

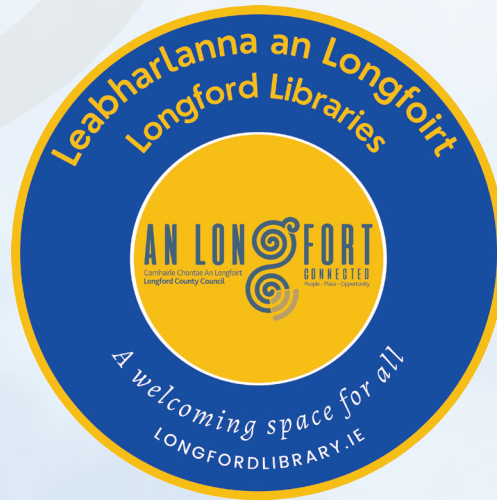
LONGFORD COUNTY COUNCIL



Library Development Programme 2021-25



Vision | Mission



The Library Service is an integral and vital part of Longford County Council. The Council's mission is set out in the Longford County Council Corporate Plan 2019-2024:

Mission

Connected People, Place and Opportunity

Our mission is to work with our communities and partners to develop Longford as a dynamic, vibrant, safe and prosperous county, celebrating its diversity, culture and heritage and, through strong leadership, build safe, healthy and sustainable communities.

Vision

Longford - the place to be

To make Longford a prosperous county that seeks to support:

- Vibrant economy
- Rural quality of life
- Active and safe communities
- Diversity, culture and heritage
- Sense of community pride and place.

Longford Libraries have much to contribute to all of these aims, and will work in an imaginative and committed way, to achieve this mission and vision.

As well as being an integral and vital part of Longford County Council, Longford Libraries are also a key part of the national public libraries network.

Longford County Council subscribes fully to the national Vision and Values, as set out in “Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities”.

National Vision for Public Libraries

The national *Vision* for public libraries is that they should be “attractive and welcoming spaces where all members of the community can access knowledge, ideas and information, and where people can reflect, connect and learn.”

A **bright attractive, trusted, welcoming** civic space



Self-service with **extended opening hours**

Centrally located, **accessible and visible**



Leading edge digital technologies to enhance the service and available for users with support from staff

A **focal point** for all public services



Free service, no fines or lending charges

Valued by and **essential to communities**



friendly, skilled staff, actively supporting and guiding users throughout the library

Attracting **users of all ages** in large numbers



A wide range of resources and services for work, leisure, learning and creativity, online and in-library

A meeting place, informally and formally



Workstation facilities for hot-desking

The go-to place locally, with **national reach**



Attracting and benefiting **local residents and users**

Places for **creativity and culture**



Values of the Library Service

The public library service is a civic resource rooted in our communities. The library supports community life and individual self-development. These values form the foundation of the public library service.

Consultation on the strategy identified key values and principals that staff and users associated with the library service:



Research & Preparation

There were three preparatory sessions with staff, held on 30 September and 1 October 2020 (two sessions), followed up by a further online session (via Microsoft Teams) on 6 November 2020. These discussions were led by Liam Ronayne, the recently-retired Cork City Librarian.

The Scope Analysis set out in Part 2, and many of the objectives in Part 3: Action Plan 2021- 2025 had their origin in these sessions.



Part 2: Context

Under the Local Government Act 2001 each local authority has an obligation to prepare a Libraries Development Programme . This plan outlines a mission, values, principles and objectives of the library service for the next 5 years. It is underpinned and guided by a number of key documents which inform its priority actions. These documents include

Longford County Council Corporate Plan 2019 - 2024

Our Public Libraries 2022 National Public Library Policy

Longford County Development Plan 2015 - 2021

County Longford Local Economic & Community Plan 2016 - 2022

County Longford Culture and Creative Strategy 2018 - 2022

**County Longford Heritage Plan 2019-2024,
incorporating the Biodiversity Action Plan**

County Longford Age Friendly Strategy 2015 - 2022

Longford - Healthy County Plan 2018 - 2022

Overview of County Longford

County Longford is centrally and strategically located in the midlands, with an area of 1,091 km². It is very accessible with road and rail links. The County has a growing population with Longford, the county town, accounting for approximately one fifth of the county's population. Longford town is the administrative centre for Longford County Council, including the Library Service. The population of the county at the last Census (2016) was 40,873, having grown by almost one third from the beginning of the century when the figure was 31,068.

The County is a hidden gem in the heart of Ireland's midlands renowned for its rich culture, heritage and natural amenities. It is a special place with fascinating history, beautiful waterways, diverse landscapes and offers visitors an authentic experience.

Longford has significant potential to attract investment and to be a major tourist destination. The County has a rich economic offer in areas of agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, med-tech and pharma areas.

Longford people are enterprising, friendly, community spirited with a strong desire to see the county progress.



Demographic Profile of County Longford



40,873

Total population as per 2016 Census

The population of County Longford grew up by 4.8% in the last five years as per 2016 Census.



65%

Percentage of population live in rural areas as per 2016 Census

67.6% of the county's total area is farmed.



86.4%

Percentage of population at work as per Live Register August 2019.



16.4%

Percentage of non-Irish population as per 2016 Census.

23%

of Co Longford population is under 15 years of age.

62.5%

are aged between 15-64.

14.5%

are aged over 65.

14.5%

(5,916) of the population have a disability.

41

Primary schools (9 DEIS).

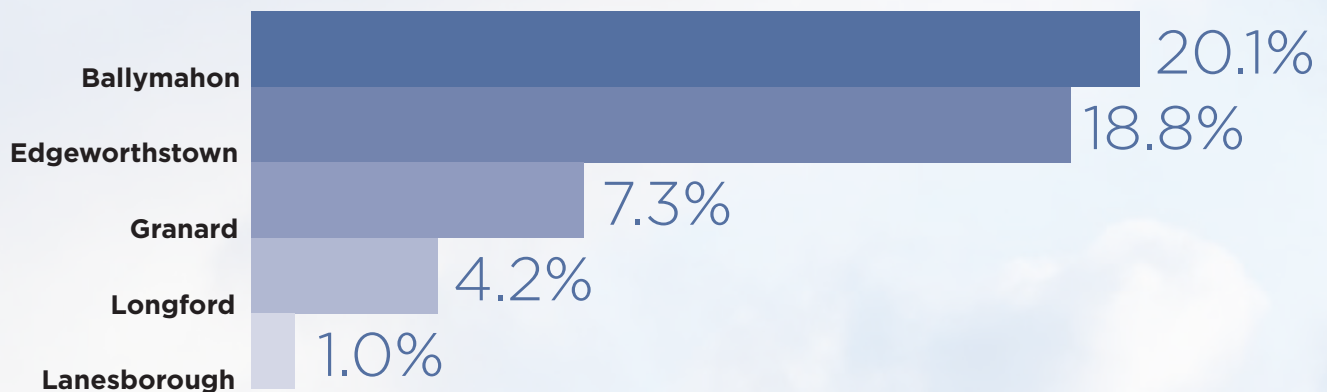
9

Post-primary schools (4 DEIS).

5,635

persons were living in Electoral Districts classified as Disadvantaged.

Growing Towns in County Longford as per 2011-2016 Census.



Profile of Longford Libraries 2021

Longford County Libraries provide access to library and information services through a network of six library branches together with the Administration and Local Studies division.

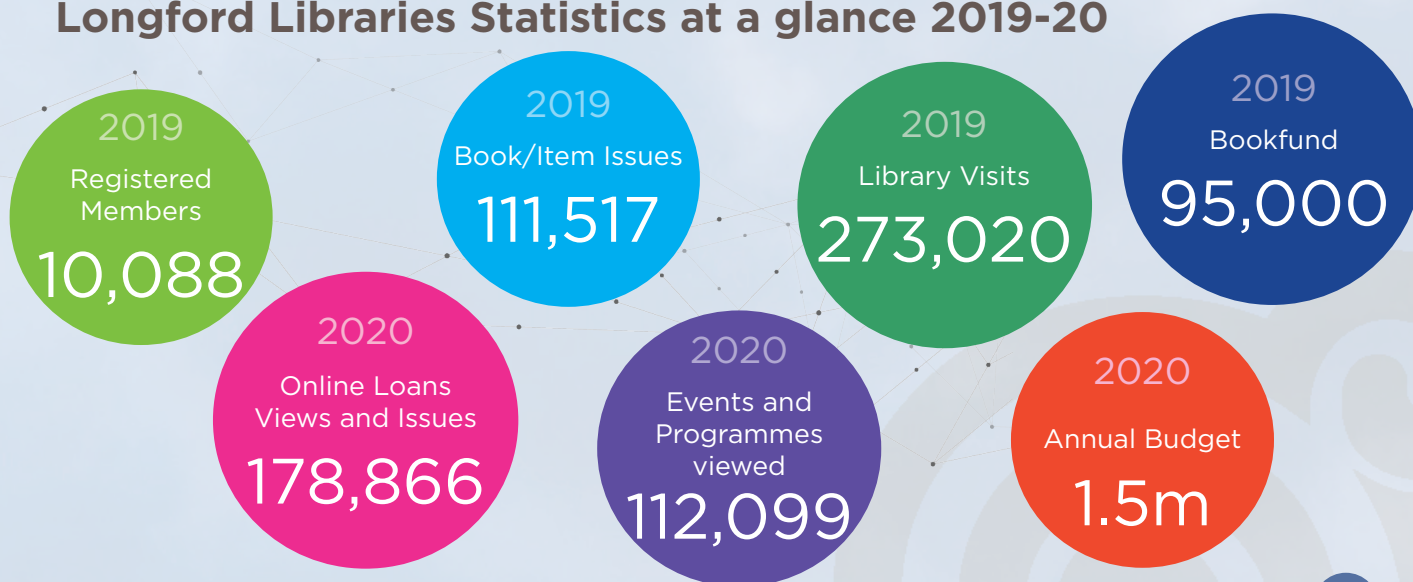


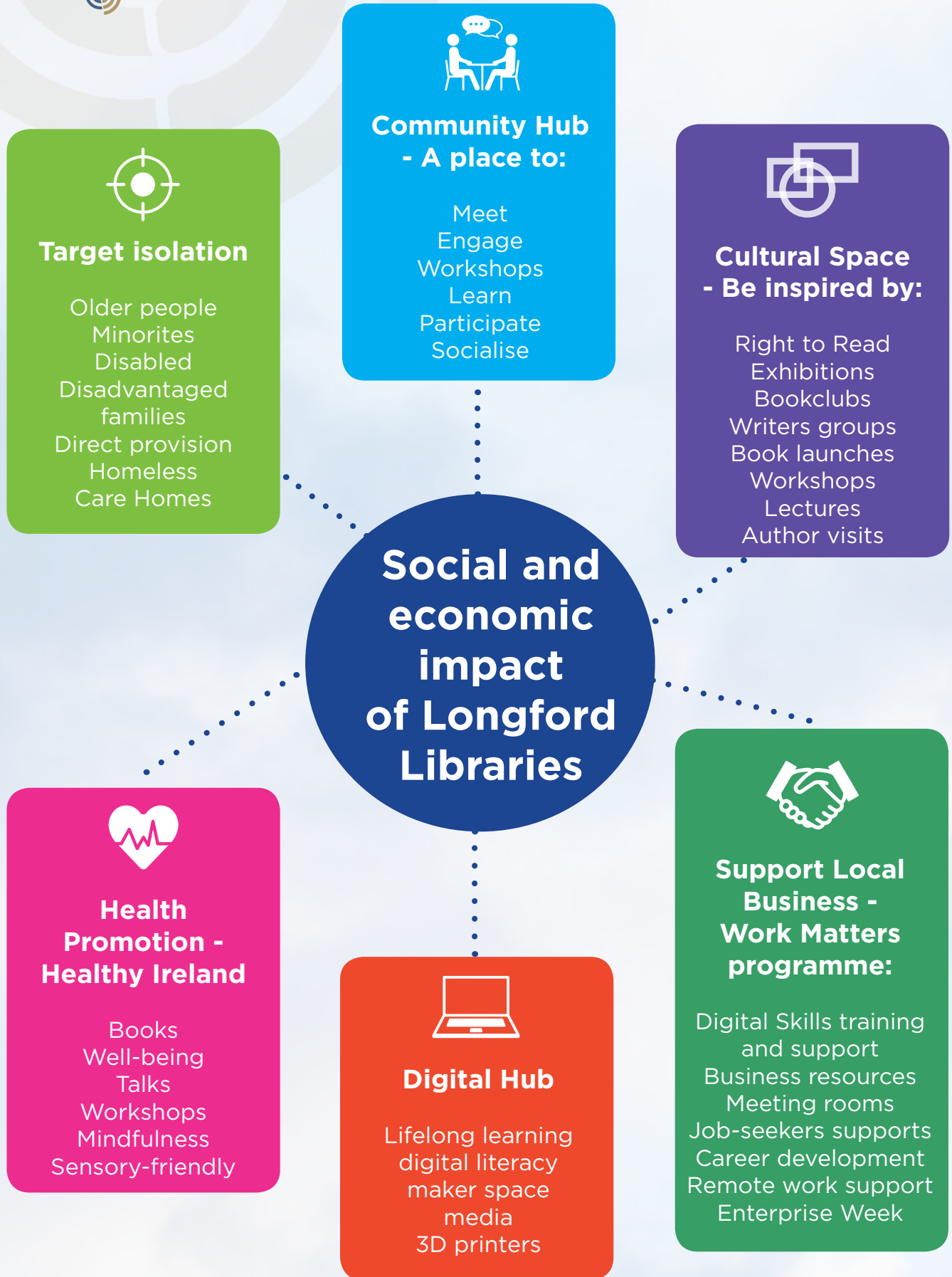
The six branches are:

The Council has invested significant amounts in developing library infrastructure, both buildings and ICT. A new state-of-the-art purpose built library is under construction on the Main street in Edgeworthstown which is an integral part of the Councils Regeneration programme for the town. Ballymahon and Granard Libraries are attractive, spacious resources in great locations, having been extended and refurbished in recent years. There are two 'My Open Libraries' in Ballymahon and Granard with a third planned for Edgeworthstown which will enable customers to access libraries from 08:00 am to 10:00 pm each day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year, post-COVID-19.

A very valuable Local Studies and Archives service operates from Library HQ on the 1st Floor of Longford Centre. This is also the Administrative HQ for the library service. Our main Branch in Longford Town was built over 40 years ago and requires some refurbishment to accommodate the growing demand for the service.

Longford Libraries Statistics at a glance 2019-20





Our Public Libraries 2022: inspiring, connecting and empowering communities is the national strategy for the continuing development of public libraries, building on the achievements of the previous strategy.

It has identified three strategic programmes for service development



The implementation of these is **supported by six strategy enablers:**



Infrastructure and Service Delivery



Library Team



Promotion and Marketing



Collections



Research and Development



Funding

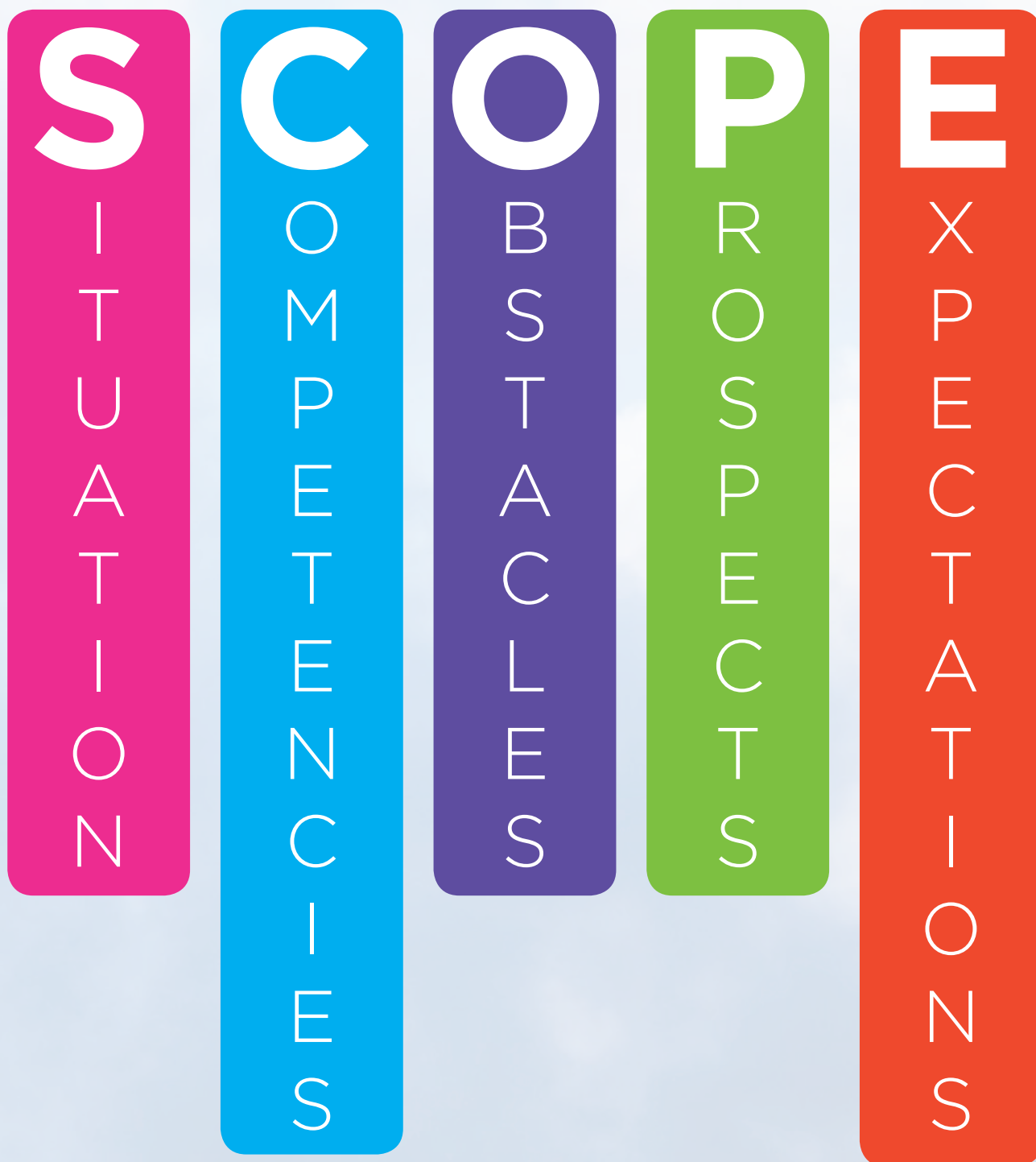
- o Reading and literacy;
- o Lifelong learning for all the ages;
- o Business and employment; and
- o Healthy living and wellbeing.

Our Ambition for the next 5 years

- Reinforce the local library as a trusted place at the centre of the community, with access to communal spaces, services and resources for all people and communities at the times that suit them most.
- Secure equitable access for all, by removing barriers, streamlining the process for joining and improving access to services for all communities
- Improve user experience, technology, resources and opening hours to provide a better service to more people, and
- Increase library use and grow active membership for the current level of 16% of the population to 30%.

Longford County Council enthusiastically embraces these ambitious targets for its Library Service and seeks to achieve them in the course of this 5-year Development Programme, while recognizing that increasing active membership to 30% will be challenging especially post Covid.





ANALYSIS

SCOPE Analysis

Situation; Competencies; Obstacles; Prospects; Expectations

In preparing this development programme, Longford Libraries embarked on a consultation process which involved all library staff, with four consultation sessions taking place, one of which was online.

This SCOPE (Situation, Competencies, Obstacles, Prospects, and Expectations) analysis was then developed, based directly on the contributions of the staff. The premise behind SCOPE is to offer a situational analysis that takes a more 360-degree view; encompassing past, current and future perspectives as set out below.

The key question in these discussions was

What does the Longford public need from its library service in the years ahead – both users and non-users?

Situation

A rear-view of the conditions bearing on Longford's situation that have a relevant and material impact on the next stage of development.

- Longford's library service is well placed and well connected locally with a diverse programme of events. Our libraries are in highly visible locations, with good internet access, and are reaching out to minorities and the "new Irish"
- The new library buildings are excellent: Ballymahon, Granard, and Edgeworthstown (to open 2021).
- The perception of Longford Libraries among the community is good with great links with schools and children, older citizens and good communication with users and the public in general.
- The public respond well to the service and appreciate the helpful staff, the fast broadband, free wifi and the removal of membership charges and fines.
- Additional staff training and the upgrading of some of our buildings must be addressed in the next period of development.

Competencies

The unique abilities and assets of Longford Libraries, providing the basis for the future development of the service.

- The resilience and agility shown by Library staff since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic reflects well on the service. The service has demonstrated that it can very quickly adapt to change and respond in a positive and creative way to changing circumstances.
- There has been a big increase in the usage of our online services especially since the start of Covid-19 when library branches had to close.
- Investment in stock and increasing bookfund
- All library services are free at the point of use.
- National distribution system has increased availability of stock
- Helpful friendly well trained staff
- Libraries are community hubs, with unique local knowledge, and well-placed as the focal point for culture in their communities.

Obstacles

The potential issues or threats that could jeopardize the achievement of the actions 2021-2025, and impinge on future Prospects.

- Large percentage of the public are not aware of the diverse range of services, or that they are free-of-charge.
- Libraries need to demonstrate our value, with teachers, parents, and the children and young people we are currently not reaching.
- Collections and stock management need to be further developed.
- Changes come too quickly for older people. They can feel overpowered by changes in society, and by technology.

- Longford Town Library is a building of its time almost 40 years old
- there is a huge need for more physical space for a growing range of services
- A number of staff retirements are coming up in the lifetime of the plan but this is a great chance for 'new blood', with fresh ideas and perspectives.
- Procurement rules can sometimes limit the ease of purchasing local publications, and support for local bookshops.
- Integration of the service at national level has many benefits but autonomy has been eroded.
- Staff training in all areas required including working with young adults, IT, children and adults with special needs.

Prospects

The opportunities which exist internally / externally which can enhance Longford Libraries' future development, and make the proposed actions possible.

- Longford will be expected to reach 30% membership by national agencies; membership is currently 19.3% in Longford, higher than the national average of 16% but it will be a challenge to reach 30%.
- Longford Libraries will continue to develop 'My Open Library' to meet local needs, building on the strong connection with local communities and good customer service.
- Grow relationship with teens and young adults and second level schools to make better use of the service .
- There is further scope for intergenerational and intercultural sharing and using libraries as "trusted" places where different cultures can meet.
- Huge potential to develop Steam and technology in libraries further

- The new LMS tender should allow for the problems in the current LMS to be dealt with, e.g., more rational searching to find a local copy.
- Expansion of the reach of the Work Matters, Healthy Ireland and Right to Read programmes
- Greater collaboration with a range of national and local statutory and voluntary service providers
- COVID-19 has shown what libraries can do; staff want to welcome people back in huge numbers once COVID-19 is behind us.

Expectations

Future-view - predictions of future internal and external conditions that are likely to materially influence, positively or negatively, the delivery of the development programme 2021-2025.

- Continued good two-way communication between library management and staff.
- Embrace ongoing technological developments
- Reaching 30% membership will be a challenge.
- Potential to grow our online membership, and other types of usage;
- Adopt a blended approach streaming and recording live lectures, talks and workshops.
- Significantly increase digital content, to meet need as seen during COVID-19
- Develop public awareness and facilitate programmes of events on Climate change and environmental issues.
- Allocate staff time to plan and organize programmes;
- Continue to promote libraries as safe welcoming spaces;

- Identify gaps in service provision and develop strategy to address them.
- Specific focus on people with sensory issues and other disabilities
- Further enhance partnerships and collaborations with community groups
- Provide more flexible spaces for events where they are lacking at present.
- Develop my Open Library in ways that meets local priorities.
- Make available as many as possible of the services, programmes, and events in virtual format to compliment physical services, programmes, and events;

Looking to the future . . .

We will focus on our values of trust, quality, innovation, inclusion and partnership.



Covid 19 and after the role of Longford Libraries

Longford Libraries played a pivotal role in the Keep Well and building community resilience campaign in County Longford especially under these key strands:

Staying connected

Our Libraries have been very proactive in keeping our citizens and communities connected, and addressing isolation.

In addition to promoting our online services we produced a regular Newsletter which was distributed widely throughout the county. We also provided basic online digital skills training and support to our older more isolated citizens, Our staff provided a homebound service All of these service will be continued as required.

Switching off and being creative

Our Libraries provided a diverse and engaging online programme of events and videos to inspire people to switch off and be creative.

Minding your mood

Through our Healthy Ireland and Building Resilience programme our libraries reached out to our older and more vulnerable citizens and worked in partnership with the Community Call service to provide whatever supports were needed on staying well during the pandemic. We will continue to provide materials and spaces to enable people to stay positive as Irish society comes to terms with the full implications of COVID-19, and the post-COVID period.

Action Plan 2021-2025

Social and cultural inclusion in Libraries

The three strategic programmes in the national public libraries strategy are:



Longford Libraries are committed to achieving the objectives of these programmes within the county, and have made great strides over recent years in this regard. In some cases, Longford's commitment will involve continuing investment in areas of strength which have been built up over the years; in other cases it will involve targeted investment in new areas of opportunity.



READING AND LITERACY

the right book, at the right time, for the right person

In developing Reading and Literacy including Digital Literacy in Longford in the period to 2025, Libraries will begin with children and young people, their needs and aspirations.

We will

- Nurture a reading culture in children and young people from the earliest age, supporting family reading and literacy.
 - ensure that every child in the county will have access to a high-quality book stock, including early years materials;
 - use The Right to Read programme as a means of promoting greater library use, in addition to developing other creative book-centred programmes and events;
 - in consultation with local and national advisory groups develop a more autism friendly library service
 - continue to work in partnership with Longford County Childcare, primary and post primary schools, Longford Youth services and Foroige to encourage and facilitate increased usage of the library
 - review our teenage collections and will enhance our teenage spaces in our libraries
 - develop practical methods of assisting children from non-Irish families to pass on language skills to their parents and other members of their families, through library usage

We will also focus on adult reading and literacy by:

- offering the widest possible range of stock to users, from our own collections and nationally;
- facilitating the work of adult literacy groups in libraries;
- continuing to offer regular series of digital skills classes

- showcase 3D printer technology in libraries, and evaluate the take-up and relevance of this initiative.

Longford Libraries are already recognized as a key support for writers, artists, creative writing, and reader development in the county. We will continue to support and develop

- author visits, book launches, and other reader-promotion initiatives;
- support for book clubs and community-focused reading initiatives.

The national target of a €4 per capita spend on new stock goes hand in hand with the national target of 30% membership, the latter dependent on the former if it is to be achieved. The Library book fund needs to be maintained and increased.



LEARNING AND INFORMATION

Longford Libraries will firmly establish libraries as the ‘go-to-place’ for information and information-gathering skills:

We will

- actively promote ‘Work Matters’ and will invest in the delivery of online resources that are useful and effective for job seekers and the business community
- provide opportunities for distance and informal learning and support personal, educational, career and business development through library stock, e-resources, events, equipment and study spaces.
- collaborate with our partners in employment services to provide guidance and assistance with pathways to work for those who are unemployed.
- continue to promote our services at local level through the Local Enterprise Office, Chamber of Commerce, ETB, Longford Womens Link, Longford Jobs Club and other partners.
- Support citizens to access e-government services and to participate fully in the democratic process.

- Develop public awareness, provide information and facilitate discussion on Climate Change.
- Through the Healthy Ireland at your library programme support the health and well being of our citizens and communities through the provision of accurate up to date health and well being information, and an ongoing programme of events.

Longford Libraries will provide opportunities and supports for everyone in the county to engage in learning, starting with children and young people:

We will

- Provide tailored collections and advice and support for children, parents and teachers;
- Support family reading and literacy initiatives in partnership with Home School Liason teachers, Family Resource centres, Foroige, After School Homework clubs and others.
- Provide safe and suitable spaces for children and young people, for homework, study, and projects.

We will actively support lifelong learning for all:

- with collections, study spaces, and knowledgeable staff;
- Promote online learning resources such as 'Universal Class' and language learning resources;
- Host open evenings with agencies such as the ETB, and third level colleges ;
- Support classes by Longford Westmeath ETB Adult Literacy and Home School Liason teachers to help parents with their children's homework;
- Promote intergenerational learning: e.g basic digital skills where young people partner with older people on a one to one basis to share their knowledge of smart phones, tablets, l pads etc.



COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Longford libraries have expanded from their more traditional role of lending books and media to becoming vibrant cultural and community hubs rooted in the communities they serve. Our staff play a central role in delivering the County Culture and Creativity strategy directs this national programme. Longford Libraries actively support our writers, Literary festivals, creative writing, and reader development in the county. Equality of opportunity is a key principle that underpins our events programme. Longford Library also has a valuable Local Studies and Archives collection and has led on the Decade of Centenaries programme along with the Archivist and Heritage Officer.

We will

- Continue to feed the curiosity and imagination of children and young people, providing resources, facilities, and creative spaces;
- Continue and expand the diverse cultural programme of exhibitions, lectures, talks and workshops;
- Continue the roll out of our programme of coding classes for children in primary schools
- Make our libraries a focus for integration and inter-cultural programmes, celebrating the cultural diversity in our county.
- Continue cultural programmes such as ‘the Library Sessions’ showcasing local artists which were started during the pandemic.
- Continue to make libraries the focus of annual events such as St. Patrick’s Day, Culture Night, and National Heritage Week.
- Continue to promote Irish language and Culture through our collections, and events programme such as Seachtain na Gaeilge, Culture Night etc
- Enhance the libraries’ role as the welcoming public face of the local authority for all sections of the community.



LOCAL STUDIES AND ARCHIVES

Longford County Library and Archives Service is responsible for the 'collective memory' of the County. We play a central role in remembering Longford's past and preserving the unique local history and culture of our county for future generations.

We will

Continue to collect, document, and preserve the materials in all formats which together tell the story of Longford's history and culture, books, newspapers, journals, maps, prints, photographs and, increasingly, digital materials;

- Explore and promote these materials with all ages and all sections of the Community, fostering greater knowledge and appreciation of the County's rich heritage.
- Expand the digitization programme of our Collections in partnership with the Archives section.



- Work with County Archivist to establish an Archives Dept. with storage that meets international archival standards.
- Continue to lead on the Decade of Centenaries programme in a reflective manner.
- Develop our tourism potential by reaching out to our Longford Diaspora and connecting them with their roots.



PROMOTING AND EXPANDING LIBRARY USE

Longford County Council is aware of the national target set out in *Our Public Libraries 2022* of “increasing library use and growing active membership from the current level of 16% of the population to 30%”. The current rate in Longford is 19.3%, higher than the national average. Growing membership to 30% is still, however, an ambitious target and membership will need to be maximised in tactical ways.

All of Longford Libraries’ efforts in terms of promoting library use will be focused on achieving the 30% target, according to the strategic goals set out below.

Longford Libraries will

- Promote library membership recognizing that membership gives ‘ownership’ and a sense of belonging;
- encourage all primary level schoolchildren to become Library members at the start of each school year with the support of teachers.
- encourage children, as the best communicators of what is on offer, to spread the word to their families and friends.
- Building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, we will continue to expand on our social media and online promotion:
- Design imaginative PR, radio and social media ads including tik tok, and use ‘influencers’ and “local heroes” to promote reading and increase usage, especially among young people
- seek the support of our customers to spread the message about our services among families, friends and colleagues. To achieve this, we will:
- prepare a step-by-step guide covering all services in one brochure, in both printed and online formats;
- Work with the Longford County Council Communications Officer to ensure consistency of approach in all of our branding.



BUILDINGS & ICT: ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE LIBRARIES

Longford County Council is committed to having library infrastructure of the highest quality, in terms of buildings, facilities, and ICT. During the lifetime of this development programme, the priorities will include:

- Opening the new Edgeworthstown Library in late 2021 and ensuring that it is a Smart library equipped with all the latest technology and accessible to all.
- The existing Longford branch building was designed and built some four decades ago. The Council will explore, at an early stage of this development programme, the various options to provide a state-of-the-art facility for Longford town.
- Reviewing the success of recently developed libraries, such as Ballymahon and Granard, and assessing their longer-term needs in terms of facilities, equipment, etc
- Auditing of all of our library buildings in terms of national nzeb regulations and being more environmentally sustainable and age friendly.
- Building on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, Longford County Council is committed to significantly developing the library service's digital services and facilities into a resource to be branded Digital Longford.



LONGFORD LIBRARIES - ACHIEVING OUR OBJECTIVES

Team Longford Libraries!

Longford County Council Library Service employs 25 highly skilled and dedicated staff members who deliver excellent customer service in each of our Branch Libraries and Support services. A workforce plan was agreed in recent years which has ensured that a stable staffing structure is in place.

We will

- ensure that we maintain staffing levels capable of responding to changing needs over the next five years
- match staffing hours to areas of need in a targeted manner
- provide for succession planning, the timely replacement of retirees, and the retention of corporate memory;
- Reward innovation and ensure that staff members are supported in their professional development.
- review specialist needs which are likely to arise during the course of this development programme including IT expertise and community engagement skills.
- Participate fully in the Performance Management and Development System for Longford County Council
- Offer Continuing Professional Development as appropriate, and take advantage of library team leadership programmes at national level.
- Continue to be mindful of the well-being of library staff in all its aspects, not least in the post-COVID-19 environment, and will provide supports and Health and safety training as required.
- Regularly review, and where necessary enhance, two-way staff communications and staff engagement processes.



FUNDING

While mindful of the fiscal pressures faced by all local authorities and public bodies in the post-COVID-19 environment.

Longford County Council will ensure that

- the library service has the annual revenue funding it will require to successfully implement the objectives in this development programme
- Longford Libraries reaches the national target for per capita spend on stock of €4.

- sufficient matched funding will be allocated to the library service to enable it to avail of national grant funding opportunities offered by the Department.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

One of the keynotes in the strategic programmes set out above is the emphasis on partnerships with local agencies and community groups, partnerships with creatives of all kinds, partnerships with other departments of Longford County Council, and partnerships with national agencies, the LGMA and government departments. Longford Libraries will continue to build and strengthen existing partnerships and develop new partnerships where required. Partnership and collaboration will be core to the successful delivery of the objectives in this development programme.



IMPLEMENTATION MONITORING AND REVIEW

Longford County Council will put in place a rigorous process to ensure the successful implementation of this development programme. The Plan will be contextualised by Longford County Council's Corporate Plan, County Development Plan and other relevant local and government policy. The Council will:

- ensure that there are good governance procedures in place in terms of child protection, health & safety, data protection, risk management, and other relevant matters;
- ensure that there are annual library service plans, designed to provide for the successful implementation of this development programme.
- ensure that there are regular reports to the Council members and senior management on the implementation of the objectives in this development programme;
- provide for effective service delivery structures within the library staff.
- Review and revise the plan where necessary in the context of any major changes in strategic direction if and when such changes arise.

