



ON THE MOON  
AND THE MESSAGE FROM EARTH: WE'RE BREATHING AGAIN!

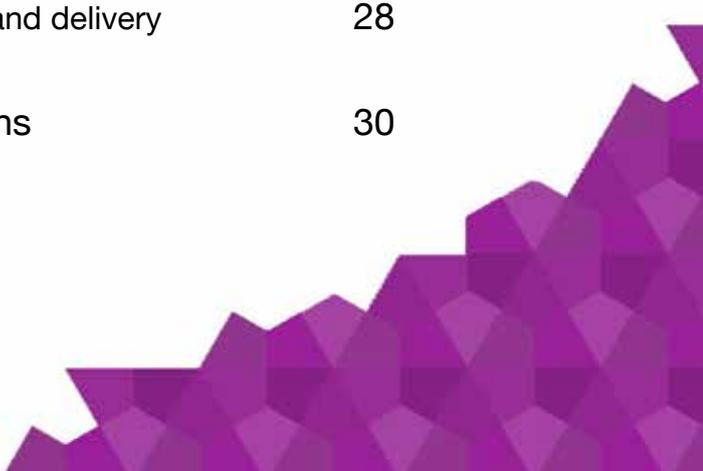


**libraries ni**  
Corporate Plan  
2020 - 2024



# Contents

Foreword by Chairperson and Chief Executive	1
1. Who we are	4
1.3 Our Vision	4
1.4 Our Mission	4
1.5 Our Values	4
1.6 Our Network and Services	5
2. Looking Back	7
3. Performance Measures	11
4. Looking Forward: The Strategic Planning Context	12
Public Policy Environment	12
Economic Environment	13
Social Change	14
Technological Development	15
Customers	15
Staff	17
5. <b>Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions</b>	18
<b>Outcome Area 1:</b> A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing	20
<b>Outcome Area 2:</b> Inspired, informed and literate children and adults	24
<b>Outcome Area 3:</b> Effective Governance and delivery	28
6. Measuring Outcomes and Strategic Actions	30



## Foreword by Chairperson and Chief Executive



This plan builds upon the positive foundations that were laid in the 2016 - 2020 Corporate Plan whilst maintaining a firm commitment to help support those who live, study or work in communities across Northern Ireland. This Corporate Plan sets out the Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions that Libraries NI intends to focus on over the next four years, communicating a clear direction, approach and operational framework.

Having just celebrated Libraries NI's tenth anniversary, it is evident that much has been achieved and yet much has changed. In developing the Corporate Plan, Libraries NI's management team and Board have examined the wider demographic, political and social environment, giving much thought as to how Libraries NI should keep pace with new demands, new developments and technologies whilst also incorporating the move to an outcomes based approach to service delivery.

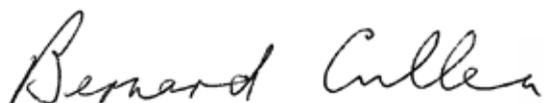
The extensive network of libraries is strategically important and we believe that this importance will strengthen as we work collaboratively with an increasing number of organisations across government departments, public bodies and the voluntary and private sectors.

Libraries support the delivery of other services, providing local access points and helping customers to connect with information and support that contributes to social and economic wellbeing. This is facilitated by our dedicated and professional staff who are committed to providing help and support to assist people, no matter what their background or circumstances.

There are substantial financial challenges ahead for Libraries NI and we will work closely with officials from the Department for Communities throughout the years of the plan. Funding levels have had a significant impact upon all aspects of the organisation over the past four years and yet we remain focused on maximising every opportunity to improve the efficiency of the organisation, building upon the savings that have already been delivered and working with the Department to secure the resources to deliver the aspirations and ambitions set out in this Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan's framework recognises the importance of the draft Programme for Government whilst also including the themes and outcomes articulated in district council community plans. By embracing this direction for the outcome based planning approach, we now have three clear desired Outcome Areas and corresponding Strategic Actions. The outcomes delivery planning approach is a major change for Libraries NI and this methodology will be integrated throughout the organisation, forming the basis of annual business plans each year and developing new ways to report the achievements of the organisation.

Libraries are trusted service providers in the heart of communities supporting people from different backgrounds and demographics, encouraging a love of reading and providing opportunities for people to learn and to connect with information, IT and services. We will continue to work closely with officials from the Department for Communities, other government departments and partners throughout the years of this Corporate Plan to deliver for people whilst building upon our unique position as a trusted and valued community resource.



Libraries NI Chairperson



Libraries NI Chief Executive



# 1. Who We Are

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

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

## 1.3 Our Vision

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

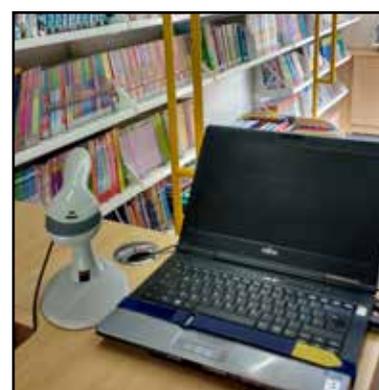
## 1.4 Our Mission

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

## 1.5 Our Values

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

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

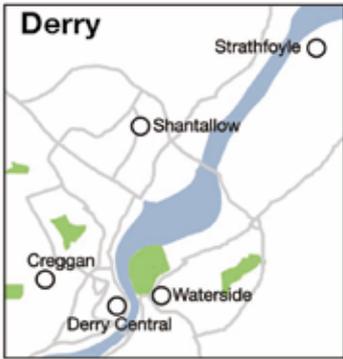


**Responsive** – we are a learning organisation that is open to new ideas and better ways to serve individuals and communities. We have a focus on quality, are creative and flexible and will continue to explore innovative ways of working to ensure that services are vibrant, effective and relevant to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

## 1.6 Our Network and Services

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

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



## 2. Looking Back

2.1 In the period covered by the Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020 Libraries NI operated in a challenging environment with uncertainty in respect of longer-term planning and continued financial constraints in the public sector, characterised by a series of one-year resource allocations and significant budget reductions year on year. The key focus during the period was seeking to develop and deliver effective services in line with our priorities and in support of the strategic priorities of the Department for Communities (DfC), the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the draft Programme for Government while at the same time realising the efficiencies required by the budget cuts through the implementation of annual savings plans and measures.

2.2 Our strategic priorities in the 2016 - 2020 period centred on five corporate goals:

- support literacy and promote a love of reading
- contribute to social and community wellbeing
- promote economic wellbeing
- support and develop our people
- deliver high quality services.

2.3 In order to help achieve these corporate goals our work was focused on a number of key service priorities and a series of strategic objectives and targets set out in Annual Business Plans. Service priorities included:

- Children and Young People
- Cultural Heritage
- Digital Inclusion
- Support for Health and Wellbeing
- Community Relations and Cultural Diversity
- Reading and Reader Development.



2.4 Our work in support of these corporate goals and service priorities included:

- developing and delivering public library services aligned to support draft Programme for Government and Department for Communities priority outcomes
- increasing use of the public library service as a local access point for communities to many services delivered by the Department for Communities, other government departments and organisations in the public, community and voluntary sector
- promoting cultural diversity and good relations through participating in the annual Good Relations Week, Holocaust Memorial Day, Refugee Week, Embrace and celebrating different cultures through events such as, Chinese New Year, Diwali and Burns Night
- helping to combat social exclusion through delivery of services and programmes targeted at a community or local area level and groups at risk including refugees, people affected by dementia, the homeless and people affected by autism, rural dwellers and those living in poverty
- developing and maintaining a number of strategic partnerships with other statutory agencies and public bodies, including the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Department of Finance (DoF), Public Record Office of NI (PRONI), National Museums NI (NMNI), Health Trusts, BBC and

District Councils to promote joined up working on mutually agreed priorities, enhance services for library users and extend the reach and relevance of public library services

- promoting library services to meet needs in rural areas and working closely with DAERA to successfully introduce seven Out of Hours Libraries, increasing access to facilities, resources and broadband in rural areas
- as the largest UK library authority developing closer links with Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), other UK Library authorities and National Libraries through Libraries Connected, the British Library Living Knowledge Network and partnership working with Republic of Ireland library authorities and associations
- providing a wide range of programmes, events and activities to support reading and reader development, children's and young people's services, learning and information, digital inclusion, cultural and creative development and heritage



- providing access to health information and working with partners to deliver a range of health events and activities including Mindfulness and Healthy Eating sessions, adult health and teenage health fairs and the use of music as a tool to promote better mental health. Take Five Steps to Wellbeing is an example of one successful initiative delivered in local libraries that contributed to promoting improved health and wellbeing
- engaging actively with District Councils as a statutory partner in the Community Planning process to help identify long term objectives, develop plans to tackle cross-cutting issues and work collaboratively for the benefit of citizens
- delivering new and innovative programmes and activities including lending Micro:bit starter packs to children and young people to inspire and develop a new generation of digital pioneers building coding skills for the future
- promoting a love of reading and encouraging debate about books through initiatives such as Two Cities One Book (launched March 2016 with Dublin City Public Libraries) and the Biggest Bookclub in the Country and Bookweek NI with the BBC
- launching the Digital Citizen initiative as a new model of targeted delivery of IT support in libraries and other community settings
- providing talks, workshops, lectures and exhibitions to mark significant anniversaries such as Decade of Commemorations, The Library Men of World War One and women's suffrage, making use of Libraries NI's extensive, and often unique heritage resources





- continuing to promote free downloadable eBooks and audiobooks, eMagazines and other online resources, many of which can be accessed by library users from their own homes
- celebrating the 130th Anniversary of Belfast Central Library and the tenth anniversary of the formation of Libraries NI
- launch of the Libraries NI Storyteller in Residence (January 2016) funded through the Armstrong Storytelling Trust
- implementing savings measures to assist with meeting financial targets
- delivering a wide range of development programmes and wellbeing initiatives for staff
- carrying out works to maintain and improve the fabric and condition of buildings across the library estate. This included restoration of the historic Castlewella Library building, and major refurbishments and extensions at the Lisburn Road and Coleraine libraries.

## 3. Performance Measures

3.1 Each year an Annual Business Plan setting out the actions to be taken and the associated targets is prepared and approved. The Annual Business Plan is informed by the Corporate Plan, relevant priorities in the draft Programme for Government and the Department for Communities' strategy and policy for the public library service. The Annual Plan sets out the agreed Key Performance Indicators which are used to report quarterly to the Board and the Department.

3.2 Over the period of the 2016 – 2020 Corporate Plan, Key Performance Indicators have focused on the following areas:

- participation levels in relation to branch library and mobile services, including issues and renewals, active library members, use of public access terminals and Wi-Fi

- mobile library services
- participation in programmes and activities
- promotion of the library service across digital platforms including website and social media
- staff sickness absence levels
- standards for technology support and services and
- financial management (resource and capital budgets).

3.3 Libraries NI's Annual Reports for the period 2015/16 – 2019/20 contain detailed information on our work and include annual Key Performance Indicators, agreed with DfC.



## 4. Looking Forward: The Strategic Planning Context

4.1 In developing this Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024 consideration has been given to external factors that influence, shape and impact on libraries, library use and the public sector landscape within which the library service is delivered in Northern Ireland. These

factors include public policy, economic, social, cultural and technological environment, government priorities as well as strategic developments taking place in respect of library service provision and wider public service provision.



### Public Policy Environment

4.2 The draft Programme for Government (PfG) issued in May 2016 set out a framework of societal outcomes that the Northern Ireland Executive wants to achieve in support of its overarching purpose of 'improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage and driving economic growth'. These outcomes are further restated in the Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018/19 issued by the Executive Office. Libraries NI is committed to contributing to the achievement of outcomes identified in the draft PfG. The Outcome Areas set out in this Corporate Plan take cognizance of the draft PfG and reflects how Libraries NI will contribute to progressing priorities within the context of the wider public policy agenda.

4.3 Our priorities and outcomes are also guided by the vision and priorities of the Department for Communities and in particular the Department's Business Plan 2019/20 and the overarching policy framework for the public library service in Northern Ireland – 'delivering tomorrow's libraries'. Account has been taken of the most recent Public Library Standards which focus on tackling poverty and social exclusion, participation, customer satisfaction, access, stock and access to ICT. The Department has indicated its intention to review the Public Library Standards and any changes arising from such a review will be taken on board over the period of this Corporate Plan.



## Economic Environment

4.4 In developing this Corporate Plan we have been mindful of the emphasis placed in the Programme for Government and by the Department for Communities on collaborative working across government departments, public bodies and the voluntary and private sectors. Libraries NI does not sit in isolation and through the work our staff do in local libraries, right across Northern Ireland, we support other public services that are vital for local and regional prosperity and wellbeing. Our libraries already offer a wide range of programmes which contribute to social and economic wellbeing and many of these programmes are delivered in partnership with other organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors, with which we have agreed Memoranda of Understanding. We believe that there will be opportunities to extend these partnerships and build new ones to support individuals and communities and we will continue to work positively with the range of organisations both within the Department for Communities and across government to seek to optimise the potential and opportunities offered.

4.5 In recent years corporate and business planning has taken place in the context of a series of one-year budget settlements, approved in the absence of an Executive and Assembly by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Communities. This has created a difficult and challenging environment within which to plan and deliver library services. Over the period of the 2016 – 2020 Corporate Plan baseline funding for the library service has fallen in cash terms by 11.3%. This was offset, in part, by in-year allocations however the timing and uncertainty associated with such additional funding creates its own challenges. Taking account of the cumulative effects of inflationary increases in costs over the same period the overall funding for the public library service has decreased significantly in real terms.

4.6 All indications are that public finances are likely to remain constrained going forward and along with ongoing political uncertainty and the impact of Brexit - an unknown factor - the planning and economic environment is set to remain challenging. In responding to economic challenges Libraries NI has met its financial responsibilities each year and has delivered significant levels of



savings while continuing to deliver effective services. This has included reductions in library opening hours, reductions in staffing levels, reductions in the stock budget and cuts to maintenance and other budgets. The current situation is not sustainable and a solution is required to create greater financial stability and to provide an adequate level of resourcing to avoid further inevitable detrimental impacts on the services provided by Libraries NI. In setting out our strategic direction we will engage with the Department for Communities with a view to securing a level of funding that will underpin the provision of a comprehensive and efficient public library service for the people of Northern Ireland and enable us to deliver on our aspirations and ambitions for the library service as set out in this Corporate Plan.

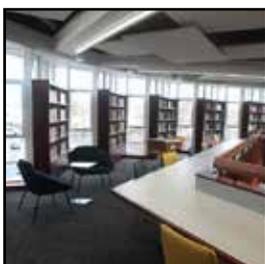
4.7 The demand for library services and activities remains strong across all age groups. It is essential, therefore that we continue to look at new creative and innovative ways of delivering our services that are both financially sustainable and effective more than ever, our planning must be evidence-based i.e. informed by a sound understanding of our actual and potential customers and their needs and expectations now as well as by knowledge of programmes and projects that have impacted positively on the lives of individuals and communities. It must take account also

of the need to rethink and reframe the current service delivery model to ensure continued sustainability into the future.

4.8 The economic value of the public library service has been acknowledged in various pieces of research. The library network is dispersed across the entirety of Northern Ireland and contributes in economic terms at both a local and a regional level. At a time when High Streets in towns and villages are coming under increasing pressure the role of libraries in visibly supporting local communities has never been more important.

### Social Change

4.9 In an increasingly diverse and multi-cultural society the promotion of social inclusion towards a shared and better future for all citizens remains a high priority. We live in a society where much inequality still exists and where not everybody has an equal opportunity to develop their talents to the full. The Northern Ireland Executive recognised that actions to address poverty and tackle disadvantage are prerequisites for social progress and set out its commitment, through the draft PfG, to addressing inequality and unfairness and creating conditions that support inclusion and equality of opportunity.





Libraries NI, is to be customer focused and deliver the best possible public service. Many resources are now available online and digital literacy plays an increasingly important role in connecting communities with services and building social capital. This includes important skills such as online safety and privacy which it is recognised forms part of the basic skillset required to be a digital citizen. As the use and impact of new technology driven services increases and government agendas continue to maintain a focus on “digital first” the need to ensure community-based support, resources and access remains a priority. Access to ICT and related infrastructure, and to the skills necessary to make effective use of it, are essential prerequisites to success.

4.10 Public libraries are widely recognised as welcoming, accessible, trusted and shared spaces, embedded in communities and used by people of all ages, cultures and backgrounds to pursue leisure and learning and to have access to high quality information resources. Research carried out by independent organisations such as Carnegie UK Trust provides supporting evidence on the role of libraries with approximately 75% of people in the UK recognising them as being important to communities. Libraries NI will continue to ensure that its services are delivered in welcoming and accessible environments and that they are available to all sections of the community.

### Customers

4.12 Libraries NI has undertaken a number of strategic reviews of provision since the establishment of a single library authority, involving widespread public consultation. These reviews were important in terms of ensuring a network of sustainable libraries and an effective and efficient mobile library service as well as, in some cases, addressing savings required to meet financial

### Technological Development

4.11 The pace of technological advancements continues to shape, influence and transform customer expectations and behaviour patterns and the way in which services are delivered. Digital technologies and the growth of social media, including how people create and share content and network, now play a central role in the lives of citizens in the 21st century, profoundly affecting how we live and how society functions. The goal of many public bodies, including



objectives. We continue to use customer feedback and information from customer surveys and the Continuous Household Survey to gauge customer expectations and requirements about services that we provide and to inform how we develop and deliver future services.

#### 4.13 Our customers have told us that:

- there are high levels of satisfaction with the services offered
- libraries are an important resource for many people who cannot afford to buy books or have a personal computer with internet access
- libraries play a key role in supporting people who are unemployed and seeking work and who use the library and, in particular, the free access to the internet, to look for jobs and build their skills
- they value the resources, support and encouragement available in libraries for learners of all ages, some of whom have had negative experiences of formal education

- older people, in particular, view libraries as places of social interaction
- libraries are community hubs and this is particularly important in rural areas where there is often a lack of other public buildings
- libraries and library staff make an important contribution to the development of early learning skills through, for example, their work with pre-school children and their parents or carers
- the role of libraries in supporting and extending literacy skills through work with schools and school age children should not be underestimated
- the library is a recognised shared space - in some areas the only shared community facility - and that it contributes to community cohesion and social inclusion
- the library is an important and trusted source of information, including about services available from other organisations.



## Staff

4.14 Libraries NI has been operating for ten years and in that time there has been a number of changes and re-organisations deployed incrementally on an annual basis in line with the implementation of various voluntary exit and redundancy schemes. There have been reductions in staff numbers in every year since Libraries NI began operating and at the end of 2018/19 staff numbers (headcount) were some 26.5 per cent less than in 2009/10.

4.15 Libraries NI will continue to face changes and challenges over the coming years. As an organisation it will continually need to adapt services to provide a comprehensive and efficient public library service and to continue to play a

proactive role in delivering government policy and priorities to the communities it serves. At the same time the funding context for public services is likely to remain challenging.

4.16 Despite all the changes that have taken place, staff members have continued to provide a high quality service and feedback from library users consistently tells us that they value highly the knowledge, skills and support provided by our staff. We recognise also the need to continue to engage with staff and provide them with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills so that they can continue to deliver high quality, professional and customer-focused services.



## 5. Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions

- 5.1 This Corporate Plan has been developed taking account of outcomes based principles and approaches which will be carried through into subsequent annual business plans. An outcomes-based approach represents a fundamental change to the way in which Libraries NI plans and delivers a public library service in Northern Ireland. The PfG framework sets out the major societal outcomes of the Executive and provides the strategic direction for the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. At a population level 12 priority outcomes have been set and all Departments and public bodies are required to work collaboratively to deliver against them and to contribute towards the overarching aim of ‘improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage and driving growth’.
- 5.2 In developing this Corporate Plan we have taken account of our statutory responsibility to deliver a public library service and have sought to closely align what we do with those parts of the PfG framework that have most relevance and where we believe our impact to be most significant. The plan also draws on themes and outcomes articulated in community plans developed by the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland. Three discrete Libraries NI outcome areas are set out in this plan:
- a shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing
  - inspired, informed and literate children and adults
  - effective governance and delivery.
- 5.3 Strategic Actions related to the outcome areas identified in this plan will be monitored and their impact measured at the organisation level. Nevertheless, by working to realise actions in outcome areas Libraries NI will be able to make its contribution towards achievement of population outcomes such as health, education and young people, societal wellbeing, connecting people and strengthening communities. The Libraries NI outcome areas and how our work aligns with the PfG framework and community plans is summarised in Figure 1 overleaf.
- 5.4 For each Libraries NI outcome area a number of strategic actions have been developed within which to frame the delivery of our services and priorities over the next four years. The Libraries NI outcome areas and strategic actions will provide the context and framework for annual ‘delivery’, or business, plans which will set out, each year, the more detailed actions, objectives and targets to ensure the aspirations and ambitions articulated in this four-year Corporate Plan are delivered.
- 5.5 Libraries NI Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions are set out in detail and summarised in Appendix 1.

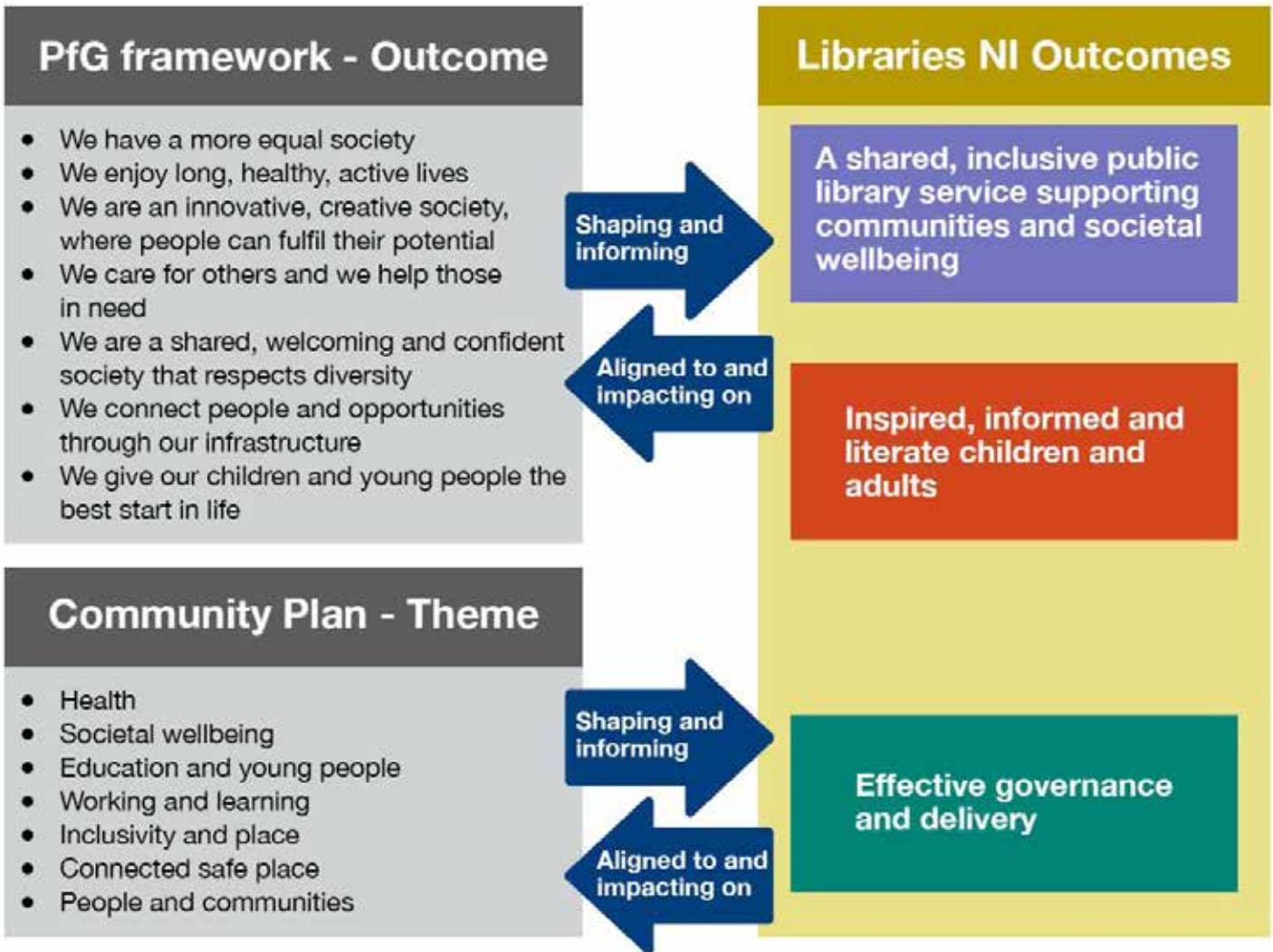


Figure 1. *Alignment of Libreres NI Outcome Areas with PfG Framework and Community Plans*

# Outcome Area 1: A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing

## Strategic Actions:

- Provide a customer focused public library service to people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland which contributes to societal wellbeing
- Create strong mutually beneficial regional and local partnerships, including with other public services and community planning partners, to develop libraries as access points for a wide range of services
- Reduce barriers to library use especially for those at risk of being socially excluded
- Raise awareness and increase understanding of library services with customers, the general public and stakeholders.

5.6 The services and resources available in public libraries have evolved, grown and expanded beyond all recognition in recent years. In addition to books your local library will often be a busy community hub with activities for children and young people, older people, education programmes, health events and fairs, cultural heritage resources, exhibitions and displays, access to information and services, eBooks, eMagazines and a range of other information technology equipment, infrastructure and services including computer training and digital literacy resources. However, research with the public shows that too many people are unaware of the services currently available in local libraries. At a time when libraries face unprecedented challenges and very real threats we need to let the public know what services are available in libraries and how they can access them.

5.7 Over the period of this Corporate Plan we will develop our Customer Service Strategy and business intelligence and customer engagement capability to better understand people who use libraries, to develop tailored services and respond to their needs. In this way there will be a focus on providing services where, when and how our customers want them. We will raise the profile of libraries and increase awareness with the public of the range of resources, services and activities available free of charge. We will develop our programmes and services to ensure they are relevant and in line with customer expectations.

5.8 Investing in the physical fabric of library buildings to create comfortable, welcoming and pleasing environments will be another important strand to ensuring libraries are properly resourced, refreshed, relevant, accessible and ultimately well used. The level of investment will depend on availability of capital funding and over the next four

years projects will range in size, complexity and scale. Nevertheless, we anticipate redevelopment and new build projects being brought forward in a number of areas including Enniskillen, Fivemiletown, Newtownards and Banbridge. We will also continue to engage with the Department for Communities to develop proposals for investment at Belfast Central Library. Belfast Central Library is a unique flagship library for Northern Ireland and the aspiration to refurbish the listed building and redevelop the rest of the site remains a priority for the Libraries NI Board. The project has the potential to be truly transformative in terms of the cultural heritage that is part of Belfast Central Library, providing increased access to the unique resources currently held there and to expanding the service offering that can be delivered through the library.

5.9 Actions will be taken to ensure the service offering is up to date, relevant and aligned with need and demand. Developing an evidence base to ensure funders and decision makers have a mutual understanding and recognition of the role that libraries play in supporting local and regional goals will be a priority. The links between the activities of libraries and PfG and Community Planning outcomes, in areas such as health, education, digital literacy and combatting loneliness and social exclusion need to be demonstrated and their value and impact underlined. Methods and approaches to measuring participation and impact will need to be developed to support and demonstrate how libraries change people's lives and contribute positively to the achievement of wider public sector outcomes in order to underpin the value and role of libraries.

5.10 Libraries NI is uniquely placed to make a significant contribution, to the work of the Department for Communities, in the delivery of social policy at a regional, local and community level. We will seek to encourage a 'libraries first' approach and will work to reinforce the importance of libraries as a local information and access point to many of the services being delivered both by the Department for Communities, and other public bodies and government Departments. In particular, we will continue to work closely with all eleven district councils as part of their community planning partnerships in the development and delivery of plans and actions to achieve improved outcomes for local communities and populations. We believe Libraries NI, through resources such as our network of local libraries and the public access network, can facilitate improved access to information and joined-up approaches to service delivery in all communities and particularly in those which are disadvantaged.

5.11 Libraries NI provides a unique and valued public service. Libraries are free, inclusive, shared, accessible, and trusted spaces, embedded in communities and used by people of all ages, cultures and background. They enable people to access a wide variety of learning, information and social resources that can make a difference to their quality of life, including their health and wellbeing, in both the short and long term. All libraries serve a wide range of customers including those who are at risk of social exclusion. A number of libraries are situated at the heart of urban communities which suffer high levels of deprivation and these libraries have a key role to play in supporting those who are disadvantaged or excluded. In rural areas also, where deprivation often manifests itself

differently from urban areas, the extensive network of libraries is recognised as making a significant contribution to tackling social isolation, inequality and disadvantage.

channel. Government has made significant investments in the library network and infrastructure in recent years, including the refurbishment and modernisation of library buildings, the procurement of new mobile libraries and investment in information and communications technology which provides fast broadband as well as free Wi-Fi in every library. It is important that the benefits of these investments are fully realised and given the expansive nature of the library network, there is tremendous potential for libraries to provide local access to and support for a range of citizen-focused services.

5.12 Libraries NI is well placed to promote health and wellbeing through the provision of health information, health literacy activities, social programmes and health-promoting activities, delivered in stigma-free neutral community spaces by library staff, health professionals and others.

5.13 We will recognise the importance of the library as a community hub and social space and its role in connectedness in order to combat the negative impacts of isolation.

5.14 We will also provide a programme of social activities that encourage people to socialise and to develop connections and a range of health promoting activities that offer advice and support on improving both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

5.15 While much is delivered through libraries there is significant opportunity to contribute so much more in the context of providing access to and delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. At a strategic level this is about thinking and acting differently in relation to the role libraries can play in delivery of public services. It is about positioning Libraries NI to fulfil its potential and play a much greater part in contributing to the delivery of public service strategies, promoting and demonstrating the value of the public library network and public libraries as an asset to be used and utilised as a delivery



## Outcome Area 2: Inspired, informed and literate children and adults

### Strategic Actions:

- Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults
- Provide access to Heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience
- Improve digital services, access and literacy
- Promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens.

5.16 A fundamental role of the library service is to promote reading and literacy and in doing so this supports education, skills development and lifelong learning. In this way the library service complements mainstream education providing spaces and resources for children and adults to learn and develop. Public libraries are an enabler, providing individuals the opportunity to grow, develop and fulfil their potential, live fuller lives, make more of what they have, discover new worlds and aspire to greater things. The value of reading lies in the benefits it brings to individuals, to communities and to society as a whole. It is an essential life skill, a source of enjoyment, inspiration and wellbeing and a gateway to learning and information. Reading and the development and enhancement of literacy skills are central to creating a learning culture and to addressing social exclusion, building community identity and developing responsible citizenship. Readers are active participants in the world around them which is critical to individual and social wellbeing.

5.17 Libraries NI will support and promote reading by providing stock in an environment which is conducive to reading and reader development and undertaking programmes and activities which nurture a love of reading including opportunities for shared reading experiences. We will also support the work of local writers and showcase or provide information about titles, authors and genres.

5.18 We will also seek to provide services, information and resources and to create opportunities that improve the life skills of children, young people, adults and families to assist them to achieve their creative and learning potential.

5.19 The development of a love of reading and of literacy skills is a key early intervention and an important element in equipping children and young people with skills for life. Research clearly shows that reading well is essential to tackling the effects of poverty on children. Free access to books, other reading material and information, whether in hard copy or

online, together with opportunities to develop a love of reading from an early age engages children and young people in positive and enjoyable activities, improves literacy skills and facilitates lifelong learning, which in turn contributes to breaking the cycle of deprivation and educational under-achievement. Over the period of this Corporate Plan we will play an active role in giving children and young people the best start in life and will continue to develop and deliver programmes and initiatives to engage and enthuse them.

promotion of social inclusion towards a shared and better future for all citizens remains a high priority.

5.20 We will ensure that our services, stock, activities and programmes are accessible to children and young people and provide a safe, welcoming space for children and young people and their carers. In doing this we will recognise the importance of early learning activities in contributing to cognitive and language development, provide support for formal and non-formal learning for school-aged children and provide opportunities for family learning to take place.

5.22 Libraries NI is committed to making its collections accessible to the widest possible audiences for a broad range of purposes and to the collection, preservation and exploitation of heritage material more generally, working with other organisations to achieve this where appropriate.

5.23 Libraries are spaces where cultural traditions, both local and in the wider national and world context, can be encountered, experienced, examined and celebrated in a neutral environment, increasing understanding of similarities and differences and contributing to greater community cohesion.

5.21 Public libraries in Northern Ireland have a long tradition of collecting and preserving material which relates to our cultural heritage. All libraries provide access to heritage resources. Libraries NI's unique heritage collections include items of interest to all communities in Northern Ireland and beyond. Access to cultural heritage can enrich society through nurturing creativity, imagination, and a sense of place and is of central importance in supporting and enriching the community's understanding, not only of its local identity but also of the past and its role in shaping the present. In an increasingly diverse and multicultural society the

5.24 In recognition of this Libraries NI will promote libraries as shared spaces for all age groups to experience culture and creativity, primarily by establishing libraries as locally accessible inclusive venues and platforms for artistic and cultural provision to support creativity and the cultural industries and engaging with local communities to develop audiences and increase participation.

5.25 Digital inclusion is essential for the social, economic and educational advantages of life in the modern world and we will continue to provide free access for library users to the internet, including free Wi-Fi in every library, so that library users can access the wealth of resources that are available online. In combination with providing supported digital access, we will assist people to develop the skills necessary to access,

evaluate and use information to improve digital literacy, taking account of the importance of online safety and privacy and enable them to make full use of the services and opportunities that exist.

knowledgeable staff to inspire library users and firmly establish libraries as centres of creativity and innovation.

5.26 Libraries NI recognises the importance of reviewing and developing its programmes and services in this area as customer needs evolve and we will seek to grow, expand and improve the digital services we offer. This will include the development of online and virtual library services, the introduction of new and innovative technology supported by

5.27 Whilst much information is available online Libraries NI recognises the importance of providing access to reliable and relevant information resources in a variety of formats to meet customer needs together with a range of learning experiences both for individuals and groups to enable customers to access and use information sources and to participate in family and community life.



## Outcome Area 3: Effective Governance and Delivery

### Strategic Actions:

- Maintain an effective organisational and governance framework and support and develop our people to enable delivery of high quality public services
- Make best use of available resources to support identified priorities and deliver an effective and valued public library service
- Develop and implement an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to business planning and performance measurement.

5.28 The period since Libraries NI was established has been characterised by organisation-wide and environmental change, with associated high levels of uncertainty for staff. It is likely that the next four years will see further transformation and development of the public library service, including challenges in respect of public sector funding and changes to the environment we operate in alongside the evolving needs and expectations of library users and members. We recognise the need to continue to engage with staff and their representatives throughout this period as we work to ensure that Libraries NI has the people and structures to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

5.29 In this changing environment and as digital technologies continue to develop at an exponential rate, it is essential that we develop “staff skills” so that they can provide a responsive, effective, customer-focused public service that is part of community life in the 21st century. We want to invest in the wellbeing of our people helping them to be resilient in the face of change and

to create a culture where staff are encouraged to be creative and innovative and are motivated to perform to the best of their abilities. It is essential that the operating model adopted by Libraries NI continues to be efficient and effective. We have already embarked on a review of organisation structures and a priority over the period of this Corporate Plan will be to implement changes to take account of future needs, service demands, staff development, resources, succession planning, capacity, capability and business continuity.

5.30 Technology offers significant potential for the development of new approaches to the delivery of effective and efficient library services and during the period of this Corporate Plan, Libraries NI will implement an ambitious programme aimed at renewing and replacing information technology platforms, infrastructure and services. The programme will add resilience to our current technology platforms and will create a basis for optimising and developing the use of technology in the development of services over the next four years.

5.31 Libraries NI is committed to ensuring the highest standards of governance and accountability, underpinned by openness and transparency, to ensure that stakeholders can have confidence in the organisation's decision-making processes and actions and in the management of its activities. The public sector financial environment is likely to remain challenging and we must continue to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations. We will use our human, finance, estate and technology resources as productively as possible to deliver greater value and

efficiency. Resources will be allocated to deliver identified priorities, taking account of the wider Programme for Government and feedback from customers and other stakeholders and we will work with the Department for Communities to achieve a sustainable and recurrent solution to the delivery of the public library service in Northern Ireland.

## 6. Measuring Outcomes and Strategic Actions

- 6.1 Effective planning, performance management and reporting are vital in ensuring that the needs of service users are met, essential services are delivered and statutory obligations met, that the organisation continues to improve and that we are open and transparent about progress and risks. The move to an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to planning and delivery requires a different approach to performance management, measurement and monitoring. An important element of any outcomes based approach is the shift in emphasis to outcomes and measuring the impact of actions or interventions as opposed to simply measuring the amount of work that is delivered. Two distinct levels of reporting and monitoring are typically associated with OBA:
- (1) Monitoring outcomes at a population level, which is done by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) using a range of indicators to reflect collective progress of departments and public bodies. This monitoring reflects change at a population level with no one department, Arm's-Length Bodies (ALB) or other organisation likely to effect outcomes in isolation
  - (2) Monitoring actions through performance accountability measures which is concerned with the impact of individual actions delivered by ALBs.
- 6.2 Performance in delivering this Corporate Plan will primarily be concerned with performance accountability measures which will be developed in conjunction with our Annual Business or 'delivery' plans. Performance accountability measures will be constructed around our Strategic Actions and will address the three key questions of "How much did we do? How well did we do we do it? Is anyone better off?"
- 6.3 The OBA approach will be incorporated into the existing performance management framework in Libraries NI which consists of:
- the Corporate Plan which sets out the Libraries NI Outcome Areas and high level Strategic Actions aligned to the PfG and DfC strategies for library services
  - an annual Business Plan which sets out the actions we need to take and the targets that we need to achieve in year
  - Key Performance Indicators, which are used to report regularly at Board level and to DfC on progress in relation to the annual Business Plan
  - Service Plans which translate the Business Plan into actions and targets to be taken forward by various teams within the organisation
  - the Staff Appraisal process which includes the setting of

- personalised targets and goals for individual members of staff to enable them to fulfil their respective roles in meeting the actions and targets set out in the Service Plans
- the Risk Management and associated assurance processes which are embedded in the routines and activities of the organisation and provide a structured and coherent approach to identifying, assessing and managing the risk to achievement of objectives
- the Annual Report and Accounts which provide detailed information on our work during the year.

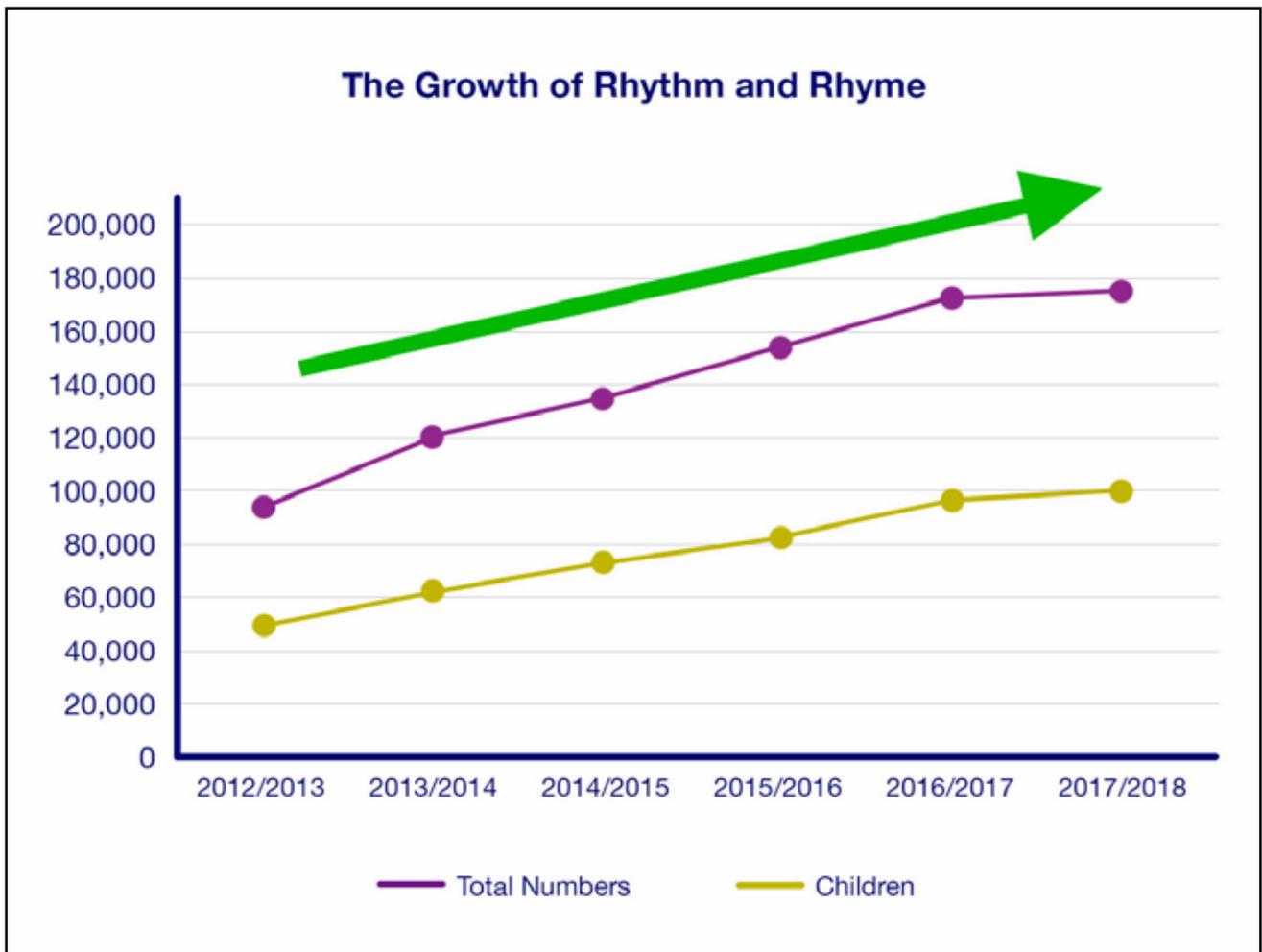
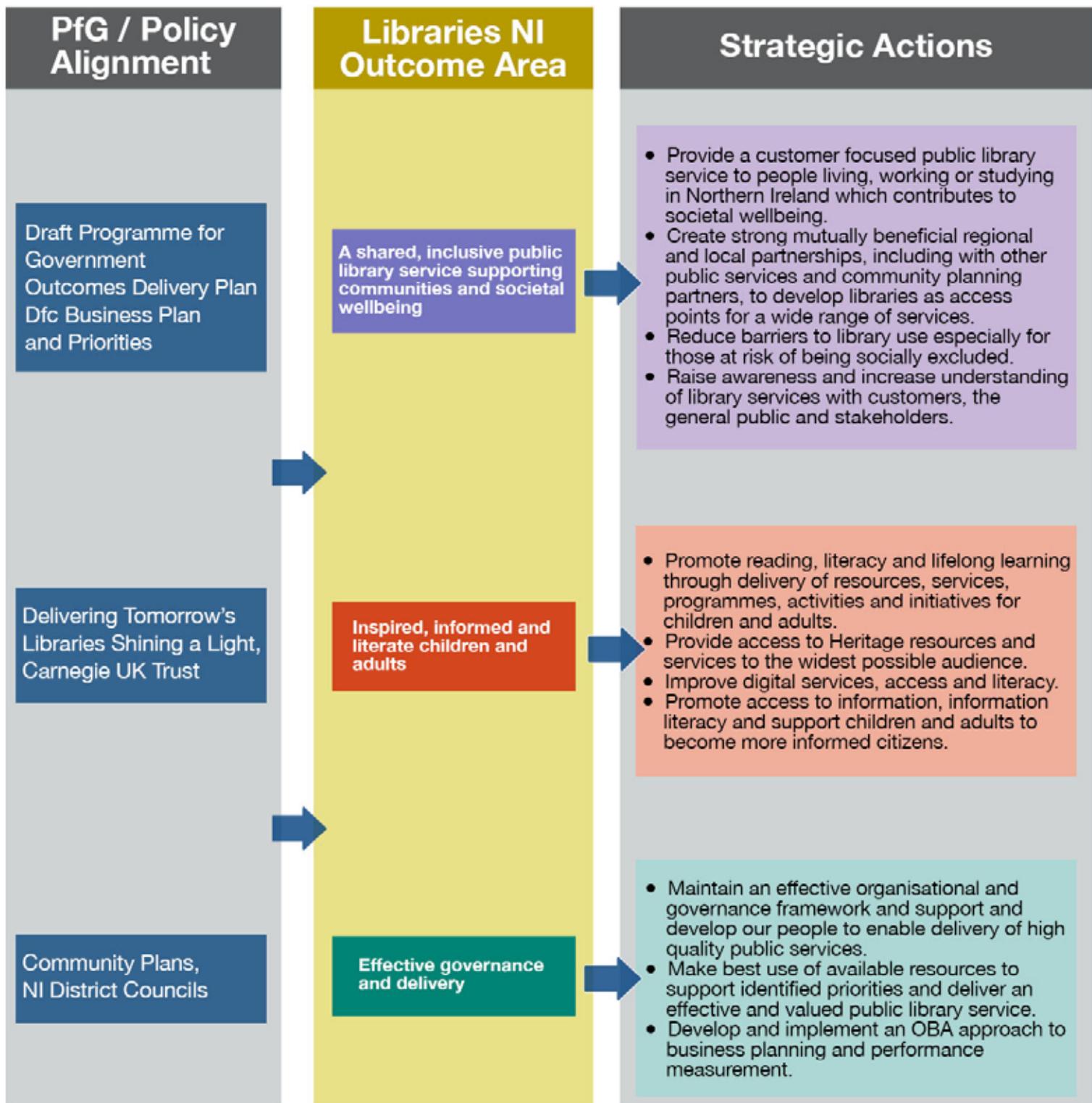


Figure 2. *The Growth of Rhythm and Rhyme 2012 - 2018*

# Appendix 1 - Alignment of Libraries NI Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions





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