

Annual Business Plan *2021 - 2022*



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Foreword by Chairperson and Chief Executive



We are pleased to present the Annual Business Plan 2021/22 which sets out the direction of travel for Libraries NI for the next twelve months and outlines our ambitions for delivering the public library service in Northern Ireland. The Annual Business Plan is set very much within the overarching framework of our Corporate Plan which sets out the Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions for the period 2020 – 24. Both the Business and Corporate Plans are closely linked to wider government priorities, and in particular the Department for Communities Strategy 2020-25: Building Inclusive Communities and the aim of making a lasting and sustainable contribution to improving the societal wellbeing of individuals and communities in Northern Ireland.

This plan has been developed in a climate of financial, societal and economic uncertainty following the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic which means that it will be important to keep it under review throughout the year. With this in mind we must focus our efforts where they can have the greatest impact, while being mindful also of our statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive service for everyone who lives, works or studies in Northern Ireland. In reality given the scale of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic the main focus during 2021/22 will be on recovery, reconnection and working to re-build services. Our services must continue to be efficient and provide value for money and we believe that libraries will continue to deliver on priority agendas that make a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities.

The extensive network of libraries is strategically important and we believe that this importance will strengthen as we re-establish services and continue to work collaboratively with organisations across government departments, public bodies and the voluntary and private sectors. In this way Libraries NI can play its role in the wider societal recovery from the impacts of the pandemic and can support the delivery of other services, providing local access points and helping customers to connect with

information and services that contribute to social and economic wellbeing. All of this is only made possible by our dedicated and professional staff who are committed to delivering high standards of service and providing help and support to assist people using libraries, no matter what their background or circumstances.

The Annual Business Plan continues to develop our approach to outcomes based planning with three clear desired Outcome Areas and corresponding Strategic Actions. The outcomes delivery planning approach is a major change for Libraries NI and work will continue during 2021/22 to further integrate this methodology throughout the organisation, with a view to forming a basis for developing business plans in subsequent years, including new ways to report the achievements of the organisation.

Libraries are trusted service providers in the heart of communities supporting people from different backgrounds and demographics, encouraging a love of reading and providing opportunities for people to learn and to connect with information, IT and services. As we respond to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we will continue to work closely with officials from the Department for Communities, other government departments and partners, throughout the next twelve months, to deliver for people whilst building upon our unique position as a trusted and valued community resource.



Bernard Cullen
Chairperson



Jim O'Hagan
Chief Executive

1. Who we are

1.1 The Northern Ireland Library Authority, more commonly known as Libraries NI, is a regional body responsible for the provision and delivery of a public library service in Northern Ireland. Libraries NI is the largest single library authority in the UK. Our primary duty, as set down in the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, is to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for persons living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.

1.2 The Board of Libraries NI, when fully constituted, comprises a Chairperson and 18 Members, the majority of whom are councillors within the meaning of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. Board Members are appointed by the Department for Communities.

1.3 Our Vision

A visible, accessible and inclusive library service at the heart of communities, enhancing lives and valued by all.

1.4 Our Mission

Connecting people with information, ideas and experiences to foster lifelong learning, inspire curiosity, provide enjoyment and strengthen communities.

1.5 Our Values

Caring - we care about our library users, the community, each other and what we do. We will provide a safe and welcoming environment where people can connect and explore. We will show respect for users of our service and for each other, will build trust and will strive to provide positive experiences for both external and internal customers.

Accountable – we take responsibility, as individuals and as an organisation, for effective stewardship of the resources allocated to us and for delivering on our commitments. We will act with honesty and integrity and maintain high standards of governance, responsible leadership and efficient operations.

Responsive – we are a learning organisation that is open to new ideas and better ways to serve individuals and communities. We have a focus on quality, are creative and flexible and will continue to explore innovative ways of working to ensure that services are vibrant, effective and relevant to the changing needs of our customers.

1.6 Our Network and Services

The library network is crucial to the delivery of both an effective and comprehensive library service taking account of the geographic and demographic spread of Northern Ireland. Our services, under normal operational conditions, are delivered through a network of 96 branch libraries, heritage libraries, mobile libraries and a homecall service, which provide a wide range of free services including:

- books and other material such as audio books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines
- downloadable eBooks, audio books and eMagazines and other online resources, most of which can also be accessed from home
- supported access to computers for use by the general public with free internet access for library members
- support for the development of ICT skills
- free Wi-Fi, enabling library members to use their own devices
- learning opportunities
- storytimes, rhythm and rhyme sessions and other activities for children
- school class visits
- family history, heritage and local studies material
- access to information from a range of sources and organisations
- access to cultural and creative experiences
- reading groups for children, teenagers and adults
- health and wellbeing information, activities and events
- social activities, such as 'Knit and Natter' and 'Tea and Newspapers', which promote community cohesion and combat isolation
- study, meeting and shared social space.

During 2020/21, like many public services, library services were severely disrupted by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, services provided during 2020/21 were limited and the impacts of this are likely to extend into 2021/22. However, responding to the pandemic has led to a stepped change in terms of developing new ways of working, new services, online programming and our ability to better use information technology to deliver remotely and build skills. Carrying this learning forward will inform and shape our approaches in 2021/22 and beyond this.

2. The Planning Context

- 2.1 In developing the Annual Business Plan 2021/22 consideration has been given to a range of external factors that influence, shape and impact on libraries, library use and the public sector landscape within which the library service is delivered in Northern Ireland. These factors include public policy, economic, social,

cultural, technological developments, library customers and our staff. We recognise that we do not operate in isolation and take account of government priorities as well as strategic developments taking place in respect of library service provision and wider public service provision generally.

- 2.2 The most significant external factor over the past twelve months has been the coronavirus pandemic which has caused unprecedented disruption to peoples' lives, society and public services, including library services. Despite the extraordinary challenges of 2020/21, due to the dedication, commitment and contribution of staff across the whole organisation, Libraries NI was able to provide a limited range of services throughout the duration of the year. The learning we have taken from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the new and different ways of working, new services, use of technology and development of online programming, will inevitably influence and shape much of our effort during 2021/22 as we continue the process of reconnecting and re-building services and playing our role in the wider societal and economic recovery.
- 2.3 The Annual Business Plan is set within the context of our Corporate Plan which sets out the Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions for the period 2020 – 24 and which can be accessed [Here](#). Our priorities and outcomes are also guided by the vision and priorities of the Department for Communities and the framework of societal outcomes articulated in the draft Programme for Government (PfG) and Outcomes Delivery Plan as well as being informed by themes emerging from Community Plans.
- 2.4 The Department for Communities Strategy 2020-25: Building Inclusive Communities provides another important point of reference for libraries to contribute to the aim of making a lasting and sustainable contribution to improving the societal wellbeing of individuals and communities in Northern Ireland.

3. Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions

- 3.1 This Annual Business Plan has been developed taking account of outcomes based principles and approaches. An outcomes-based approach represents a fundamental change to the way in which Libraries NI plans and delivers a public library service in Northern Ireland. The PfG framework sets out the major societal outcomes of the Executive and provides the strategic direction for the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. At a population level 12 priority outcomes have been set and all Departments and public bodies are required to work collaboratively to deliver against them and to contribute towards the overarching aim of 'improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage and driving growth'.
- 3.2 In developing the Annual Business Plan we have taken account of our statutory responsibility to deliver a public library service and have sought to closely align what we do with those parts of the PfG framework and the Department for Communities strategic priorities that have most relevance and where we believe our impact to be most significant. The plan also draws on themes and outcomes

articulated in community plans developed by the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland.

- 3.3 We have identified three Libraries NI outcome areas and have developed a number of strategic actions around each of the outcome areas. The Libraries NI outcome areas and strategic actions provide the context and framework for 'delivery' of priorities and services with more detailed annual objectives and targets being set to ensure the aspirations and ambitions articulated in the four-year Corporate Plan are delivered.

4. 2021/22 Strategic Actions, Annual Targets and Objectives

- 4.1 The following section sets out, in detail, the Libraries NI Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and annual targets and objectives.
- 4.2 The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is likely to extend into the 2021/22 business planning year and consequently work to deliver many of the targets included in this plan will take account of government and public health guidance and the changing environment throughout the year.
- 4.3 Due to the unprecedented level of uncertainty as we move into the 2021/22 year a more formal review of the Business Plan will be carried out in-year and this may result in the plan being adjusted and or updated to reflect any material changes that are taking place within the operational landscape.

4.3 Annual Business Plan 2021/22

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets / Objectives	
Outcome 1: A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal well-being				
1	Provide a customer focused public library service to people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland which contributes to societal wellbeing	1.1	Devise, implement and keep under review approaches to service delivery that are designed to maximise safe access to library services and which take account of the changing environment throughout the year.	
		1.2	Devise and implement a minimum of two initiatives to enhance customer focus.	
		1.3	In line with the Public Library Standard Stock spend £2.25 per capita on stock – PLS target.	
		1.4	Develop and implement a programme of activities to exploit the collections	
		1.5	Achieve the following levels of participation:	
			• 3,050,000 loans and renewals	
			• 1,600,000 e loans	
			• 160,000 active members – 3% increase on 2020/21	
1.6	Promote wellbeing through a range of programmes and services to address social inclusion and loneliness			
1.7	Contribute to good relations through a range of initiatives			
2	Create strong mutually beneficial regional and local partnerships, including with other public services	2.1	Progress a minimum of three partnerships which position libraries as access points for services.	

	and community planning partners, to develop libraries as access points for a wide range of services.	2.2	Identify relevant partnerships to develop and/or deliver services and to increase participation.	
3	Reduce barriers to library use especially for those at risk of being socially excluded.	3.1	Identify two customer groups and progress initiatives to enhance services and improve access	
		3.2	Review barriers to use/participation and implement a minimum of one initiative to remove barriers	
4	Raise awareness and increase understanding of library services with customers, the general public and stakeholders.	4.1	Develop and implement stakeholder engagement plan	
		4.2	Raise awareness of Libraries NI Services to contribute to the achievement of participation targets and to inform customers about changing service delivery models	
		4.3	Raise awareness of Libraries NI and its achievements within the wider world of libraries	
		4.4	Increase total likes and follows across all relevant social media channels by 4%.	
Outcome 2: Inspired, informed and literate children and adults.				
5	Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults.	5.1	Provide access to services, programmes and activities for children and/or for adults relating to reading and learning.	
		5.2	Support and deliver reading challenge events and activities to a minimum of 12,000 children.	

6	Provide access to Heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience.	6.1	Develop and deliver services and programmes to promote access to Cultural Heritage including the development of resources for online and social media platforms.	
7	Improve digital services, access and literacy.	7.1	Provide access to ICT, including computer resources, Wi-Fi and internet access.	
		7.2	Provide access to a range of services and programmes which promote digital literacy.	
		7.3	Deliver 400 learning opportunities to improve digital literacy.	
8	Promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens.	8.1	Develop and deliver services and programmes to promote access to information including a focus on areas such as health and wellbeing information, online safety and information literacy.	
Outcome 3: Effective governance and delivery				
9	Maintain an effective organisational and governance framework and support and develop our people to enable delivery of high quality public services.	9.1	Maintain overall sickness absence levels (FTE days lost) at or below 9.50 days (by 31 March 2022)	
		9.2	Engage with staff to bolster morale and strengthen the organisational culture, taking on board learning from the management of the Covid-19 pandemic.	
		9.3	Implement revised structures for delivery of services within the new structure by 31 March 2022	
		9.4	Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21 submitted for audit by 12 July 2021 and certified by NIAO by 31 October 2021.	

		9.5	Complete work with the Department to put in place a new Partnership Agreement.	
		9.6	Provide an Internal Audit Service to support effective governance and delivery of organisational objectives, including completion of 90% of planned audits by 31 March 2022.	
10	Make best use of available resources to support identified priorities and deliver an effective and valued public library service.	10.1	Deliver annual resource and capital expenditure within 1% underspend of respective total budgets by 31 March 2022	
		10.2	Complete all procurement stages for the e3 project, up to the 31 March 2022, in line with the e3 Project Plan (by 31 March 2022)	
		10.3	Engage with the Department for Communities and develop an approach for the delivery of the Belfast Central Library Project by 31 March 2022	
		10.4	Review the Corporate Risk Register quarterly at Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Board, and review Service and Project Risk Registers bi-annually at relevant Committees.	
		10.5	Implement major and minor capital works and maintenance programmes in line with available resources by 31 March 2022	
		10.6	Deliver staff development programmes to support the growth of staff in new roles arising from the organisation and structures review, by 31 March 2022.	
11	Implement an OBA approach to business planning and performance measurement.	11.1	Develop OBA reporting for two Strategic Actions set out in the Annual Business Plan.	

5. Measuring Results

5.1 Effective planning, performance management and reporting are vital in ensuring that the needs of service users are met, essential services are delivered and statutory obligations discharged and that the organisation continues to improve and be open and transparent about progress and risks. The move to an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to planning and delivery requires a different approach to performance management, measurement and monitoring. An important element of any outcomes based approach is the shift in emphasis to outcomes and measuring the impact of actions or interventions as opposed to simply measuring the amount of work that is delivered. Two distinct levels of reporting and monitoring are typically associated with OBA:

- (1) Monitoring outcomes at a population level, which is done by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) using a range of indicators to reflect collective progress of departments and public bodies. This monitoring reflects change at a population level with no one department, Arm's-Length Bodies (ALB) or other organisation likely to affect outcomes in isolation
- (2) Monitoring actions through performance accountability measures which are concerned with the impact of individual actions delivered by ALB's.

5.2 Strategic Actions related to the outcome areas identified in this plan will be monitored and their impact measured at the organisation level. Nevertheless, by working to realise actions in outcome areas Libraries NI will be able to make its contribution towards achievement of population outcomes such as health, education and young people, societal wellbeing, digital inclusion, connecting people and strengthening communities.

5.3 The OBA approach will be incorporated into the existing performance management framework in Libraries NI which consists of different elements including:

- the Corporate Plan which sets out the high level outcomes and strategic actions linked to the PfG and DfC strategies for library services
- an annual Business Plan which sets out the actions we need to take and the targets that we need to achieve in year
- Key Performance Indicators, which are used to report regularly at Board level and to DfC on progress in relation to the Annual Business Plan
- Service Plans which translate the Business Plan into more detailed actions and targets to be taken forward by various teams within the organisation
- the Staff Appraisal process which includes the setting of personalised targets and goals for individual members of staff to enable them to fulfil their respective roles in meeting the actions and targets set out in the Service Plans
- the Risk Management and associated assurance processes which are embedded in the routines and activities of the organisation and provide a structured and coherent approach to identifying, assessing and managing the risk to achievement of objectives and

- the Annual Report and Accounts which provide detailed information on our work during the year.
- 5.4 The most significant risks to the achievement of outcomes and strategic actions is the uncertainty regarding funding levels going forward and the continued impact of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 5.5 The Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and Key Performance Indicators for the 2021/22 Business Plan are set out below.

Table 1: Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Outcome Area: A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing	
<p>Strategic Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a customer focused public library service to people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland which contributes to societal wellbeing. • Create strong mutually beneficial regional and local partnerships, including with other public services and community planning partners, to develop libraries as access points for a wide range of services. • Reduce barriers to library use especially for those at risk of being socially excluded. • Raise awareness and increase understanding of library services with customers, the general public and stakeholders. 	<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):</p> <p>No. loans and renewals against target.</p> <p>No. e loans against target.</p> <p>No. new members against target.</p> <p>No. active members against target.</p> <p>95% of branch libraries reopened and / or providing services *</p> <p>% increase social media likes against target.</p>

Outcome Area: Inspired, informed and literate children and adults	
<p>Strategic Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults. • Provide access to Heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience. • Improve digital services, access and literacy. • Promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens. 	<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):</p> <p>Participation in reading challenges – measured against target.</p> <p>Number of learning opportunities to improve digital literacy – measured against target</p> <p>95% of branch libraries providing WiFi / Public Access Terminal.</p> <p>No. of WiFi / Public Access Terminal uses – measured against target.</p>
Outcome Area: Effective Governance and delivery	
<p>Strategic Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain an effective organisational and governance framework and support and develop our people to enable delivery of high quality public services. • Make best use of available resources to support identified priorities and deliver an effective and valued public library service. • Develop and implement an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to business planning and performance measurement. 	<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):</p> <p>Annual net spend (resource and capital) will be within budget. Underspend will be minimised to ≤1% of budget</p> <p>Capital and minor works programmes will be implemented in accordance with the agreed timetable and budget</p> <p>Maintain overall sickness absence levels at or below 9.50 FTE days</p> <p>95% of ICT service provision standards will be met</p> <p>100% of invoices will be paid within 30 working days</p> <p>90% of invoices will be paid within 10 working days</p> <p>95% of Internal Audit service targets and standards will be met.</p>

* Where allowed to do so by government regulation. Excludes libraries closed for planned refurbishment / repairs.

6. Financing Our Services

- 6.1 While the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic had led to some delay in the release of the initial 2021/22 financial allocations the Department for Communities confirmed the Libraries NI baseline resource budget on 11 May 2021 as being £28,135,000, an increase of some £1,970,000 on the opening allocation of £26,165,000 seen in the previous financial year. This positive move towards a more sustainable level of funding for the public library service reflected the constructive and collaborative work undertaken by Libraries NI and DfC throughout 2020.
- 6.2 While acknowledging that financial pressures remain and that further collaboration and effort will take place throughout 2021/22 to ease or address these pressures, the initial resource allocation of £28,135,000 provides a positive platform on which to base internal budget allocations and to develop spending plans, to support delivery of this business plan, without the need to immediately apply more stringent controls on expenditure or implement further additional savings measures.
- 6.3 A Spending Plan has been prepared on the basis of the confirmed resource allocation and a series of planning assumptions about cost increases, the continuing challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and additional pressures anticipated to materialise in 2021/22.
- 6.4 Based on current projections, we anticipate expenditure against the indicative resource budget in 2020/21 will be as follows:

Table 2: Category of Spend

Category of Spend	£000's
Staff	17,429
Stock	1,050
Premises	4,473
Supplies and services	5,528
Vehicle	200
Sub-total	28,680
Income	(545)
Total	28,135

- 6.5 A capital funding allocation of £3.142 million has been confirmed to meet existing contractually committed expenditure including procurement of the e3 ICT project

and further development of the projects to replace library facilities in Enniskillen and Fivemiletown. The funding allocation will also support delivery of a range of infrastructure improvements and address a number of Health and Safety related issues across the library estate.

7. Governance and Delivering the Business Plan

- 7.1 Libraries NI has a corporate governance framework which specifies organisation and governance structures, including roles and responsibilities, to ensure proper and effective management and delivery of plans and priorities within available resources. The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring delivery of the Libraries NI Business Plan and is supported in this by two Directors who manage core business groups to deliver library services to the public and to provide support services within the organisation. Arrangements are in place for regular monitoring of the Business Plan and the Libraries NI Board and Committees provide scrutiny and oversight.
- 7.2 Libraries NI has a well-established framework for risk management. A number of risks identified in 2020/21 are likely to be relevant in 2021/22 and these include:
- uncertainty and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to continue work reconnecting and re-building library services
 - the challenging financial environment
 - the need to complete the next stage of organisation restructuring
 - the impact of ongoing industrial action.
- 7.3 At the start of each business cycle a fundamental review of the corporate risk register is undertaken with a view to ensuring a strategic focus is maintained on key risks to the achievement of objectives and targets.

Appendix 1: Libraries NI Board Members

Professor Bernard Cullen	Chairperson
Councillor Donal Lyons	Vice Chairperson
Mr Neil Bodger	
Alderman Thomas Burns	
Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
Councillor Glenn Finlay	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	
Councillor Cheryl Johnston	
Councillor Garath Keating	
Mrs Deirdre Kenny	
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
Mr John Peto	
Mr Harry Reid	
Dr Margaret Ward	
Councillor Billy Webb MBE JP	
Miss Linda Wilson	

Appendix 2: Libraries NI - Organisation Structure

