

## Public Authority Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties Annual Progress Report –2021-22

### Contact:

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

[www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Pages/Equality.aspx](http://www.librariesni.org.uk/AboutUs/OurOrg/Pages/Equality.aspx)

### Signature:



**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 2021 and March 2022**

## **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 2021\_22, 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. Libraries NI faced another challenging year in 2021/22, dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which once again caused serious disruption to our normal operations and the provision of the library service. We began the year with all libraries open but with restrictions in place that limited services, access to computers, the internet and printing, and BookBox and Book and Collect. As government restrictions eased during the year, more and more services were re-introduced, including browsing in libraries, access to study space and heritage collections, face-to-face programming and room hire. Unfortunately, as we moved into the winter period, the new and highly infectious Omicron variant resulted in further widespread government restrictions and resultant disruption to library services. In February 2022, restrictions were lifted and once again the work began to re-introduce the services that had been disrupted.*
- 2. Recognising the difficulties and additional stress the pandemic created for many of our users we continued to adapt and delivered a range of core programming that contribute to wellbeing, literacy, and combatting social isolation. During 2021/22, a hybrid approach to delivering services was adopted, with programmes and activities including Rhythm and Rhyme, Children's Storytime, Heritage from Home, Reading Groups and Creative Writing sessions being delivered both in library premises and through social media channels, including Facebook, YouTube and Zoom.*
- 3. Digital inclusion remained high on our agenda, and throughout 2021/22 Libraries NI offered digital support via various channels, including e-mail and telephone. Help sheets were created to provide easy access to basic digital skills, and modules to support digital learning were developed and delivered via the Zoom platform. These programmes help individuals to improve digital skills, maintain connections with friends and families and equipped them to access Libraries NI and wider government resources.*
- 4. Despite the many constraints we continued to focus our resources and activities in building on the opportunities to improve life opportunities and tackle social exclusion through early interventions aimed at children and young people. While many of our normal branch library activities were constrained, resources were made available online, and programmes and activities were adapted and delivered through our website and social media channels. Rhythm and Rhyme sessions were delivered using Zoom and Facebook and continued to prove popular with children and their parents and carers. With the relaxation of restrictions, we were able to deliver more and more activities in*

*local library settings including the Summer Reading Challenge which saw 13,900 children register to take part, reading some 149,622 books over the summer period. During Children's Mental Health Week we promoted a range of resources and activities to support and help young people to deal with difficult and challenging issues.*

5. *2021/22 saw the removal of Overdue charges for items borrowed from the library network, removing a barrier to accessing library services at a time when many in society are struggling with financial hardship. The initiative aimed to create a more equitable service provision and promote libraries as inclusive places. In supporting the move Communities Minister, Deirdre Hargey reinforced the message that "Libraries are a crucial resource at the heart of our communities. They serve as a place for people to access a wide range of services and also provide a safe place for people who live alone, feel isolated or marginalised and they are a focal point for many community based activities for all ages."*
6. *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 to take forward actions aimed at addressing the immediate impacts of the pandemic and recovery.*
7. *Libraries NI continues to be committed to the Equality Commission 'Every Customer Counts – Promoting Accessible Services' initiative.*
8. *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.*
9. *Quarterly policy screening reports were issued to consultees and published on the Libraries NI website.*

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- 2 Please provide examples of outcomes and/or the impact of equality action plans/ measures in 2021-22 (*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 2021-22 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 AND 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 2021-22 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 2021-22 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 remains 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 2021-22 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 2021-22 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 2021-22 reporting period, please indicate the **number** of:

Actions completed:	<input type="text"/>	Actions ongoing:	<input type="text"/>	Actions to commence:	<input type="text"/>
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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 2021/22 and the recovery period from 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 2021-22 reporting period (points not identified in an appended plan):

***Not applicable***

9 In reviewing progress on the equality action plan/action measures during the 2021-22 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

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- 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 2021-22 however the onset and subsequent impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic effectively halted progress, as a return to a more normal and stable operating environment continues it is intended to revisit and reinvigorate the action plan during 2022/23 to better reflect the present business environment.***

**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

***Not Applicable - There were no consultations undertaken in the 2021-22 reporting period***

- 11** Please provide any **details and examples of good practice** in consultation during the 2021-22 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:

***Not applicable - No policy was screened in during the period***

- 12** In the 2021-22 reporting period, given the consultation methods offered, which consultation methods were **most frequently used 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)*:

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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:

***See response to 10. Above - There were no consultations undertaken in the 2021-22 reporting period***

**13** Were any awareness-raising activities for consultees undertaken, on the commitments in the Equality Scheme, during the 2021-22 reporting period? *(tick one box only)*

Yes       No       Not applicable

Please provide any details and examples:

**14** Was the consultation list reviewed during the 2021-22 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)*:

13
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**16** Please provide the **number of assessments** that were consulted upon during 2021-22 :

0	Policy consultations conducted with <b>screening</b> assessment presented.
0	Policy consultations conducted <b>with an equality impact assessment</b> (EQIA) presented.
0	Consultations for an <b>EQIA</b> 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 2021-22 reporting period***





- 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 2021/22 has seen a return to more normal service delivery and a diminishing of the impacts of the Covid pandemic other societal factors have come into play e.g. financial and cost of living crisis. As a result the drivers for how and why the public access our services continues to evolve shaping the data and feedback on the accessibility and reach of our services which in turn informs our response to the shape of current and future service delivery models 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 2021-22, 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 2021-22 the following training opportunities were provided:***

- Access to the CAL e-learning Unconscious Bias module for all newly appointed staff***
- Access to the CAL e-learning Introduction to Section 75 and Introduction to Human Rights modules for 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: Sight Loss 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, Reachdeck (formerly 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 staff attended online Sight Loss Awareness sessions. These sessions were aimed at helping staff to recognise and better address sight loss issues experienced by some of our customers..*
- *HR staff attended a number of events to update knowledge in relation to Employment Law 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 partial closure of libraries to the general public for part of the year 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 virtual sessions on: delivering services in the virtual environment, building resilience, supporting vulnerable and hosting junior reading groups, Lego Clubs etc. 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 to prepare for the return to face to face delivery of services on re-opening.*

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

**26** Please list any examples of where monitoring during 2021-22, 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 2021-22?

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)*

***No specific areas have been highlighted, the review of the scheme will consider arrangements in the round and taking account of the service delivery environment prevalent at the time.***

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 we will continue in reviewing and updating a range of policies including introducing a flexible /hybrid working framework 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?

	<b>Training Action Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcome / Impact</b>
1	Provision of the Equality Scheme and a Summary of the Scheme on the staff intranet	<u>All</u> 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 <u>all</u> new starts (permanent and temporary) and agency staff via local and corporate (LNI staff only) induction	
3	Access to the CAL e-learning Unconscious Bias module	Module undertaken by newly appointed staff	
4	Access to the CAL e-learning Introduction to Section 75 module	Module undertaken by middle and senior managers	
5	Access to the CAL e-learning Introduction to Human Rights module	Module undertaken by middle and senior managers	
6	Safeguarding (Children and Adults at Risk) Awareness training	All newly appointed staff (including agency/temporary contracts)	
7	A range of customer focused training events, including: Sight Loss 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?

	<b>Communications Action Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcome / Impact</b>
1	As we return to more normal service delivery approaches we have made particular efforts to reconnect with our service users and to make the public aware of the free and accessible services offered by public libraries. As well as the continued use of online platforms and social media we have undertaken a dedicated marketing campaign to inform the public.	The 'Open Your Mind' campaign delivered in 2021/22 raised awareness of public library services through informational advertising utilising bus shelter/stop posters, radio segments, newspapers and social media influencers (Facebook/Twitter).	Significantly raised profile with all sectors of society of free to access public services in a safe environment and promoted the library as an access point for other public services.
2	Improving access to Libraries NI website content	An update and refreshed public web site is now available supporting ReachDeck functionality which provides language/translation/accessibility services including the ability to have PDFs read by its screen reading software.	While significantly more of our web site content is now accessible in a range of formats/languages etc. some resources still require updating to be fully compliant e.g. addition of alternative text for images. Work is ongoing to bring these areas in line with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines



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

	<b>Encourage others Action Measures</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Outcome / Impact</b>
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:

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

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

	<b>Action Measures partly achieved</b>	<b>Milestones / Outputs</b>	<b>Outcomes/Impacts</b>	<b>Reasons not fully achieved</b>
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 2022) 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 2021-22

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to impact 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 these limitations 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 2021-22	Supporting Statistics
<b>Headline statistics</b>	
Number of new members.	49,680 (including 11,223 virtual)
Number of items borrowed (physical)	2,157,105
eBook and Audiobook activity (items accessed/borrowed)	760,009
eMagazines downloaded	416,319
eNewspapers downloaded	323,682
Stock spend (inclusive of electronic media)	£3,500,000
In line with Service Priorities a range of inclusive events and programmes has been delivered by libraries throughout 2021/22	
<b>STOCK</b>	
<b>READING AND READER DEVELOPMENT</b>	
While the Covid pandemic continued to 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	

<p>our reader's e.g. hard copy, downloadable eBooks, eMagazines, eNewspapers and Audiobook.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Stock was purchased to meet the expectations and needs of all our borrowers and included items which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• documented, recognised and reflected the shared history of Northern Ireland</li> <li>• reflected the diverse communities in Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Supported the reading needs of adults and children with hearing and sight impairments e.g. large print books, audiobooks and downloadable audiobooks.</li> </ul> <p><b>Removal of Overdue Charges</b> The removal of overdue charges was a very positive policy development in 2021/22, removing a barrier to accessing library services at a time when we were working hard to encourage customers to return to libraries.</p> <p><b>Celebrating Books and Reading</b> Libraries NI continued its work to support readers and reader development and during March 2022 Libraries NI held a number of events and activities to 'Celebrate Books and Reading' with 70 libraries participating in events and activities to promote reading for pleasure and to coincide with national initiatives including World Book Day, Shakespeare Week and World Poetry Day. In total 300 events were delivered across branch libraries and staff engaged with customers and readers to talk about and celebrate books. The activities included book displays, poetry events, themed story times and a 'Love It or Loathe It' promotion where customers rated the books they had read.</p>	
<p><b>ACCESS TO SERVICES</b> Recognising the obstacles remained for many following the height of the Covid pandemic we continued to adjust our service delivery methods to accommodate the anxiety being experienced by various groups in society.</p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Open Days and Family Fun Days</b></p>	

Open Days and Family Fun Days were hosted in 12 libraries during February and March 2022, combining a mix of library and facilitated events with Mr Hullabaloo, Theatre Without Walls and Science Starz. Participating libraries hosted a variety of free events to highlight services and to showcase the range of activities which take place regularly in libraries including Knit and Natter, Rhythm and Rhyme, Creative Writing and Reading Groups. This was an initiative to encourage customers to engage with the library service.

### **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 activities continued to provide social interaction for people at risk of isolation or exclusion including online activities and in the later part of the year a resumption of face to face physical events and meetings.

Specific efforts were made and resources dedicated to making contact and enabling people to access digital and online services such as;

#### **Get Online Week**

Online IT events took place between 18 – 24 October 2021 in communities all across the UK during Get Online Week, showing people how to stay connected and how the internet can make life easier, cheaper, healthier and more fun! Libraries NI offered a programme of free Zoom sessions for customers allowing them to discover the benefits of getting online while promoting our network of libraries, Wi-Fi, computer resources and IT help that is available all year long.

### **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.

<p><b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES</b></p> <p>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:</p> <p>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.</p> <p><b>Reading Challenges</b></p> <p>The 2021 Summer Reading Challenge ‘Wild World Heroes’ with the theme of nature and conservation and with associated reading resources was delivered in online and physical formats in partnership with The Reading Agency and the World Wildlife Fund. This intervention received positive feedback from school Principals with some 70% of the children in the pilot libraries having read three or more books over the summer and becoming more engaged and interested in reading.</p> <p><b>Our Wee Place</b></p> <p>Copies of a children’s book ‘Our Wee Place’ commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office and created to ‘sensitively reflect on the experience of growing up in Northern Ireland’ were given to Libraries NI. The author, Sophie Kirtley, and illustrator, Ellan Rankin, are both from Northern Ireland and copies of the books are freely available in local libraries.</p>	
<p><b>DIGITAL INCLUSION</b></p> <p>From April 2021 Libraries NI continued to offer digital support through a range of platforms responding to 1,051 requests for digital support. Help sheets providing easy access to basic digital skills and topics were made available to ensure that the</p>	

public could help themselves and/or others maintain contact with friends and family and access online resources during periods of lockdown.

Modules to support digital skills development continued to be delivered via the Zoom platform with 423 sessions and 775 participants taking part. Go On modules were delivered to participants who had limited digital skills and during 2021/22 new modules were developed including Internet Safety for Parents, Pressreader and Advanced Zoom with customers learning to use technology while also being encouraged to use Libraries NI eResources. These learning modules and access to eResources contributed to improving customer digital skills and assisted in reducing social isolation through enabling e-access to family, friends and library resources.

Responses to the programme evaluation indicated that 92% found the digital assistance was very useful, 88% of respondents felt they had learnt new skills or developed existing skills and 32% felt it helped them to communicate with family or friends.

**Connect** was a new initiative aimed at the digitally excluded and delivered in partnership with the Department of Finance, Business in the Community, Ignite IT, Supporting Communities and The Police Service of Northern Ireland. The programme was delivered in two phases. The first phase was primarily delivered as one to one support and the second phase attempted to connect more with groups than individuals. In both phases Libraries NI provided IT support, including phone and email support, for the participants along with assistance in connecting to the internet, delivering 84 sessions, 36 of which were online and 48 of which were provided face-to-face.

#### **High Street Support Scheme (Spend Local)**

Libraries NI, through the Department for Communities, engaged with the Department for the Economy to raise awareness of the free computers, Wi-Fi and broadband access in local libraries and to help support and facilitate people in local communities wishing to complete the online application for the High Street Support Scheme.

#### **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 was a programme developed and delivered in 2021 to offset loneliness by encouraging online social



<p>activities. Following the success of the programme 25 online health events including Chair Yoga, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi were enjoyed by 289 people during the 2021/22 year.</p> <p>Children’s Mental Health Week</p> <p>During Children’s Mental Health Week which ran from 7 – 13 February 2022 Libraries NI partnered with the publishing house Award Publications and prize winning children’s author Pete Johnson to publish a joke book for children. The joke book is based around his fun loving character Louis, who features in the ‘Louis the Laugh’ series. During Book Week NI people were invited to submit jokes with over 550 received and these informed the resulting book ‘How to be a Comedy Genius’ which was launched in Chichester Library. Other programming during Children’s Mental Health week included Catherine Wells (Occupational Therapist) who provided daily wellbeing messages posted on social media and Clare Galway (Dietician) who gave parents and carers advice on Mood Boosting foods for children.</p> <p><b>Staff Wellbeing</b></p> <p>2021 continued to present 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.</p>	
<p><b>GOOD RELATIONS</b></p> <p><b>Good Relations Week</b></p> <p>The theme for Good Relations Week, held between 20 -26 September 2021, was “Brighter Days Ahead” and focused on the issues faced by young people during the pandemic. It highlighted empathy and supported and encouraged our young people to look ahead to a brighter future, filled with hope and optimism as we start to return to normal life.</p> <p>Libraries NI offered a range of physical and virtual events featuring story times, workshops, exhibitions, reading groups including a visually impaired reading group. International Storytellers facilitated by Libraries NI Storyteller in Residence, Japanese born teller Masako Carey and South African Nandi Jola, participated by celebrating cultural diversity with inspirational tales. The Health element included walking groups, Tai Chi and an online healthy recipe and cookery workshop.</p> <p>The Libraries NI ‘<b>Turning Heads</b>’ project hosted a panel discussion and virtual poetry workshop during Good Relations Week. This event highlighted the cultural</p>	

<p>significance, heritage, sensitivities, and social pressures of hair for people of African descent. The event was led by Beyond Skin in partnership with House of 4C hair salon and Lush UK Belfast and included a relaxed discussion with an audience question and answer session.</p>	
<p><b>CULTURAL HERITAGE</b></p> <p>Access to the Libraries NI Cultural Heritage collections was subject to Covid-19 restrictions for part of the year with much of the material available on a consultation only basis. However Heritage staff developed and launched a new touring exhibition ‘Your Past in Print.’ This exhibition showcases Libraries NI’s extensive newspaper collection using images and articles from historical newspapers. The exhibition highlights the wealth of information held in the local, provincial and national newspaper titles held by Libraries NI.</p> <p><b>Heritage from Home</b> Following a successful funding application for £10,000 made to the Heritage Lottery Shared History Fund the popular Heritage from Home programme continued to be delivered in 2021/22 with 33 online talks and workshops delivered from October 2021 to March 2022 and attended by 1,680 people.</p> <p><b>The Armstrong Storytelling Trust</b> also delivered online workshops allowing children and adults to both understand and reminisce about school life in bygone years.</p> <p><b>Northern Ireland 1921 to 2021 Virtual Exhibition and Stormont Remembered</b>, a virtual exhibition highlighting the rich variety of Libraries NI’s resources and charting the events of 1921 leading up to the creation of Northern Ireland was also delivered.</p>	
<p><b>RURAL NEEDS</b></p> <p>In 2021/22 libraries continued to provide important services to rural dwellers including Mobile Library services, Homecall and BookBox as well as online resources such as eBooks, eNewspapers and eMagazines which are available to everyone.</p> <p>Of the 12 policies/strategies/plans which were subject to a Rural Needs Impact Assessment during 2021/22 no specific rural needs actions were identified.</p>	
<p><b>MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS</b></p> <p>Throughout the year, the constant changing environment meant that customers were often unsure about what was available despite ongoing marketing communications. The momentum to re-engage with customers was often interrupted by necessary government restrictions in response</p>	

to the changing levels of Covid; simply letting regular users know that their library was open became an ongoing task. The primary challenge for communications was to keep customers informed about restrictions, the requirements for customers whilst they were in libraries and the changing level of service offer provided both online and in libraries. This required frequent graphic changes, video changes and press updates along with website updates including branch opening hour changes and service disruption announcements due to Covid. This frequency of service changes made the planned ReConnect with customers difficult and it had a marked effect on service delivery as, for example, the restrictions led to one of the major planned initiatives being switched to online only at the final stage even though the work for communications, website and social media had already been completed.

A significant advertising campaign informing and promoting the safe, free and accessible public library services ran from the middle of February through to the end of March 2022

While there was less expenditure on digital promotion than previous years social media followers grew during the year by over 9%. The growth of social media was encouraging but work was also underway to increase the number of customers that could be contacted directly via promotional email and over 4,000 new customers signed up.

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
<b>COMMITMENT</b>			
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 2021/22 and work undertaken to reconnect and re-establish relationships impacted by the Covid pandemic.
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.
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.
<b>SERVICE DELIVERY</b>			
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	Our promotional and communication materials are more reflective of the diversity of society as a whole	Diversity of images and content now taken into consideration when designing, developing and publishing materials.
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.

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
<b>TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT</b>			
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
<b>RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION</b>			
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.
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>			

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 2021 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 work ongoing to address outstanding accessibility issues e.g. updating of document formats, addition of text descriptions for photographs etc.
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
<p>Provide information for line managers for when a member of staff declares their disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop a flowchart detailing the process for managers to use when a member of staff declares their disability</li> <li>• update Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments</li> <li>• include the above in training for managers, such as absence management training.</li> </ul>	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 and implementation works ongoing

Action	Timescale	Expected Outcome	Progress
Collate information on reasonable adjustments that have been made for staff, to use as a central source of information for other line managers	Quarterly	Database set up Agreed elements of database made available to line managers Feedback from staff who have a disability indicates satisfaction with support provided	Database in place
<b>PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT</b>			
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
<b>MONITORING AND REVIEWING</b>			
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 2023 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. Implementation date revised.
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