair:

Tom Enright, Wexford County Council

Members:

Frank Curran, Wicklow County Council

David Dalton, Department of Rural and Community Development

Paul Dunne, Local Government Management Agency

Claire Gilligan, Local Government Management Agency

Margaret Hayes, Dublin City Council

Annette Kelly, Local Government Management Agency

Philomena Poole, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council

Mary Stuart, Offaly County Council

LIBRARY STRATEGY REVIEW WORKING GROUP

Chair:

Paul Geraghty, Department of Rural and Community Development

Members:

Mary Carleton Reynolds, Longford County Council

Damien Brady, Limerick City and County Council

Donal Brennan, Laois County Council

Eileen Davey, Department of Rural and Community Development

Margaret Hayes, Dublin City Council

Paul Moynihan, Cork City Council

Mary Quinn, Leitrim County Council

Mary Stuart, Offaly County Council

Joan Ward, Local Government Management Agency

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**APPENDIX 3:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Department of Rural and Community Development, the City and County Management Association and the Local Government Management Agency thank sincerely everyone involved in developing ***Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities***.

In particular, we would like to thank the Chair and members of the Library Strategy Review Working Group for the development of the strategy and the Chair and members of the Libraries Development Committee for providing oversight and guidance throughout the process.

We would also very much like to acknowledge the input of the library staff and City and County Librarians, who participated enthusiastically and in large numbers in the process, providing feedback, insight and recommendations to shape ***Our Public Libraries 2022***. We are grateful too, for the valuable contributions from the local authority elected members and senior management.

The level of response received from the many members of the public and interested organisations and agencies across the country during the public consultation was very significant. The feedback has been very informing and very much appreciated.

Our thanks goes to those respondents who kindly permitted us to quote their inputs in the strategy.

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An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development



Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association



AN GHNÍOMHÁIREACHT BAINISTÍOCHTA HEALÁR AIFÉIL
LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT AGENCY