

Annual Business Plan 2024/25



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Foreword by Chairperson and Chief Executive



We are pleased to present the Annual Business Plan 2024/25 which sets out the direction of travel for Libraries NI for the next twelve months and outlines our ambitions for delivering the public library service in Northern Ireland. The Annual Business Plan is set very much within the overarching framework of our Corporate Plan which sets out the Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions for the period 2020 – 24. Indeed a key strand of work during 2024/25 will be to prepare a new Corporate Plan for the period 2025 – 30. Both the Business and Corporate Plans are closely linked and aligned to wider government priorities, and in particular the Department for Communities Business Plans and Strategy 2020-25: Building Inclusive Communities and the aim of making a lasting and sustainable contribution to improving the societal wellbeing of individuals and communities in Northern Ireland.

This plan has been developed against a backdrop of an extremely challenging public sector budget position in Northern Ireland. The funding allocation for 2024 – 25 is less than projected demands on the service and consequently we have sought to focus resources to best support the delivery of library services within the parameters of the budget that has been set. We will continue to work with the Department over the course of the year with a view to taking advantage of opportunities that may arise for further allocations, particularly to boost book stock spend.

We will work hard to ensure that libraries continue to deliver on priority agendas that make a real difference to the lives of individuals and communities. However, the constrained financial situation will inevitably impact on the scope of what can be delivered.

The network of libraries remains strategically important and we believe that this importance will strengthen as we continue to work collaboratively with organisations across government departments, public bodies and the voluntary and private sectors. Despite the challenges Libraries NI must continue to play its part in wider society, supporting the delivery of services, providing local access points and helping customers

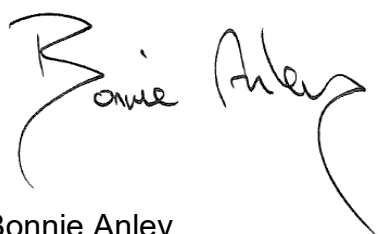
to connect with information and services that contribute to social and economic wellbeing. All of this is only made possible by our dedicated and professional staff who are committed to delivering high standards of service and providing help and support to assist people using libraries, no matter what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

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, technology and services. As we work to meet the challenges of the next twelve months, we will continue to play our part in societal and economic recovery, working closely with officials from the Department for Communities, other government departments and partners, to deliver for people whilst building upon our unique position as a trusted and valued community resource.

Within budgetary constraints, Libraries NI will endeavour to provide a public library service to meet the needs of the communities across Northern Ireland who rely on and use library services and resources.

In these uncertain times this business plan will need to remain agile and adaptable as we respond to challenges and changing priorities. We are certain that by working together we can ensure that public library services continue to be delivered to support local communities and wider society in Northern Ireland.

Our staff are the driving force behind our achievements and successes and we would like to thank everyone for their ongoing commitment to delivering the public library service.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bonnie Anley". The signature is stylized, with a large, looped "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Bonnie Anley
Chairperson

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim O'Hagan". The signature is stylized, with a large, looped "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jim O'Hagan
Chief Executive

1. Who we are

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

1.2 The Board of Libraries NI, when fully constituted, comprises a Chairperson and not more than 18 Members, the majority of whom, as far as is practicable, are councillors within the meaning of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. The Department for Communities is responsible for determining the number of Board Members and for making appointments to the Board of Libraries NI. There are presently seven Board Members and an independent Chairperson with plans to make a further five appointments.

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. A wide range of free services are delivered through a network of 96 branch libraries, Heritage libraries, mobile libraries, a homecall service as well as through online channels, and include:

- books and other material such as audio books, newspapers, periodicals and magazines
- downloadable eBooks, audio books, eNewspapers 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, including art and music
- 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.

As we face into 2024/25 continuing to maintain services and service delivery will be both challenging and vitally important for our customers and the many hard pressed communities we serve.

1.7 Our Staff Customer Promise

We value the many and different people who come to libraries to use the services we offer. Libraries are all about people and we have developed a Staff Customer Promise setting out, under five themes, our approach and intentions when engaging with the many and varied library customers. This is summarised below.



2. The Planning Context

- 2.1 In developing the Annual Business Plan 2024/25 consideration has been given to a range of external factors that influence, shape and impact on libraries, library use and the public sector landscape within which the library service is delivered. These factors include public policy, economic, social, cultural, technological developments, library customers and our staff. We recognise that we do not operate in isolation and take account of the wider economic and societal challenges and government priorities as well as strategic developments taking place in respect of library service provision and wider public service provision generally.
- 2.2 The most significant external factors over the past years have been the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, followed by the cost of living crisis, ongoing political uncertainty and most recently the unprecedented financial challenges faced right across the public sector in Northern Ireland. During 2023/24 Libraries NI operated on a funding allocation that saw its baseline funding reduced by 5% from the previous year, creating a shortfall of some £1.2 million in staffing, programming and other operating budgets with the library stock budget set at an historic low of £260,000, effectively preventing the purchase of any new book stock for much of the year. While temporary financial control measures remained in place throughout the year there was some welcome relief with regard to the purchase of book stock following an in-year allocation of £1.2m in December 2023 and a further £1.0m in February 2024.
- 2.3 As we move into 2024/25 we are under no illusion about the scale of the challenge that lies ahead. The cumulative impacts of the funding cuts in 2023/24, and previous years, and the long term sustainability and resourcing of Libraries NI has clear and far reaching implications for the delivery of the public library service. Undoubtedly there will be further financial challenges ahead for Libraries NI and we will work closely with officials from the Department for Communities to secure adequate levels of investment to maintain and develop services and to meet our statutory obligation to deliver a comprehensive and efficient public library service. However, we need to be clear about the connection between the level of funding allocated to support the library service and our ability to deliver against this plan.
- 2.4 During 2023/24 a new Library Management System was implemented under the auspices of the renewed managed service arrangements put in place to support our information and communications technology infrastructure. Other key business support applications were also implemented. The deployment of this refreshed technology will create the platform for improvements in customer and service delivery and the provision of a modern efficient and effective public library service.
- 2.5 We also recognise that our staff are central to everything we do in the delivery of the public library service. Despite all the changes that have taken place, our staff have continued to provide high quality service and the feedback received from library customers consistently tells us that they value highly the knowledge, skills and support provided by our staff across the library network. The challenges of recent years have impacted on staffing and staff morale and investment in our

people will be crucial to future success. We will continue to implement the new organisation structures and engage with our 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.

- 2.6 The Annual Business Plan is set within the context of our Corporate Plan which sets out the Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions for the period 2020 – 24 and which can be accessed [here](#). Our priorities and outcomes are also guided by the vision and priorities of the Department for Communities and the wider framework of societal outcomes articulated in the previous Programme for Government (PfG) and NICS Outcomes Delivery Plans as well as being informed by themes emerging from Community Plans and a range of other government strategies and policies including the Children and Young People’s Strategy, the Skills for a 10 x Economy Strategy, the Rural Policy Framework and Digital Transformation.
- 2.7 The Department for Communities Strategy 2020-25: Building Inclusive Communities provides another important point of reference for libraries to contribute to the aim of making a lasting and sustainable contribution to improving the societal wellbeing of individuals and communities in Northern Ireland. As we look to the future we are also mindful of work the Department is taking forward in respect of new social inclusion strategies and our role in areas such as Culture, Arts and Heritage. We also look forward to working with the Department during 2024/25 to further consider the development and updating of the overarching public library strategy that will be important to setting the future framework for the delivery of library services. Work will also take place during 2024/25 to refresh, renew and update the Libraries NI Corporate Plan and to set strategic direction and priorities for the next five years.

3. Outcome Areas and Strategic Actions

- 3.1 This Annual Business Plan has been developed taking account of outcomes based principles and approaches. An outcomes-based approach represents a fundamental change to the way in which Libraries NI plans and delivers a public library service in Northern Ireland. The PfG framework sets out the major societal outcomes of the Northern Ireland Executive and provides the strategic direction for the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. At a population level 12 priority outcomes have been set and all Departments and public bodies are required to work collaboratively to deliver against them and to contribute towards the overarching aim of 'improving wellbeing for all – by tackling disadvantage and driving growth'.
- 3.2 In developing the Annual Business Plan we have taken account of our statutory responsibility to deliver a public library service and have sought to closely align what we do with those parts of the previously agreed PfG framework and the Department for Communities strategic priorities that have most relevance and where we believe our impact to be most significant. The plan also draws on themes and outcomes articulated in community plans developed under the auspices of the 11 district councils in Northern Ireland.

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

4. 2024/25 Strategic Actions, Annual Targets and Objectives

- 4.1 The following section sets out, in detail, the Libraries NI Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and annual targets and objectives.
- 4.2 The impact of the cost of living crisis and the economic and financial challenges experienced during 2023/24 are likely to extend into the 2024/25 business planning year and consequently work to deliver many of the targets included in this plan will be affected by the level of funding allocated and the scale of cuts or other measures that are required to be applied.
- 4.3 Due to the continued level of geo-political and economic uncertainty as we move into the 2024/25 year it will be necessary to adopt a flexible approach and to keep the Business Plan under review in-year and this may result in the plan being adjusted and or updated to reflect any material changes that are taking place within the operational landscape.

4.3 Annual Business Plan 2024/25

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
Outcome 1: A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal well-being				
1	Provide a customer focused public library service to people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland which contributes to societal wellbeing	1.1	Engage with the Department for Communities to encourage the development of a new Public Library Strategy.	DLS
		1.2	Commence implementation of CustomerFocus - The Transformation of the Frontline Service Strategy by 31 March 2025.	DLS
		1.3	In line with the Public Library Standard for Stock, spend £2.25 per capita on stock – PLS target.	DLS
		1.4	Develop CustomerFirst – the customer experience strategy 2025 – 2028, including a framework for implementation, by 31 March 2025.	DLS
		1.5	Deliver the following performance levels with the aim of expanding the customer base, increasing library membership and maximising participation:	DLS
			(a) 3,500,000 loans and renewals	
			(b) 2,500,000 e loans	DLS
			(c) 300,000 active members	DLS
			(d) 100,000 new members	DLS
		1.6	Proactively promote libraries as welcoming spaces in which to enjoy a range of services and programmes that deliver improved health and wellbeing outcomes, positive approaches to social isolation and loneliness and support people through the cost of living.	DLS
1.7	Contribute to good relations through a range of initiatives.	DLS		

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
2	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.	2.1	Engage with strategic and/or relevant partnerships to enhance Libraries NI visibility as access points to deliver services, widen access and increase participation.	DLS
		2.2	Continue to contribute to the delivery of Community Planning.	DLS
		2.3	In partnership with The Executive Office (TEO), deliver, promote and evaluate (year one) of the Free Access to Period Products project.	DLS
3	Reduce barriers to library use especially for those at risk of being socially excluded.	3.1	Develop a Children's Strategy by 30 December 2024.	DLS
		3.2	Collaborate with Department of Education and Education Authority to explore ways of expanding membership and access to library services, reading, resources and programming for children in NI.	DLS
		3.3	Continue to engage with marginalised groups including newcomer communities and the homeless.	DLS
4	Raise awareness and increase understanding of library services with customers, the general public and stakeholders.	4.1	Commence implementation of the 2024/25 Stakeholder Plan in June 2024 and ensure the Plan is actioned, monitored, updated and delivered by 31 March 2025.	DLS
		4.2	Raise awareness of Libraries NI, its unique position as a single library authority, and achievements to the local, national and international professional library world.	DLS
		4.3	Increase use of social media across the network of platforms to achieve a 5% growth against the March 2024 baseline by 31 March 2025.	DLS

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
		4.4	Progress the implementation of the Strategic Marketing Plan 2024 - 2026.	DLS
		4.5	Provide strategic marketing support in the development of the new Corporate Plan 2025 - 2030.	DLS
		4.6	Produce a feasibility paper setting out an approach to reviewing and updating Libraries NI branding, including digital branding and presence.	DLS
Outcome 2: Inspired, informed and literate children and adults.				
5	Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults.	5.1	Update the Libraries NI Reading Strategy 2024 – 2027 and launch it by 31 March 2025.	DLS
		5.2	Deliver Book Week NI 2024 in partnership with the BBC.	DLS
		5.3	Promote, deliver and evaluate the 2024 Big Summer Read, through a programme of outreach, events and activities to reach a minimum of 13,500 children.	DLS
		5.4	Deliver a range of supported programming and events to enhance lifelong learning opportunities across the library network.	
6	Provide access to Heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience.	6.1	Develop an approach to promoting access to and engagement with Heritage, Culture and Creativity by 31 December 2024.	DLS
7	Improve digital services, access and literacy.	7.1	Develop a Framework for a Digital Service Offer and the provision of a range of services and programming to facilitate Digital Choices.	DLS

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
		7.2	Deliver a mix of learning opportunities and other programming to widen access to and increase digital understanding and skills. (Target 1,000).	DLS
		7.3	Provide comprehensive access to ICT, including computer resources, Wi-Fi, PATs and internet access across the library network.	DBS
		7.4	Promote use of computer resources (Wi-Fi and PATs) across the library network. Targets: Wi-Fi 200,000 sessions PATS 360,000 sessions	DLS
8	Promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens.	8.1	Develop and deliver services, resources and programmes to promote both access to information and signposting communities to relevant information sources, including positive health and wellbeing, the environment, sustainability, cost of living and online safety and information literacy.	DLS
Outcome 3: Effective governance and delivery				
9	Maintain an effective organisational and governance framework and support and develop our people to enable delivery of high quality public services.	9.1	Reduce overall sickness absence levels (FTE days lost) to 10.50 days, or less (from the baseline figure of 12.70 days as at 31 March 2024).	DBS
		9.2	Engage with staff to bolster morale and strengthen the organisational culture, taking account of the climate of financial, societal and economic uncertainty and current industrial action.	SMT
		9.3	Implement and embed revised structures for service delivery and determine, as appropriate, any further changes needed by 31 March 2025.	DLS

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
		9.4	Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 submitted for audit by 12 July 2024 and certified by NIAO by 31 October 2024.	DBS
		9.5	Update, as appropriate, processes and procedures to reflect new governance arrangements following completion and sign-off of the new Partnership Agreement (by 31 October 2024).	DBS
		9.6	Provide an Internal Audit Service to support effective governance and delivery of organisational objectives, including completion of 90% of planned audits by 31 March 2025.	HIA
10	Make best use of available resources to support identified priorities and deliver an effective and valued public library service.	10.1	Deliver annual resource and capital expenditure within 1% underspend of respective total budgets by 31 March 2025.	DBS
		10.2	Implement key deliverables of the e3 project to include transition to Azure Cloud Solutions and rollout of final phase of RFID equipment refresh and HR system functionality by 31 March 2025.	DBS
		10.3	Agree, with the Department for Communities, a strategy and approach for progressing the Belfast Central Library Project and an updated Outline Business Case (OBC) by 31 March 2025.	DBS
		10.4	Review the Corporate Risk Register quarterly at Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and the Board, and review Service and Project Risk Registers bi-annually at relevant Committees.	DBS
		10.5	Implement major and minor capital works and maintenance programmes in line with available resources by 31 March 2025.	CE
		10.6	Incorporate positive actions to mitigate climate change impacts in major and minor capital works and maintenance programmes by 31 March 2025.	DBS/CE

	Strategic Actions		Annual Targets/Objectives	
		10.7	Develop and deliver five targeted energy management infrastructure projects by 31 March 2025 which will directly contribute to lowering the organisation net energy consumption by 30% by 2030 (2016/17 baseline year).	DBS
		10.8	Re-establish regular staff performance appraisal processes at all levels throughout the organisation by 31 March 2025.	DBS
		10.9	Deliver induction training and provide support to the new Chairperson and new Board Members by 31 December 2024.	SMT
		10.10	Engage with the Department to seek a review of the approach to the funding of the public library service (resource and capital) to ensure a more sustainable basis for the delivery of the service.	CE
		10.11	Adopt a proactive, whole organisation, approach to tackling climate change commitments, including the promotion of principles in the Green Library Manifesto.	SMT
11	Implement an OBA approach to business planning and performance measurement.	11.1	Prepare a new Corporate Plan for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030 by 31 March 2025.	CE
		11.2	Review the approach to Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) reporting in line with the development of a new Corporate Plan by 31 March 2025.	CE

5. Measuring Results

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

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

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

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

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

- the Annual Report and Accounts which provide detailed information on our work during the year.

- 5.4 The most significant risks to the achievement of outcomes and strategic actions is the economic and geo-political uncertainty, unmanageable cost increases driven by global and inflationary forces and securing an appropriate level of funding to deliver the public library service.
- 5.5 The Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and Key Performance Indicators for the 2024/25 Business Plan are set out below.

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

Outcome Area: A shared, inclusive public library service supporting communities and societal wellbeing	
<p>Strategic Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a customer focused public library service to people living, working or studying in Northern Ireland which contributes to societal wellbeing. • Create strong mutually beneficial regional and local partnerships, including with other public services and community planning partners, to develop libraries as access points for a wide range of services. • Reduce barriers to library use especially for those at risk of being socially excluded. • Raise awareness and increase understanding of library services with customers, the general public and stakeholders. 	<p>Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. loans and renewals against target. No. e loans against target. No. new members against target. No. active members against target. 95% of branch libraries opened and / or providing services. Positive customer satisfaction rating. ¹

Outcome Area: Inspired, informed and literate children and adults

Strategic Actions:	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote reading, literacy and lifelong learning through delivery of resources, services, programmes, activities and initiatives for children and adults. Provide access to Heritage resources and services to the widest possible audience. Improve digital services, access and literacy. Promote access to information, information literacy and support children and adults to become more informed citizens. 	<p>Participation in reading challenges – measured against target.</p> <p>Number of learning opportunities to improve digital literacy – measured against target.</p> <p>95% of branch libraries providing Wi-Fi / Public Access Terminals.</p> <p>Achieve 95% of total available PATS hours / WiFi hours.</p> <p>No. of Wi-Fi / Public Access Terminal uses – measured against target.</p> <p>95% of libraries delivering at least one core activity regularly. ²</p>

Outcome Area: Effective Governance and delivery

Strategic Actions:	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain an effective organisational and governance framework and support and develop our people to enable delivery of high quality public services. Make best use of available resources to support identified priorities and deliver an effective and valued public library service. Develop and implement an Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to business planning and performance measurement. 	<p>Annual net spend (resource and capital) will be within budget. Underspend will be minimised to ≤1% of budget.</p> <p>Capital and minor works programmes will be implemented in accordance with the agreed timetable and budget.</p> <p>Reduce overall sickness absence levels, FTE days lost, to 10.50 days or less (from the baseline figure of 12.70 days at 31 March 2024).</p> <p>95% of ICT service provision standards will be met.</p> <p>98% of invoices will be paid within 30 working days. ³</p> <p>90% of invoices will be paid within 10 working days.</p> <p>95% of Internal Audit service targets and standards will be met.</p>

¹ The primary Source of data will be the Continuous Household Survey with supplementary data from the Libraries NI Triennial Customer Survey where this is available.

² Regularly is defined as at least once per month.

³ Invoices paid within 30 working days is an internal service target and not a formal KPI and is included for reporting purposes only.

6. Financing Our Services

- 6.1 With the reestablishment of political institutions responsibility for setting the 2024-25 Budget returned to the NI Executive. Although desirable to have a Budget in place in advance of the new financial year, to ensure the views of Ministers were reflected, the Executive agreed to an extension to this timeframe, resulting in a Budget not being set before 1 April 2024. Subsequently as a planning assumption and to enable existing services to be maintained the Department for Communities provided an interim Resource allocation based on 3 months of the 2023-24 Opening Budget, equivalent to £7,253,000.

As the interim allocation had not taken account of the expenditure demands falling due in the first quarter of the year a constrained approach to service delivery was required to manage within the limited funding envelope and pending settlement of a full year funding allocation.

The Executive considered and set the NI Budget 2024-25 on 25 April 2024 and subsequently on 11 June 2024 the Minister for Communities published his initial Budget 2024-25 decisions and commenced an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA). Pending conclusion of the EQIA in September 2024 and any subsequent adjustment to funding outcomes DfC confirmed on 18 June 2024 an Indicative Opening Resource Budget Allocation for Libraries NI for the year 2024/25 of £31,189,000.

- 6.2 The resource allocation for 2024/25 while increasing the baseline funding position by some £2,176,000 from the previous year's opening baseline represents a decrease of some £625,000 in comparison to the final funding position on 31 March 2024. Taking account of ongoing inflationary pressures, the timing of allocations and the yet unknown outcomes from the Departmental EQIA the 2024/25 allocation creates a challenging environment in which to plan and deliver public library services throughout the remainder of the year. In particular the absence of supplementary funding support for library stock as seen in 2023/24 is problematic in the context of a statutory requirement to provide a comprehensive public library service.
- 6.3 A Budget and Spending Plan has been prepared based on the confirmed resource allocation of £31,189,000 and the influences of a range of planning assumptions about inflationary pressures, market trends and pressures anticipated to materialise in 2024/25.

- 6.4 Based on current projections, we anticipate expenditure against the resource allocation in 2024/25 will be as set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Category of Spend

Category of Spend	£000's
Staff	20,144
Stock	820
Premises	5,511
Supplies and services	5,446
Vehicle	270
Sub-total	32,191
Income	-1,002
Total Net Expenditure	31,189

- 6.5 Capital funding continues to present significant challenges and as DfC consider the options for allocating funding following the challenging 2024-25 Capital budget set by the Northern Ireland Executive a capital allocation remains outstanding. However we have authority (confirmed by DfC 17 May 2024) to incur Capital expenditure on existing contractual commitments and inescapable projects only . These including ongoing delivery of the e3 ICT project, construction of the replacement library facility for Fivemiletown, completion of the Killyleagh library low carbon retrofit project and will account for some £4,762,000 of expenditure throughout the remainder of the year.

7. Governance and Delivering the Business Plan

- 7.1 Libraries NI has a corporate governance framework which specifies organisation and governance structures, including roles and responsibilities, to ensure proper and effective management and delivery of plans and priorities within available resources. The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring delivery of the Libraries NI Business Plan and is supported in this by two Directors who manage core business groups to deliver library services to the public and to provide support services within the organisation. Arrangements are in place for regular monitoring of the Business Plan and the Libraries NI Board and Committees provide scrutiny and oversight.
- 7.2 Libraries NI has a well-established framework for risk management. A number of risks identified in 2023/24 are likely to continue be relevant in 2024/25 and these include:
- the challenging financial and business planning environment, including reductions in funding allocations
 - the impact of industrial action, commenced in June 2023

- the need to complete the next stage of organisation restructuring and to recruit to vacant posts in a challenging recruitment environment.

7.3 At the start of each business cycle a fundamental review of the corporate risk register is undertaken with a view to ensuring a strategic focus is maintained on key risks to the achievement of objectives and targets.

Appendix 1: Libraries NI Board Members

Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
Councillor Julie Gilmour	Vice Chairperson
Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
Councillor Andrew McAuley	
Councillor Martin McRandal	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
Mr John Peto	
Miss Linda Wilson	

Board membership as at 10 June 2024.

Appendix 2: Libraries NI - Organisation Structure

