

**Public consultation on the draft  
Strategy for Public Libraries 2013 - 2017**

**2 September - 11 October, 2013**

**Department of the Environment, Community  
and Local Government  
Newtown Road  
Wexford  
Co. Wexford**

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

Ireland's public library service is a local government public service, delivered by local authorities. Libraries provide a range of services through a network of public library branches, library mobiles, online through local library service websites and national portal and resource websites.

The public library service is overseen at national level by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, with the advisory support of Libraries Development, Local Government Management Agency.

The current profile of the public library service, according to the most recent statistics<sup>1</sup>, is as follows:

- Public libraries provide a wide range of services both physical and virtual, including print and digital lending material, reader development advice, internet access and support, information and reference resources and guidance, learning and e-learning activities, literacy support, cultural promotion and community development.
- There are 16.3 million visits made to public libraries each year.
- There are 19.3 million books, audio books, CDs and DVDs borrowed from public libraries annually.
- 41% of the books borrowed by adults are non-fiction books.
- There are 1.9 million Internet sessions provided on 2,100 Internet access PCs and via free Wi-Fi.
- There are 344 branch libraries and 32 mobile libraries.
- Local Authorities spent €131.6 million on library services in 2011.
- Local Authorities spent €9 million on stock in 2011, an average of €1.97 per capita.
- Public libraries in Ireland are run by 32 separate library authorities.

The draft public libraries strategy is an initiative of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the County and City Managers' Association and the Local Government Management Agency. It sets out a plan for the systematic growth and development of public libraries in Ireland for the period 2013 to 2017 in the context of people's changing needs, Government policy and the current and predicted economic, social and cultural environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Management Agency. *Public Library Authority Statistics Actuals 2011* (Expected publication date: August 2013)

## **1.2 Public Consultation**

### ***The purpose of this consultation***

The draft public library strategy has been developed taking stakeholder views into account. The consultation process has included local and national policy makers, discussions with a broad range of focus groups, public library management and staff, government departments, interested public bodies and international library authorities.

This public consultation is the final phase in the planned stakeholder engagement on the development of the public library strategy. The purpose of this phase is to open the consultation widely, ensuring input from as broad a range of interested parties as possible.

### ***Consultation on the draft text of the public library strategy***

Stakeholders are invited to read the text of the draft public library strategy and return comments to the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government via Libraries Development, Local Government Management Agency, before the **11<sup>th</sup> of October 2013** and respondents are kindly requested to use the electronic template provided.

Completed templates should be returned by post or email before the **11th of October 2013** to:

Libraries Development,  
Local Government Management Agency,  
Local Government House,  
35 – 39 Ushers Quay,  
Dublin 8.

Email: [librariesdevelopment@lgma.ie](mailto:librariesdevelopment@lgma.ie)

Telephone: 01 6332200

### ***What happens when you submit your comments?***

When you have submitted your comment you will receive acknowledgement that we have received it by email or post. When the consultation period is finished, all comments will be considered and addressed in the light of the strategy.

Please note that all submissions and comments submitted to Libraries Development, Local Government Management Agency for this purpose may be subject to release under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 to 2003.

Following the consultation process, a revised strategy will be prepared for publication in the autumn of 2013.

### 1.3 Why a new Public Library Strategy is needed

Since its origins in the Public Libraries Ireland Act, 1855, Ireland's library service has been continuously reviewed at national level by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government as part of its role in overseeing the implementation of successive public library legislation.

In 1998 the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government published *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service*, the first strategic plan for the development of the public library service at national level. *Branching Out: A New Public Library Service* ran from 1998 to 2007 and was followed by *Branching Out - Future Directions* from 2008-2012. The *Branching Out* strategies and capital funding programmes delivered improved library buildings, opening hours, ICT, stock, staffing and staff training. They provided the mechanism for stakeholder co-operation to realise a uniformly agreed vision for public libraries and for planned and co-ordinated development and enhancement of the service.

The *Branching Out* strategies established a forum for all stakeholders to collaborate on forming a positive, inclusive vision for public libraries and led to a well thought-out and grounded national policy that transformed services, buildings and resources. As the progress made in these two previous strategies has been substantial, it is important to build on the momentum of results and outcomes already achieved.

The five year period of the proposed strategy begins in a very different economic climate and in a rapidly changing society with high levels of unemployment, a surge in birth rate and a significantly growing population of people aged over 65. Technological changes in the last decade have revolutionised life for the majority of people. The changing face of local government in Ireland under the action plan for effective local government, *Putting People First*<sup>2</sup>, will have far-reaching impacts at local and national level.

The public library service needs to provide an effective, vibrant and relevant service for people and communities in this changed and continuously evolving environment. A new strategy provides the framework to achieve this and to position the public library service to best advantage for the future, for the benefit of the public.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government. *Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government*. Stationary Office: Dublin, 2012.