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This is a draft document from the Libraries Taskforce, it is not a statement of government policy. We are conducting a consultation until 3 June 2016 and welcome feedback on the document via our online questionnaire.

## 1. Executive summary

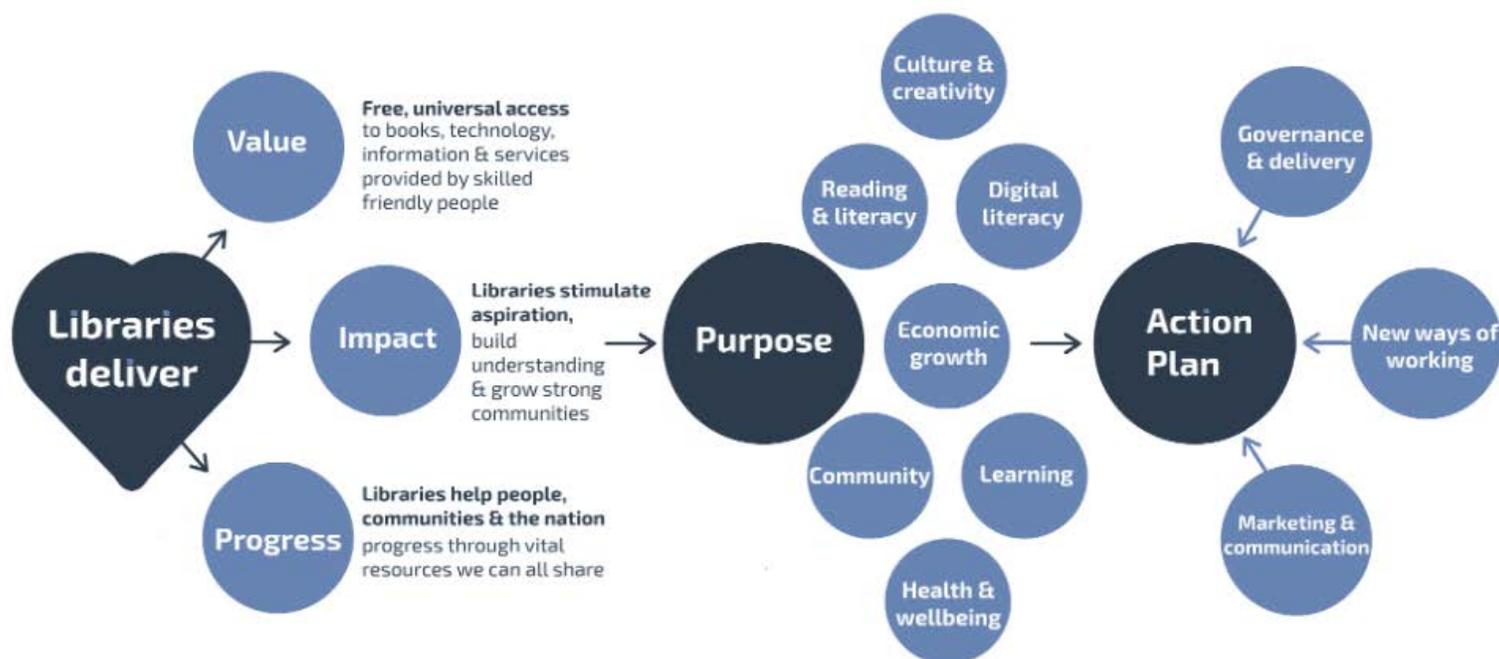


Figure 1: Libraries Deliver

Note: citations can be found in [Annex 3: Image credits and references](#)

## 2. Introduction

“Libraries are, let us not forget, a golden thread throughout our lives... The library does more than simply loan books. It underpins every community. It is not just a place for self-improvement, but the supplier of an infrastructure for life and learning, from babies to old age, offering support, help, education, and encouraging a love of reading. Whether you wish to apply for a job, or seek housing benefit, or understand your pension rights or the health solutions available to you, or learn to read, the library can assist.”

William Sieghart & Panel, [Independent Library Report for England](#)

People in England love libraries. More than half of the UK population has a current library card and, with 225 million physical visits to public libraries in England in 2015 and 96 million visits to websites, they are one of our most popular and trusted public services.

In 2014, the government published William Sieghart’s [Independent Library Report for England](#). This called for clear local decision-making and a national strategy to secure the future of public libraries in England.

This draft Ambition document is the answer to that call. It has been produced by the [Leadership for Libraries Taskforce](#) - a partnership of organisations committed to delivering a successful and vibrant future for public libraries in England - at the request of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). National government has supported the development of this document, but as a draft produced by the Taskforce it is not a statement of government policy at this stage.

The Ambition document sets out a vision of the value and impact of public libraries - a national network that delivers transformation and progress for people, communities and the nation. It is primarily intended for use by:

- decision makers in local and central government
  - local authority leaders and library portfolio holders
  - local authority chief executives
  - chief executives of library organisations outside direct local authority delivery (eg trusts, mutuals and other outsourced providers)
  - commissioners of services
- ministers and policy owners in government departments
- heads of library services and the library workforce
- communities running / thinking of running community libraries
- partner organisations who deliver services with public libraries or would be interested in doing so
- existing and potential library suppliers

It should also be of interest to library users as well as communities and members of the public more broadly.

The Taskforce is seeking views on this draft document - details of the consultation process can be found [here](#).

Alongside the final published document we will publish an action plan showing how local and national government and the library profession will work together with local communities and other partners to make

our shared ambition a reality.

## 3. Context

“The challenge which public libraries face is to continue to be the kind of places which Andrew Carnegie wanted when he funded libraries:

- places that give people a chance, a second chance and even a third chance
- places that improve the communities they are based in
- places that respond to the needs of local people, giving them the opportunity to live fuller lives, make more of what they have, discover new worlds and aspire to greater things”

[Speaking Volumes, Carnegie UK Trust](#)

### 3.1 What people want from libraries

Public libraries exist to serve the people who live, work or study in their area. Their future viability and usage depends on meeting the needs of those groups and on ensuring that libraries’ role in supporting these groups is fully recognised and resourced.

The Museums Libraries and Archives Council's [What do the public want from libraries](#) report from 2010 showed a series of reasons why people use libraries. These were:

- a love of reading
- the opportunity for discovering new things
- study
- education
- learning
- social contact
- spending time alone
- finding out something specific

Our recent research has identified a series of needs, many of which reinforce previous messages. This research has shown both that people’s needs change over time and that libraries provide a ‘cradle to grave’ service. Also they are there as a response to more acute needs which arise for some people. This moves away from ideas of users (people who regularly use a library over the course of their life) and lapsed or non-users.

These concepts are illustrated in the following diagrams: Figure 2.1 which shows needs based around life events everyone will experience, such as leaving school or retiring; and Figure 2.2 which shows services grouped by more acute needs, which will not be experienced by everyone and may also arise unexpectedly.

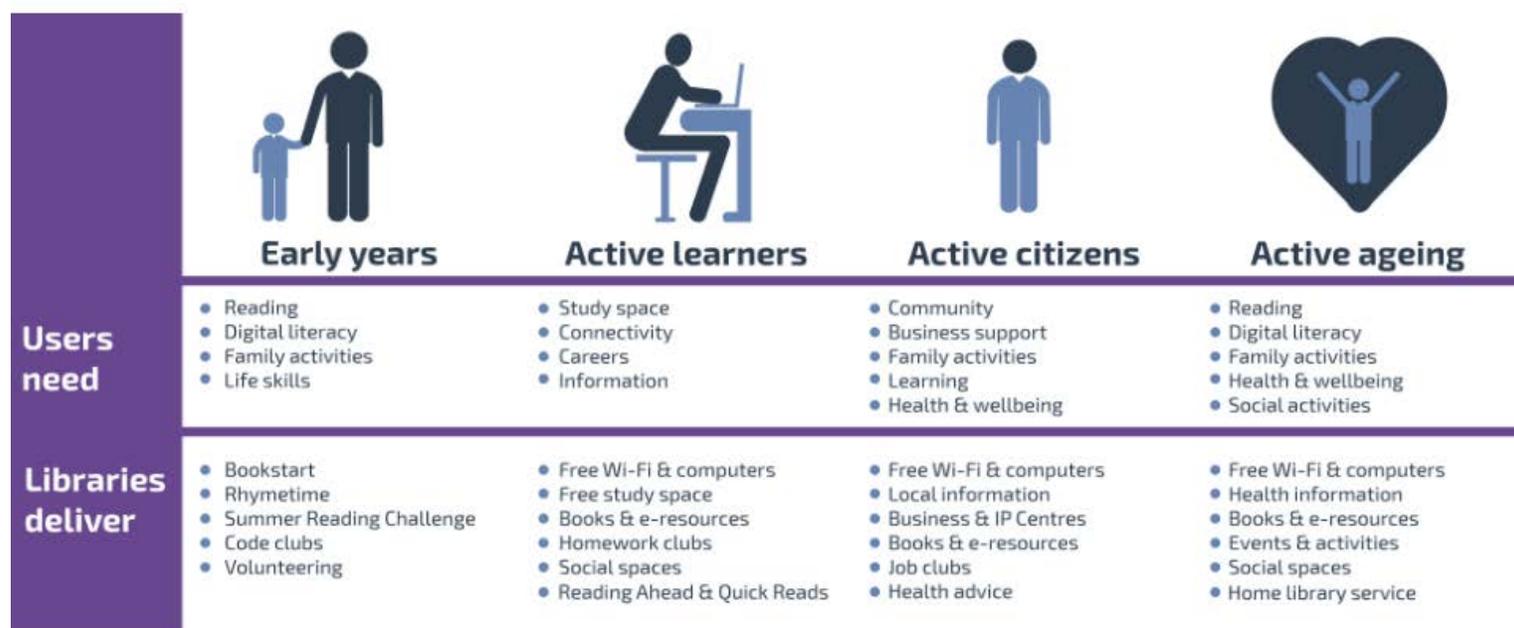


Figure 2.1: people's needs during a lifetime

Note: citations can be found in [Annex 3: Image credits and references](#)

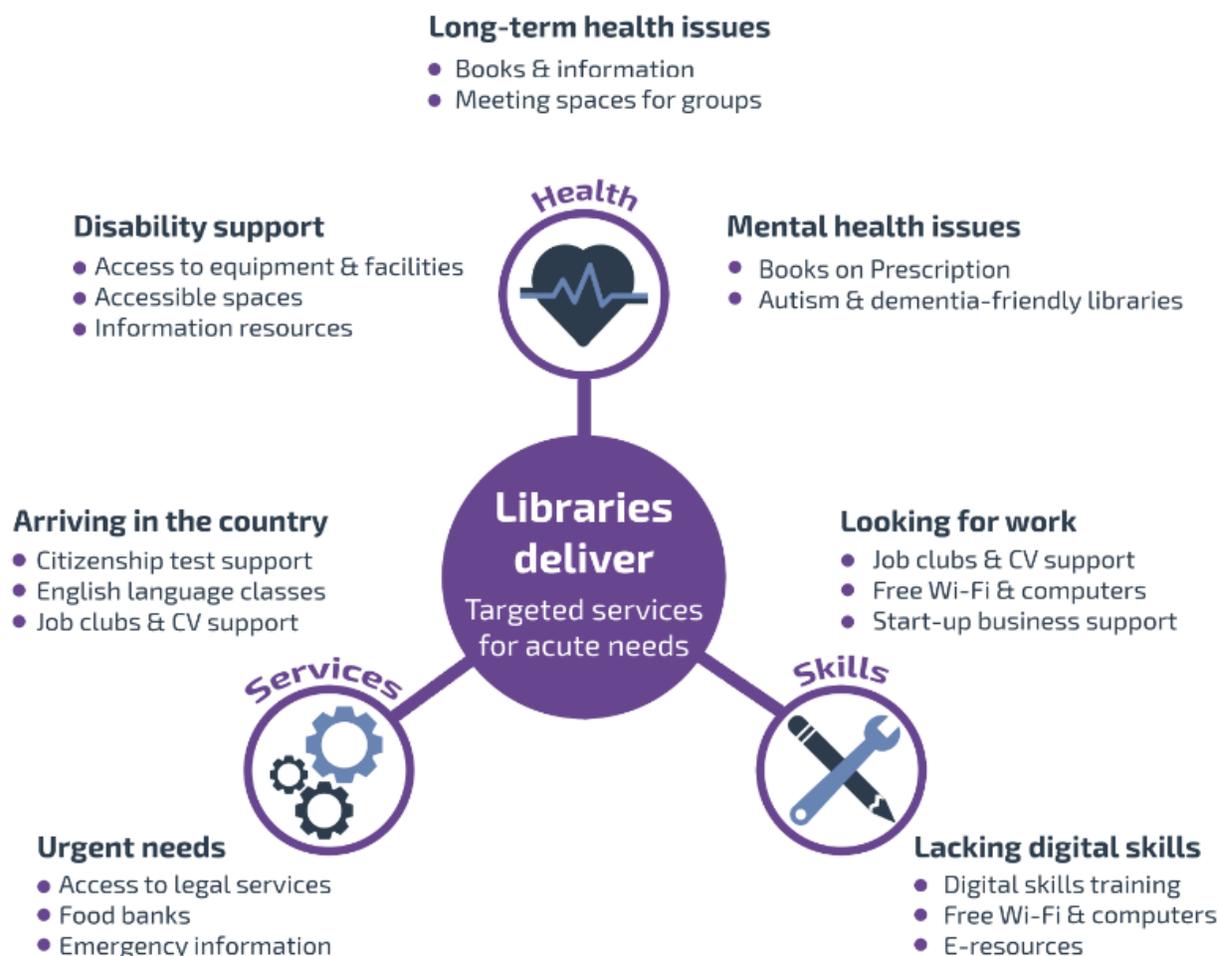


Figure 2.2: Targeted services for acute needs

Note: citations can be found in [Annex 3: Image credits and references](#)

### 3.2 Envisioning the Library of the Future

The Arts Council England (ACE) report [Envisioning the Library of the Future](#) states that “public libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them people can explore and share reading, information, knowledge and culture.”

It highlights 3 essential ‘ingredients’ which define a public library:

- a safe, free, creative community space that is enjoyable and easy to use, both physically and virtually
- an excellent range of quality books, digital resources and other content
- well-trained, friendly people to help users to find what they want either independently or with support

Library leaders, librarians and other staff are already being innovative and transforming their libraries by adapting to local needs and providing a range of high-quality services supported by skilled and friendly staff. Increasingly, they are being supported by volunteers in their work.

This Ambition document sets out how we will work together to deliver a sustainable, high-quality public library network which continues to meet people’s changing needs and expectations.

### 3.3 Assumptions about the future

In addition to changes in people's needs of libraries, the wider context and operating environment for libraries is also changing rapidly. In developing this document, we have made a number of assumptions about the future, and these are explored more fully in [Annex 1: Assumptions about the future](#). These include:

- the economic conditions for public libraries will continue to change, as the wider remit of local government changes – budgets will continue to be constrained and there will be an ever increasing expectation of greater transparency around the use of public funds
- public libraries will continue to navigate a complex legal and regulatory environment, addressing issues around privacy, copyright, statutory services and data management
- public libraries will continue to be affected by changes in society including an ageing population, different working patterns and new models for formal and informal learning
- technology will continue to change our lives by shaping expectations and allowing new ways to deliver services
- public libraries will continue to compete with other sources of information and entertainment, physically and virtually

### 3.4 Legislative framework

Public libraries in England are a statutory service. Under the [1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act](#), local authorities in England have a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all people working, living or studying full-time in the area that want to make use of it. Local authorities have the power to offer wider library services beyond the statutory service to other user groups.

In providing this service, local authorities must, among other things:

- have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service
- lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area

It is the statutory duty of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to:

- superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities in England
- secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred on them as library authorities

More information on the legislative framework and points to consider if a library service is being reviewed, including factors that will be considered by the Secretary of State in deciding whether to order an inquiry, can be found in the guidance, [Libraries as a statutory service](#), that was published alongside the Taskforce's [Libraries shaping the future: good practice toolkit](#). The information contained in that guidance is not a statement of government policy but provided to help guide local authorities and others.

## 4. Vision

Our vision is of a vibrant public library network for the 21st century that supports a strong, sustainable and

democratic society and delivers a wide range of benefits to people, communities and the nation.

We aim to support and champion a public library network that is:

- available to everyone, free at the point-of-use
- appropriately resourced and sustainable
- nationally consistent but responsive to local needs and priorities
- marketed effectively to promote use by the widest possible audience

## 4.1 Libraries deliver value

Public libraries provide free, universal access to books, online resources, information, ideas and creativity supported by skilled, friendly people and up-to-date technology.

[ACE research](#) describes a 5:1 benefit-cost relating to investment in libraries [Note: this research was not solely based on England].

## 4.2 Libraries deliver impact

Evidence shows that public libraries have a huge positive impact on their users and the communities they serve, providing things that money can't buy or not everyone can access. Libraries:

- stimulate aspiration, opening people to new ideas and opportunities and giving them the tools, skills, information and confidence they need to succeed
- libraries build knowledge and understanding, helping us to engage with culture and creativity, to promote dialogue and build stronger communities
- libraries provide safe, welcoming spaces where people can meet, think, learn, create, take part and give back

## 4.3 Libraries deliver progress

Libraries exist to help everyone progress through vital resources and opportunities we can all share.

# 5. What libraries can achieve

In our vision for the 21st century, we see the purpose of the public library network as contributing to the delivery of 7 areas:

- reading and literacy
- digital literacy
- health and wellbeing
- economic growth
- culture and creativity
- communities
- learning

As can be seen from the diagram (Figure 3), libraries already demonstrate significant value in these areas:



Figure 3: existing library activity in the 7 delivery areas

Note: citations can be found in [Annex 3: Image credits and references](#)

Local and national government and the library sector will continue to work together to achieve measurable impact across these areas. In the sections that follow, we set out our ambitions for 2021.

## 6. Purpose 1: Reading and literacy

**Libraries deliver [as articulated and delivered in SCL's Universal Offers]:**

- access to quality books and reading materials and expert staff
- electronic resources, magazines and ebooks
- appropriate reading materials
- activities designed to get and keep people reading
- improved literacy, skills and pupil attainment

**Ambitions for 2021:**

- improve England's ranking for literacy in the OECD
- universal library membership for children, resulting in active borrowing and participation in reading-based activity
- all libraries offering a wide range of reading programmes including the Summer Reading Challenge and seeing an increase in the number of children, young people, adults and families participating (both as readers and volunteers)
- systematic evaluation of impact of literacy and reading programmes
- increased numbers of people reading for pleasure

### Indicators:

- CIPFA: increased number of issues per year for adult and children's books
- CIPFA: increased number of active borrowers
- The [Reading Agency's](#) data on the Summer Reading Challenge
- number of library services using The Reading Agency's reading outcomes framework

"The number of UK adults who are functionally illiterate is estimated at 6 to 8 million... Although there are programs in place to skill up existing workers, the big gap is how to improve the literacy of people who are not in the workforce."

[The Economic & Social Cost of Illiteracy](#), World Literacy Foundation

Literacy and reading are two of the most fundamental skills in life. [Evidence from the Department for Education](#) shows that reading for pleasure grows self-confidence, strengthens community participation and improves knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report [Building Skills for All: A review of England](#) highlighted literacy challenges in England. One in ten graduates leave university with low levels of numeracy and literacy, and over 40% of unemployed people have low basic literacy skills.

Public libraries in England already support and promote literacy in lots of ways. Through books, reading programmes and online resources they are the catalyst for improved reading and literacy skills. Libraries ensure that everyone has free access to books and literature regardless of age, wealth or education.

Initiatives such as the BookTrust's [Bookstart](#) programme and The Reading Agency's [Summer Reading Challenge](#), [Reading Hack](#) and [Reading Ahead](#) are pioneering collaborations between libraries, readers and local partners that deliver real improvements in literacy skills amongst children and adults.

## 7. Purpose 2: Digital literacy

**Libraries deliver [as articulated and delivered in SCL's Universal Offers]:**

improved digital skills

- reduced digital exclusion
- increased usage of government services online
- access to high-speed broadband

### **Ambitions for 2021:**

- digital literacy recognised as a core skill
- all public libraries delivering an active Digital Inclusion programme
- long-term partnership with Go ON UK and related digital literacy initiatives
- all public libraries delivering Assisted Digital / Digital Inclusion support
- libraries seen as spaces where the community comes together to co-create and make things

### **Indicators:**

- improving scores on GOV.UK's [Digital Engagement dashboard](#), most notably percentage of internet use, skills and confidence, employment opportunities, saving money, entrepreneurialism, communication and connectivity, healthy lifestyles, leisure and entertainment, and access to public services online
- increasing percentage of libraries offering makerspaces

“Being digitally capable can make a significant difference to individuals and organisations day to day. For individuals, this can mean cutting household bills, finding a job, or maintaining contact with distant friends and relatives. For organisations, going online can provide ways to reach more customers and reduce operating costs. The internet also provides broader benefits, by helping to address wider social and economic issues like reducing isolation and supporting economic growth.”

[Government Digital Inclusion Strategy](#)

Public libraries are at the forefront of developing digital literacy skills. They provide a trusted network of accessible locations with free WiFi, computers and the support of skilled staff and volunteers to help people get more from the internet.

Fourteen per cent of households do not have internet access but can still share the benefits of being online through libraries. Through the roll out of high-quality WiFi in public libraries enabled by DCMS, they can either access the internet through libraries or their own devices.

The [Society of Chief Librarians \(SCL\)](#) delivered digital skills training to over 14,000 library staff during 2014/15. This skilled workforce is now able to roll out transformative initiatives like Code Green and the innovative Make It Digital in partnership with the BBC. [Code Green](#) (along with makerspaces and code clubs) helps intermediate and advanced users develop their skills through independent learning, particularly inspiring younger generations to engage with the STEM agenda (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). This promotes the development of the high-end technology skills needed

for prosperity and social mobility.

Increasing digital literacy supports the public to use online government services. Trained library staff help by providing information and signposting services on areas such as benefits, business, health and wellbeing. This delivers savings for other public services, for example, saving the NHS an estimated £27.5 million in 2014/15 and providing a vital extension to services provided by job centres.

## 8. Purpose 3: Health and wellbeing

### **Libraries deliver [as articulated and delivered SCL's Universal Offers]:**

- longer, healthier lives
- reduced health inequalities
- better-informed customers for health services
- cost savings for the NHS
- extended support for public health programmes

### **Ambitions for 2021:**

- libraries are a key partner for Public Health England, the NHS and local health bodies
- measurable savings for health services through library-based initiatives
- improvements in health and wellbeing indicators delivered through libraries
- increase in the number of Books on Prescription offers to cover all of the most common health conditions
- increase in the number of libraries being commissioned to deliver health agendas
- increase in co-locations / shared services between public libraries and health-related organisations

### **Indicators:**

- numbers of public libraries delivering commissioned health agendas
- numbers of public libraries co-locating / sharing services with health-related organisations
- number of books on the Reading Well lists being borrowed

“Combining the value to the individual and in reduced health spending, the health, wellbeing and quality of life benefits of libraries could be valued nationally at around £748.1 million per annum.”

ACE [Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Public Libraries](#)

A study commissioned by ACE found that using the library has a positive association with general health. The predicted medical cost savings associated with library use is £1.32 per person per year. This was based on reductions in GP visits caused by improved access to health information. Across the library-using

population, this could save the NHS an estimated £27.5 million a year.

The [Reading Well](#) Books on Prescription programme (an SCL/Reading Agency joint programme) provides self-help resources for common mental health conditions (including anxiety, depression, phobias as well as some eating disorders) and dementia for adults and young people. The scheme aims to bring reading's healing benefits to the 6 million people with recognised medical conditions. Reading Well Books on Prescription means that GPs and mental health professionals can prescribe patients cognitive behavioural therapy through a visit to the library.

Libraries also provide access to health and social care information and signpost users to online information and specialist agencies. They provide a network of local hubs offering non-clinical community spaces where health and wellbeing groups work with the community. By extending these offers, increasing partnerships, and sharing resources with health providers, public libraries will become an integral part of the health and wellbeing of the nation. This will free up NHS resources and help people to be better informed about their health and wellbeing.

## 9. Purpose 4: Economic growth

### Libraries deliver:

- growth and sustainable jobs
- supporting businesses to create jobs
- creating sustainable economic growth
- support to job seekers

### Ambitions for 2021:

- expansion of the British Library Business and IP Centre Network from 8 to 20
- start-up and business support offered in all public libraries, with enterprise hubs / business start-up spaces where appropriate
- increased access to jobs and employment support in all public libraries
- public libraries fully integrated into local economic development partnerships
- a range of skills development programmes available through libraries, eg volunteering opportunities like the Reading Hack programme for young people

### Indicators:

- number of job clubs being run in libraries
- number of libraries with enterprise hubs / business start-up spaces
- increasing rates of new business starts in a library environment
- number of people volunteering in libraries and using libraries as places for skills development

“At the beginning, I accessed as much information as I could as the library was a full jug and I was an

empty glass. I used the information in the library to fill my knowledge in terms of the market, how to go about taking things to market, but mostly for making contacts with people through Manchester Inventors Group. I was looking for anything and everything depending on what I needed at the time; marketing, market research, books on manufacturing, trade magazines on PR's, literally anything I could get my hands on. The Business & IP Centre saved me thousands.”

[Russell Clifton, founder of Ruk-Bug](#) (an all-terrain pushchair)

According to ACE [research](#), public libraries deliver positive economic impact in 3 related areas:

- as economic actors in their own right (economic impact)
- as institutions that facilitate the creation of economic value in the adjacent area and local economy (place-based economic development)
- as organisations that deliver a wide range of services, most of which are valued by both users and non-users when set against the cost of provision (benefit-cost/total economic value approaches)

As well as driving economic growth, libraries mean people can access employment through job clubs, back to work programmes and facilitated sessions with partner agencies, eg Adult Learning and Skills, Jobcentre Plus and local organisations. They also help businesses to start up and grow, creating new jobs. They provide information and signpost government support for education and employment.

“Libraries meet a very wide range of needs within local communities and, in Devon, as in many parts of the country, have developed their role in recent years to support key agendas for the local authority such as health and wellbeing and economic growth. As we move to a new era in Devon of providing our libraries via a new public service mutual, we are clear that libraries are a key resource we want to see nurtured and further developed rather than a cost.”

John Smith, Head of Services for Communities, Devon County Council

New or refurbished libraries can be a catalyst for regeneration and contribute to vibrant high streets. As local authorities consider rationalising the public sector estate in their area, libraries should be integral to these plans and often provide an excellent base for co-location of services. Libraries can provide income generating space for meetings, remote workers and small businesses.

The Business and Intellectual Property (BIPC) centres [set up by the British Library throughout England](#) already support business owners, entrepreneurs and inventors with access to a comprehensive collection of databases and publications for free. A wider network of these centres could transform city libraries into engines of innovation, economic growth and social mobility.

A national network has the proven potential to create essential knowledge-based businesses and jobs in devolved cities across England at relatively low cost.

## 10. Purpose 5: Culture and creativity

## Libraries deliver:

- enriching the lives of individuals and communities
- placing art and culture at the heart of 'placemaking'
- promoting the social and economic role of arts and culture
- creating vibrant local creative economies

## Ambitions for 2021:

- universal participation by public libraries in [National Libraries Day](#) and [World Book Night](#), plus increased participation and engagement overall
- support for local creative businesses in all public libraries
- greater collaboration between arts and cultural organisations to provide seamless access to collections and resources through activities and use of space
- more children from disadvantaged backgrounds having access to cultural events

## Indicators:

- increased participation in National Libraries Day and World Book Night by both the public and libraries
- increased number of effective partnerships with cultural organisations
- increased number of culture-related events in and/or with libraries

“The library houses thousands of imaginations, thoughts of the living and the dead. A good day in the library means you see the world differently when you depart. Maybe you understand the twinkling of the stars, the falling of objects to earth or what it takes to be an astronaut, or you’ve battled a dragon or discovered just how stinky the stinky past could be in a horrible history; this can be a place where we are made.”

Robin Ince, comedian, actor and writer, [#libraryletters](#)

Libraries are cultural hubs within communities - places for inspiration, research, creativity, education, economic prosperity and enjoyment. They help people gain a sense of place and take pride in their neighbourhoods and communities.

Libraries also provide access and signposting to wider cultural activities, objects, knowledge and sites. They encourage people to explore their own culture and creativity, and offer the deep wealth of resources that creative people use for inspiration. Many libraries are co-located with or work in partnership with museums, art galleries and other cultural destinations to deliver a vibrant local programme of events and activities.

As an important part of the cultural sector, libraries have a role in supporting the aims of the government's Culture White Paper. These include:

- helping to increase participation in culture, especially by giving opportunities for everyone to access culture regardless of background
- enabling culture to be integral to communities and contribute to the transformation of places
- promoting the contribution of cultural sectors to improved health and wellbeing
- supporting the development of new cultural partnerships at national and local levels

Since ACE's Grants for the Arts Libraries fund started, £6,609,202 has been invested in 141 projects. Work spans many sectors, and includes visual arts, theatre, music, literature and dance.

The value that exposure to the arts and culture can offer is illustrated through programmes such as the recent "[Find Your Voice](#)" initiative led by Oxfordshire libraries which was inspired by the anniversary of Magna Carta. Young people were invited to create and take part in music, film and theatre workshops, make artwork for touring exhibitions, contribute to a book and visit the Houses of Parliament. The project was designed to inspire young people to invest in where they live, empower them to be the catalyst for change and support their active involvement in decision making.

Libraries can also make a valuable contribution as part of a bigger arts initiative such as a regional festival or activity bringing together lots of local artists.

## 11. Purpose 6: Communities

### Libraries deliver:

- safer and stronger communities
- thriving neighbourhoods
- tackling poverty and social exclusion
- combating disadvantage
- opportunities to 'give back' and share skills through volunteering

### Ambitions for 2021:

- library development plans created in partnership with communities
- libraries acknowledged and celebrated as a vital part of community life
- libraries as community centres that provide Universal Offers plus a range of additional facilities at main hubs
- teams in libraries making effective use of the skills volunteers can bring to libraries alongside paid staff

### Indicators:

- increased engagement in libraries evidenced in DCMS [Taking Part](#)
- increased volunteering in libraries supporting programmes such as the Summer Reading Challenge

“Libraries are unique in their contribution to so many areas of community life, including education, health and wellbeing, tackling poverty and social exclusion.”

[Report on Public Libraries in Wales, 2014](#)

Public libraries contribute directly to community cohesion by creating a sense of place for their users and providing an inclusive, free and safe space for all. Each public library is at the heart of its community, supported by trained staff skilled in community engagement and customer service. Libraries can uniquely partner with community organisations and liaise between communities and government.

The library’s virtual presence and physical space are important, and community members already make use of the library’s services and information in the building and remotely. Where people are unable to access library buildings in person, authorities provide a wide range of outreach services, eg home, hospital and prison visits. By 2021, through providing free access to government information, digital government services, employment assistance and more, libraries will play an invaluable role in community members’ lives.

Volunteering plays an increasing part in the delivery of many activities in libraries supporting paid library staff. This includes young people who, as part of the Reading Hack programme, support the Summer Reading Challenge, people who run homework clubs, act as digital buddies or deliver a programme of social events. Volunteering offers benefits both to the individuals who give their time and to those who are recipients. It can build skills, self esteem and self confidence, and offer a sense of achievement. It can also boost career options (source: survey carried out by [TimeBank](#) through Reed Executive).

## 12. Purpose 7: Learning

### **Libraries deliver [as articulated and delivered in SCL’s Universal Offers]:**

- through creating opportunities
- by creating smarter citizens
- helping everyone reach their potential
- making opportunity more equal
- improving skills for employment

### **Ambitions for 2021:**

- measurable improvements in learning support provided through libraries
- investment in learning and skills programmes in libraries
- increased partnerships with learning providers including schools and colleges, prisons and the informal sector

### **Indicators:**

- number of people undertaking structured and informal learning programmes through libraries
- number of partnerships with learning providers
- number of participants in Reading Ahead

“There is nowhere quiet to study at home with my whole family sharing 3 rooms. This is the only place I can come to really focus.”

“Where do you look when you don’t even know what you want to do or what you are relevant for any more? I feel the library is full of options that I wouldn’t think were possible.”

Respondents in Taskforce user research interviews, 2015

Libraries promote lifelong learning, self-improvement and social mobility. They play an important role supporting the educational curriculum with reading for enjoyment, books clubs, homework clubs and code clubs.

They provide opportunities for individuals to explore and be creative including workshops, discussion groups and special events for children and families. Libraries are places where communities and individuals can develop, share ideas and learn together.

They are spaces for study and reflection which people may not have at home.

Libraries offer free resources for study and learning such as online resources and courses, text books and reference books. Libraries also provide information about free and low cost learning opportunities to their communities.

Libraries provide opportunities for adult learning at all stages and levels. They provide everyone with opportunities to learn new skills and explore a range of subjects. The library workforce provides users with essential support to get the most from available learning opportunities.

By providing literacy services, increasing partnerships with educational providers and encouraging the use of library resources to help with learning then by 2021 public libraries will be an integral part of the life-long learning journey.

Knowledge is now recognised as the driver of productivity and economic growth, leading to a new focus on the role of information, technology and learning in economic performance. Library, information and knowledge management professionals help the public understand and be part of the knowledge economy.

## 13. How we can make this happen

To successfully achieve all these purposes, we need to ensure that the public library network in England is secured on a long-term sustainable footing.

We have, therefore, considered how this can be achieved, including through:

- governance and delivery

new ways of working

- marketing and communications

## 14. Governance and delivery

The public library network, like any public service, needs active management to make sure that it remains relevant to the needs of the public. Since the foundation of the majority of our public libraries rural and urban centres have seen dramatic changes in population, transport, technology and patterns of use.

Our action plan to 2021 is based on proactive and collaborative leadership and development of the network so that libraries continue to meet people's changing needs.

### 14.1 Design principles

To inform the superintendence of public libraries as a network, we have developed a draft set of design principles – equally relevant at both an England-wide and local level. The design principles are:

- compliance with the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act
- focus on public benefit
- be responsive to local needs
- promote a high quality customer experience
- work towards a consistent England-wide offer
- use public funds effectively and efficiently
- promote innovation and enterprise
- make decisions informed by evidence
- build on success

See [Annex 2: Design principles](#) for a full definition.

### 14.2 Model for service delivery

In light of the design principles above, we reviewed a number of models for the delivery of public library services in other countries and considered how these might work in England.

For the physical library network, our preferred approach is a strong network of public libraries in England that is nationally-developed, regionally-supported and locally-led, delivered through a partnership between local authorities, communities and the library profession, and through effective collaboration with other cultural and learning organisations.

Responsibility for the superintendence of statutory public library services would stay with central government. Responsibility and accountability for delivery would remain with local authorities, using their insight into local needs to draw up evidence-based plans for optimal service provision. Authorities would be supported by increased partnerships and programmes at a national level.

The Taskforce will promote, and consider ways to incentivise libraries to exploit opportunities for collaboration, eg shared service models and/or combined authorities, which could effectively reduce the

number of library management bodies over time. This process could learn from, and potentially build on, emergent structures to manage economic growth and transport infrastructure.

This approach:

- is consistent with the design principles
- combines the advantages of a joined-up network with responsiveness to local needs
- offers the potential for significant efficiency gains
- supports the aims of national and local government partners

It requires no legislative change since it is compatible with the existing framework set out in the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act.

Developing this approach for public libraries in England will also require a re-assessment of the many national structures and organisations involved in providing leadership to, and support for, local libraries and library services.

These bodies (such as SCL, ACE, Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)) have all been providing valuable input to the library sector for many years, but their individual capacity to provide support is often severely limited, either by a lack of resource or limitations to their role and remit. Whilst co-ordination of these bodies has improved through the Libraries Taskforce, we are a time-limited body and a longer-term, sustainable solution needs to be developed.

We will recommend to DCMS that they commission an independent review to determine the functions required at a national level, to consider options and make recommendations on the structures needed to achieve future success.

### **14.3 Evidence-based planning**

The provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient' public library service is not just about the number of library service points. Active superintendence relies on informed governance which combines the:

- accessibility of service points for the user community
- quality of services they provide, mapped to local needs
- availability of those services, including opening hours

We believe that, following the Local Government Spending Review Settlement, the time is ripe for authorities to carry out a data-driven, community-informed mapping exercise. This could be used by a local authority to develop a clear Public Library Delivery Plan for its area, taking into account the distribution of other local services - both within its area and immediate cross-boundaries.

This mapping exercise may still mean that some libraries will continue to be closed, merged or relocated, but this process would then be as a result of a strategic assessment of need, proactively managed with the community and library professionals rather than reactive or imposed in response to wider economic factors. If there is a reduction in the overall number of physical service points, we would expect the remaining libraries to provide enhanced services, eg fewer but better.

We will publish guidance on how to conduct an evidence-based mapping and planning exercise, based on established good practice in the sector. Local authorities would be supported to complete this voluntary

exercise as part of their statutory responsibility for public libraries, and to provide a plan to implement any proposed new model.

In the meantime, authorities considering making changes to the provision of their library service should send notification of their proposals at the earliest possible stage (and definitely prior to public engagement) to the DCMS Libraries team to assist the Secretary of State in his superintendence role.

## 14.4 Investing in the future

Public funding for public libraries should be seen as investment in the future health, well-being, strength, happiness and prosperity of local people and communities.

The government has [announced](#) the intention to withdraw the central Revenue Support Grant, meaning that local authorities will fund local services such as libraries from local revenues including Council Tax, 100% retention of Business Rates and the New Homes Bonus.

Securing the future of statutory public library services will mean local authorities developing a viable long-term financing model, with support from the Libraries Taskforce, which includes:

- clear, shared delivery plans informed by evidence and developed with local communities
- continued access to national programmes and grant support
- marshalling and using evidence to advocate for library services and the value they add
- exploring other opportunities for income generation (see also [New Ways of Working](#)).

It is essential that, in achieving this, the neutrality of the public library service is maintained.

We anticipate that there will be a continued need for national oversight of public library funding to make sure that inequalities in local circumstances do not disadvantage communities unfairly. This sits alongside the responsibility of the Secretary of State to promote the long-term improvement of the public library network across England.

## 14.5 Developing the library workforce

“Google can bring you back 100,000 answers, a librarian can bring you back the right one.”

Neil Gaiman

Library users value the support they receive from the people that work in their libraries. Library users need to have access to the skills and expertise of library and information professionals. They are able to deliver high-quality access to knowledge and information while promoting information literacy and digital skills. Library staff may be supported by volunteers to augment their services.

Excellent public library services need access to a range of skills including:

- leadership

partnership working

- community engagement
- advocacy and communications
- commercial skills
- digital skills, including online privacy
- entrepreneurship and innovation
- customer service

Taskforce partners will work together to produce a Skills Strategy to develop the library workforce of the future. In developing this Strategy, we will take into account the issues highlighted in the [report](#) published by [CILIP](#) and the Archives and Records Association (ARA) in November 2015 on the UK information sectors. This considered workers in a range of sectors, including public libraries, and emphasised the importance of bringing in new talent, providing opportunities for career development for existing staff, and increasing staff diversity.

In developing and delivering the Skills Strategy, we will work with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors who employ library and information professionals. This will ensure the public library workforce develop transferable skills which support movement between sectors (including the cultural and education sectors) to share learning and good practice.

In addition to setting out options for training and Continuous Professional Development for public library staff, the proposed strategy will address the learning and development needs of councillors, senior officers and volunteers.

## 15. New ways of working

Public libraries in England have a strong track-record of innovation and evolution to meet people's changing needs. Delivering this Ambition provides opportunities to embrace new ways of working and to provide ongoing sector-led support for the active development of library services.

### 15.1 Striving for Excellence

Many local authorities in England have worked hard to promote excellence in their public library services. In supporting other authorities to do likewise, we would welcome views on whether the following 2 connected developments would be of value to the sector:

#### An 'Expectation Set'

An 'Expectation Set' to provide libraries who want it with a sector-led benchmark they could use for self-assessment, planning and improvement. This would be a clear statement of what makes an excellent library / library service - a higher bar than the regular 'comprehensive and efficient' assessment. It would be outcome-focused (specifying the 'what' rather than the 'how') and would be likely to include sections on:

- buildings and facilities, including location, accessibility and furnishing
- books, e-books, online resources and other reference and reading materials
- library workforce

- public internet access and related support
- information services
- public programmes, events and related engagement activities

### **A voluntary accreditation scheme**

A voluntary sector-led accreditation scheme for public library services in England, providing participating authorities with an external assessment of the quality and effectiveness of their services and their delivery against the 'Expectation Set'. If an authority applied for accreditation but did not achieve it, that would not necessarily mean it is failing to be 'comprehensive and efficient' - that would need to be a separate consideration on the merits of the case. The benefits of participating in a voluntary accreditation scheme could include:

- raising awareness and understanding of library services
- building confidence and credibility with decision makers and the public
- helping libraries improve their services to focus on user needs
- supporting planning and development for the library workforce
- supporting improvement by strengthening policies and procedures
- strengthening the case for third party investment and funding
- helping libraries meet statutory requirements, including Equalities legislation

If responsibility for day-to-day running of a library were to be transferred from local authority direct provision to a third party, the local authority would need to ensure that the 'Expectation Set' continued to be met to maintain accredited status. A regular re-assessment process would need to be built into the scheme.

## **15.2 Evidence-driven decision making**

Our vision of a vibrant public library network for the 21st century needs evidence-based management, clear prioritisation and effective planning. When developing this Ambition, we drew on a range of data sources, including the data published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA).

This highlighted a number of challenges in delivering effective evidence-based policy for public libraries in England. Current data provision has:

- a focus on inputs rather than outputs and long-term impact
- an emphasis on collecting quantitative data over qualitative data
- a 'time delay' in accessing up-to-date information to monitor impact
- 'siloes' datasets which limit the ability to compare multiple sources of information
- data which is held behind pay walls, and therefore not accessible to all
- a lack of resource to make effective use of available data

We want to develop a culture of monitoring and data-sharing across the public library sector in England to support future planning, investment and improvement. To stimulate this, the Taskforce will publish a model basic data set, and will support creation of a process to ensure that this information can be provided and

shared in as transparent and automated way as possible.

## 15.3 Income generation

Exploring the role of income generation will be essential to secure the future of high-quality library services. Libraries have identified a range of approaches to generating income. These include:

- non-library public service contracts
- private sector service contracts and partnerships
- direct trading and retail
- paid-for services
- fundraising from charities, trusts, foundations and individuals (eg crowdfunding)
- precepts from parish and town councils to support libraries
- Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 Agreements

Public libraries can be enterprises in their own right, supporting local businesses and strengthening local economies.

## 15.4 Commissioning

[Commissioning](#) is one of a range of delivery models which provide ways of joining up resources to improve services and outcomes for individuals and communities. At the same time care must be taken to make sure that commissioning of services does not result in a loss of quality or accessibility.

As safe, neutral, free-to-access spaces, libraries are good venues for the provision of a range of commissioned services, such as Children's Centres.

We will provide guidance on a range of commissioning models, including the use of mutuals, trusts and Community Interest Companies (CIC).

## 15.5 Procurement

A joined-up approach to procurement, eg of library software, offers significant opportunities both to save money and promote greater collaboration. There are already a number of library services who have come together in consortia to purchase stock. Furthermore, The Digital Library, a framework with suppliers for online resources administered by [Jisc](#) on SCL's behalf, has yielded savings of £1.6 million for an investment of £30,000 per annum.

We will work with local authorities to support them in adopting new approaches to procurement, including considering national procurement frameworks to promote consistency and reduce procurement overheads.

Taskforce members will work with suppliers to promote an ongoing dialogue about current and future needs and how these will be met.

## 15.6 Digital and technology

Public libraries in England use technology in a variety of ways to promote access to information, services

and the library building. We believe a joined-up approach to the use of digital tools and innovative technologies is an essential part of realising our vision.

We see 4 main areas for future development as part of this Ambition:

- delivering 24/7 online access to public library services through a Single Library Digital Presence (SLDP)
- improving access to library buildings and services
- improving access to information and resources within library buildings by getting the most from universally available WiFi
- encouraging users to become more involved in providing feedback and contributing to the development of services

Taskforce members will review proposals for the Single Library Digital Presence and develop an implementation plan, including working with partners to establish a sustainable governance and funding model.

We will also identify and promote examples of good practice using technology to facilitate access to library buildings and services.

## 15.7 Co-location

Faced with a challenging financial environment, local authorities are transforming the way they deliver services by redesigning, reorganising and reforming, including rationalising the local and central government property estate. Libraries and library staff have a critical role to play in that transformation.

Libraries can increase access to council services alongside cost savings. Libraries have co-located with a wide range of organisations including local colleges and job centres, post offices, tourist information and police offices. They have also provided an access point for things like IT, language training, job clubs and local authority 'face-to-face' services.

The Taskforce believes co-location can offer a viable route for providing access to council services as long as it is carefully designed so the library isn't overwhelmed by other services as well as managing issues such as noise and child protection.

## 16. Marketing and communications

Public libraries provide vital services and resources for people of all ages and walks of life that can have a big impact on their lives. Using the library is a habit that we pass on from generation to generation - children who see their parents using the library are more likely to do so themselves.

Libraries face increased competition for leisure time and attention. The internet, streaming and mobile platforms all provide access to entertainment and educational resources. Library leaders, librarians and other staff have worked hard to attract the public through marketing and promotional campaigns and innovative services, but we need, for example, to make greater use of social media.

Significant improvements need to be made to perceptions and awareness of public libraries, the services they provide and benefits they bring. We believe we should seize the opportunity to raise public awareness of the richness of the public library offer at 2 levels:

- nationally, through campaigns like National Libraries Day and programmes like the Summer Reading Challenge and Reading Well
- regionally and locally through service-wide promotional campaigns and targeted marketing

## 16.1 National campaigns

Taskforce partners will collaborate with others (including the devolved administrations where relevant) to develop a joined-up annual programme of promotional activity to promote public awareness of and engagement with public libraries. This programme will include:

- promotion of the [Universal Offers](#) developed by SCL
- a UK-wide National Libraries Day campaign
- a joined-up approach to celebrating The Reading Agency's World Book Night programme in partnership with publishers and booksellers
- collaborative promotion of the Summer Reading Challenge, led by The Reading Agency

## 16.2 Media profile

The media plays an important role shaping perceptions and raising awareness about public libraries and the full range of services which they provide. However, current media attention is mainly focused on stories relating to consultations over changes to library service provision and the perceived diminishing role of public libraries due to the internet.

We believe that it is time to shift this focus with an active campaign of positive media engagement – developing a clear offer and ensuring that this is reinforced in interviews, placed editorial and other media coverage of public libraries.

We will engage with campaigners who are combating the loss or reduction of individual services to develop a shared set of messages which reduce the risk of appearing divided within the library community. We will use initiatives such as the [CILIP Libraries Change Lives awards](#) and other partnerships to highlight and celebrate the transformative work that public library staff do every day in their communities.

## 16.3 Making the case for libraries

As a statutory service, libraries are directly affected by developments in national and local policy in England. It is important that the interests of public libraries are represented in, and promoted by, central government and local authorities. This is best achieved by focusing on what the organisation concerned is trying to deliver, then positioning libraries as a mechanism to achieve this, rather than being library-centric. The Taskforce believes it is important to focus on 5 connected priorities:

- ongoing engagement with policymakers to promote awareness and understanding of the full range of public library services and their impact on other policy areas
- developing an influential voice at a national level to secure policy and regulation which supports public libraries in delivering their mission
- developing influence with local councillors and decision-makers to secure favourable outcomes and ongoing support through local policy and funding

- celebrating the commitment and achievements of local leaders in supporting their public library offer
- showcasing to the public the impact of library based activities on health, wellbeing, employment and skills development

## 17. Action plan

Since the Independent Library Report for England was published, we have already amongst other things:

- enabled universal WiFi coverage in public libraries in England
- worked with partners including BT, Barclays and the Tinder Foundation to build digital skills in communities
- continued to support the expansion of the British Library's Business and IP centre network to support small businesses and entrepreneurs
- published 2 toolkits: [Libraries shaping the future: good practice toolkit](#), on 16 December 2015; and [Community managed libraries: good practice toolkit](#) published 23 March 2016
- actively engaged with ministers across a wide range of government departments to promote the value of libraries in delivering their agendas
- worked closely with local authorities to identify and promote existing good practice in managing and developing public library services

To build on this existing activity, we are now calling on national and local government, sector bodies, partner organisations, funding agencies and the profession to come together to develop and deliver an action plan for the future. The action plan will encompass the:

- 7 purposes
- governance and delivery
- new ways of working
- marketing and communications

It will be created following feedback from the consultation. Some proposed actions are highlighted in the main text but we would welcome further input on new areas of activity that would add most value to the library sector.

### 17.1 Monitoring and reporting

In the 'Purpose' section, we have provided examples of the types of indicators we might use to monitor progress. We are seeking feedback and suggestions of alternatives through the consultation process.

Once the Ambition document is published, we will:

- review progress against agreed actions at each Taskforce meeting
- publish a high level, narrative progress update on the agreed action plan on GOV.UK every 6 months
- review the Ambition document and action plan every year, ensuring that it still reflects the ambitions of today's library service and provides an up-to-date set of actions

# 18. Annex 1: Assumptions

## 18.1 Assumptions about the Future

To make progress toward the outlined Vision, we should constantly anticipate, and assess the implications of, the strategic factors likely to affect our ability to succeed. This process will help us to constantly recalibrate our view of the future and provides a basis upon which to review and update this document. The aims and actions in this document are based on this foresight; therefore, we will carry out an annual review of these assumptions to ensure the Ambition document and action plan remain relevant and up-to-date.

## 18.2 Assumptions

### Economic and regulatory factors

1. Library budgets will continue to be constrained and there will be an ever increasing expectation of greater transparency around the use of public funds
2. Private fundraising, as well as other forms of alternative funding streams, should be seen as an opportunity
3. Libraries should be able to demonstrate return on investment (ROI) to the public and to decision makers
4. There will be an increase in partnerships and in pooled and/or shared resources in response to smaller overall budgets
5. Library services will continue to be viewed as largely discretionary by some, despite their statutory legal status
6. The economics around the publishing industry and the transition to electronic content will continue to change, impacting the delivery of services at the library
7. Competition will come from technology, entertainment and information services
8. There will be limits to the amount of private funding available along with more competition for those pounds
9. The legal environment will require more time, energy, and expertise, particularly as local authority proposals for library changes are tested
10. Copyright and digital licensing will continue to evolve
11. Confidentiality/privacy will become more complex and will affect public use, records, maintenance, and requirements for registration, data collection and marketing

### Social values and politics

1. National and local political agendas will change and the public's support for those political agendas will continue to fluctuate
2. Public libraries will remain a symbol of democracy providing a strategic opportunity for growth and financial support
3. Libraries will continue to focus on not only having a seat at the decision-making table but setting the table
4. The library as a place for the community to congregate will continue to grow
5. The library as a place for content (co-)creation will continue to grow

6. Definitions of family will continue to change
7. Volunteering will continue to grow
8. There is increased expectation that libraries will incorporate sustainable practices into their operations
9. Reading will continue to be a critical skill to succeed in life and enjoying reading will continue to be a key determining factor in developing reading skills
10. The library's role in support of lifelong learning will continue to increase

#### Demographics

1. The need for a more diverse library workforce will increase to reflect changing communities
2. Library staff will continue to stay in the workforce longer, thereby reducing opportunity to enter the profession
3. The value of interacting with others will continue, but the tools and approaches will continue to change (ie face-to-face versus online social networking tools, etc)
4. Trends in the way education is delivered will continue to affect the role of, and the services provided, by public libraries
5. New immigrants from countries without a public library tradition will need assistance in understanding the role and services of the public library
6. The socio-economic gap will continue to grow and the income level defining poverty will continue to rise.
7. The general population will live longer and be more active
8. More and more people will use the library's technology resources
9. Changes in demographics will influence the ways people interact and behave in public spaces, including public libraries

#### Technology and science

1. Technology will allow libraries the opportunity to attract and serve new client groups, and offer customised services
2. Technology training will continue to be a challenge
3. Online social networking will continue to evolve
4. There will be a greater interest and demand for user-generated content
5. Users will expect multiple access modes to the library, different for each person
6. Libraries will continue to be a technology safety net for a large percentage of the population
7. There will be a greater need for assistive technology
8. Technology will give libraries the opportunity to provide services on a one-to-many basis
9. As technology expands, there will be changes in the way people access personal health and government records
10. Reliance on technology for everyday life will continue to grow
11. As access to government services increasingly switches to being digital by default, libraries will face increased demand to support users

#### Professional competition and structure

1. There are (perceived to be) major competitors that have a huge penetration in the market and they will

continue to grow

2. There will be a continued threat to our status as information providers and less understanding by the public of the difference between libraries and their competitors
3. The traditional structure of libraries makes it harder for them to change
4. The nature of our work with the public is changing and the traditional staffing structure will have to be adjusted
5. To remain competitive, libraries will need to have a more external, customer focused orientation.
6. Many library competitors will continue to have better resources and larger budgets
7. Our funders will know organisations like Google and Amazon and what services they provide better than they know libraries
8. There may be a tension between our need to market and collect critical user data and the expectation that we should not use public funds for marketing
9. There may be less enthusiasm for the public library as a public good
10. Due to local funding structures, it will be more difficult to get economies of scale in the financing of libraries and for libraries to invest in research and development
11. Libraries will continue to be conflicted between maintaining a non-profit business model and providing services
12. Libraries will continue to be constrained by the ability and interest of the vendors in delivering solutions
13. There may be a tension between our need to collect critical user data and librarians' value of privacy
14. There will be an increased emphasis on partnerships to extend the library's reach and to collaboratively and co-operatively address community goals

## 19. Annex 2: Design principles

We have developed draft design principles that they believe the public library network should work to to make it fit-for-purpose, efficient and capable of delivering public benefit.

The principles have been developed for the public library network at an England-wide level, but the ideas expressed are equally relevant at local library service level.

### **Compliance with the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act**

The future organisation of the public library network in England should remain compliant with the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act, including the retention of an explicit connection between national superintendence, a coherent and consistent offer, and local leadership.

### **Focus on public benefit**

The development of public libraries in England should be structured around an explicit statement of the public benefit, outcomes and impact which they deliver.

### **Be responsive to local needs**

Public libraries should be developed with the active support, engagement and participation of their community.

### **Promoting a high-quality customer experience**

Delivery of public library services, their development and investment in them should be guided by a clear, outcomes-focused, approach which focuses on providing a high-quality customer experience.

### **Work towards a consistent England-wide offer**

There is potential to strengthen the value of public libraries as a joined-up and integrated England-wide brand and develop their services to provide a consistent quality of experience across the country.

### **Use public funds effectively and efficiently**

The organisation and governance of the public library network should be developed to deliver the most effective and efficient use of public investment, and be reviewed regularly.

### **Promote innovation and enterprise**

Public libraries should be supported to continue innovating in the development of their physical and digital services, and encouraged to be entrepreneurial and creative in building new service models and partnerships.

### **Make decisions informed by evidence**

Those making decisions about library services should always base those decisions on evidence and data. Robust evaluation of programmes and projects is also vital.

### **Build on success**

Evidence of good practice can be seen both in England and further afield. It is important that this is identified, shared and built upon.

## **20. Annex 3: Image credits and references**

Figure 1: created by CILIP, based on a workshop run by Wolff Olins

Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2: created by CILIP, based on research done by [Cassie Robinson](#)

Figure 3: created by CILIP. Citations for the statistics used, clockwise from top:

1. Health and Wellbeing: £27.5 million saving to NHS through public library services Source: [ACE](#)
2. Digital literacy: 26 million hours of internet access provided in 2014-15 Source: The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, (2015). Public library statistics 2015-16 estimates and 2014-15 actuals.
3. Learning: 10 million academic journal articles provided free across UK Source: [Access to Research](#)
4. Culture and creativity Figures provided by ACE
5. Economic growth: £38 million in added value to UK economy in 2013-15 by Enterprising libraries Source: [British Library](#)

6. Communities: 224.6 million visits in 2014/15 Source: “Number of physical visits for library purposes” - Table M Library Users. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, (2015). Public library statistics 2015-16 estimates and 2014-15 actuals. CIPFA. [actual number is 224,636 million] More than visits to Premier League football games, the cinema and the top 10 UK tourist attractions combined. Sources:
  - [Premier League: 27.5 million](#)
  - [UK cinema audience: 157.5 million](#)
  - [combined top 10 attractions visits for 2015: 42,782,803](#)
7. Reading and literacy: 786,547 children took part in Summer Reading Challenge in UK libraries in 2015 Source: [DCMS, \(Dec. 2015\)](#). Report under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for 2015. [pdf]

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