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Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties

Annual Progress Report 2020 - 21

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Documents published relating to our Equality Scheme can be found at:

www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Pages/Equality.aspx

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This report has been prepared using a template circulated by the Equality Commission.

It presents our progress in fulfilling our statutory equality and good relations duties, and implementing Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plans.

This report reflects progress made between April 2020 and March 2021

PART A – Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Scheme

SECTION 1: EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS OUTCOMES, IMPACTS AND GOOD PRACTICE

In 2020_21, please provide examples of key policy/service delivery developments made by the public authority in this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations; and the outcomes and improvements achieved.

 Please relate these to the implementation of your statutory equality and good relations duties and Equality Scheme where appropriate.

1. *The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 created an unprecedented series of challenges for Libraries NI, impacting every area of our services, preventing or significantly constraining our activities and requiring the organisation to adapt at short notice to the frequently changing social landscape, to develop alternative approaches to communication and to how we connected with our users. All of our physical service points closed from March 2020 through to July, reopening mid-year with limited services and closed again in December in response to local legislation. As a consequence it was not possible to carry out many of the activities which we would normally have delivered in support of our equality agenda and the outcomes set out in our Equality Scheme. Our focus throughout 2020/21 has been to provide alternative inclusive and accessible services within the constraints of health and NI Executive guidelines.*

2.   *Recognising the difficulties and additional stress the pandemic created for many of our users we suspended the application of fees and charges to the majority of our services and waived limits on the amount of materials that could be borrowed at any given time.*

3. *Aware that local lockdowns gave rise to increasing loneliness and isolation for many of our most vulnerable customers we developed bespoke Book and collect services, contacting individuals and families via telephone offering the facility to request books chosen by staff with contactless collection. A similar service, Book Box, was also developed for those who were shielding and unable to leave their homes, delivered to our customer's front doors.*

4. *We significantly increased our online and Social Media presence throughout the periods of lockdown ensuring our connection to local communities was maintained and so that despite a lack of physical interaction we could stay in touch with our customers. Bespoke programmes of Rhythm and Rhyme, Children's Story times and Craft Projects were developed and broadcast online regularly, specifically aimed at supporting families' home schooling, working from home or those having to isolate.*

5. *A relaxation in restrictions in August 2020 enabled us to offer limited but free local access to broadband, Wi-Fi and computers. Printing, scanning and photocopying services were also available at this time for those who had no access at home. Support was provided to assist those users for whom the use of information and online technology was challenging.*

6. *Individual libraries provided a range of online programmes aimed at encouraging social interaction between older users including Reading Groups, Knit and Natter etc.*

7. *An extensive programme of targeted Zoom help sessions were delivered by the Adult Learning Team to address lack of skill and confidence in accessing online content, something that was vital during the Lockdown periods, especially for those on their own or with limited opportunity to connect with others. Happiness Labs were introduced in targeted areas – special interest workshops initially aiming at connecting those within their own community to address loneliness and to introduce fun and new interests. This was rolled out across the Service to maximise the impact and connect with as many as possible.*

8. *Online service offerings were expanded with significant additional investment being made in online resources such as eBooks, eMagazines and downloadable audiobooks with the welcome addition of online Newspapers to make library services and information accessible 24/7, resulting in a large increase of new virtual membership.*

9. *A focused approach to Health and Wellbeing – Take 5 Steps was introduced to encourage staff and customers to adopt self-care regimes. We continued to engage with regional and locally based organisations to promote Health and Wellbeing facilitating access to health information in a neutral, stigma free environment. Support and signposting to other health information was provided in partnership with, for example, Health Trusts, Macmillan Cancer Support, Cedar Foundation, Autism NI, Dementia NI, Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), Aware NI and Linking Generations NI (LGNI).*

10. *Libraries NI continued to play a key role as a statutory partner in the Community Planning process and has continued to actively engage with Councils and other Community Planning partners (via Zoom) to take forward actions aimed at addressing the immediate impacts of the pandemic and recovery .*

11. *Libraries NI continues to be committed to the Equality Commission 'Every Customer Counts – Promoting Accessible Services' initiative.*

12. *All of the additional new activities, programmes and services developed by Libraries NI during this period are inclusive and aim to increase understanding and respect for other cultures, traditions and beliefs. Libraries NI continues to be accessible to all whether for social interaction, learning a new skill or exploring different cultural traditions.*

13. *Quarterly policy screening reports were issued to consultees and published on the Libraries NI website.*

2   Please provide examples of outcomes and/or the impact of equality action plans/ measures in 2020_21 (*or append the plan with progress/examples identified*).

Please see Appendix One: Part A Section 1 Question 2

3   Has the application of the Equality Scheme commitments resulted in any changes to policy, practice, procedures and/or service delivery areas during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ **Yes**   ☒ No (go to Q.4)   ☐ Not applicable (go to Q.4)

Please provide any details and examples:

3a   With regard to the change(s) made to policies, practices or procedures and/or service delivery areas, what difference was made, or will be made, for individuals, i.e. the impact on those according to Section 75 category?

Please provide any details and examples: **Not applicable see response to 3.**

3b   What aspect of the Equality Scheme prompted or led to the change(s)? *(tick all that apply)* - **Not applicable see response to 3.**

☐   As a result of the organisation's screening of a policy *(please give details):*

☐   As a result of what was identified through the EQIA and consultation exercise *(please give details):*

☐   As a result of analysis from monitoring the impact *(please give details):*

☐   As a result of changes to access to information and services *(please specify and give details):*

☐   Other *(please specify and give details):*

SECTION 2: PROGRESS ON EQUALITY SCHEME COMMITMENTS <u>AND</u> ACTION PLANS/MEASURES

ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSING COMPLIANCE (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 2)

4 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within job descriptions during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☒ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

An inclusive approach is mainstreamed into service provision and delivery to ensure implementation of the Equality Scheme is incorporated into Corporate, Service and Branch Plans and Staff Appraisals.

5 Were the Section 75 statutory duties integrated within performance plans during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☒ Yes, organisation wide

☐ Yes, some departments/jobs

☐ No, this is not an Equality Scheme commitment

☐ No, this is scheduled for later in the Equality Scheme, or has already been done

☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Libraries NI is committed to an inclusive approach to service delivery and continually reviews services to people with disabilities, access to buildings and supports continuous improvement through training programmes. Libraries NI works in partnership with other organisations to maximise inclusive service delivery.

6   In the 2020-21 reporting period were **objectives/ targets/ performance measures** relating to the Section 75 statutory duties **integrated** into corporate plans, strategic planning and/or operational business plans? *(tick all that apply)*

☒   Yes, through the work to prepare or develop the new corporate plan

☒   Yes, through organisation-wide annual business planning

☐   Yes, in some departments/jobs

☐   No, these are already mainstreamed through the organisation's ongoing corporate plan

☐   No, the organisation's planning cycle does not coincide with this 2020-21 report

☐   Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Libraries NI is committed to an inclusive approach to service delivery. Libraries NI continually reviews services to people with disabilities, access to buildings and supports continuous improvement through training programmes. Libraries NI works in partnership with other organisations to maximise inclusive service delivery.

EQUALITY ACTION PLANS/MEASURES

7   Within the 2020-21 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:		Actions ongoing:		Actions to commence:	

Please provide any details and examples (*in addition to question 2*):

Libraries NI delivered a range of activities, events, programmes and initiatives through its network of 98 libraries (when opening of physical facilities was permitted) and via online services throughout 2020/21 and the period of the Covid 19 pandemic. Many of these are delivered in conjunction with strategic and local partnerships, Memoranda of Understanding and service level agreements.

8   Please give details of changes or amendments made to the equality action plan/measures during the 2020-21 reporting period (points not identified in an appended plan):

Not applicable

9   In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2020-21 reporting period, the following have been identified: *(tick all that apply)*

☐   Continuing action(s), to progress the next stage addressing the known inequality

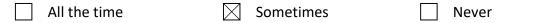☐   Action(s) to address the known inequality in a different way

☐ Action(s) to address newly identified inequalities/recently prioritised inequalities

☐ Measures to address a prioritised inequality have been completed

A review of the Libraries NI Audit of Inequalities was completed in late 2019. An Action Plan was agreed and implementation of actions was due to commence in 2020-21 however the onset and subsequent impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic effectively halted progress, as a return to a more normal operating environment is achieved the action plan will be reviewed, rescheduled and revitalised.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTING (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 3)

10 Following the initial notification of consultations, a targeted approach was taken – and consultation with those for whom the issue was of particular relevance: *(tick one box only)*

☐ All the time   ☒ Sometimes   ☐ Never

A consultation was undertaken on proposals to relocate the public library services for the Irish and local Studies Library, Armagh. While the consultation was largely focused on the physical location of services within Armagh City and was therefore of particular interest to some groups such as local politicians, historians etc. the consultation was open to all and initial equality screening found *no evidence to suggest that people with different religious beliefs, political beliefs, marital status, racial groups, sexual orientation or gender will be differentially affected by the proposals.*

11 Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2020-21 reporting period, on matters relevant (e.g. the development of a policy that has been screened in) to the need to promote equality of opportunity and/or the desirability of promoting good relations:

No policy was screened in during the period

12 In the 2020-21 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently <u>used</u>** by consultees: *(tick all that apply)*

☐ Face to face meetings

☐ Focus groups

☒ Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing

☒ Questionnaires

☒ Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/out of the consultation

☒ Internet discussions

☐ Telephone consultations

☒ Other *(please specify)*: **Online meetings/discussions via Zoom etc.**

Please provide any details or examples of the uptake of these methods of consultation in relation to the consultees' membership of particular Section 75 categories:

The impacts of the Covid pandemic did limit the methods of consultation, effectively preventing the holding of public meetings or limiting face to face interactions to virtual platforms. However despite these limitations 88 questionnaires and 18 written submissions were received from individuals and organisations in response to what was in essence a relatively local reorganisation and relocations of a service delivery point.

13 Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

14 Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ Not applicable – no commitment to review

ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSING AND CONSULTING ON THE LIKELY IMPACT OF POLICIES (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 4)

Libraries NI Policy Screening Outcome Reports

15 Please provide the **number** of policies screened during the year (*as recorded in screening reports*):

28

16 Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2020-21 :

0	Policy consultations conducted with **screening** assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted **with an equality impact assessment** (EQIA) presented.

| 0 | Consultations for an **EQIA** alone. |

17 Please provide details of the **main consultations** conducted on an assessment (as described above) or other matters relevant to the Section 75 duties:

Not Applicable - There were no consultations undertaken in the 2020-21 reporting period

18 Were any screening decisions (or equivalent initial assessments of relevance) reviewed following concerns raised by consultees? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No concerns were raised ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

Libraries NI considers all feedback from consultees

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PUBLISHING THE RESULTS OF ASSESSMENTS (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 4)

19 Following decisions on a policy, were the results of any EQIAs published during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

No EQIA were undertaken during 2020-21

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING AND PUBLISHING THE RESULTS OF MONITORING (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 4)

20 From the Equality Scheme monitoring arrangements, was there an audit of existing information systems during the 2020-21 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No, already taken place

☐ No, scheduled to take place at a later date ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details:

21 In analysing monitoring information gathered, was any action taken to change/review any policies? *(tick one box only)*

☐ Yes ☒ No ☐ Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

22 Please provide any details or examples of where the monitoring of policies, during the 2020-21 reporting period, has shown changes to differential/adverse impacts previously assessed:

None

23 Please provide any details or examples of monitoring that has contributed to the availability of equality and good relations information/data for service delivery planning or policy development:

While many of the normal monitoring processes were disrupted throughout 2020/21 the enforced shift to the delivery of services via online media has provided data and feedback on the accessibility and reach of our services which will inform future service delivery planning and policy development

STAFF TRAINING (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 5)

24 Please report on the activities from the training plan/programme (section 5.4 of the Model Equality Scheme) undertaken during 2020-21, and the extent to which they met the training objectives in the Equality Scheme.

Libraries NI includes in its training plan a range of activities that are designed to increase staff's awareness and understanding of equality issues and training activities that are designed to ensure that service provision is accessible to all. These activities include:

- *A robust staff induction process*
- *Targeted training interventions aimed at enabling and increasing participation in library services by Section 75 groups*
- *Opportunity for specialist staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of issues facing both staff and customers*

In 2020-21 the following training activities were undertaken:

- *Completion of the CAL e-learning Unconscious Bias module by all newly appointed staff*
- *Completion of the CAL e-learning Introduction to Section 75 and Introduction to Human Rights modules by newly appointed middle and senior managers*
- *Safeguarding Awareness training for all newly appointed and Agency staff*
- *Driver CPC (Certificate of Professional Competence) for Mobile and Homecall staff*
- *First Aid at Work accredited training provided to designated First Aiders (10 posts)*
- *Attendance at various training events, seminars and conferences by HR staff*

- *Attendance by Branch staff and Services Directorate middle management staff at a range of customer focused training events, including: SafePlace, Youth Gambling Awareness, Autism Awareness and Alzheimer's Awareness*

- *Training by Information and Learning Team staff to enhance Branch staff's ability to deliver core activities, including Rhythm and Rhyme, Lego Club, ScamWise, Browsealoud.*

The delivery of these training activities helped to ensure that the training objectives, as detailed in the Equality Scheme, continued to be met.

25 Please provide any examples of relevant training shown to have worked well, in that participants have achieved the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve the stated objectives:

The training activities detailed at 24 above are those from a list of Corporate, Service and Personal Development interventions with a particular emphasis on meeting the training objectives as set out in the Equality Scheme, offered to staff throughout LNI.

The following activities are worth highlighting in particular and are examples of training that has worked well and have been aimed specifically at increasing staff's awareness of the needs of those from a variety of Section 75 groups:

- *Many Library Assistants, Branch Library Managers, District Managers and Mobile Library staff attended a number of online sessions facilitated by Autism NI and the Alzheimer's Society. The objective of these sessions was to increase staff's understanding of autism and dementia as well as helping staff identify ways in which services could be better targeted at those with and those caring for those with these conditions.*

- *A number of Branch staff attended online information sessions aimed at increasing awareness of the Safe Place scheme, of which Libraries NI is a participant. Attendance, and the cascading of information following attendance, has increased staff's awareness of the Scheme and ability to assist if required.*

- *A number of staff attended online Youth Gambling Awareness sessions. These sessions were aimed at helping staff to be able to identify and offer advice to young people who may be becoming addicted to online gambling in particular.*

- *HR staff attended a number of events including Creating a Culture of Good Mental Health and Employment Law updates, including the Annual Review of Employment Law. Staff's attendance at these events helped to ensure that Policies, Procedures and the help and advice offered to staff by HR remains up-to-date and compliant with, for example, equality awareness and legislation.*

- *All Recruitment and Selection Panel members were provided with Recruitment and Selection training, including awareness of equality of opportunity and practical considerations in relation to applicants with particular needs.*

- *The closure of libraries to general public use and browsing in particular provided opportunity for the rollout of training, delivered virtually, to enhance staff's ability to deliver library services and core activities both during lockdown and on re-opening. This training included: using zoom; junior reading groups; Rhythm and Rhyme; Lego Club;*

Creative Writing; Browse Aloud; Scam Wise. This training has enabled staff to continue to deliver a range of services during lockdown (including, for example, Rhythm and Rhyme by zoom) as well as prepare, for example, newly appointed staff to deliver services on re-opening.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND SERVICES (MODEL EQUALITY SCHEME CHAPTER 6)

26   Please list any examples of where monitoring during 2020-21, across all functions, has resulted in action and improvement in relation to access to information and services:

None

Complaints (Model Equality Scheme Chapter 8)

27   How many complaints in relation to the Equality Scheme have been received during 2020-21?

Insert number here:

0

Please provide any details of each complaint raised and outcome:

Section 3: Looking Forward

28   Please indicate when the Equality Scheme is due for review:

A review of the Libraries NI Equality Scheme was completed in January 2019 the next scheduled 5 yearly review will commence in late 2023 for completion early 2024.

29   Are there areas of the Equality Scheme arrangements (screening/consultation/training) your organisation anticipates will be focused upon in the next reporting period? *(please provide details)*

Nothing specific

30   In relation to the advice and services that the Commission offers, what equality and good relations priorities are anticipated over the next (2021-22) reporting period? *(please tick any that apply)*

☐   Employment

☐   Goods, facilities and services

☐   Legislative changes

☐   Organisational changes/ new functions

☐   Nothing specific, more of the same

☒   Other (please state):

We anticipate reviewing, updating a range of policies including our Harassment and Dignity at Work Policy and will work to develop new flexible /hybrid working frameworks and may seek advice from the Commission when doing so.

PART B - Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Disability Action Plans

1. Number of action measures for this **reporting period** that have been:

☐

Fully achieved

☐

Partially achieved

☐

Not achieved

2. Please outline below details on all **actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
National			
Regional			
Local			

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Provision of the Equality Scheme and a Summary of the Scheme on the staff intranet	All staff have access to the intranet	The delivery of this training has ensured that staff (frontline and support staff) have appropriate and relevant awareness, knowledge and skills in the delivery of customer focused services, including to customers with needs specific to Section 75 categories.
2	Awareness raising of the Scheme as part of Staff Induction	Delivered to all new starts (permanent and temporary) and agency staff via local and corporate (LNI staff only) induction	
3	CAL e-learning Unconscious Bias module	Module completed by all newly appointed staff	
4	CAL e-learning Introduction to Section 75 module	Module completed by all middle and senior managers	
5	CAL e-learning Introduction to Human Rights module	Module completed by all middle and senior managers	
6	Equality Commission seminars, workshops and online training	Attendance/completion by HR and services staff as appropriate	
7	Safeguarding (Children and Adults at Risk) Awareness training	All newly appointed staff (including agency/temporary contracts)	
8	A range of customer focused training events, including: SafePlace, Youth Gambling Awareness, Autism Awareness and Alzheimer's Awareness	Relevant service orientated middle and senior managers	

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Significant growth in the use of online platforms including social media as a means of delivering services during lockdowns.	Online service offerings were expanded with significant additional investment being made in online resources such as eBooks, eMagazines and downloadable audiobooks and Newspapers. We also significantly increased our online and Social Media presence throughout the periods of lockdown ensuring our connection to local communities was maintained. Bespoke programmes of Rhythm and Rhyme, Children's Story times, Craft Projects were developed and broadcast online regularly, specifically aimed at supporting families home schooling, working from home or those having to isolate.	Improving and extending access to information and services generally during times when physical library locations were inaccessible or users were unable to leave home, in particular to those customers with needs specific to Section 75 categories.
2	Improving access to Libraries NI website content	The addition of Browsealoud to Libraries NI website	Browsealoud is software which adds speech, reading and translation to websites facilitating access and participation for people with dyslexia, low literacy, mild visual impairments and those who speak English as a second language.

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to '**encourage others'** to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	**Outputs**	**Outcome / Impact**
1	Libraries NI is committed to promoting positive attitudes and implements an inclusive approach to service provision.	Please see examples listed in Appendix One: Part A Section 1 Question 2.	

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	**Outputs**	**Outcomes / Impact**
1	Refer to Appendix One: Part A Section 1 Question 2.		
2			

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	**Milestones / Outputs**	**Outcomes/Impacts**	**Reasons not fully achieved**
1	Refer to Appendix One: Part A Section 1 Question 2.			

4. Please outline what action measures **have not been achieved** and the reasons why.

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1	Not applicable	
2	Not applicable	

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative   *Customer Feedback process in place*

(b) Quantitative   *number and nature of subject of complaints/compliments/feedback measured and reported to SMT and relevant Board Committees*

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes?

No. Libraries NI Disability Action Plan has been reviewed and will be subject to further review as required. If yes, please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisation's annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

At the time of drafting of this report (Oct 2021) we do not intend to make any further revisions to our Plan however continual review may result in changes being introduced at a later date.

 Outputs – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.
 Outcome / Impact – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.
 National: Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments
 Regional: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level
 Local: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local fora.
 Milestones – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.

APPENDIX 1: PART A SECTION 1 QUESTION 2

2   Libraries NI examples of outcome/impact of Equality actions/measures and statistics for 2020-21

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on every area of our service delivery, preventing or significantly constraining our activities and requiring the organisation to adapt at short notice to the frequently changing social landscape, to develop alternative approaches to communication and to how we connected with our users. Despite all of our physical service points being closed from March 2020 through to July, only partially reopening mid-year with limited services and being closed again in December we adapted our service offerings and delivery models so we could provide alternative inclusive and accessible services throughout the year.

A range of programmes, activities and services were delivered either in libraries or in virtual environments to support our Service Priorities including:

- Reading and Reader Development (access to information, materials and support)
- Children and Young People (targeted activities)
- Digital Inclusion
- Good Relations
- Cultural Heritage
- Support for Health and Wellbeing.

Outcome/impact of Equality action/measures 2020-21	Supporting Statistics
Headline statistics	
Number of new members.	33,517 (including 28,174 virtual)
Number of items borrowed (physical)	897,349
eBook and Audiobook activity (items accessed/borrowed)	920,524
eMagazines downloaded	983,023
eNewspapers downloaded	406,778
Stock spend (inclusive of electronic media)	£3,018,000
In line with Service Priorities a range of inclusive events and programmes has been delivered by libraries throughout 2020/21	
STOCK	
READING AND READER DEVELOPMENT While the Covid pandemic significantly restricted physical access to library facilities which in turn limited the normal browsing and selection of reading materials by customers Libraries NI maintained and made available through a range of alternative services an extensive stock collection contains in excess of 2,500,000 items. The collection aimed to meet the needs of the entire community within Northern Ireland with over 50 languages being represented in the collection. Books and other materials were available in a range of	

formats to meet the individual needs of our reader's e.g. hard copy, downloadable eBooks, eMagazines, eNewspapers and Audiobook. Electronic formats such as eBooks allow readers to increase text size and change colour of text to assist their reading. Libraries NI provided access to over 2.3 million electronic items. Stock was purchased to meet the expectations and needs of all our borrowers and included items which: • documented, recognised and reflected the shared history of Northern Ireland • reflected the diverse communities in Northern Ireland • Supported the reading needs of adults and children with hearing and sight impairments e.g. large print books, audiobooks and downloadable audiobooks.	
ACCESS TO SERVICES Recognising the obstacles the Covid pandemic presented to many people steps were put in place to remove barriers and facilitate continued access to library services including increased loans limits, suspension of charges and automatic renewal of on loan items. In addition alternative service delivery methods were introduced to allow continued safe access to library services including Book Box (material selected by library staff for collection or delivery), Book and Collect, Print and Collect etc. Taking account of the anxiety being experienced by various groups in society specific and separate 'safe' access times were put in place for those most vulnerable through the peaks of the pandemic Although limited by the wider restrictions imposed to control the risks from Covid our Homecall Service staff continued to deliver books and audiobooks to people who were unable to access library services independently, enabling people with disabilities to continue their reading habit and providing a vital connection to many forced to isolate from wider society. **TARGETING SOCIAL EXCLUSION** Resources continued to be targeted at 15 libraries in the lowest 10% Super Output and Urban Village areas, including two central libraries in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry In more general terms specific activities were developed to provide social interaction for people at risk of isolation or exclusion including online Zoom Reading Groups, Knit and Natter and creative writing groups.	

Specific efforts were made and resources dedicated to making contact with elderly and vulnerable customers, simple contact phone calls and outreach proved invaluable in maintaining contact with these groups.

DISABILITY AND SENSORY IMPAIRMENT

Libraries NI continues to be committed to actively removing barriers to ensure that individuals living with a sensory impairment or disability, visible or hidden, have access to services. We have:

Invested in our physical estate to modernise and refurbish libraries to improve access and make them disability friendly

Promoted positive attitudes through training and awareness raising for our staff to make it easier for people living with an unseen disability to join/use a library and so that staff are cognisant of people who may have learning difficulty and may require more time and patience.
Armagh Library produced a Christmas song for children which was recorded and broadcast on Facebook with staff signing the lyrics in Makaton – this was subsequently shared to various groups.

Reading groups specifically aimed at the visually impaired continued to be provided via online platforms.

DIGITAL INCLUSION SERVICES
Although physical access to our facilities was limited at times we continued to provide
- loop systems and Minicom service available to promote accessibility for people with hearing loss or speech impairment
- assistive software and larger 20" screens available on public access computers enabling people with sight impairments to access ICT and virtual library services.
- Browsealoud as an integral part of the Libraries NI website which adds speech, reading and translation functionality facilitating access and participation for people with dyslexia, low literacy, mild visual impairments and those who speak English as a second language.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The Covid pandemic created many difficulties for families and children, enforced home-schooling, lack of access to resources and expertise placed significant strain on parents and carers. We made significant efforts to ensure our

programming aimed at children and young people was available via alternative mediums while access to physical facilities was limited. We developed and provided online (live broadcasts and recorded video) programmes to develop and support pre-literacy, literacy, learning, information seeking and digital skills and to foster a love of reading. Programmes included:

Rhythm and Rhyme, a programme of rhymes, stories and songs for preschool children aged 0-4 and their parents/carers. Supplemented by resources on our website including rhymes,, reading challenges, rhyming information and fun activities to help parents and carers develop their child's communication and language skills.

Storytime and Bedtime Stories - a free online programme of stories and poems for children aged 4-8 years.

Craft Sessions and Creative Lego Workshop – delivered online a programme of activities and craft projects providing stimulating and fun activities.

HEALTH AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

DIGITAL INCLUSION

The Covid pandemic resulted in an immediate and significant shift to reliance on digital platforms for many services previously delivered in person. Building on the work previously undertaken in promoting greater equality of access to learning opportunities and information resources and supporting adults to become better informed and skilled we refocused our resources and staff to deliver a range of relevant assistance and training programmes aimed at providing users with sufficient online and IT skill to manage in what was for many a new and challenging digital environment.

Training and support was provided through a range of channels including e-mail, a telephone help line and delivery via video conferencing platforms to allow users to improve their digital skills, maintain connections with friends and families, do their shopping online and to access Libraries NI resources.

Modules delivered using WhatsApp, Zoom, Scam Awareness, Staying in Touch, Church Online Access, Online Shopping and Online Learning as well as promoting access to Libraries NI resources such as eMagazines, eBooks, Press Reader and Audio books.

Some 552 training/support sessions were provided attended by some 1240 individuals with 1656 enquiries for digital assistance being addressed.

SUPPORT FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Libraries NI continued to support Health and Wellbeing by providing access to health information and signposting to other organisations as well as delivering and hosting a range of activities and events. Many Health and Wellbeing events and programmes are successfully delivered through effective partnership working. Examples include:

Happiness Labs
The COVID 19 Resilience fund enabled the creation of a new programme of events as part of the Health offer in Libraries NI. Happiness Labs were developed to bring existing library members together on an online platform to combat loneliness and isolation and to provide opportunities for them to access a programme of health and wellbeing activities.
This cross cutting initiative engaged with customer groups who previously met in libraries providing a chance for them to reconnect and build friendships again whilst learning a new skill and gaining knowledge and information about their general health and wellbeing. The health activities chosen incorporated the Take 5 steps to Wellbeing message:
All of the sessions were facilitated by a member of Libraries NI staff and provided an opportunity to promote all of the other resources available both at a local and corporate level.

Happiness Labs	Total sessions	Total attendees
Mindfulness	23	163
Chair yoga	24	185
Tai Chi	21	201
Positivity talk	23	134
Hatha Yoga	22	166
Nutrition and cookery demo.	20	147
TOTAL	**133**	**996**

Health Talks
A programme developed and implemented across the Libraries NI platform to provide the public with trustworthy information from Health professionals and/or very experienced speakers with expertise in their specific topic, raising awareness and supporting the public to look after their health and wellbeing.

Two targeted initiatives were delivered:

A motivational and inspirational talk to support mental health "An audience with Siobhan O'Neill", Mental Health Champion, provided the audience information on how to achieve good mental health by incorporating the "Take 5 steps to wellbeing" – Connect, Keep learning, be active, and Take notice, Give. 120 people attended the event.

An inspirational and informative talk "Anxiety as my super power "target was provided by a speaker who could talk from their own experiences about anxiety and how it may be used beneficially and how to use the "Take 5 steps to wellbeing" each day to support staying well and healthy. 78 people attended the event.

Staff Wellbeing 2020 presented our staff with a series of challenges in terms of their wellbeing and personal safety. The Covid pandemic fuelled anxiety and concern, testing personal resilience and that of the organisation as a whole. Concerted efforts were made and resources dedicated to identifying risks and mitigating actions, informing and educating staff, providing guidance and advice on remaining safe in the workplace and their private lives. Confidential support to help counter anxiety, depression, isolation and the physiological impacts of the pandemic were made available.	
GOOD RELATIONS While the Covid pandemic, health restrictions and social distancing requirements considerably curtailed the normal use of libraries as accessible, inclusive community hubs throughout 2020 significant efforts were made to provide alternative virtual arenas that could that provide shared social space where individuals and groups could meet to participate in community activity, learn about different cultures and give a voice to their own identity and heritage.	
CULTURAL HERITAGE Access to cultural heritage, both local and national, enriches society through nurturing creativity, imagination, pride in our past and a sense of place. Sharing space and interests in and across communities and working extensively with a range of partners creates a platform to share ideas and raise awareness of cultural differences. Our heritage staff collect, preserve, exploit and provide access to material which relates to cultural heritage and initiate and organise talks, activities and exhibitions. Physical access to heritage material was limited in 2020 as facilities closed in response to the Covid pandemic and alternative provisions were made to establish a Heritage from Home talks programme providing a virtual platform for the continued access to curated materials, from our own collections images and videos from the Digital Film Archive and allowing users to engaged via social media.	
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS Social media growth and activity continued with increased likes, follows and views on our Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages. Content on the Libraries NI social media channels was extended with video available to support customer needs.	

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
COMMITMENT			
Establish relationships with groups consisting of representatives of people with disabilities, to identify, provide and promote opportunities which will improve engagement by people with a disability in key work areas.	Ongoing	Relationships to be established and maintained where they already exist.	Relationships maintained throughout 2020/21 although the provision and promotion of opportunities curtailed by Covid pandemic measures.
Identify and address barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing and utilising public library services.	Annually	Feedback received or Consultation exercises undertaken in a range of mediums to ascertain the views of interested parties.	Feedback taken on board in developing responses to adapting service provision within the limitation of national and local health restrictions
Identify opportunities, including the use of images, for Libraries NI to promote good practice and help to address negative stereotypes of people who have a disability and I promote positive role models.	Annually	Feedback received or Consultation exercises undertaken in a range of mediums to ascertain the views of interested parties.	Feedback taken on board in developing responses to adapting service provision within the limitation of national and local health restrictions
SERVICE DELIVERY			
Consider the diversity of images used and potential for portraying a wider range of individuals when developing information materials including websites.	At design stage of material	Relationships to be established and maintained where they already exist.	Further development hampered by national and local health restrictions
Ensure that new duties are taken into account when designing any future training / educational programmes, guidance and legislation.	On commission of project or programme	Training/educational programme and guidance revised in line with new duties and legislation	Equality duties taken into account in designing training / educational programmes and adapting service delivery methods.
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT			

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
Provide all staff with disability equality and legislation training.	On appointment/ promotion and three yearly or as dictated by law.	Awareness training materials/providers sourced and training provided in relevant areas	Completion of the CAL e-learning Unconscious Bias module by all newly appointed staff. Completion of the CAL e-learning Introduction to Section 75 and Introduction to Human Rights modules by newly appointed middle and senior managers
Raise awareness of specific barriers faced by people with disabilities including through linking in with National Awareness Days or Weeks (such as Mind your Health Day)	Ongoing	Increased staff awareness of a range of disabilities and needs	Awareness raising an ongoing part of corporate business and staff management processes
RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION			
Promote use of employment support programmes, such as Workable NI, by staff and line managers.	Ongoing	People with a disability are supported to access employment opportunities and remain in employment.	Support mechanisms in place and actively monitored
Encourage people with a disability to apply for opportunities in Libraries NI and onto the Board of Libraries NI providing information in accessible formats both internal and external to Libraries NI.	On instigation of recruitment action	Internal and external Recruitment Campaigns continue to actively invite people with disabilities providing information for applicants in accessible formats on the staff Intranet and Libraries NI website. Provide training to Libraries NI Board.	Our Recruitment Campaigns continue to actively invite people with disabilities and information is provided in accessible formats to assist with applications.
COMMUNICATION			

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
Member of the Equality Commission's Mental Health Charter and to Every Customer Counts.	Annual review	Health and wellbeing initiatives promote good mental health which benefit employees and communities across NI. LNI will continue to develop and maintain partnerships, provide free information, events, and programme and employee assistance to support mental health.	We continue to provide and promote Mental Health and Wellbeing initiatives to employees and communities across NI. Particular focus throughout 2020 has been on addressing the impacts of isolation, anxiety and stress arising from the Covid pandemic
Ensure accessibility of the Libraries NI website in line with current legislation/guidance	Annual review and appropriate action initiated	People with disabilities have access to information published on Libraries NI Website. Demonstration of compliance with Northern Ireland Equality Commission guidance on accessible website design.	Website redesigned and remodelled to comply with accessibility requirements
Review Intranet site(s) to ensure accessibility by internal staff.	Annual review and appropriate action initiated	Website review completed and actions implemented.	Intranet site moved to accessible SharePoint platform
Provide information for line managers for when a member of staff declares their disability ☐ develop a flowchart detailing the process for managers to use when a member of staff declares their disability ☐ update Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments ☐ include the above in training for managers, such as absence management training.	By March 2022	Flowchart developed and shared with line managers Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments updated and shared with line managers Feedback from staff who have a disability indicates satisfaction with support provided	Development works ongoing
Collate information on reasonable adjustments that have been made for staff, to use as a	Quarterly	Database set up	Database in place

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
central source of information for other line managers		Agreed elements of database made available to line managers Feedback from staff who have a disability indicates satisfaction with support provided	
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT			
Ensure that all Libraries NI owned or managed premises and other infrastructure are accessible.	Annual review in line with review of estates management plans	Audit or update audits of premises in line with DDA requirements.	Cycle of review and improvements ongoing in line with available resources
MONITORING AND REVIEWING			
Review the operation of existing services in conjunction with people with disabilities and their representatives to identify any barriers to access for this group.	By March 2022 and bi-annually thereafter	Development and assessment of customer feedback systems.	Progress delayed as a direct result of impacts of pandemic, minor revisions to feedback system undertaken however substantive review yet to be completed
Ensure that, where possible, disability monitoring information is collected in respect of users of Libraries NI services and job applicants.	Annually	The collection of information is carried out using periodic surveys and questionnaires, analysing employee exit interviews or customer complaints or grievances.	Collection of information ongoing

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
Measure Libraries NI performance against Action Plan targets and take appropriate action where these targets are not met.	Annually	Monitoring report produced quarterly use of information on goods, facilities and services provided by Libraries NI and actions taken.	Performance Review undertaken
Encourage staff, job applicants and appointees to declare that they have a disability or care for a person with a disability through awareness raising and providing guidance to staff and applicants on the importance of monitoring.	Ongoing	More accurate data in place. Equal Opportunities form is a mandatory part of the job application process to encourage applicants to provide data to support the monitoring process. Greater number of staff feel comfortable declaring they have a disability.	Ongoing