

MAYO COUNTY LIBRARY

DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011 - 2014

“At the moment that we persuade a child, any child, to cross that threshold, that magic threshold into a library, we change their lives forever, for the better. It’s an enormous force for good”

Barack Obama

Our Mission

“To make Mayo libraries the best in Ireland”

FOREWORD

Libraries are the best used and most popular of our cultural services. It has been said that Public Libraries are the only service of the Local Authority which touches the lives of the citizen from the cradle to the grave as library membership and usage often follows a lifecycle model. Almost all reports and studies dealing with the information society recognise that access to information, knowledge and cultural products promotes economic, social and cultural integration. Arguably libraries are more closely aligned to educational, cultural and goals than at any other time in its history in that government policy views the knowledge-economy as a solution to our unemployment problems.

Libraries are freely accessible places and spaces which provide equitable access to ideas, information, knowledge, life options and learning opportunities. In the current recessionary times, libraries provide an invaluable social outlet for people who find themselves isolated by unemployment or people who have more time and less money in their pockets.

Mayo County Council's library development plan (2011-2014) has been prepared through an extensive consultation process with representatives of all those concerned with maintaining and delivering a high quality customer focused library service in the county. It brings together the objectives of the Mayo County Council Corporate Plan with the blueprint for development of the library service nationally (Branching Out – Future Directions, 2008). It is expansive in nature but mindful of the present economic climate all Local Authority services now operate within. Its purpose is to maintain a high standard of service delivery whilst driving the Library service forward to attain more cohesive and collaborative working patterns with local and national organizations. The proposal to deliver services in community partnership and shared approach to service provision

We have remained ambitious in our objectives in this plan, keeping the physical improvement of library infrastructure high on our agenda despite the current economic climate. We remain committed to providing one of the highest standards of library provision in the country and welcome the enhancements to service outlined in the plan particularly in the areas of social inclusion, support for life long learning, inclusion and accessibility.

We look forward to successfully seeing the plan take shape over the next four years.

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BACKGROUND

Mayo library service operates through a network of 15 branches and a small number of community services namely in Knockmore, Ballycastle, Inishturk and Clare Island as well as a school library service. Mayo Library service falls under the remit of the Directorate of Culture, Education, Heritage and Corporate Affairs of Mayo County Council

This library development plan has been prepared as a legislative requirement under section 78 of the Local government Act 2001. It takes full cognisance of the objectives of:

Mayo County Council Corporate Plan 2010 – 2014

Mayo County Development Board's integrated strategy 2002 -2012

Mayo County Development Plan 2008-2014

Mayo County Council Arts Plan 2011-2014

Mayo County Council draft Heritage Plan 2011 -2016.

In 2010, the budget for the operation of the library service was €2,859,873, which included the cost of staff and a book fund of €257, 160. There are 50 staff employed by Mayo Library service which includes a full-time manager of the Jackie Clarke Library. The library service had almost 27,000 members in 2010 with 572,000 books being borrowed. 72,000 computer sessions were booked throughout the year. Over 300 events are held every year as part of the library's cultural programme, and the library attracts around 365,000 visitors per annum

INTRODUCTION

“Since buying books is an unimaginable luxury to those struggling to buy groceries, the only viable route towards improving those children's chances in life is the local lending library.”

Our glorious libraries civilise us, by Rowan Pelling in The Telegraph. November 17th 2010.

The overall aim of this Plan is to outline ways in which Mayo Library Service can be developed to address user needs and to deliver our services more innovatively and effectively. There has never been a greater need for a coherent, innovative and practical vision for public library provision as there is at this time of huge economic and social change. At a time when information can be accessed from almost anywhere, the *raison d'être* for a public library must hinge on the fact that all groups can conveniently access all forms of information, both traditional and electronic, in a one stop shop, at times that suit them. The public library can deliver on this while providing an accessible, socially inclusive environment that actively endorses the value of books and other media in terms of fostering knowledge, creativity and imagination. Libraries contribute significantly to the economic, social, cultural and environmental wellbeing of the local community. A good library service will deliver against key policy objectives and provide:

- A positive future for children and young people
- A fulfilling life for older people
- Strong, safe and sustainable communities
- Promotion of local identity and community pride
- Learning, skills and workforce development
- Health improvements and wellbeing
- Equality, community cohesion and social justice
- Economic regeneration

The public library is based on a fundamental philosophy of supporting learning throughout life. The library provides critical infrastructure to support the knowledge economy by helping people improve or start businesses, assisting people to develop language skills, providing access to online services and enabling people to gain or improve computer skills. It fosters a sense of community and belonging by helping people accomplish tasks and achieve goals, by providing community information, supporting local culture and the arts and through the provision of a safe and pleasant environment thereby enhancing quality of life.

This plan outlines where the library service currently is and examines how best to position it to adapt to the dynamic changes of the period 2011 to 2014. Considerable progress has been made in library provision in the county under the previous Mayo Library development plan *Reading the Future* which plotted development from 2006 to

2010. There is now an even geographical spread of branch libraries, an experienced and highly motivated staff and high usage of the branch network by the public. Our service has a presence in almost every town in Mayo where we interact on a daily basis with people from all backgrounds and of all abilities. **We offer a range of self directed opportunities to individuals and groups in the areas of education, information, heritage, history and leisure.** It is clear that where quality library buildings and services are provided in larger towns with good catchment populations, with excellent locations and appropriate opening hours, staffing and stock, demand for and usage of services is very high. Challenges however still remain with regard to geographical, social and economic isolation, the age profile of library users, national low literacy levels and inadequate, inaccessible and dated public buildings. Some of these challenges can be harder to ameliorate in leaner financial times. There still remains the need to make some of the older buildings more accessible, the necessity of refurbishing those built in the 70s and 80s and the necessity of having a book fund which reflects the converging demands now expected when providing a library service to an inclusive society. This plan highlights the challenge of maintaining and improving our infrastructure, book stock and ICT provision while delivering an important and relevant service to the people of Mayo.

We have had the phase of capital development. We now have the phase of “how do we make the best use of these facilities”. The core challenge to public service providers is to replace a vicious circle, in which slow change increases dissatisfaction with service standards, erodes public support and makes higher investment less likely, with a virtuous circle, in which continuous improvement and high standards underpin strong public support and high investment. **We must ensure that the long-awaited and hard-won improvements of the last two decades are not undermined or even unravelled in the current economic crisis.** This is the challenge that is addressed in this Library Development Plan.

METHODOLOGY

Extensive research and consultation has informed this document and the findings reflect the concerns of all the stakeholders. In order to understand our services from a citizen's point of view our primary concern was listening to the people of Mayo. This was done through a consultation campaign in the local media, by post and by email.

In addition, a number of focus groups were convened and the results collated. Interest groups were drawn from the elderly, the travelling community, children, single parents, literacy organisations, the long-term unemployed and from the Community Forum. Adult learners, the Heritage Office, Community & Enterprise, the Arts Office, and teenagers were also targeted

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The development plan (2011-2014) will provide the focus for the work of the library staff over the next four years. As such, it will be reviewed each year with regard to progress made and areas for prioritisation. It will also be monitored by the SPC of the Cultural, Education, Heritage and Corporate Affairs Directorate.

Budgetary conditions and staffing resources are integral components to any development plan and it is acknowledged that the Library Service will have to work within the resources made available to it by both the Local Authority and the Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. However, every opportunity will be availed of to work collaboratively with local and national bodies to ensure that Mayo Library service remains at the forefront of library provision in the country.

The plan will also be monitored through:

An annual works programme will be put in place to deliver the plan. There will be annual reviews of this programme.

The installation of door counters in all branches to measure visitor numbers accurately.

The development of *qualitative* measures of library use in cooperation with other library services

The provision of enhanced facilities for feedback from the public

The integration of annual priorities into the council performance management and development (PMDS) system.

COROPORATE OBJECTIVES

This is the second Mayo library development plan and follows on from *Reading the Future* which plotted the growth of the service from 2006 to 2010. In that plan actions were identified under seven key objectives. After much discussion and consultation it has been agreed that those objectives are still paramount.

The purpose of the plan is to align the activities of the Library Service to the prioritised core values of the Mayo County Council Corporate Plan 2010-2014. The Library Service is situated in the Cultural, Education, Heritage and Corporate Affairs Directorate. Both the corporate and library plan focus on values of quality customer service, value for money, social inclusion, community involvement, innovation, partnership and consultation. A strong emphasis is placed on Health and Safety as by definition a public library service is an open service.

Following on from the consultation process, seven core objectives have been identified to form the basis of the Library Development Plan:

- 1. To encourage and promote reading and books**
- 2. To make the library accessible to all**
- 3. To foster lifelong learning and access to local and global information**
- 4. To be a centre for culture and imagination**
- 5. To market and promote the library service to maximise its potential**
- 6. To collect, preserve and make accessible the written, photographic, musical and oral culture of County Mayo**
- 7. To manage and develop the Library service as a learning organisation**

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 1

Encourage and promote reading and books

There has been a quiet remodelling of the library service in the last ten years – a move from being passive providers of books on shelves to being a lively, social reading service. Book clubs, summer reading schemes, author programs, book reviews on the library website, reader development training of library staff and the use of social networking tools have led to the primacy of the book being reasserted whether for enlightenment, information or just plain entertainment. The library's book collection is its prime asset and the key contributor to sustaining communities by meeting their needs to access a wide variety of materials. Reading will continue to be the key focus of all library activity and expertise will increase as the Frontline training course is rolled out to all staff.

Enhance the reader development programme through book clubs, displays and innovative schemes to encourage new readers.

Provide staff training on reader development with particular emphasis on the Frontline training course.

Increase the numbers of school visits to library branches

Expand children's activities to become an all-year programme

Investigate the feasibility of introducing a separate children's membership card

Introduce summer reading programmes for children in all branches

Develop and promote specialist literacy support resources to enhance reading development in schools with particular emphasis on disadvantaged schools

Improve teenage readership by working with Transition Year programmes, No Name clubs, Dail na nOg and other youth organisations.

Prepare and promote guides to book-stock (hard copy or electronically) targeting niche groups such as disadvantaged teenagers or males who live alone

Establish book clubs targeted at particular sectors – such as school children, teenagers or Irish language speakers.

Set up parent and toddler mornings where a need is identified

Expand use of local media to promote books and reading

Use library website to promote reading through book reviews, recommended lists, Facebook and new media.

Stock a wide range of materials to serve people of varying literacy levels.

Work with literacy agencies in County Mayo to combat literacy problems in the county

Attain the nationally recommend per capita book stock target of €3.77 by the term of this plan.

Actively pursue an inter lending agreement with third level institutions in the region

Initiate a book festival in the county during the term of this plan

Examine the feasibility of constructing teen advisory panels on book selection

Review school library service provision in the light of the removal of the School's

Library grant in 2009 with particular focus on promoting reading.

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 2

Make the Library accessible to all

Social inclusion is at the heart of the philosophy of Mayo County Library. "Access for all" is our motto in relation to all our services. Whilst an adequate book fund will insure a range and quality of stock of a high standard, if the building is unattractive or inaccessible, its use will be limited. Though the library capital programme expanded greatly during the "Celtic Tiger" years, a number of the older branches are in need of refurbishment and struggle to portray an image that is in step with modern Ireland. This plan prioritises accessibility to our services through provision of new branch libraries and refurbishment of older buildings and through making our materials and services available whenever and wherever they are required in a format that is accessible to the user. Our aim is to make our libraries vibrant and welcoming rather than silent and sombre. We will also examine the potential to create "smarter", more coherent service delivery through closer relationships with other public agencies and community groups.

All new branches should be centrally located, have accessible "shop frontage", be at least 1,500 square feet of dedicated library space and have adequate parking

Enhance the range and quality of our branches emphasising physical, social and cultural access

Ensure that all new libraries include a multipurpose space for community cultural and educational programming

Provide more informal areas where people can drink coffee and chat in larger libraries

Provide new library facilities in Swinford and Westport

Continue the expansion of the branch library network by providing service points in North West and South Mayo and in Newport.

Consolidate the branch library network by extending branches or providing new libraries at Ballyhaunis, Claremorris, Foxford and Crossmolina.

Co-operate with community groups and organisations such as Post Offices, community halls, tourist offices or shops to provide small library collections in isolated areas where none would otherwise be possible due to infrastructural deficits.

Maintain and improve the service to nursing homes in the county

Continue the programme to make our branches physically accessible through the provision of ramps, wider entrances, disability parking, signage etc.

Ensure sustainable and economic use of energy in all library premises.

Develop adult literacy programmes in conjunction with relevant organisations.

Undertake a feasibility assessment on the introduction of a lending service for those who cannot visit our service points e.g. a postage service to the house bound

Introduce free membership for all by 2014.

Target the inclusion of marginalised groups at all events

Upgrade staff facilities in branches where possible

Investigate the concept of making our smaller libraries “Boutique libraries” – rather than attempt to be a mini-version of our larger branches with a little bit of everything, they might have specially chosen stock focussed on the demand of their target community.

Use new social networking tools and digital technology to reinforce the library-book connection and to provide opportunities for our users to create content.

All library buildings to be Wifi enabled

Continue to improve accessibility to our website for people with visual difficulties

Investigate the benefits and costs of RFID (radio frequency identification) for stock management

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 3

To foster lifelong learning and access to local and global information

More than ever before people are gathering and sharing information and looking for new ways to learn. There is now an acceptance that learning does not stop once school or university has been left behind. The Government recognizes the need to use technology as a tool in the drive towards a knowledge based “smart” economy. There is also wide recognition of the need to tackle literacy problems and to bridge the digital divide.

Digitization and access to 24 hour library services are now recognized as supporting distance education and remote learning. An important development has been the introduction of library-based initiatives to support those seeking to get back into the workforce by enhancing their reading skills and IT literacy, and through self-directed learning. The FAS eLearning Initiative, which is provided in three Mayo libraries, allows library users, with the support of a dedicated facilitator, access to free online courses.

In one of the largest and most comprehensive studies ever undertaken on what influences the level of education a child will attain, researchers have discovered that getting books into a child’s home is the best way to help children succeed, above and beyond such factors as education level of the parents, the country’s GDP, the father’s occupation or the political system of the country (Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 2010) Studies also show a clear correlation between reading levels and library usage suggesting that early primary level interventions are required to combat educational disadvantage. The library service has massive potential to support and encourage learning in spite of the ending of support for the School Library Service in 2009.

Enhance support to distance learning through a 24/7 service with access to digital content such as digital books, downloadable audio books, online maps and photographs.

Expand the programme of introductory computer courses such as those provided for the elderly and through FAS.

Provide support for people who are job seeking – CV skills, IT skills, start your own business etc.

Communicate with a wide user base through innovative, cost effective online social media – Facebook, blogs, Ezines, etc.

Initiate a programme to create Podcasts of events in libraries

Develop an eBook service

Increase links to library website from relevant organisations

Review our service to primary schools provision in the light of the removal of the School’s Library grant in 2009 with a view towards integrating it into the general service while utilising its expertise in the area of literacy to target children with special needs and

those in disadvantaged areas.

This will be done by:

- Providing an advisory service for teachers and parents to include information workshops, current awareness sessions and advice
- Providing support for reading development activities in branches
- Working closer with schools to support the curriculum
- Providing a book-exchange visit service
- Develop and expand the collaborative literacy focused intervention project between Mayo County Library and the HSE West Speech & Language Therapy Service

Encourage branches to develop closer ties with local schools through curriculum and homework support

Continue to work in partnership with schools, GMIT and Mayo Education Centre

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 4

To be a centre for culture and imagination

In Mayo we have a rich and ancient culture that we must continue to preserve and foster. Mayo County Library plays a key role in the cultural life of the county. Our annual events programme comprises over 300 events including readings, exhibitions, workshops, lectures and community and arts events. The library has brought top names in the field of writing and culture to the county as part of its annual programme which includes Bealtaine, Children's Book Festival, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Heritage Week, Science Week, Library Ireland Week, the EDGE Festival in Ballina, the Rolling Sun Festival as well as numerous reading programmes for children.

The library will continue contributing to the vibrant cultural life of Mayo by:

We will ensure that our year-round cultural programme grows in range and strength.

Work with national cultural and heritage organisations to develop and co-ordinate exhibition programming.

We will continue our commitment to the Irish language and culture through:

- Developing our Gaelic language collections

- Fostering our partnership with Oifigeach na Gaeilge, Forad na Gaeilge agus Glor Mhaigh Eo
- Develop and expand the Seachtain na Gaeilge Festival.
- Include events in the Irish Language in all library programmes

Develop a structured programme of talks and lectures

Organise themed events around books e.g. cooking, gardening, hobbies.

Provide exhibition facilities and support for local community, arts and heritage bodies

Design and circulate an annual touring exhibition on aspects of Mayo Heritage

Ensure that the best artists and writers are featured in Library activities and programmes

Ensure that multi-purpose events spaces are provided in all new branches.

Create a Mayo traditional music archive in Ballina library

Continue to work with the County Arts services in specific programmes e.g. The EDGE Festival and National Poetry Day.

Participate in Music PAL, providing access to music information and materials across a range of public libraries and archive services

Collaborate with and support local history, archaeology and genealogy societies in the county.

Extend the story time programme to all full time branches

CORPORATE OBJECTION 5

To market and promote the Library and its services to maximise its potential

Marketing is crucial to the success of our service. In the library world, we have gone from an era of scarcity to abundance –books are available everywhere from charity shops to Amazon.com. Free internet and Wifi are also widely available. Our challenge is to build a distinctive brand. The best PR of all is a satisfied customer. Our strength is that we are local and we are trusted. We have strong building and IT infrastructures and a comprehensive book stock. Now we must aim to make the library the most exciting buildings in our towns:

Aim to increase library membership to 30% of the population by 2014

Aim to increase library visits by 10% by 2014

Commission a programme of non-user market research in conjunction with GMIT Business department.
Carry out annual mail-shots of information and promotional literature to every home in County Mayo, focussing on publicising permanent core services.
Provide a facility for online membership registration

Establish and maintain a regular Library News column in all Mayo newspapers

Establish and maintain a database of email addresses and mobile phone numbers of all members

Build a database of reader profiles to make “Amazon-like” recommendations.

Use the library website to promote book stock

Create a monthly email newsletter

Hold open days to promote the service.

Provide a fines amnesty and free membership on allocated days.

Hold displays in shopping centres, community centres and other busy public areas.

Initiate “Meet the neighbours” days in local organisations such as businesses and community groups.

Provide free membership by 2014.

Utilise social networking and Web2 technologies to target particular groups e.g. teenagers

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 6

To collect, preserve and make accessible the written, photographic, musical and oral culture of County Mayo

By its nature, aspects of culture can be ephemeral and easily lost amid a constantly changing economic and demographic landscape which appears solid and seemingly unchanging. However, all culture changes and evolves and becomes history which is either kept or lost. County Mayo is fortunate to have a rich collection of local historical material which is accessed by a wide audience locally as well as contributing to cultural tourism in the county. Castlebar Library is home to the single most important resource for the study of the history, archaeology, literature and culture of Mayo. Our unique local studies collection has been built up over eighty years and includes books, journals, newspapers, maps, digitised materials, microfilm and photographs. The

comprehensiveness and uniqueness of this collection is a testament to the consistent dedication of library staff from the establishment of the service.

Complete the Mayo Newspaper digitisation project

Develop a heritage column in local newspapers

Strengthen links with the Mayo diaspora through information provision, genealogy service and the creation of a diaspora heritage collection

Open the Jackie Clarke Library in Ballina in 2011

Proactively source and acquire historical documents relating to Mayo whether from private or public collections.

Strengthen links with Jackie Clarke Library to create synergies and avoid duplication of resources.

Create a county archive and develop a policy for the collection, storage and availability of archives

Maintain and expand the current photographic digitisation programme

Implement a rolling programme of digitisation of primary source local history resources

Increase funding for special collections of books, prints, maps etc of Mayo interest

Initiate a policy to encourage donations of private collections

Continue to develop a genealogy service in conjunction with other family history agencies in the county.

CORPORATE OBJECTIVE 7

To manage and develop the Library service as a learning organisation

Mayo library staff has clearly demonstrated their capacity to be innovative, flexible and imaginative in achieving service excellence. Over the period of this plan there will be a decline in staff numbers and we will have to do more with less. The key to this will be through training and development and through the use of new technologies. At the same time the health and safety of staff will remain our priority.

Continue to provide staff with appropriate training within current budgetary constraints and integrate this new knowledge into the system

Prioritise training in the areas of Health and Safety and Child Protection

Provide training to staff to allow them to keep up-to-date with and to exploit new IT developments

Agree a regular sequence of senior management meetings

Provide enhanced opportunities for annual feedback and consultative meeting with all staff.

Review staff security and safety on an ongoing basis

Adopt a Child Protection Policy for the library service.

Continue to provide staff with opportunities to experience best-practice examples of innovation in library services in Ireland and in Europe.

Implement the Performance Management Development System in the library service in conjunction with Mayo County Council policies.

Develop efficient and transparent procurement procedures to deliver a better quality service

CONCLUSION

In summary, Mayo Library service is an advanced, well used and respected service. Customer satisfaction is high with the population using the service for a myriad of purposes. Further development of Library Services within the county is therefore central to providing inclusive cultural and educational opportunities and as a force for social/cultural cohesion. As Library Services develop in the county they are poised to be a critical intervention in the cultural life of County Mayo at a time when national and local government is concerned about civic leadership and engagement, about cultural and economic development and about positive community relations and healthy sustainable communities.

The public library is trusted public resource that taps into community needs while providing access to information, knowledge, culture and learning. This plan emphasises the role of libraries as civic assets for their communities and makes them places for community activity, education and recreation giving a visible daily return on the council's investment. This plan will contribute to making Mayo libraries a responsive, relevant, flexible and valuable service which can inspire and change lives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The management of the library service sincere thanks to all those who made submissions, to our committed library staff, to the members of the r Cultural, Education, Heritage and Corporate Affairs SPC, to elected members and council management and all who have contributed to this plan.