

# Our Library, Our Future

South Dublin Libraries  
Development Plan  
2023 - 2027

Energising, Inspiring, Creating, Rejuvenating & Empowering



Comhairle Contae  
Átha Cliath Theas  
South Dublin County Council

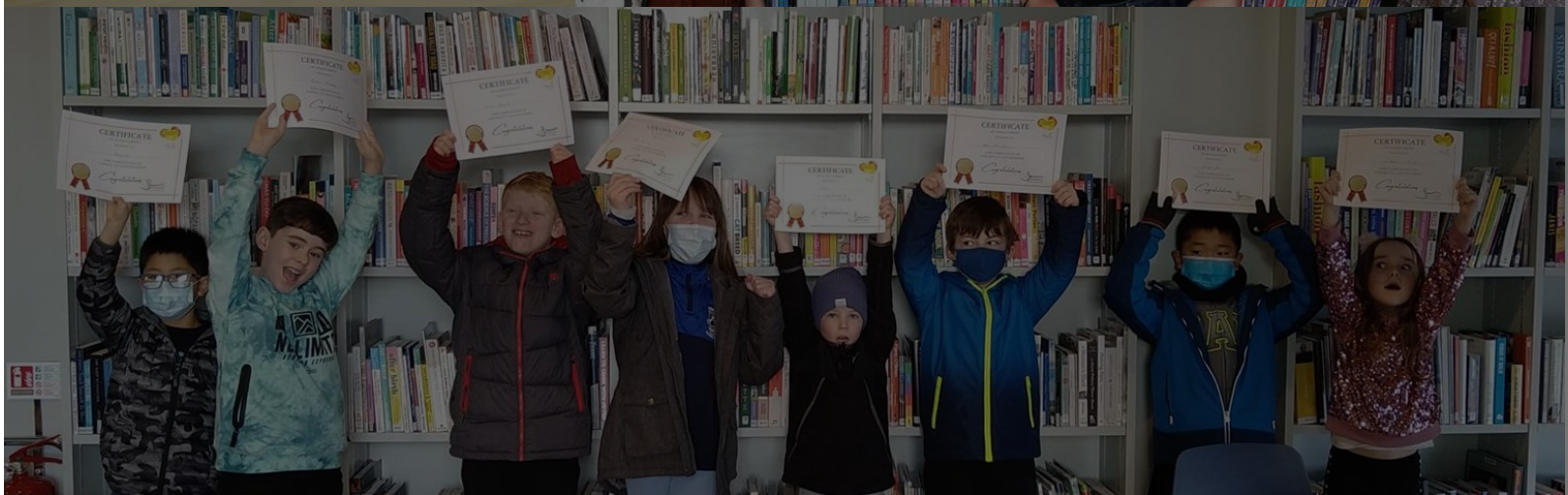
*“The health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries”*

**Carl Sagan**

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# Welcome to the South Dublin Libraries Development Plan 2023 - 2027





Our  
Library,  
Our  
Future





## **Cllr Emma Murphy**

### **Mayor of South Dublin County Council**

Over the past five years the library service in South Dublin has continued to develop its offerings. The service remained vibrant and relevant through the pandemic and the agility of our staff allowed the teams to realign and support our citizens in the virtual and online realm.

Moving past the dark days of the pandemic and engaging with its citizens the service has re-established its place within our communities. The new libraries at Castletymon, North Clondalkin and the new mobile library fleet are very well used, and library event audiences across the network are back to pre-pandemic times and in fact surpassing them. This new Library Development Plan sets out the direction the library service intends to go. It sets out tangible objectives which were developed by public consultation, library staff input, as well as public representative opinion. This plan endeavours to highlight how libraries will continue to engage, inspire, and empower our citizens and our staff. It highlights the importance of curating and creating our local heritage, to ensure the communities of tomorrow have a reference point when trying to find out about the history of the area in which they live, work, or study. It also highlights the continual development of new and improved services and staying abreast of new technologies, ensuring staff are trained to deliver on the needs of an ever-changing landscape.

Libraries are a pillar of our community, providing an equitable service for all, and its staff are the scaffolding that supports the service. Our libraries provide the ultimate sustainable offering i.e., to reread books that have already been read, and as Stephen Fry put it “a library book, I imagine is a happy book”.

As Mayor of South Dublin I would like to congratulate the library team and the County Librarian on an ambitious plan and look forward to my own continual relationship with this amazing service.



# Daniel McLoughlin

## Chief Executive

I am delighted to present “Our Library, Our Future”, South Dublin Libraries Development Plan 2023-2027. The plan sets out the framework that will underpin the design and development of our library service for the next five years. Our ambition for our County is to have it recognised as a place that our communities are proud of, that our businesses can thrive in, and where we can live healthier, more sustainable and fulfilled lives. The realisation of that ambition requires community coherence and adaptation to change in areas such as climate action and digitalisation. Libraries, as community spaces provide a vehicle for coherence, an opportunity for digitisation, a platform for learning about issues greatly impacting the day-to-day lives of our communities. It is vital to ensure that our services are designed to put the experiences and needs of our communities first.

In the past two years, public libraries and local authorities have risen to the challenges presented by global issues, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact of the war in Ukraine. Our libraries continue to provide a wide range of services that are free and accessible but also as important, trusted cultural and democratic spaces offering open, inclusive opportunities for learning and collaboration.

The last five years have seen significant investment in library infrastructure with new libraries built to serve the communities of North Clondalkin and Castletymon, while investment in the mobile library fleet has seen the service develop as a pro-active agent for community engagement and promoter for the library service and the local authority.

Over the next five years this plan seeks to maintain the importance of our library service as an integrative force within the communities they serve, open and inclusive, centres of learning as well as advocates and agents of change. We hope to expand the service with new libraries in Adamstown and Citywest, and progress plans for expanding the service in the west and south of the county in line with our County Development plan.

Our library service aspires to become a benchmark for what public libraries can be in terms of engagement, relevance, innovation, and impact. The success of the plan will depend on the active participation of our communities, our members, our staff, management, and elected members. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in the research and consultation phase over the summer of 2022. I am confident that this plan will deliver the continued growth of South Dublin’s library service over the next five years and build the services capacity to respond to the needs of the community into the future.



## **Paul Fusco**

### **County Librarian**

The environment in which the library service operates has changed significantly since the adoption of our previous development plan. There have been planned service developments, such as the expansion of My Open Library and the transition to a shared national public library catalogue, as well as service innovations and changes in user behaviour due to the Covid-19 pandemic. How the library service behaves and engages with our communities must also change if we are to stay relevant and deliver a service that catches the attention of members and non-members alike amongst the numerous options to spend their free time.

In drafting this plan, we took a human-centred design approach to understanding and defining the challenges we face. The plan puts forward insight led strategies that bring us from where we are currently, to where we want to be. To that end, it is a lean strategy document that identifies our strengths and areas of focus for development, as well as naming the challenges we face both in a local and global context.

This plan complements and intersects with the South Dublin County Development Plan, and Creative and Cultural Strategy, as well as with national public library development strategies. It also aligns with Our Public Service 2020 strategy, the Civil Service Renewal 2030 strategy, and the newly published “Design Principles for Government”.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this plan, our members, our staff, our partner organisations, elected members, and the non-users who contributed valuable insights over the course of the public consultation process.

I want to acknowledge the contribution of Trevor Vaugh and the team at ThinkActionable who guided us through the design-led approach to strategy development.

I want to especially thank all the staff of South Dublin Libraries, not only for the enthusiasm with which they contributed to this plan, but for the commitment and creativity they bring to their work. It’s because of them that we are so well placed to deliver for our communities on this innovative and ambitious plan.



# Our Library, Our Future

*“Now here’s my challenge to you all. I know many of you are already taking some action, but we all need to step up tenfold. What are the ways librarians can rise to the challenge and be part of the collective action that the Secretary General was calling for to secure a sustainable future for people and planet?”*

*...How can you create an enabling environment to start this vital conversation? How can you inspire young people to be innovative? How can you use knowledge to motivate people? How can you encourage collective action for change?”*

**Mary Robinson**

Speaking at the World Library  
and Information Congress 2022

# Introduction

**Welcome to South Dublin Libraries Development Plan 2023 - 2027. This plan is ambitious, brave and innovative in terms of how it was developed, the direction it seeks to bring our libraries and the impact we believe it will have.**

Leaders from across Ireland and around the world have called for organisations to do more when it comes to taking on and responding to some of the many challenges facing our communities, societies and our planet today. The library has always played an important role in society and in responding to its needs. Now more than ever, our communities and society need the library to innovate, to work harder, and to use its position at the heart of community to understand, facilitate and respond to their needs. This Development Plan sets out a new approach to using the power of knowledge, community, inspiration and truth that our sector holds in abundance.

This development plan identifies key challenges and insights which we uncovered during our thorough research and consultation work, and sets out the strategy and work programmes for South Dublin Libraries for the next five years. This document includes an ambitious aspiration statement for South Dublin Libraries, key development areas in which we will focus and detail on the capabilities and leadership we will need in place to be successful. This strategy is designed to make the library more relevant, more innovative and to put it in a better place to have the impact we know we can have.

In this time of rapid social, cultural and technological change, with many great challenges facing our communities and our world, we see this as an important time for the library service to respond. The 2023 - 2027 development plan is one of the most important we have ever created. It offers a means of rethinking what the library is, why it exists and what it can do to play its part in a time of unprecedented change and opportunity.

This development plan has been developed from the ground up. In its creation we have asked new questions, spoken to new people, sought feedback in new ways and we are presenting our findings in a new format. This is a 'living document,' and across our identified challenges and insights we offer our community an opportunity to submit thoughts and ideas and work with us in the important task ahead. We firmly believe that our future needs our libraries, and to deliver, we must evolve and co-create with our community.

This year at the World Library and Information Congress, former Irish president Mary Robinson made an impassioned call to libraries to do more and to "create an enabling environment to start this vital conversation." The South Dublin Libraries Development Plan 2023 - 2027 sees us rise to this challenge, as our libraries have an important part to play in informing, inspiring and enabling our communities for the future.



# Overview of the Plan

This development plan comes at a time of great change, challenge and uncertainty in our communities, in society and in our world. As we all begin to question what role we can play in ensuring a better future, this document lays out an ambitious plan for what South Dublin Libraries will do over the next five years to play our part. This development plan in broad terms is about innovation *in the now* to ensure we can play a part in securing our future.

To implement an ambitious and effective plan, we must first begin by understanding our purpose:

**We exist to inspire, support and enable the people of South Dublin to live, learn and thrive. We do this by removing barriers to knowledge and information. By creating space to think, talk and explore and by being there if and when they need us. What we as a library do today will have impact on all our futures.**

To meet our purpose, this plan took a non-traditional, human-centred design approach in its development. Combining in-depth user and

non-user ethnographic interviews, in branch consultation, large scale public and staff surveys, and creative ideation sessions, 10 key challenge and insight themes were identified;

## Key challenges and insights:

1. Small islands of coherence
2. Engagement across key demographics
3. Solving problems right, but are they the right problems?
4. Making the most of precious free time
5. Guilt & fear getting in the way of non-users
6. Staff love libraries, members love libraries
7. Trying to be all things to all people
8. Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places
9. Sitting at the edge of 'cool', but not quite there
10. A workforce ready, willing and waiting

These challenges and insights are detailed throughout this document and will form the basis of our actions over the next five years. To ensure the success of this development plan and lead in its implementation, key members of the South Dublin Libraries management will take up the role of 'Champions.' These SDL champions

will cover the areas of: Environment & Sustainability, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Innovation & Creativity, Literacy & The Irish Language, Outreach & Engagement and Heritage & Placemaking

With the key challenges, insights and six SDL champions identified, five key development areas were identified:

### 1. Energising Our Collection

Building on the research skills, and passion for books and knowledge that our library staff have in abundance, we will identify innovative and creative ways of managing, curating and making our collections more accessible for our members.

### 2. Expanding Our Community

The library primarily serves the oldest and the youngest in our communities. We will work to attract and better serve new members, particularly teenagers and young adults. These are important cohorts as they are motivated to make the change we need within society and will bring new energy to our branches.

### 3. Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places

As a young local authority with a growing population and a mix of established and new urban centres, South Dublin Libraries recognises its position in creating as well as curating our county's heritage.

### 4. Rejuvenating Our Physical & Virtual Spaces

The spatial and virtual needs of our members are evolving and our non-users are choosing alternatives that have greater appeal. We will work with our members and our community to ensure that our spaces are not just comfortable, functional and inviting, but are also beautiful and demonstrate that we listen to, and understand the needs of our diverse community

### 5. Empowering Our Staff

Our staff are passionate about the libraries and serving the community. They are creative and knowledgeable and we must work to ensure they are empowered to make our libraries better and stronger.

## Development Plan Structure

Development planning is an exciting opportunity to understand the present and to creatively explore the future. Taking a human-centred design approach, a rigorous development process allowed the development team to deeply understand the real challenges to be tackled, make important choices about where to focus and work to build a meaningful and impactful future direction for South Dublin Libraries. This development plan is structured around answering four key questions, each cascading to form a coherent plan. The four key questions are:

**Q1 What is South Dublin Libraries ambitious winning aspiration and what purpose will guide us?**

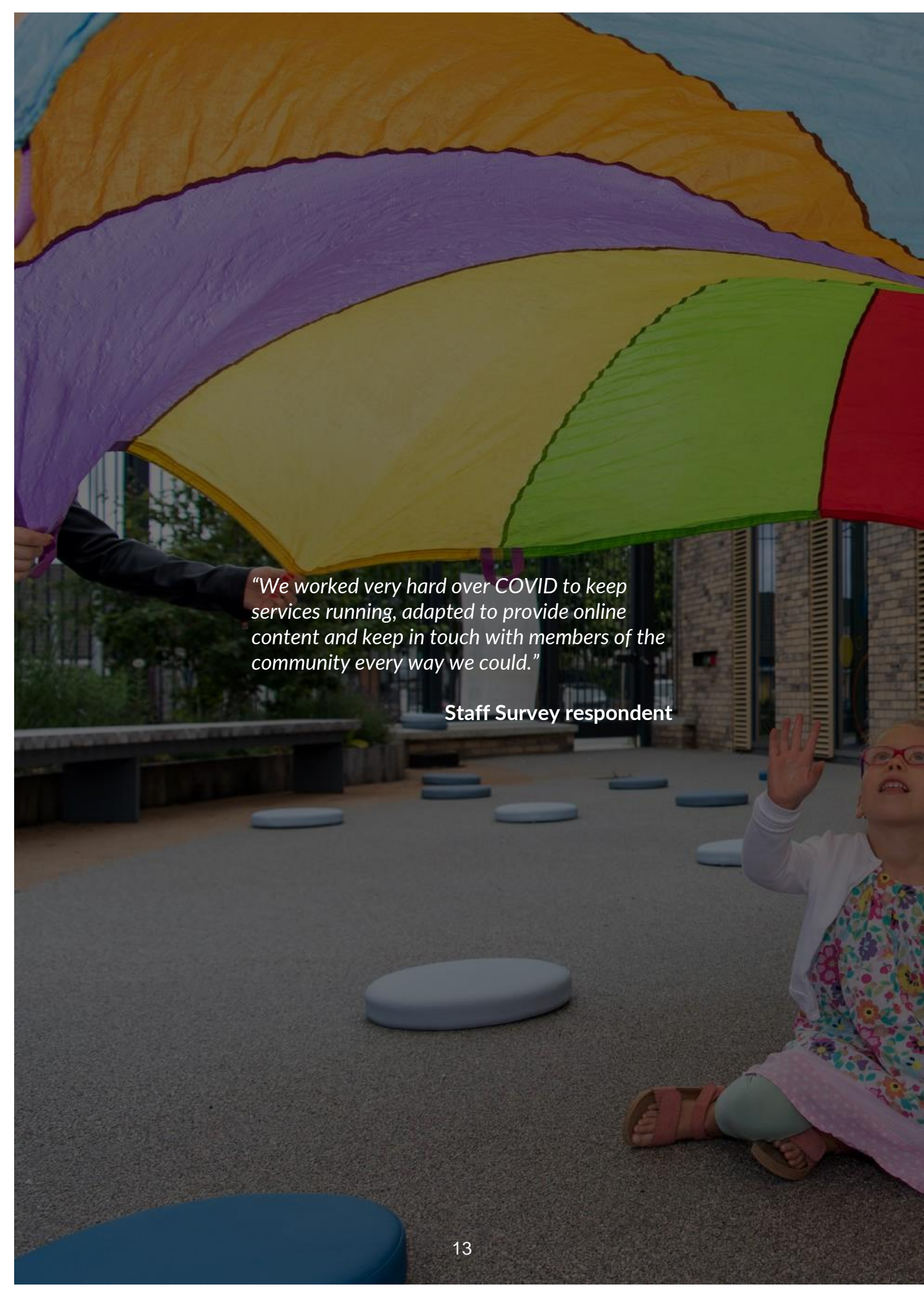
**Q2 In what key development areas should we focus our efforts over the next 5 years?**

**Q3 In each of these areas, how will we ensure we are successful?**

**Q4 What capabilities and leadership do we need to support our efforts?**

## Our Library, Our Future

*Our Library, Our Future* is anchored on innovation and in particular Human-Centred and Planet-Centred innovation. It is about innovating to create the libraries we need today and into the future. Over the next five years we will work towards preparing our libraries for a changing world and we will adapt our approach to better meet the needs of our communities and the challenges we face.

A child with red glasses and a floral dress sits on a grey carpeted floor, looking up at a large, colorful fabric structure held up by an adult. The fabric is divided into sections of yellow, purple, green, and red. The child is surrounded by several light blue and grey oval-shaped cushions. In the background, there is a brick building with large windows and a concrete bench.

*“We worked very hard over COVID to keep services running, adapted to provide online content and keep in touch with members of the community every way we could.”*

**Staff Survey respondent**

A child is holding a large, vibrant rainbow flag in a library setting. The flag is the central focus, with its colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple) clearly visible. The child is partially visible on the right side of the frame, holding the flag. The background shows a library interior with bookshelves and other people, though they are out of focus. The overall atmosphere is bright and positive.

# The last Five Years in Review

A review of the last five years would not be complete without acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The flexibility and openness to change of library staff came to the fore, and the adaptability of our services for delivery across digital platforms was highlighted. So too was the ability to innovate our service design.

As libraries were forced to close as part of public health measures. We had to redefine what services could be delivered online in addition to those already established. We also applied this approach to other services, such as our mobile library service, which moved from predominantly serving regular public stops to delivering to our members' homes. With the Library@Home service and initiatives such as "Library Under the Lid," over 240 people per month received library services to their doors.

During COVID-19 restrictions the library development team restructured how they delivered services with over 1,400 events and festivals delivered online, with maximum reach and engagement. Events were available for all South Dublin Library users.

This was a new approach as libraries had previously catered for their own community area. This resulted in a broader reach and offered a more equitable access to the service across the county. The events included the Red Line Book Festival, Children's Book Festival, Between the Red Lines mini-Fest, Season of Science, Bealtine and many other programmes. We also delivered tutorials, language classes, and music classes online.

The library service received a Staff Innovation Award in recognition of various new approaches taken to ensure continued service provision over the course of the pandemic. That approach to refining service delivery to adapt to changing situations has now been applied to our response to the increased number of refugees joining our community from Ukraine and other countries. These challenges presented us with an opportunity to demonstrate our ability to innovate, adapt and re-design our services; an approach that has been validated by the uptick in new member registrations, and will be further developed through the delivery of this plan.

## Reading and Digital Literacy

A *Right to Read* coordinator was appointed and continues to coordinate events/workshops and programmes to support literacy in all age groups. TTRS (Touch Type Read Spell) log-ons have been purchased for all libraries. With staff support, this programme is delivered effectively to support children with literacy challenges. A successful pilot in Ballyroan library saw the introduction of LEXIA: another digital support that will be rolled out further in the coming months.

## STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths)

Events/workshops/programmes have been very successful, and demand remains high. These included, science workshops, 3D printing workshops, animation, recording studio mixing, coding classes for children and families, digital photography, workshops on using new technologies for local crafters and much more. STEAM events have made science and new technologies more accessible to all age groups across the county. *Season of Science*, South Dublin Libraries' own sciences festival takes place annually in November and goes from strength to strength.

## Membership Campaign

To reconnect in person with our community SDL got out on the road in April 2022. We brought opportunities for citizens to join the library, in shopping centres, outdoor markets, festivals, and workplaces. The campaign will remain a constant part of library engagement and reminds our staff that we need to self-promote all of our services as well as affording our citizens ease of access to them.

## Creative Studio – North Clondalkin Library

The Creative Studio at North Clondalkin Library is a facility that allows users to record music and podcasts in a soundproofed and fully equipped environment. We have a wide range of musical equipment and recording apparatus that users of the studio can avail of. Users can also bring in their own instruments to the studio.

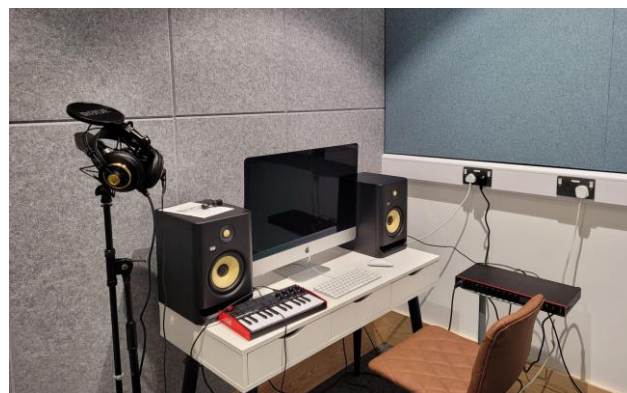


Fig 1, The Creative Studio at North Clondalkin Library

Use of the Creative Studio has taken off in the last number of months. Currently we have our Music writer in residence writing & recording their album in the studio. Similarly local musician Niamh Keane has recorded her recent single from the studio. It also has received great use with programmed events (RockJam school of music & Contact studio) have run programmes with Transition Year students.

## History All Around Us Schools Project

Between 2019 and 2022, the History All Around Us project engaged with schools in the Rathfarnham and Tallaght areas. The project got children involved in researching and learning about their local and family histories using digital and traditional library sources, and hands-on workshops and field trips. It aimed to foster cultural citizenship through pride in their area, in line with South Dublin County's LECF. The project supports the development of literacy skills, reading, writing creatively, critical thinking and researching, all in line with the Right to Read programme and the LECF. The project continued to be delivered during the pandemic, through online and outdoor events. Also, as part of this project, a colouring book featuring South Dublin heritage sites was distributed to all schools in the county.

## Think Big Space

This space has been developed in a partnership with Amazon Web Services who have provided high quality IT equipment, including virtual reality headsets, and learning programmes. South Dublin Libraries have been linking with schools across South Dublin to offer workshops and learning packages to support STEAM and increase accessibility to these new and emerging technologies.

In November 2022, Chambers Ireland awarded Think Big Space an Excellence in Local Government Award under the Local Authority Innovation category.



Fig. 2 The Think Big space

## Creating an Archive – COVID Memories Project

This is an initiative of Historian in Residence, Liz Gillis. In her research of the revolutionary period, one voice has always been missing - that of the children who lived 100 years ago.

2020 was a year we will never forget, the pandemic hit and the whole world stopped. Everyone was affected in one way or another. It is a watershed moment in our lives, one that future historians will research and study. And that is how the idea for this project came about. There will be many stories left by adults about what it was like to live through the pandemic, but what about the children? Their stories and how Covid impacted them are just as important. It is vital that we record their memories for future research.

With this in mind, South Dublin Libraries invited primary schools to engage in The COVID Memories Project which involved Liz Gillis and the Decade of Centenaries Artist-in-Residence, Eva

Kelly. A number of workshops were held with students in their local libraries where they learned about primary sources with Liz and discovered why they are important in telling stories. Eva explained how art has been used to interpret historical events. The students were asked to draw or paint an image of what living through the pandemic was like for them. The drawings were then digitised and placed in the South Dublin Libraries Archive, where they will be stored safely for future generations to discover. Most importantly, this project ensures that the voices and memories of the children who lived during this momentous event will be seen and heard.

## Red Line Festival

The Red Line Festival is produced by South Dublin Libraries and Arts offering a programme of events and workshops that appeal to people of all ages and interests, from children to adults, casual readers to bookworms. The Red Line Festival features events in quality performance venues such as The Civic, historical buildings including Rathfarnham Castle and Pearse Museum at St. Enda's Park, along with our fantastic branch libraries across South Dublin County. Red Line 2022 saw the expansion of the festival beyond the book to include other cultural streams such as sport, music, theatre etc. From 'True Crime' with Paul Williams, Ex-State pathologist Dr Marie Cassidy and Private Investigator Patrick Marry to rapping with writer in residence Selló in partnership with NOISE Music, or readings of Ulysses at Rathfarnham Castle and a whole series of sports events at Tallaght Stadium, poetry awards and performances from DJs from 'Give Us The Night', the Red Line Festival was a celebration of all things literary be it spoken, written, sung, played, illustrated, or even just thought!



Fig.3 The Red Line festival programme 2022



# Our Library, Our Future in context

It is not possible to consider the future of our libraries in isolation from the society and communities which we serve. South Dublin Libraries are in a unique position as a central hub within local communities to creatively respond to the challenges facing them.

As beacons of creative problem solving, but also “beacons of hope” as we heard during the research for this plan, we strongly believe our network can positively impact the future and provide even more value to our current and future members. At a time when the future is uncertain for many, and where people are feeling helpless and disillusioned, we believe South Dublin Libraries must respond.

According to the [Council for Public Libraries](#), public libraries have an important role to play in society, not only in providing information on climate change for example, but also in being responsive to unpredictable and unexpected challenges and crises in the future. Public libraries are one of the most trusted and valued public services in the country, and in a time of political divergence, polarisation and eroding trust, our place within the community could be used to facilitate improved relationships between the community and the local authority as well as between communities themselves.

Throughout history our library has played an important role in society and today is no different. However, today we have challenges that appear to be some of the most serious we have faced. These challenges are not just about access to information and the need to build literacy. They are about access to the right information, providing space to think, collaborate, be inspired, motivated and to relax.

*“Libraries are vital. Countries that invest in Libraries are the same countries that score well across all other Human Development Indexes. Libraries are free, which means all members society can educate themselves in almost any subject they like.”*

Staff Survey Respondent

## Small Islands of Coherence

We as communities, a nation and a planet are facing great challenges. Our communities and people are suffering. Research tells us that our young people are scared and feel helpless, even paralysed. We all have a part to play; but the library may have a particularly important one. As the Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine once said “When a system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the entire system to a higher order.” Across our research, particularly in branches, people described libraries as ‘beacons of hope’ and ‘Islands of escape.’ Repeatedly we heard sentiment like “the impact the library has had here for the community is amazing to see.” But what if we could do more? What if we could become a place that stands up to the challenges we face, and inspire, empower and facilitate people to do the same?

Our libraries and our network could become “Areas for citizens to engage with information on activism in their community and nationally, conserving water, lowering their energy/electricity costs”.

This is more than just information, this is about providing the right information, it’s about space and it’s about learning. As one respondent suggested, South Dublin Libraries could become “cutting edge in facilitating lifelong learning and nurturing minds to help combat the challenges of society such as the climate crisis or the proliferation of false information online.” South Dublin Libraries could become leaders and “be at the forefront of real environmental change through its junior and young adult users particularly.”

This bias towards action could be South Dublin Libraries response to all of the challenges we face and care about, from mental health, “The library is an important factor in the mental health of so many members of the community” to racial and gender justice, and political polarisation.

## Some of what we heard

*“Libraries are vital. Countries that invest in Libraries are the same countries that score well across all other Human Development Indexes. Libraries are free, which means all members society can educate themselves in almost any subject they like. Free books for children is one of the most cost effective way to mitigate against child poverty.”*

*“I think the library is a vital resource that has a civilising influence on society, providing entertainment, education, enlightenment, engagement and information. It is a safe haven and a place where children and adults can learn the value of quiet thought and reflection.”*

*“The library is right here in the center of my village. What if it used the windows to present important information, the billboards to make people aware of important conversations and its events to lead the important climate and societal conversations that need to happen?!”*

*“I believe it provides public and free knowledge and entertainment in a time of great need for such.”*

*“The library is an important factor in the mental health of so many members of the community. All this is added to by the knowledge that there will always be a friendly helpful person there who will help you whenever you visit.”*

*“We are in a climate emergency - Every organisation needs to act and act fast. The library might not realise it, but what it does could actually play a really important role in interfacing with and informing the public.”*

*“The library is very important. Books have been with me through some bad times and libraries are a safe, warm place to relax and read”*

*“It has at times been a challenge-but the impact the library has had here for the community is amazing to see.”*

*“Areas for citizens to engage with information on activism in their community and nationally, conserving water, lowering their energy/electricity costs”*

*“There is not enough happening in the libraries relating to the climate emergency for my kids. Everybody is talking about it, but how do you “bring it home” with kids? Maybe it could be in the form of books, podcasts, flyers, events? “*

*“The library, while not necessarily providing a service that I find use for, still acts as a pillar of our society and is fundamentally important to youth and the elderly”*

*“The library has been my Refuge and my place of joy all my life, a window onto the wonders of the world. Please, please do not turn it into a business centre. There are other SDCC services that fulfill that role.”*

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*“It’s hard to think about, but what will the books in 50 years be about? Will we as a planet even exist? Will the books be talking about places, animals and ideas that no longer exist? It’s a terrifying thought.”*

*Interview Participant*

# Our Purpose & Aspiration

Throughout all of our research we asked questions to help us define compelling purpose and aspiration statements. Our communities and our staff told us that they recognise the importance of what we do, but also pointed to the great change and many challenges facing our society. In times of great change we need to rethink, reimagine and work to understand why we exist and be ambitious about what we want to become.

## Our Purpose

We exist to inspire, support and enable the people of South Dublin to live, learn and thrive. We do this by removing barriers to knowledge and information, by creating space to think, talk and explore and by being there if and when they need us. **What we as a library do today will have impact on all our futures.**

# Our Aspiration

South Dublin Libraries will become a benchmark for what a public library can be in terms of engagement, relevance, innovation and impact. We will do this by questioning why we exist, what we do and how we can better serve the public.

Today, society and communities face many challenges, where accurate information, human connection and inspiration is needed. **South Dublin Libraries will use our position in the heart of communities to better serve those communities.**

**Our  
Library,  
Our  
Future**

# Key Findings & Our Actions

Drawing on the findings from across the public consultations, public and staff surveys, contextual enquiry and non user interviews, 10 key challenges were identified. We believe that if these challenges are tackled and overcome it would allow South Dublin Libraries to achieve its objectives over the next 5 years. On the next page, we outline our overarching development plan and over the following pages we expand on the key challenges and insights identifies and captured under the five key development areas:

- 1. Energising our Collection**
- 2. Expanding our Community**
- 3. Sharing our Stories, Making our Places**
- 4. Rejuvenating our Physical & Virtual Spaces**
- 5. Empowering our Staff**

Rather than placing the emphasis on listing tasks and objectives to be completed over the next 5 years, we paid particular attention to framing key insights and challenges identified throughout the research phase. These will form a foundation for our efforts and provide a valuable guide for South Dublin Libraries over the next five years.

# Our Overarching Development Plan

## Innovation for the library we need today

Human-Centred Innovation for, with & through the library



## The library working for tomorrow

Responding to increasing community, social and global challenges



### SDL Champions

We will create 6 'SDL Champion' roles that will be responsible for overseeing the development plan activation.



### Areas we will focus on

We will prioritise two distinct but interwoven areas: growing our active and new memberships by focusing on teenagers and young adults, and responding to the great challenges we face today and into the future. While we will continue to support all members of the community, these new focus areas offer opportunity for growth, sustainability and immense positive impact.



### Achieving Success in these areas

We are living in a time of unprecedented change and growing community, societal and global challenges. Leaders have called for action, and in response, we will authentically position our libraries as places of truth, inspiration and action. This is the right thing to do, but it will also resonate and align with the values, needs and motivations of a highly desirable cohort of non-library users.



### The capabilities needed to support

We will build on our current people and research expertise and our enviable position in the heart of communities, to better understand the unmet and unarticulated needs of this exciting cohort. We will build relationships not transactions, we will train, empower and reward our teams to design and co-create initiatives, events and collections with members, not for them.



### How management will support

Leadership and management will be aligned around our aspiration and values. We will communicate regularly to highlight the urgency and importance of our work, discuss issues and review strategy in the open. We will empower and enable our workforce to make this strategy a success, and we will celebrate those successes.

# South Dublin Libraries Champions



SDL champion for  
**Environment &  
Sustainability**



SDL champion for  
**Equality, Diversity  
& Inclusion**



SDL champion for  
**Innovation &  
Creativity**



SDL champion for  
**Literacy & the  
Irish language**



SDL champion for  
**Outreach &  
Engagement**



SDL champion for  
**Heritage &  
Placemaking**

## Role of the SDL Champions

Keep the area being championed on the agenda and be the Go-To Person for that area.

- Embed the area being championed in the business plan under developing key policies and procedures.
- Ensure that the voice of those represented is reflected in our services e.g. through participation with charitable organisations, promotion, and marketing.
- Be aware of current legislation where relevant.
- Research and share 'best practice' and emulate where possible.
- Evaluate the business through an audit in the area being championed to identify needs and gaps in relation to information, facilities, and customer service.
- Chair committee/working group for the area being championed:
  - Lead on the development of an action plan to bridge the gaps identified in the audit.
  - Engage ambassadors across the branch network to help embed new practices and approaches.
  - Write a promise / pledge for the business in relation to the area being championed.
- Communicate positive achievements to colleagues throughout the service and broader local authority.
- To use expertise to help answer related enquiries and complaints.
- Review related feedback to further develop the service.

# Key Development Areas 2023-2027

Development Area 01

**Expanding our Community**

Development Area 02

**Energising our Collection**

Development Area 03

**Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places**

Development Area 04

**Rejuvenating our Physical & Virtual Space**

Development Area 05

**Empowering our Staff**

**Our Library, Our Future**



## Development Area 01

# Expanding Our Community:

Enter any library and you will notice that older adults and mothers with young children make up the majority of those using the service. Vast swathes of the community are missing and we must find out why and respond. We must work to expand our membership and adapt to find ways of inspiring them to join.

### Engagement across key demographics

The vast majority of library members are represented by the two ends of the age spectrum. With 53% of respondents from our public survey being over the age of 45, and just 8.4% under the age of 24, it is clear that the library is not appealing to the full spectrum of our communities. As one staff member said *"We really need to provide better services and connections with older age groups, teens and men. it's traditionally more a venue for younger children and women"*. While it is easy to be content with who we get through our doors, to be the truly *"democratic"* and *"representative"* organisation we claim to be, we must do more.

While our members do get value, the middle cohort, particularly teenagers and young adults are missing. Not only is this a large and important group, it is a group that could benefit greatly from what the libraries have to offer and could bring a great deal of energy and insight to the library.

Across all of the research for this development plan we heard numerous calls for the libraries to attract more teenagers and young people. During staff consultations in particular, there were passionate calls to *"find new ways of engaging,"* and to offer *"more than just a space to study during exams."* There were call for libraries to *"push our boundaries"* to meet the needs of all age groups within our society and to give them the chance to feel that they have *"a reason and a right to use the library service."*

The public also expresses a strong desire for the library to make efforts to attract and engage 15 - 20 year olds, some pointing out that this cohort *"is really neglected by most community groups, agencies etc."* It was suggested that as well as a wider range of books and more targeted events, efforts should be made to align better with the needs of young people and innovate to *"be more relevant."*

### Guilt & fear getting in the way of non-users

Beyond time constraints, guilt and fear are two dominant feelings amongst non-users that may be preventing them joining or visiting the library. These feelings manifest in a number of ways. Firstly, the idea of going to, or sitting in the library without a transaction creates a level of guilt, particularly amongst young adult non-users. Comments like *"I know the library is supposed to be for everyone, but sitting there I cannot help but think I am taking up the space of someone who needs it more"* and *"Yes, it's free, but that feels strange - I know there is no catch but I still feel uneasy"* were heard in various forms. Transactions, no matter how small, create comfort, acceptance and a sense of belonging. When we spoke to people using coffee shops close to libraries, a common sentiment was *"I sometimes go to Starbucks and sit upstairs for hours! It's a lovely open space, lots of tables, and sockets everywhere! You buy a coffee every hour and then you feel no guilt!"*. Reciprocity bias, or our tendency to reciprocate the actions of others may go some way to explaining part of this guilt.

Other forms of guilt we heard related to not returning books on time, or at all, even if there are no fines. Initiatives like physical dropboxes utilised during COVID lockdowns were mentioned as a way of easing this form of guilt.

Fears, whether old fears of intimidating spaces or librarians, or new fears, play a part in people not attending the library. Librarians recognise this *"I think on arrival at a branch it can be intimidating to a lot of people and they want to be able to search themselves and look around"* users also recognise this, *"Scary place, need to re-educate us oldies about how quiet we need to be as we fear the old style librarian getting overly cross with us."* Across all research, the fear of getting in trouble, fear of asking for help, fear of being too noisy, fear of being judged and even fear of not knowing how the library works were all present. These feelings are powerful and can be the difference between stepping into a library or not.

# Expanding Our Community:

## Areas of focus

### Attracting teenagers & young adults:

We will focus on teenagers & young adults as a powerful opportunity for sustainable growth & positive impact.

### Finding our purpose

We will align South Dublin Libraries to an inspiring purpose, centred around responding to the increasing community, social and global challenges.

### Transition to experiences

Transition the library from a place of transaction towards unique experiences and working to develop an emotional connection and become more relevant to the public.

### Adapting to member needs

We recognise the need to adapt the delivery of library services to better suit the needs of our members and non members. This relates not only to an increase in online services, but by continuing to diversify how we deliver our physical services.

## Achieving Success in these areas

- Develop specialist events relating to challenges and topics that teenagers and young adults care about and find relevant. Where possible, these should be co-developed with the intended audience.
- Define and develop what a unique 'SDL experience' is. Redesign existing services and create new ones to demonstrate it.
- Align the library vision, values and behaviours more closely with those of teenagers & young adults.
- Stepping up to take real action, facilitate meaningful dialogue and ensure that reliable, informative and inspirational content is easy to access.
- Deliver additional opening hours through the provision of 'My Open Library' and creatively explore all opportunities to deliver library services in a variety of building types, sizes, and locations to best serve the needs of the community.
- Develop a series of initiatives that make the library less intimidating for non users based on real insight. Create accessible and innovative education initiatives to explain how the library works and what it offers for those who may not be familiar.
- Explore opportunities to develop new initiatives that create non-monetary transactions (expertise, charity, donation etc.) to remove guilt felt by non users.
- Including teenagers and young adults in the development of specialist events & creating a unique SDL experience. Co-design to encourage long-term involvement and interest in the library
- Expand partnership with Noise Music/Music Generation.
- Utilise our staff's research skills and our access to the community, to carry out rich qualitative and quantitative research on the needs, goals and motivations of desirable user groups.
- Upskill our staff on the principles of human-centred innovation and experience design, and empower them to respond to needs and opportunities.
- Build a network of community change makers, national experts and work with them to develop events and initiatives that align with our purpose and aspiration.
- Set up a system where individuals can join branch and inter-branch working groups to tackle identified challenges that align with their interests and experience.
- Provide time and space for staff to carry out research relating to understanding needs and designing services and experiences.

## Development Area 02

# Energising Our Collections:

We are all living busier lives, with an endless supply of media to inform, distract and entertain us. The context in which our libraries operate have changed, but have we changed enough to keep up? To compete and to add value we must find ways of adding new value, energising our offerings and aligning what we do with the lives of our communities.

### Solving problems right, but are they the right problems?

The library offers many great initiatives that are well considered and executed but unfortunately they often do not break through the awareness and engagement barriers - particularly with non-users.

Building on the identified 'engaging across demographics' and the "Making the most of precious free time" challenges in this section, it appears that the library is finding it difficult to develop events and offerings that happen at the right time, appeal in the right way or that can compete with other sources. As one non-user in an interview told us *"I'm sure there is lots going on in the library, some of which I would probably enjoy and get value out of, but ya know, youtube is easier and I don't have to worry about making a bad decision."*

*This disinterest is also combined with a lack of awareness, as this non user pointed out: "the library is not on my radar at all. Don't see ads, don't hear about events, don't really hear people talking about it. We all know its there, its open and it's free, it's just not appealing!"*

From a staff point of view there was a feeling that perhaps there were too many events for too little return, and a feeling of event fatigue: *"I think staff are also becoming snowed under with the sheer amount of events and a more focused approach would be good."*

Staff called for more outreach, better marketing and social media, and importantly, rethinking who they are trying to appeal to and put effort into designing events and inviting speakers to target desirable groups. It was suggested that to do this, efforts must be made to reach out to communities to *"identify real needs"* and to respond based on challenges facing members and the community at large.

### Making the most of precious free time

There are many reasons why people do not engage with South Dublin Libraries. One key emerging theme relates to time. Deciding to visit the library, search for a book and spend time reading it are all commitments of people's precious free time.

Lives are busy and the unlike in the past, access to entertainment, knowledge and escape are readily available on our smartphones, through our televisions and at the click of a "buy now" button. While it easy to accept these as just the way it is, we feel it is important that the library evolves and responds. Yes, perhaps the original function of libraries is not as relevant today to some people, but there are emerging needs amongst these groups, perhaps as a result, or a side effect of the times we are living in.

Many respondents in the public survey, and across our consultations referred to a lack of time, too busy or just got out of the habit as reasons for not engaging with the library. In our survey over 25% cited 'too busy' or 'times not suitable' as the main reason they do not attend.

Also related to time, we heard about 'wasted time' and this relates to perceived time on a "Bad book" or not finding what they were looking for. *"Once I go off the library for a long period, because of a bad read / choice, waste of time, I won't risk my time again and I go off the library for a long period"*. As one staff member also commented: *"The thing standing in the way is online shopping. It is sometimes easier to order a book online and have it delivered within two days rather than wait a week or two on on a book from the library."*

Related to this, there were many calls from the public for more and better curation of information, from *"more varied recommendations," "staff recommending favourites"* and *"book ratings and reviews."* This appears to be one solution to the challenge of time, as it has become the norm thanks to search engines and online retailers. This is something users are currently doing *"I consult my phone/ google to check online reviews before I settle on the book. It needs to be 4/5 and 4.5 is very promising"* and could open great opportunities for engagement, value adding activity and time saving.

# Energising Our Collections:

## Areas we will focus on

### Innovative Curation:

Rather than competing with online retailers, we will focus on expert curation over quantity, and insight over scale. Innovative curation will come through our staff, our users and through our research.

### Wayfinding and responding to life:

While communities are diverse, they share consistent life events, some scary and some exciting. We as a library can help people navigate these events, when they need it. We can be more responsive.

### Meaningful partnerships:

We will strengthen existing partnerships and provide support for local and national strategies that can add value to our users.

### Literacy & Healthy Ireland:

Develop our 'Right to Read' and 'Healthy Ireland' offerings.

## Achieving Success in these areas

- Work with our users to understand their needs and design and co-create new ways of saving them time, providing what they are looking for and curating our collections.
- Respond to, and stay ahead of community needs by identifying and stocking books / materials / forms etc. that align with key events in their lives or currently affecting the community.
- Identify new, common needs of the community that we may not offer / or are difficult to offer. Partner with organizations to provide these services. These could range from assistive technologies and specialist hobby equipment, to power tools and art supplies etc.
- Continue to deliver literacy supports and the sustained prioritisation of the nationally coordinated 'Right to Read' programme.
- The 'Healthy Ireland at Your Library' will be supported by expanding our programme of events and promoting the library as a reliable source of information on public health.

- Expand our collection (TTT) and our programme of events celebrating Neuro-Diversity to include Personal Sensory Regulation (Cubbies) and consider zoning and differentiation of spaces when both designing new libraries and refitting existing ones.
- Provide top-level support to allow staff time and flexibility to research and work on opportunities for innovative curation.
- Open up dialogue and forming partnerships with partner organisations to deliver new services and value to our users.
- Cross-branch collaboration to ideate potential ways of curating collections, sharing insights and creating a level of consistency across branches.
- Upskill staff in the principles of human-centred innovation and experience design to question orthodoxies and develop meaningful approaches and initiatives to tackle these challenges. Involve users in our research activity and co-creating services and experiences with them.
- Ensure that health, well-being and community resilience are promoted through our collections and events programmes.

## Development Area 03

# Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places

Having a sense of pride in our origins and in the localities in which we live, helps us develop our sense of who we are. Sitting at the center of communities, the library can play an important role.

### Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places

Heritage is what we have inherited from the past, to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations. The geographical area that makes up South Dublin has a heritage that stretches back to prehistory, evidence of which can still be seen today. At the same time, due to the pace of growth in the county, what was present in living memory can already seem like a faraway past. The living memory of communities in Tallaght, Clondalkin, Lucan, Ballyboden—too many to mention—present pictures of our towns, villages, suburbs that would be unrecognisable to the children living there today. As one respondent mentioned *“I feel that digitization of local historical information and books should be prioritized to make studying of social history easier”*.

Over the past 60 years, South Dublin has been transformed from a rural place into one of the most populated urban centres in the country, and it is still growing. Today, in our new towns and suburbs, retaining or in some cases developing a sense of place and identity presents challenges: community and family structures have changed, and we are open to many more global influences; the obvious examples of our heritage vary from place to place in the county. But as one respondent stated about the role of the library, *“it plays a key element in terms of Cultural Capital to the fabric of a Community”*. Other respondents spoke about the importance of the library, describing it as *“the most important building in any community”*, *“a pride of place in the community”* and *“it’s not just another building here, our library symbolises what we can become, where we came from and provides hope”*. What is present throughout the whole county are the stories and experiences of those who have lived through the recent history of the County. The experience for new community members in Adamstown surely relates to the experience of those who arrived in Tallaght in the 1960s. As the library service for a young local authority with a growing population and a

mix of established and new urban centres, South Dublin Libraries recognises its position in helping our communities to create as well as curate our county’s heritage, to record and share the stories that make our places. *The library is a place for “Engaging young people in the art of writing across all genres both poetry and prose to create a county of creative beings and a community of word lovers”*

This has been one of the great strengths of our library service. The recorded culture and memory of the County are held in our local studies collection, ensuring that these precious resources are available for all, both now and into the future. This award-winning local studies collection will continue to be an area of focus over the next five years.

Another area of focus will be our “new heritage”, what we are referring to in this plan as “Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places”. Our people shape the County’s future, and we recognise the importance of recording their experiences for future generations. Having shown through projects such as “Covid Memories” and “History All Around Us” that we can broaden the audience for heritage and placemaking programmes, we will build on our experience, further widening our approach to how we deliver collections and programmes. Our community value exhibitions, and spoke about them regularly, *“We love the exhibition space”*, and *“It is a focal point in the community for arts events exhibitions etc.”* Digitisation, social media, and virtual reality present opportunities to bring these programmes to life for younger generations for whom these relatively new technologies have become mainstream. *“There is so much amazing technology out there that our children (and us curious adults) need to know about. It could be transformative if it was available to all through the library”*.

Our goal is to deliver programmes under this banner across the County both through our branch network and digital media, that reflect the past and contribute to the future of our diverse individual communities, and that reach both our traditional and new audiences.

# Sharing Our Stories, Making Our Places:

## Areas we will focus on

### **New Heritage:**

Heritage is what we have inherited from the past, to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations. As a young local authority with a growing population and a mix of established and new urban centres, SDL recognises its position in creating as well as curating our county's heritage and in helping our communities maintain and develop their pride of place.

### **Technology for all:**

Explore the opportunities presented by digitisation, social media, and virtual reality to bring our collections and programmes to a wider audience.

### **Collect and curate:**

Collect and curate materials relating to South Dublin County and its people, preserving them for future generations, and explore new ways of promoting the history and heritage of the county.

## **Achieving Success in these areas**

- Partner to develop quality creative programmes focused on introducing people to areas of cultural & creative importance. Position SDL as a portal for creative pursuits within the community.
- Support local artists and creators through unique exhibitions and help preserve and promote their works for our archives. We will put emphasis on works that are relevant to our proposed target areas.
- Explore the ideas of working with local authors and artists to publish their work at a small scale.

- We will explore opportunities for adding more specialised facilities for different types of creative initiatives. These may require more adaptable spaces (Wipeable surfaces for art based activity, storage for crafts, equipment and recording space for podcasts, etc.)
- Create and identify funding sources to ensure quality and success in these areas

## Development Area 04

# Rejuvenating Our Physical & Virtual Space

The spatial and virtual needs of our members are evolving and our non-users are choosing alternatives that have greater appeal. We must work with our members and our community to ensure that our spaces are not just comfortable, functional and inviting, but are also beautiful and demonstrate that we listen and understand the needs of our diverse communities.

### Sitting at the edge of 'cool,' but not quite there

The library holds a unique and important position in our communities, with qualities unlike any other public service. Libraries are places of “enlightenment,” “escape,” “inspiration” and “connection,” but above all else libraries “are for the people”, all people.

As noted in previous insights and challenges, while the library is for everybody, large swathes of the community are absent, particularly teenagers and young adults. From our research, we have found that this is often because they already have easy access to more content than they need, they are well networked but above all else, the library today is just not as relevant to them. *“Apart from borrowbox, the library is not on my radar at all. I don't see ad's, I don't hear about events, don't really hear people talking about it. I know....we all know its there, its open and it's free, it's just not appealing!”*

These findings are at odds to the fact that some of the “coolest” actors, public figures and musicians praise libraries as catalysts, muses and refuges. Libraries also have real environmental credibility and share important qualities to what our youth care about, as another non-user pointed out; *“For me, books, reading, truth & community are things I really value - all my friends are the same. Although the library has all of this and more...(they even offer an escape from the neo-liberalism!). They should be heaving, I should want to be there. but for some reason the library feels flat, dated...just uncool”*. Libraries, are sitting on the edge of cool, of relevance, but just not breaking through. What if the library made efforts to become more relevant? Many of the people we spoke to and observed are walking past libraries to go to coffee shops, which are seen as *“Just more comfortable. The one I go to most is really cool and has a great atmosphere. It's actually not all about the coffee, it's the space, it's the vibe it's the feeling of sitting there relaxed and content.”*

We are now in the ‘Experience Economy,’ entering the social economy, where people demand something more. If we want those people coming through our doors, if we want to be talked about and if we want to have wider and longer term impact, we have to be ‘cooler.’ We have to become more relevant.

### Trying to be all things to all people

Yes, the library is democratic, open to all, and an important part of a community, but are we trying to be all things to all people? We need to ask, at this point in history, who needs us, who can benefit most and what can we do to be more relevant to them? We also have to ask ourselves if trying to be all things to all people is leading to dissatisfaction. As the author Garr Reynold once said *“If everything is important, then nothing is important. If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.”*

Across all of our research, a number of issues kept arising, particularly issues with noise and calls for spaces to be “separated,” “segmented,” or “dedicated.” Noise is a big issue amongst staff and adult users *“the noise is absolutely shocking. Kids screaming and all the adults are speaking at full volume and seem to be treating the space as child care its ridiculous! Its very hard to read or focus on study.”* Others suggested there are too many children's events *“Although the library is a great space for all members of the community, I sometimes find it too loud when there are children's events on in the main library space and I am trying to read”* and *“[the library] has become more of a creche, community centre, playground and sometimes a festival environment. Which is not good.”*

Relating to this, there were many calls for space to be segmented for children *“separate child area as both children and parents make way too much noise!”* and for students trying to work and study *“design a suitable study area...during the school year students represent a large percentage of our patrons and I feel the facilities provided to them is of a very low standard.”* There is no question that we must encourage children into the library and make the space enjoyable. However, going forward we must make efforts to tailor the library so it is comfortable for all. We must consider this when designing new branches, when carrying out work on existing branches and we must explore creative ways of making all branches comfortable and functional for a wide spectrum of users.

# Refreshing Our Physical & Virtual Space:

## Areas we will focus on

### The library as a third+ space:

The library is already a 'third place' (a social space separate from home and the workplace). Expectations have evolved amongst key demographics and these spaces must now offer more function, better atmosphere and "instagrammable" features and aesthetics. There is an opportunity to transform areas of our libraries into places that people want to be, want to be seen in and want to share. We call this a third+ Space as it provides what similar spaces cannot - our unique and valuable library services and expertise.

### Targeted Comfort

Our library is used by a diverse range of people with diverse needs. While it has evolved over years to where it is today, there is a need now to reconsider if our branches are providing the functionality and comfort needed to allow all users to do what they want to do in the right environment.

## Achieving Success in these areas

- Deliver new libraries in line with the County Development Plan (2022-2028): Adamstown and Citywest, and the renewal of Clondalkin. Through continued investment in library services, we will support healthy placemaking and sustainable movement.
- Deliver additional opening hours through the provision of My Open Library, explore all opportunities to deliver library services in a variety of building types, size, and location.
- Create attractive, comfortable and "edgy" spaces within our branches. Their job is twofold: firstly, they will be comfortable places to relax, talk and read, and secondly, they will provide a tangible focal point as well as a digital one. This will aid marketing and branding efforts.

- Design ways for the full spectrum of current and future library users to be comfortable doing what they come to the library to do. This can range from offering noise cancelling headphones and providing innovative study spaces to developing targeted comfort initiatives and zones.
- Work in collaboration with target demographics, with local designers, architects and South Dublin County Council architects to identify creative solutions that are desirable and attractive to our customers, feasible from a technical perspective and financially viable.
- Task branch and inter-branch working groups with identifying potential aesthetic / additions / technologies (sound absorption, coffee, furnishings, etc.) that will allow this space to meet identified needs and create a desirable atmosphere. Offer support to branches and share learnings that help staff create the right spaces and atmosphere for users.



## Development Area 05

# Enabling & Empowering Our Staff:

Our staff are our most valuable asset and the interface between the community and valuable services we offer. We are fortunate that they are passionate about what they do, but we need to ensure they have time and support to take on projects that make the most of their skills and add value to our community.

### A workforce ready, willing and...waiting

Based on our survey findings, the library has some of the most dedicated and happiest staff in the public sector. When surveyed, **91% of respondents said they agree or strongly agree that they are proud to work in South Dublin Libraries**. This, combined with the fact that library staff are driven by working with and serving the public suggests that South Dublin Library staff are ready and willing to step up and play an active role in ensuring this development plan is successful.



Fig 4. Word cloud of staff survey responses

The staff survey also highlighted that SDL staff are creative and innovative, with **78% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are creative** and **72% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have ideas that would help improve services or attract new members**. Staff also recognise the challenges, with **37% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that South Dublin Libraries are doing enough to demonstrate the value across the community**.

Staff have the passion, skills and energy to rise to the challenges and are well placed to provide innovative and creative solutions. However, communication across teams, branches and leadership must be improved so that they feel more engaged and empowered, *“Feeling not in the loop and not knowing about projects that are happening/planned, but at the same time feeling relieved because I feel I don't have time or energy to give new projects.”*

We must identify ways of providing our staff time to work on meaningful projects, empower and upskill them to experiment and drive initiatives that will improve our branches and help our communities and society.

### Staff love libraries, members love libraries

The library is trusted and highly valued by the public. When we asked them if they would recommend the library to a friend, the resounding answer was yes! Staff also love working there, so then where is everybody and who are the libraries advocates? We tend to put lack of engagement down to communication and marketing, but maybe it's more that? Marketing is useful for making people want things, but design makes things people want. Our research tells us there is both an awareness gap but also a gap in what we offer and what people want.

Much of our research pointed out issues with social media and marketing communication. Many blamed this for not being able to attract people through the doors. Respondents called for more, better and wider promotion, as one respondent pointed out *“we need more advertising than what they have, my friend works there and I never realised what services they provide eg audio, magazines etc. Now I must just go there.”* It is clear that there is a mismatch between what is offered and what the public know is offered, so communication must be improved. It is also important that the library does more to understand the needs of their customers. For example, in our staff and public surveys, we asked **“What are the main reasons people go to the library?”** Interestingly there was a significant gap between answers;

71% of users say its The range of books  
51% of staff think its The range of books

31% of users say its the events and activities  
78% of staff think its the events and activities

32% of users say its 'to gain new knowledge'  
9% of staff think its 'to gain new knowledge'

These gaps were consistent across the research and point to a need for us to spend time questioning what we do to make sure we are not making assumptions. We must also spend time carrying out user research in the form of one-to-one interviews, workshops and through co-creation of services. Many responses in the staff survey suggested a need to *“get out to the community more and not wait for the community to come to the Library”* and this might offer an opportunity to gather insight and understanding that we cannot get from within our branches.

# Enabling & Empowering Our Staff:

## Areas we will focus on

### Innovation & improvement

Our staff are creative, empathetic and passionate about their roles and serving society. These values align with the qualities of human-centred innovators and offer huge opportunities for improving our services, creating efficiencies and empowering our staff. It also aligns with [Our Public Service 2020](#) strategy and the [Civil Service Renewal 2030](#) strategy and the newly published '[Design Principles for Government in Ireland](#).'

### Getting out into the community

We will meet our community where they are, and use the opportunity to not only promote the services of the library, but gather insight and understanding of our users needs. Over the next five years we must not just design for, but design our services with the community.

### Irish Language

Form a cross-network working group to promote and advocate service delivery improvements in the Irish language.

## Achieving Success in these areas

- Identify suitable partners to deliver high impact design innovation capability building. They will assist us in designing a programme which aligns with the goals of the library, accommodates all staff to participate, and provides time for staff to carry out research work and develop service, process and experience innovation proposals. We will commit to test and pilot high-potential ideas emerging, and provide time and space for the relevant staff to work on them.
- Enable staff to avail of training opportunities in the Irish language to encourage use of the language in all aspects of service delivery.
- Work with local schools and Universities to provide Irish language upskilling opportunities for staff.
- Develop a high impact innovation programme specifically tailored to library innovation. We will use the outputs of this programme to create a funnel of innovations and service improvements under the key development areas of this plan. Viable innovations will be supported and implemented over the next 5 years.
- As part of our commitment to co-creation and human-centred innovation, we will use our position in the community to identify more outreach and collaboration opportunities.
- We will form a cross-network working group to promote and advocate service delivery improvements in the Irish language.

# Get involved

Traditionally, development plans are implemented over a period of several years without much ongoing engagement with the public or staff. As a result, the strategy may not remain relevant or be as effective over time. To address this, the "Our Library, Our Future" development aims to continue engaging with the public and staff throughout the implementation process through a series of interactive questions based on research findings.

Five key areas have been identified in this development plan, along with associated questions. Gathering ideas and suggestions on these aspects of the plan will help ensure that the strategy remains relevant and effective.

Additionally, regular feedback from the public and staff can help identify and address any challenges or issues that may arise during implementation, allowing for continuous improvement and fine-tuning of the strategy.

Members of the public can access the idea submission portal through the provided link or by scanning the QR code with their smartphone. The SDL team will review submissions regularly.

## Development Area 01 Expanding Our Community:

### Question we need to ask

**Q: How might we attract, even inspire teenagers and young people to join the library and receive real value from what we do?**



To submit your suggestions, scan this code or follow this link.

<https://forms.office.com/e/vwXug08zt6>

## Development Area 02 Energising Our Collections:

### Question we need to ask

**Q: How might we create services and experiences that are so meaningful that people want to share and engage with them?**



To submit your suggestions, scan this code or follow this link.

<https://forms.office.com/e/e1XggkFi4Q>

**Development Area 03**  
**Sharing Our Stories,  
Making Our Places**

**Question we need to ask**

**Q: How might we rethink our services so as to save people time and make it easier or faster for them to get value from us?**



To submit your suggestions, scan this code or follow this link.

<https://forms.office.com/e/WHBwxNQ7Ej>

**Development Area 04**  
**Rejuvenating Our  
Physical & Virtual  
Space**

**Question we need to ask**

**Q: How might we remove the guilt felt by people considering joining or visiting the library by building in some form of meaningful exchange?**

**Q: How might we get ahead of fears that people might have regarding the library and remove that excuse?**



To submit your suggestions, scan this code or follow this link.

<https://forms.office.com/e/P9pikiCAXW>

**Development Area 05**  
**Enabling &  
Empowering Our  
Staff:**

**Question we need to ask**

**Q: How might we design our offering to work harder for us so that the right people see them at the right time?**



To submit your suggestions, scan this code or follow this link

<https://forms.office.com/e/sTy3yRDsfA>



# Consultation Process

The preparation of the South Dublin Library Development Plan 2023 - 2027 involved consultation with a variety of stakeholders including users and non-users of the service, library staff, other departments within South Dublin County Council and community groups. A Human-Centred design approach was used to ensure that user needs were at the centre of the process and that consultations sessions were engaging and delivered valuable insight.

# A Design-Led Approach

Project success often balances on a teams understanding and interpretation of the problems to be solved. Most project failures are the result of beginning a project with incorrect assumptions about the user, the problem or the solution. Successful projects on the other hand, are most often born from deep unbiased immersion in the problem and a more accurate understanding of the needs of the user. It is here where unmet and unarticulated customer needs and hidden behaviours are observed and meaningful insights are uncovered.

For this development plan we took a design-led approach to understanding the challenges and opportunities facing South Dublin Libraries in attracting and engaging users. A design led approach begins with people and spending time with them where they are. Taking a design led approach to this development plan aligned with the recently published [Design Principles for Government in Ireland](#) from the Dept. Public Expenditure & Reform. This publication describes a design approach as;

“developing empathy and understanding of people’s changing needs and circumstances by talking directly with the people we are designing for. Using those insights, possible solutions are imagined, prototyped and tested with people to see if there is harmony between what is actually desirable (does it meet their needs?), what's viable (does it make economic sense?) and what is feasible (is it technically possible?). Learning is then applied to develop and deliver well considered products and services”.

Design Principles for Government in Ireland (2022)- Dept. Public Expenditure & Reform

The findings outlined in this development plan are the result of 6 months of design research. Across this research, various tools and techniques were used to facilitate better conversations with people through a number of different research formats. Firstly it was important to first gain a macro understanding of the library system. Desk research was carried out, as were scoping workshops and a interviews with library staff and leadership. This work helped us to identify high level challenges and opportunities for deeper investigation.

It became clear from our initial research that while there would be no issue finding current active users to interview and survey, capturing non-users and potential future users would be more challenging. As leadership was keen to increase active users and ensure that a full spectrum of people from the community were availing of the library services, our research approach was designed to ensure their voices were captured throughout.

On the next page we detail some of the work carried out in this development of the 2023 - 2027 plan.

## Design Principles for Government in Ireland



Fig 5. Design principles for government in Ireland

## Branch Consultation Sessions

Getting out to branches and meeting the staff and public was essential to form an understanding of the challenges, to see the branch culture and hear first hand the stories from staff and members. In total, 8 consultation sessions were held. The first two were with library staff, and the remaining 6 took place in Castletymon, NCL, Ballyroan, Clondalkin, Tallaght and Lucan libraries. Each session took a different approach, where various exercises and discussion themes were used to gather feedback.

Each session focused on a different theme relating to library activity. Across each two hour session, a diverse group of participants took part in specially designed discussion and reflection exercises.



Fig 6: Consultation session with members of North Clondalkin library

## Staff Survey

A staff survey was developed and distributed to all staff for completion. In total there were 46 respondents from across the SDL network. The survey was designed to delve deeply into their understanding of the purpose of the library, their individual motivation for working in the library, what they are most proud of and general questions relating to what they felt was and was not working.

## Public Survey

A digital public survey was developed and shared across all library social media channels. To accompany this and to facilitate people without access to a computer, the same survey was created in hard copy. In total there were 854 responses, 573 digital responses and 281 paper based.

## Non-User Interviews

To capture the voice and opinion of non-users, semi structured interviews were carried out with 12 individuals across a range of age categories. These individuals were either members of a library that do not visit regularly, individuals that have never visited a library and individuals that had not been to a library in many years.

The interviews took a semi-structured format, with questions designed to probe the deeper reasons for not attending and reasons for selecting other spaces to spend their free time / obtain books and other forms of media.

These interviews were either prearranged with identified individuals or were intercepts with individuals identified during contextual inquiry work.

## Contextual Enquiry

Contextual inquiry is a type of ethnographic field study that involves in-depth observation and interviews with a small sample of users to gain a robust understanding of work practices and behaviours. For this research, coffeeshops, particularly those close to public libraries were identified as a rich site for investigation. Our researchers also carried our inquiries outside of branches with individuals who were not inclined to enter the library.

As well as the surroundings, activities and observing behaviour, conversations were initiated with individuals, primarily focused on why they chose a coffee shop over a library, what they use the environment for and what qualities did it have that the library did not have.

## Thematic Analysis

Across all of the research, a large amount of data was collected. This data was reviewed by the research team and sorted into a number of themes. Both analogue approaches and digital analysis using the collaboration software Miro was used throughout the process. Themes were discussed with SDL leadership and key insights and challenges were framed and written up.

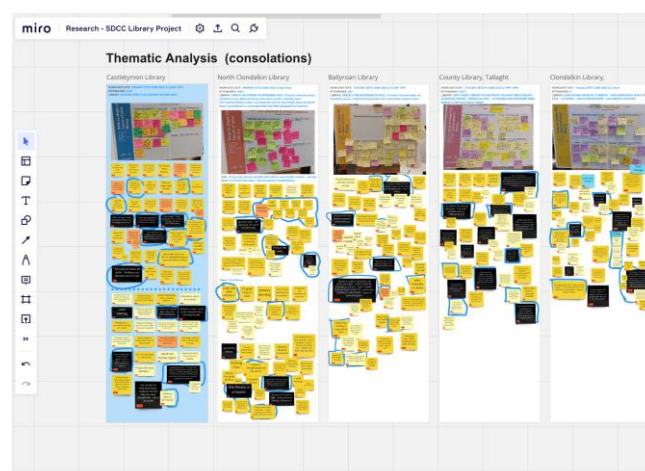


Fig 7: A section of the Miro software analysing consultation findings.





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