

# Foreword by Chairperson and Chief Executive

This Corporate Plan 2025 – 2030 articulates our vision, values and priorities over the next five years. It captures who we are, what we do and how the public library service will make a positive impact for people and communities throughout Northern Ireland. It reflects our commitment to uphold the highest standards of service delivery in the provision of a public library service and sets out how our people, facilities, infrastructure and resources will be deployed to deliver our priorities, goals and objectives.

It is our vision to provide 'A relevant, accessible and inclusive library service making a difference to the lives of people and communities'. The Corporate Plan represents our ambition and aspiration for the public library service and we will work with purpose and dedication to deliver our vision and mission in a way that aligns with our core values and priorities. Much has been achieved and we want to build on this to improve and develop the library service and deliver more. This plan provides the framework for how we will do this through the priorities and strategic goals we have set for the next five years.

A lot has happened over the last four years. There were the unprecedented challenges of the global coronavirus pandemic which caused widespread disruption to our normal operations, the provision of library services and society generally. Thanks to the efforts of our dedicated staff, we were able to adapt and respond in ways that ensured library services continued to be provided and we know this was greatly appreciated by the people and communities we serve. There have also been opportunities in adversity as we saw online library services grow, other new services and approaches develop and new information and communications technology and infrastructure implemented.

In our external environment the impacts of climate change on our planet are evident, and as a public body we are committed to taking effective action and will be focusing on strategies to contribute towards Net-Zero Carbon and a more sustainable library service, including our commitment to initiatives such as the Green Library Manifesto.

Everyone who works for Libraries NI plays a vital role in the continued development and success of the library service and there will be a renewed focus on learning and development and health and wellbeing and it is our aim to have a workplace culture, where all employees feel supported, led, managed, developed, engaged and included.

The public sector landscape is both challenging and changing and we are determined to move forward with confidence, and with a spirit of partnership and collaboration to deliver an efficient, effective and value for money library service for all communities in Northern Ireland. Rising costs and the challenge of delivering services within constrained budgets will require careful planning and resource management to find innovative and creative solutions. as well as opportunities to optimise procedures and processes. We will continue to embrace an ethos of efficiency and continuous improvement while making the case for an appropriate level of investment to meet our statutory

obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service to the people of Northern Ireland.

Libraries are trusted places 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, technology and services. As we look to the future we will continue to work closely with officials from the Department for Communities, other government departments and partners to deliver for people whilst building upon our unique position as a trusted and valued community resource.



Shirtle ( )

Libraries NI Chief Executive

Libraries NI Chairperson



A wide range of free library services are delivered through a network of:



98 libraries



Heritage libraries



Mobile libraries



Homecall service

Library services can also be accessed online from home.





### **Our Vision**

A relevant, accessible and inclusive library service making a difference to the lives of people and communities.

### **Our Mission**

To provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service for people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland.

We are passionate about libraries and as we deliver against our mission we will strive to encourage reading, creativity and lifelong learning, to enrich lives, and to connect people and communities with culture, heritage, information, ideas and experiences. We want to amplify the role, impact and contribution of our libraries in the lives of people and communities and to societal wellbeing.

### **Our Values**

#### Caring

We care about our customers, the communities we serve, the colleagues we work with and the services we provide. We will provide a safe, friendly and welcoming environment, we will promote a culture of openness and transparency, respect diversity and treat our customers, staff and partners fairly.

#### **Accountable**

We are accountable, we will act with honesty and integrity and maintain high standards of governance, responsible leadership and efficient operations.

#### **Progressive**

We are a progressive, forward-looking, learning organisation, responsive to our customers, open to new ideas and better ways to serve people 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.





Our previous corporate priorities centred around three outcome areas and 11 strategic actions which are set out in the 2020 – 24 Corporate Plan. Our work in support of delivering against the three outcome areas is reported in detail in our published Annual Report and Accounts but highlights and successes include:

## A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing

- providing welcoming, locally accessible and stigma-free, inclusive environments and spaces for our diverse range of customers, delivering events and activities, combatting loneliness and social isolation
- offering places and spaces to meet and connect, including for parents and carers, children, students, retired and older people
- playing an important part in the response to wider societal challenges, including recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis and supporting delivery of other free services
- our dedicated and professional staff delivering high standards of service, help and support to assist people using libraries, no matter what their background or circumstances

Listen to avid library user, Florence,

as she talks about how she uses

the library and the impact it has.

- providing local access points to information, services and resources, including access to a wide range of services through partners in the statutory, community and voluntary sectors
- delivering services and programmes which matter to people, communities and government, including mental health programmes, parenting activities, literacy, education, digital inclusion, promotion of health literacy and trusted information, positive ageing, and much more, as well as access to online resources, eBooks and eMagazines
- engaging with Community Planning across all eleven district council areas.
  - 66 Over my 60 years, I have seen such a difference in behaviour in libraries.

#### Inspired, informed and literate children and adults

- provision of early intervention activities and resources to support reading and emotional development and improve life opportunities and educational outcomes for children and young people
- promotion of reading for pleasure and activities associated with reading through our reader development programmes encouraging people of all ages to read, to read more widely, and to get more from their reading
- engaging people and communities through cultural heritage collections and resources in the nine heritage libraries, pop-up and touring exhibitions and through working with partners such as PRONI

- provision of free Wi-Fi / Broadband and IT infrastructure to help get people connected online
- delivery of a wide range of digital learning opportunities, including Introduction to iPad, Scam Awareness, Go On, Get Online and eClinics
- provision of events, activities and resources to support learning and development for children and adults through initiatives like the Northern Ireland Science Festival, the Belfast Festival of Learning and STEM Ambassadors.

This library's so good!



Listen to Nicola and Louis, as they talk about how the library has supported Louis in his development and reading journey.

#### Effective governance and delivery

- re-shaped operational and delivery structures and services, including the Network of Libraries, Collections, Online Services and Service Support, Customer Experience and Customer Groups
- application of risk management and financial management measures to cope with a range of challenges and uncertainty, including planning, funding, inflationary pressures and the COVID-19 pandemic
- delivery of key elements of the Information and Communications Technology and Managed Services programme and projects to support provision and development of library services into the future

- investment in the library estate and fleet including refurbishments, upgrades to facilities, installation of energy efficiency technologies and taking forward three pilot retrofit high efficiency low energy buildings
- implemented measures to reduce energy consumption in line with the Northern Ireland Government Energy Management Strategy and Action Plan 2030.

## **Libraries Leading The Way**

### **Exemplar EnerPHit Projects**

- Libraries NI is taking steps to reduce the organisation's carbon footprint.
- In 2024, three exemplar refurbishment and carbon reduction retrofit projects designed to the EnerPHit standard were completed at Ballymoney, Bessbrook and Killyleagh.
- EnerPhit is a building standard developed by the Passivhaus Institute that focuses on retrofitting existing buildings to achieve a high energy efficiency rating. Meeting the standard requires making improvements to the whole building including insulation, airtightness and triple glazed windows, as well as the installation of energyefficient heating, cooling and ventilation systems.
- Ballymoney Library was the first of the three projects to be completed and was facilitated by the Department for Communities and supported by some £820,000 of capital funding provided through the Department for the Economy's Energy Invest to Save Programme 2023/24. It is the first public building designed to the EnerPHit standard to be completed in the United Kingdom.
- The refurbished libraries not only look great but are designed to reduce carbon outputs by up to 70%, equating to some six tonnes of carbon savings per annum and significantly reducing the running costs of the library.





The world we operate in has changed and we need to evolve, adapt and respond to a changed and changing environment. As we go into the next five years it is important to consider the strategic factors that influence, shape and impact on libraries, library use and the public sector landscape within which we operate and deliver the library service.



## Legislation, Policy Landscape and Government Priorities

In developing this Corporate Plan we have taken account of our statutory responsibility, set out in the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service and this requires us to provide a service that is wide-ranging and multi-faceted. Our priorities and goals are guided by the priorities of the Department for Communities, the Public Library Policy and the wider framework of societal outcomes articulated by the Northern Ireland Executive within the Programme for Government. We believe libraries can continue to inform the public and make a lasting and sustainable contribution to improving the societal wellbeing of people and communities in Northern Ireland.

Libraries form a vital part of the public sector ecosystem, providing information and impacting positively across a wide number of domains and indicators of Wellbeing highlighted within the Programme for Government.

Libraries NI has a network of libraries providing an infrastructure of comfortable, neutral, stigma-free, welcoming and accessible community venues that people visit though choice. All libraries provide a range of reading materials, information and resources, including free access to broadband and Wi-Fi, programmes and activities. Through this Corporate Plan, Libraries will support a number of priorities and missions identified within the Programme for Government, including education, early years and child development, tackling root causes of disadvantage, poverty, loneliness, and exclusion, while facilitating social inclusion, positive mental health and wellbeing, employment, digital inclusion and promoting shared spaces and safer

communities. Libraries can act as a gateway for people to access information and many other government and public services from premises situated in the heart of local communities.

Libraries also have an important role to play by contributing to the wider crosscutting strategy, policy and legislative framework, including Heritage, Culture and Creativity, social inclusion, anti-poverty strategy, Children and Young People, skills development, the Rural Policy Framework, Digital Inclusion and Transformation. Climate Change commitments will also inform our work and approach over the next five years and in addition, this Corporate Plan also draws on themes and outcomes articulated in community plans developed for all 11 district councils areas in Northern Ireland.

This Corporate Plan positions the public library service in a way that optimises our contribution to wider government, policies and societal wellbeing while delivering for people and delivering for communities.

## **Economic and Financial Outlook**

The public sector financial landscape is challenging and constrained and in setting out our strategic direction we will work closely with the Minister and officials from the Department for Communities to secure the necessary levels of investment to maintain and develop services to meet our statutory obligation to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service while also positively impacting on the people and communities we serve. However, we need to be clear about the connection between the level of funding allocated to support the public library service and our ability to deliver against the aspiration and ambition set out in this Corporate Plan.





## **Digitalisation**

There has been significant investment to upgrade information and communications technology infrastructure and services to support delivery of library and business support services. This investment creates a platform for future improvements in customer and service delivery and the provision of a more modern efficient and effective public library service. This will inevitably entail exploration, use and application of new and emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, process automation, and multi-channel service delivery. It is our aim to be at the leading edge of digitalisation supporting delivery of public library services.

### **Our Customers**

Libraries are all about people and in the 21st century have evolved as multi-faceted, multi-channel delivery organisations serving communities. Library customers are at the heart of what we do as an organisation, they reflect a wide and diverse demographic, and engage with the library for a variety of services and in a variety of ways. It is important that we are responsive to customer needs and expectations and we have developed a Customer First Strategy which provides a frame of reference to create a unique customer experience, promote brand loyalty, increase and retain the customer

base, widen access to library spaces, facilities, resources and collections, and increase participation in programmes activities and events. We recognise children, families and older people as key customer groups and we will continue to use customer feedback and information from customer surveys and the Continuous Household Survey to gauge customer expectations and requirements about services that we provide, assess how well we are doing and to inform how we develop and deliver responsive and relevant future services.

### A service valued by our customers...

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Amazing service - busy class at Rhythm and Rhyme. Great social opportunity for mums and dads. Staff are so great with the kids, and we had so much fun.

Libraries are an integral part of the community and provide so much for people - Wi-Fi, computer access, computer courses, newspapers, etc.

Safe environment, welcomed and surrounded by books.

imagination.

Reading keeps my mind sharp - stimulating my "

Knit and Natter is the highlight of my week. The laughter and social interaction are so valuable to me... staff look after us so well. The library is the ideal environment for us all to meet, chat and to benefit our mental health.

the library.

I would be lost without

## **Partnership Working**

We create and add value right across Northern Ireland through the work we do with others in libraries.

Our libraries offer a wide range of programmes which contribute to social and economic wellbeing and many of these programmes are enhanced through delivering in partnership with other organisations. We will extend these partnerships and build new ones to support individuals and communities and we will continue to work positively with a range of organisations including the Department for Communities, the Education Authority, Health Trusts, as well as across central and local government and the community and voluntary sectors, to seek to optimise the potential and opportunities offered and to positively impact on local and regional prosperity and wellbeing.









An Roinn

Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe

Fairmin, Environment an' Kintra Matthers



**Commonities** 

www.communities-ni.gov.uk



























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Public libraries are there for everyone at the heart of our communities and as we set out our priorities and strategic goals in support of delivering our mission we want to amplify the impact, role and contribution of the library service.

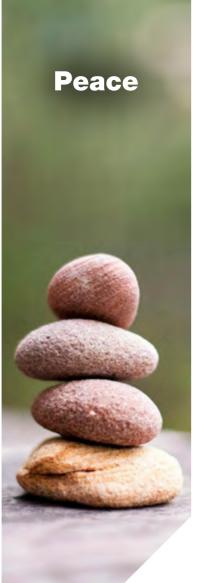
Libraries need to adapt and change to reflect the different ways in which people access and use services and there is a need to continually review and update approaches to meet both existing and evolving needs, while improving access, use and visibility of our public libraries as an essential community service.

Our corporate plan provides a solid basis for delivering our mission by focusing on three broad library priorities aligned to the missions within the programme for government. Programme for Government missions and priorities









Library priority areas supporting Programme for Government missions and priorities

## Promote reading, inspire, support and connect people through all stages of life.

#### We will:

- Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults.
- 2. Provide opportunities for people to engage in an evolving digital world and improve digital literacy while promoting libraries as trusted access points and a gateway to services and information, including other public services.
- **3.** Provide library resources, services and activities to support and help children develop through their early years.

## Contribute to inclusive cohesive communities and societal wellbeing.

#### We will:

- 4. Provide a relevant, accessible library service that meets the evolving needs of people in Northern Ireland.
- 5. Promote awareness and use of library services, engage new audiences and provide an exemplary customer driven approach and experience for people who use library services.
- **6.** Provide information, programmes and services that contribute to positive health and wellbeing.
- 7. Build, develop and use the extensive library collections to illustrate and increase understanding of a shared cultural heritage.

#### Deliver a high performing library service, valued by society

SUPPORT

CONNECT

#### We will:

- **8.** Support and develop our people to be a highly capable, engaged and empowered workforce.
- **9.** Make best use of available resources to deliver an effective and valued public library service.
- **10.** Collate, prepare and disseminate evidence to demonstrate the impact of libraries, library programmes and service offers, and contribute to debate and discussion on wider library developments.
- 11. Shape our libraries to be attractive, accessible, and trusted spaces.
- 12. Actively respond to the climate change challenge.

INFORM FRANSFORM DELIVER

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## Promote reading, inspire, support and connect people through all stages of life

Promoting reading and inspiring, supporting and engaging people through all stages of life is a central library priority that reflects the very nature and ethos of delivering a public library service as part of a vibrant and thriving society. Our strategic goals supporting this priority area are built around promoting reading, literacy, and lifelong learning and we will adopt a customer driven approach to ensure that services best meet local needs and expectations and that people who use our services have a great experience of their library.



Children and young people are really important to libraries, we want to develop stronger links with education partners and schools to ensure events, activities, study space, reading and other materials, resources and the services available in libraries best meet their needs. This is about creating good reading habits, raising literacy standards and improving educational outcomes.

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Increasingly important is the role of public libraries in providing opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to fully engage in a digital world through freely available resources, information, support and services, including access to services provided by other public bodies and organisations.



Libraries are social spaces, places to meet and connect, and play a vital role in supporting older people to access information and services and to navigate safely in an increasingly digital world. IT resources, free broadband and Wi-Fi, individual support and programmes like Get Online, and Scam Awareness all play a part in this.

The most significant opportunities to improve people's health, wellbeing and life opportunities exist in the form of early interventions particularly, though not exclusively, designed for children and young people. Services and programmes for children and young people are a key element in Libraries NI's approach to promoting a lifelong love of reading and writing, enhancing language development and improving literacy levels, thereby addressing issues associated with poverty and social exclusion. This will remain an area of focus over the lifetime of this Corporate Plan.



## **Contribute to inclusive** cohesive communities and societal wellbeing

Libraries play an important role in promoting social inclusion and providing safe, trusted, accessible spaces and services for people in local communities. They contribute to inclusivity, promote community cohesion and impact positively on societal wellbeing, all of which have been identified as priorities within the Programme for Government, Community Plans and by the Department for Communities.

The strategic goals supporting an inclusive library service, that contributes to social and community cohesion and societal well-being, includes the provision of a relevant and accessible service and, in particular, promoting a greater awareness and use of the library service and the breath and range of events activities and resources offered.

Our stakeholders tell us that we need to change, we need to refresh the library offer, review core activities, develop more community-based activities and adopt a more tailored approach to services available in different libraries.

Specific objectives and actions will include maintaining multiple service delivery channels, reviewing the library network and fleet, transforming the way we work and operate, updating our strategic marketing plan, and refreshing the Libraries NI brand in a way that appeals to and engages the widest spectrum of people across society in Northern Ireland. We will update programmes and activities that positively support health and well-being and a key element of this will be to promote the wider health and well-being benefits of engaging in reading, participating in activities in libraries, and interacting in ways that help promote positive brain health, combat loneliness and social isolation and promote positive ageing. There are also opportunities to use collections and resources to promote shared understanding of cultural heritage and history.





## Deliver a high performing library service, valued by society

As an organisation tasked with delivering the public library service we need to be innovative, flexible and high performing. To achieve this we must support and develop our people and build organisational capacity and capability. We will seek to make best use of the resources available to us, financial and other, and we will continue to shape our libraries to be safe and trusted spaces, while actively responding to the climate change agenda.

Further work needs to be done to build and develop the evidence base to demonstrate the impact and social value of libraries and this will be an area of renewed focus over the next five years drawing on experience here in Northern Ireland as well as the rest of the UK and further afield.



With the decline of town centres the library, increasingly, needs to be a destination in its own right.



We recognise that our people are central to everything we do in the delivery of a high quality public library service. Feedback received from library customers consistently tells us that staff are highly valued for the knowledge, skills and support they provide across the library network. The challenges of recent years have impacted on staffing and staff morale and investment in our people will be crucial to future success. We will complete the implementation of the new organisation structures to align and realign resources to best support service delivery and engage with our staff to provide them with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills, including in the use of information technology as well as new and emerging technologies, so that they can continue to deliver high quality, professional and customer focused services.

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Our Corporate Plan is an ambitious but realistic statement of intent for the public library service in Northern Ireland. The foundations for its successful delivery will be built on a number of key enablers:

#### **Our People**

Our people are key to delivering this Corporate Plan and supporting and enabling their contributions and positive responses will be essential to the success of delivering the library service over the next five years. This will require investment in upskilling and people development.

## Resourcing and Financing the Service

While recognising the financial challenges faced by the wider public sector we will continue to advocate for the level of resources needed to provide a sustainable public library service and to support delivery of this plan.

## Capital Investment and Infrastructure

A number of years of underinvestment in the library estate and fleet means there is a need for a more strategic approach, with adequate capital funding, to ensure core infrastructure can support and sustain service delivery.

#### **Technology**

Recent investment in technology and related services provides a platform for the effective and efficient delivery of library services, improved experiences and choices for customers and future development of the service, including the role of Al.

## Partnership and Collaboration

Working collaboratively with partners can help us achieve our aims and outcomes. Partners bring skills, knowledge, additional resources and creates opportunities to develop partnerships and networks, and build relationships with other audiences.

#### **Data and Evidence**

Data driven approaches will provide insights, improve performance and help inform decisions as we face future challenges. This includes using data to develop, tailor and refine service offerings to specific customers and groups and to support the case for investing in the service.

#### **Transformation and Change**

The environment we work in continues to change and so we need to respond and review our operational model and delivery channels, we need to be alert to our customers needs and expectations and use all of the resources at our disposal, including technology and where applicable AI, to change and improve the way we work and provide services.

When we talk to stakeholders they tell us clearly what they want from the public library service. Having up-to-date reading materials, resources and books, in a range of formats, will always be important and will be central to what we do. The funding requirement for book stock and library resources, based on the existing public library standard of £2.25 per head of population and population projections over the next five years is set out in the table below:

Year	Population projections (NISRA) <sup>1</sup>
2026	1,923,515
2027	1,926,860
2028	1,929,636
2029	1,931,917
2030	1,933,736

Financial Year	Book Stock and Library Resources target spend (£2.25 per capita)		
2025/26	£4,327,910		
2026/27	£4,335,440		
2027/28	£4,341,680		
2028/29	£4,346,810		
2029/30	£4,350,910		

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> NISRA Population Projections, NPP20, Estimated and projected population, mid 1991 to mid-2045.

However, there is so much more to a modern public library service. Libraries are places and spaces to meet and connect, there are a wide range of events and activities happening there, computers and IT resources and infrastructure such as free broadband and Wi-Fi are available in libraries along with gallery spaces and exhibitions. We work well with an extensive range of partners to bring new and innovative experiences to library customers and to add value, and all this good work needs to continue and develop further.

We know the service has suffered over recent years and funding has been a particular challenge. Parts of our estate are tired with facilities in a poor condition. Elements of the service are also dated and we need to meet the challenges of refreshing the service offering and increasing and improving the relevance and value of libraries to people and communities. We need to bring fresh thinking and approaches to shaping services in ways that will meet and anticipate the needs and expectations of library customers now and into the future. This must be our mission and our challenge as we look forward to deliver this corporate plan over the next five years.

## There has been underinvestment in the physical infrastructure of the library estate and fleet.

The Belfast Central Library project needs to be reinvigorated and Libraries NI will actively engage with the Department for Communities to agree a roadmap to take it forward. The projects and investment identified in this Corporate Plan begin to address the deficit of previous years. The level of investment needed to support Estate and Fleet Infrastructure during the period 2025-30 is estimated at:

Financial Year	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Project	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Enniskillen replacement library <sup>1</sup>	755	4,030	265	0	0
Newtownards replacement library <sup>1</sup>	200	50	200	4,495	450
Derry Central library <sup>1</sup>	-	100	580	4,000	2,120
Refurbish various libraries to EnerPHit standard <sup>1</sup>	0	1,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Fleet replacement <sup>1</sup>	0	1,510	1,590	600	475
Total Capital Funding Requirement:	955	6,690	4,635	11,095	5,045
Planned maintenance programme <sup>2</sup>	0	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Total Funding Requirement	955	7,690	5,635	12,095	6,045

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Capital funding requirement

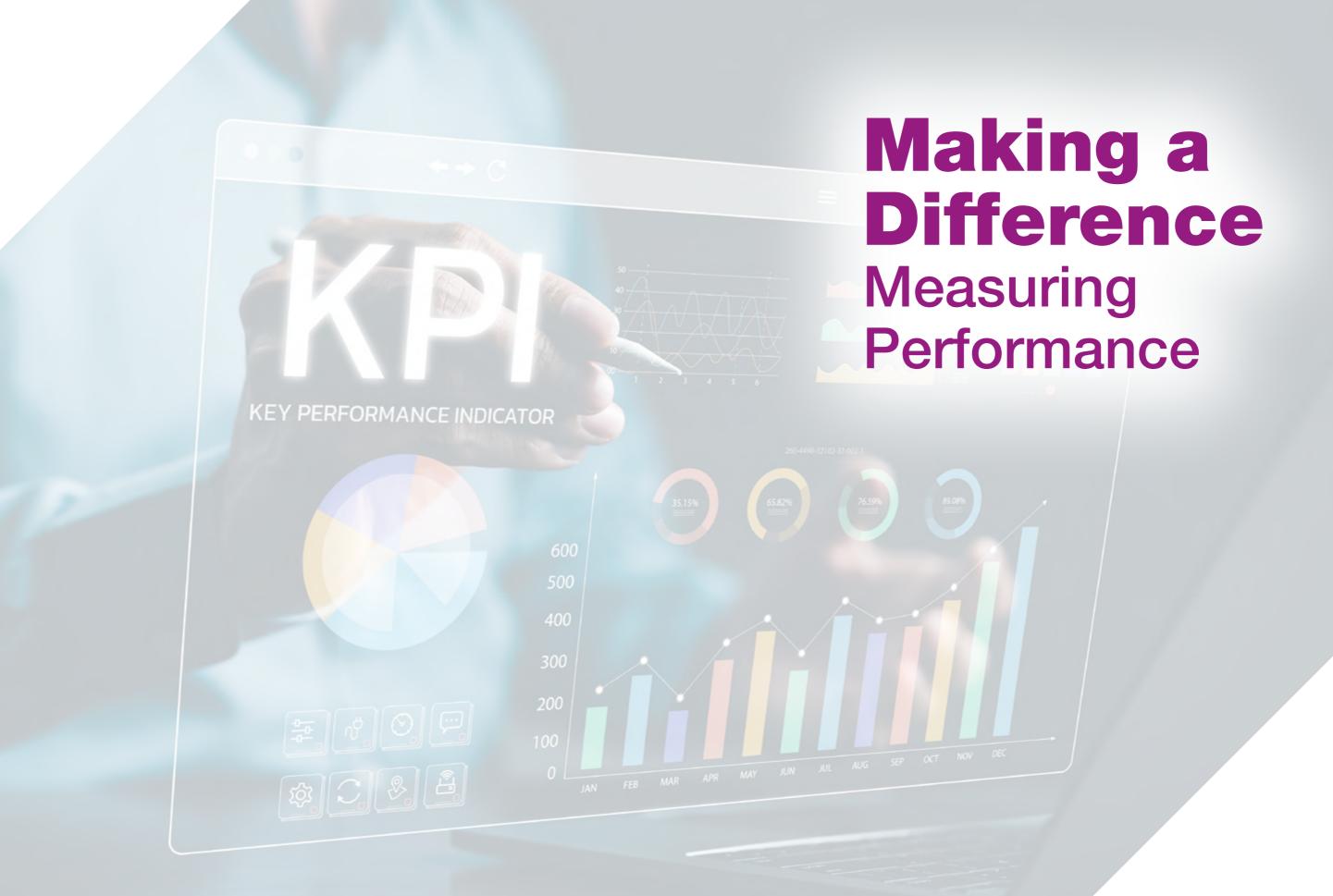
The overall level of resource funding required to deliver this corporate plan based on a targeted book stock spend of at £2.25 per capita and other running costs uplifted by 2% each year from the 2024/25 baseline is summarised in the table below.

Financial Year	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30
Funding requirement (excluding book stock and library resources)	£32,628,000	£33,280,560	£33,946,171	£34,625,095	£35,317,597
Book Stock and Library Resources target spend (£2.25 per capita)	£4,327,910	£4,335,440	£4,341,680	£4,346,810	£4,350,910
Total Resource Funding Requirement	£36,955,910	£37,616,000	£38,287,851	£38,971,905	£39,668,507

We will advocate for the resources and investment to deliver this Corporate Plan and meet our statutory obligation to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service. Libraries provide access to information and services and are increasingly providing added social value across a range of government priority areas including health, education, Community Planning, inclusivity and societal wellbeing. We will work with the Department for Communities to make the strongest case for funding the pivotal role libraries play within communities and the contribution they make towards local, regional and national priorities.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Resource funding requirement.







Performance measurement will have a focus on service delivery, quality of service, financial and resource management, efficiency and effectiveness, good governance and social value and impact of library services. We will continue to deliver against public library standards (PLS) or other measures determined by the Department for Communities as part of its review and development of public library strategy and policy. We will use a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge impact on our desired outcomes and strategic goals. These will be underpinned by tracking departmental and service performance measures alongside monitoring of progress and achievement against specific targets and objectives.

In some areas performance information will be established at the outset of the planning period and will be used as a baseline against which progress will be measured. Survey, customer and stakeholder feedback will also be used to inform and reflect on progress and to update and reshape strategic goals, actions and objectives as appropriate. In addition, a performance review will take place after three years to assess overall progress against this Corporate Plan 2025 - 30 and to make adjustments where needed.

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## Ormeau Road Library receives Library of Sanctuary Status

Today's libraries are vibrant community hubs where people can access support, learn new skills and connect with vital services. From improving wellbeing to enabling lifelong learning, library services and initiatives make a tangible difference in the lives of individuals across Northern Ireland.

Library staff play a key role in this work - providing not only essential services, but also neutral, welcoming spaces where external organisations can engage with their clients within the local community and deliver impactful programmes.

The stories featured here reflect the central role libraries play in strengthening local communities, offering trusted spaces for connection, collaboration and support.

Ormeau Road Library became the first library in Northern Ireland to be awarded Library of Sanctuary status in September 2023.

The Libraries of Sanctuary award acknowledges and celebrates libraries that have gone above and beyond in welcoming refugees and people seeking asylum whilst also helping others in the community to understand the benefits of a positive, welcoming culture.

The award was presented to Libraries NI staff during a special event by Mehrshad Esfandiari from the Belfast City of Sanctuary team representing the national charity, City of Sanctuary UK.

The library has been recognised for its work in engaging with local and newcomer communities to identify, develop and promote resources specific to their needs. The programme in place

at the library includes free and regular activities to encourage community participation as well as outreach events and enhanced collections of stock to help those whose first language is not English.

Speaking after the event, Libraries NI Chief Executive Dr Jim O'Hagan said:

libraries NI we believe our libraries are safe, welcoming and trusted spaces for everyone and having Ormeau Road Library recognised as a Library of Sanctuary underpins and emphasises these values that are core to the public library service. This award highlights libraries that go that extra step, go above and beyond, and the staff here at Ormeau Road Library are to be commended for their role and the work they have done in supporting this fabulous achievement.

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#### 11

# New Reading Corner at the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre

At the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre in Belfast, Libraries NI is creating meaningful opportunities for patients, carers and families to connect and find moments of comfort through a new Reading Corner and Book Club. The initiative provides a welcoming space where visitors can enjoy books and reading, interact with others and build a sense of community.

For patients undergoing treatment, the Reading Corner offers a chance to unwind with a book, providing a welcome distraction and moments of calm during their visits. By bringing the benefits of a library directly to the Centre, this initiative creates opportunities to connect, socialise and share experiences with others in a supportive setting.

During the launch, Julie McGrady, Cancer Support Services Improvement Lead, remarked:

66 Books and reading can play an important role in supporting emotional health and wellbeing. This initiative offers patients a chance to escape into a book and take a break from the clinical setting.

The monthly book club has quickly become a highlight for participants. Member Fiona Presho shared:

Joining the book club has allowed me to meet so many people and deepen those connections—not just by getting to know one another, but also by exploring and enjoying literature together. It's not about cancer; it's about everything else, and that's what makes it so refreshing.

By providing a quiet, inclusive space for reading and conversation, Libraries NI and the Macmillan Cancer Information and Support Centre are offering patients and families a meaningful way to connect and find moments of joy through the power of stories.



Watch the video to hear from those involved and discover how the Book Club has become a refreshing escape for members like Fiona.





## Libraries NI and PRONI: A Partnership Bringing History to Communities

Libraries NI and the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) have a long-standing relationship, formally recognised in 2017 through a Memorandum of Understanding. This partnership bridges the gap between archival expertise and local communities, ensuring wider access to historical resources and exhibitions.

With PRONI based in Belfast and Libraries NI's extensive network of 98 public libraries, the collaboration brings history to life in local spaces. By sharing expertise and resources, more people get to explore the past in an accessible way.

One of the most visible impacts of this partnership is the use of libraries as exhibition and events spaces. Travelling exhibitions curated by PRONI give people from across Northern Ireland a chance to engage with historical collections without having to travel to Belfast.

PRONI on Tour is our latest success story, bringing history straight to people's doorsteps. What started in May 2023 with Libraries NI hosting the original Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement) document in Omagh, Derry Central and Belfast Central libraries, has grown into a wider programme, bringing archives, exhibitions, rare historical collections and family history expertise to local libraries.

During a PRONI on Tour event in Fivemiletown Library, Grace from PRONI's Public Services Team highlighted the value of bringing archives directly to local communities. She described how workshops engaged both adults and children, with pupils from Fivemiletown Primary School exploring their own family tree and historical documents, including records from their own school dating back to the 1890s. Grace shared -

Even if just one child develops an interest in their local history, that's a huge win,

She emphasised the important role libraries play as community hubs, adding,

With so many locations across Northern Ireland, it's a fantastic opportunity for us to step outside Belfast and bring historical documents directly to local communities, allowing them to connect with their own history up close.

She was also delighted by the diverse mix of attendees, noting that libraries welcome not just family history enthusiasts but also those with a general interest in local history – and even those who simply enjoy a curious browse through the fascinating documents on display.



Watch the full video to hear Grace share her thoughts on libraries and get a behind-the-scenes look at PRONI on Tour in action.

# Libraries Providing a Welcoming Space for Community Support

The Connect North service recently hosted it's first-ever Community Appointment Day (CAD) in Antrim Library. To those recently diagnosed with dementia and their carers, CAD offered personalised support and an opportunity to meet face-to-face with their dedicated Link Worker and connect with local support and services.

Connect North is a support prescribing team, delivered in partnership between the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and Age NI whereby individuals can access a range of support and services to address key factors affecting their health and wellbeing, such as housing, finances, loneliness and long-term health conditions.

Antrim Library proved to be the ideal venue for this event, offering a welcoming, discreet, accessible and relaxed environment. The space enabled private areas for one-to-one assessments, a larger room for community provider tables and a quiet refreshment area where attendees could take a moment to relax. Sabrina Lynn, NHSCT Health and Wellbeing Locality Lead, highlighted the value of hosting the event in a library, describing it as a central and accessible space within the community. Sabrina praised the library staff for their incredible support - ensuring the event ran smoothly, creating a calming atmosphere and demonstrating a real understanding of the needs of those attending.

based venues, Connect North can provide support in a non-clinical setting that is familiar, comfortable and easy to access for our service users.

Building on the success of the event, Connect North plans to continue hosting Community Appointment Days in libraries and are working with Libraries NI to establish the Connect North Directory of Services within local libraries. This will recognise libraries as Connect North Community Information Points so that library users can be supported and signposted to local support services or to speak with their local Connect North Link Worker.

With libraries at the heart of the community, partnerships like this make a real difference—ensuring access to vital support to those who need it most.



Watch the video to hear Sabrina talk about the first-ever Community Appointment Day at Antrim Library and the impact of Connect North.

