

Introduction

This document is an overarching strategy for reader development activity with adults in public libraries in North West England. It identifies priorities for all authorities in line with *Framework For The Future*¹, the government's overall strategy for public libraries. While *Framework* provides a long-term vision over 10 years, this strategy provides clear direction for a shorter time period, at the end of which the region will be in a position to drive more advanced developments forward.

Each authority will develop its own actions to deliver these priorities, whilst scope is allowed for developing additional initiatives at local level. The strategy highlights and mainstreams the role of Time To Read, the regional adult reader development partnership, in making this vision a reality.

¹ Framework For the Future, Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade, DCMS, 2003

Contents

Why reading is important	page 1
What is the unique role of libraries in supporting reading?	page 2
How reader development can help	page 2
The role of <i>Time To Read</i>	page 3
The Strategy	page 4
Books, Reading and Learning	page 4
Digital Citizenship	page 6
Community and Civic Values	page 7
Delivering Change	page 8
Monitoring and Evaluation	page 9

1. Why reading is important.

Without reading skills people cannot engage fully in society: they cannot benefit from the whole range of new technologies and learning opportunities: it is difficult for them to find employment: and it can make life socially and culturally isolating.

- Reading exercises the muscles of the imagination creating **flexible**, lateral thinkers
- Reading helps develop a **creative** workforce
- Creativity **empowers** individuals and communities
- Reading allows people and communities to **grow** and learn
- Reading contributes to **healthy** individuals and communities
- Readers are independent **learners**
- Reading supports **literacy**
- Reading creates an audience for other cultural activities and has specific links to the **arts**
- Reading helps to support an understanding of others, of wider **social** issues and a culture of **citizenship**
- Reading is an important **partnership** base for a range of sectors including the arts, health, business and local government²

As well as being central to *Framework for the Future*, reading meets the needs of wider government and regional strategies including those listed below, and these are clearly referenced in the action plan.

- Local Government *Shared Priorities* ³
- North West Regional Development Agency *Economic Strategy*⁴
- Arts Council England, North West *Ambitions for the Arts* ⁵
- Arts Council England *Towards a Greater Diversity*⁶
- Regional Cultural Strategy⁷
- Skills for Life Strategy⁸
- Libraries For Life⁹

² The Reading Agency's advocacy tools *Public Libraries And Readers, The Evidence And Arguments* www.readingagency.org.uk

³ A Share of the Action, Local Government Association, 2004

⁴ Regional Economic Strategy 2003, North West Development Agency, 2004

⁵ Ambitions for the Arts in the North West, Arts Council England, 2004

⁶ Towards a Greater Diversity, Arts Council of England, 2002

⁷ The Cultural Strategy for England's North West, NW Cultural Consortium and NW Development Agency, 2001

⁸ Skills for Life- the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills, DFES, 2001

⁹ Libraries for Life. A regional Strategy for Libraries in the North West, Libraries North West, 2003

2. What is the unique role of libraries in supporting reading?

Libraries are welcoming community spaces in which to meet, browse, read and study. Books can be borrowed free of charge and specialist and out of print titles obtained.

Libraries offer:

- The opportunity for risk free experimentation with reading
- An open, non-commercial and friendly atmosphere
- Helpful and expert staff to guide and support reading¹⁰

They also offer:

- A wide range of opening hours
- A greater range of titles than bookshops including access to backlist material as well as current titles.
- Materials in a wide range of formats giving those people unable to access a standard printed book opportunity to enjoy the written word.

3. How reader development can help.

Reader development means active intervention to:

- increase people's confidence and enjoyment of reading
- open up reading choices
- offer opportunities for people to share their reading experience
- raise the status of reading as a creative activity¹¹

This statement created by *Opening The Book* was the first attempt at defining the purpose of this growing area of work. While these principles remain central to the purpose of reader development activity, it is important to add that reader development is now seen as central to the work that public libraries do, and not as an added extra.

Reader Development is the term used for the whole range of work that is carried out in libraries to encourage reading. Reader development is concerned both with reading for pleasure and with reading that supports lifelong learning. This strategy embraces all aspects of reader development, by addressing questions of:

- Promoting services to potential users
- Bringing readers together in groups and at events to counter social isolation and to foster reading as a shared experience
- Providing material and support for emergent readers with basic skills needs

¹⁰ also from *Public Libraries And Readers The Evidence And Arguments*

¹¹ Opening The Book Ltd www.openingthebook.com/website

- Encouraging wide reading through promotions, current information and use of reader-centred websites
- Providing excellent quality stocks including minority interest titles, new authors, classics, small-press material as well as best sellers
- The way stock is displayed to encourage browsing and borrowing
- The way buildings look and feel externally and internally, in order to entice people in and encourage them to stay
- Recruiting, training and enabling staff to engage creatively with users and potential users of the service

4. The role of *Time To Read*.

Time To Read is a partnership of people working in and with public libraries in the North West to actively promote reading. It is managed by a steering group consisting of representatives from Society of Chief Librarians NW, Arts Council England NW, Libraries NW, Museums Libraries and Archives NW and the current chair of the *Time To Read* network. All 22 authorities in the region actively support *Time To Read*. The network focuses on working with adults, though there is increasing crossover into work with families and young people.

A co-ordinator post sustains and develops cross-regional working. The *Time To Read* network meets every 2 months and has its own website www.time-to-read.co.uk.

Time To Read's business plan 2004-6 states that the network exists:

- To spread innovative ways of delivering core reading-related services
- To develop new ways of regional working
- To provide practical benefits in terms of shared costs
- To obtain new funding from outside the library sector
- To raise the profile of libraries and reading
- To spread and share passion for the pleasure and value of reading

Key benefits of the network have been improved communication and the sharing of best practice among practitioners in adult reader development work regionally. All authorities are now engaged and participate actively. In addition the network is recognised nationally as being at the forefront of good practice in developing new ways of regional working in support of national trends and offers.

5. The Strategy

This strategy follows the structure of *Framework For The Future* (F4F) and uses the same headings:

- Books, Reading and Learning
- Digital Citizenship
- Community and Civic Values
- Delivering Change

5.1 Books, Reading and Learning

Mindful of the public library services' unique role in providing free access to a wide range of reading material including out of print titles and the ability to obtain any book from anywhere:

Libraries across the North West region will:

- Ensure quality book stocks by use of appropriate mechanisms, e.g. the Stock Quality Assessment Tool pioneered by *Opening the Book* (F4F 4.1)
- Provide access to a diverse range of titles in a variety of formats by investigating the needs of minority groups e.g. visually impaired readers, readers of foreign languages (F4F 4.4, Ambitions for the Arts 10)
- Prioritise and support a range of national reading "offers" to ensure that readers have the opportunity to take part in campaigns and partnerships which are widely publicised e.g. World Book Day, media promotions, publisher promotions (F4F 4.8)
- Develop and maintain partnerships which allow reading activities to be taken out of libraries into other community-based centres and local workplaces (F4F 4.7)
- Ensure that books are promoted at all partnership activities e.g. at classes in dual-use buildings, ICT learning centres (F4F 4.13, 4.15, 4.18, 4.20, 4.23)
- Ensure that reading for pleasure is promoted at library-based learning activities such as homework centres (F4F 4.17)
- Ensure that staff have time to work with hard to reach groups bearing in mind this can be labour-intensive and reach small numbers (F4F 4.7)
- Ensure that materials which support literacy are identified, made available to readers and promoted to Basic Skills Providers (F4F 4.5, 4.24 and The Vital Link¹²)
- Provide opportunities for writers and readers to meet each other, to further develop audiences for reading and to create excitement around the written word (F4F 4.7, Arts Council¹³)

¹² Making The Vital Link. A toolkit for building successful partnerships between libraries and basic skills providers, The Reading Agency 2002

¹³ A Strategy for Children's Literature, Arts Council England, 2003

***Time To Read* will:**

- Ensure national offers and materials are promoted and interpreted to meet local needs (F4F 4.8)
- Participate in the development of national offers to ensure that the needs of the region are represented (F4F 4.8)
- Provide a minimum of one new, high quality promotional package per year, of particular relevance to the NW region (F4F 4.7, Ambitions for the Arts 16)
- Collect and disseminate information about the North West's literature sector to support creative activities in libraries (Regional Cultural strategy 4 and 5)
- Develop strong partnerships with other literature organisations to ensure the role of libraries is understood and valued (Regional Cultural strategy 5)
- Provide information and opportunities to northwest based writers to encourage contact between writers and readers (Ambitions for the Arts 4)
- Develop partnerships with other art sectors to enable creative reading projects to be initiated
(Ambitions for the Arts 12 and Regional Cultural Strategy 5)

5.2. Digital Citizenship

It is still the case that there is disparity between people who access ICT regularly and are comfortable with it, and those who are not confident computer users. Computer Literacy is recognised as a basic skills need. Encouraging people to use computers to share their love of reading can be a powerful means of overcoming fear of technology for some people. It can also be a means of accessing a wealth of knowledge, including information about books and reading and can provide opportunities for on-line reader development activities.

Libraries across the North West region will:

- Signpost information about books and reading activities on library websites (F4F 5.2)
- Develop computer literacy and access to e government by promoting reading sites and information about books to people engaged in reading activities (F4F 5.3, 5.4, Shared Priorities- improving quality of life)
- Encourage the development of interactive reading areas on library websites to provide opportunity for people to share their opinions about books and reading (F4fF5.4)
- Support the development of virtual reading groups to enable isolated readers, or those readers unable or reluctant to join groups, to share their opinions with other readers (F4F 5.1, 5.4)
- Support frontline staff in using online reader development training programmes (Opening the Book frontline training)

***Time To Read* will:**

- Share best practice and provide training to support the growing use of ICT in providing reading-based services (F4F 5.7)
- Participate in and support national programmes which use ICT to encourage dialogue about books and reading and enable participation in national reading polls (F4F 5.4)
- Maintain and continuously improve the *Time To Read* website as a tool for promoting activity in the region, sharing best practice and a source of information

5.3. Community and Civic Values

Libraries are a vital community asset accessed in static buildings as well as through mobile services and outreach activities. Increasingly library services are partnering other service providers to ensure that services are provided in appropriate locations. Libraries need to ensure that their services are relevant to everyone within the community and that they adapt to changing demand.

Libraries across the North West region will:

- Ensure that the presentation of books is attractive and pays attention to lessons from the retail sector in use of space and display materials (Opening the Book, Shared Priorities – safer and stronger communities)
- Ensure that collections of books in appropriate community languages are current and promoted and that signing in library buildings makes them visible to potential readers (F4F 6.6, 6.8)
- Ensure that collections of material that supports literacy is clearly visible and well signed (F4F 6.6, Shared Priorities- raising standards, The Vital Link, Libraries For Life)
- Support the establishment of inclusive readers groups, which cater for the needs of people with disabilities, as well as being able to respond to demand for information about the wider range of reading groups in an area (F4F 6.8, Shared Priorities- Safer & stronger communities)
- Provide collections of books which support readers groups including some literature from other cultures, as a way of increasing tolerance and understanding (Arts Council: Towards Greater Diversity)
- Encourage the development of family activities so that children and young people are encouraged to read alongside their parents and carers (Shared Priorities- improving the quality of life, Ambitions for the Arts- creative partnerships)

***Time To Read* will:**

- Support the design of creative reader-centred activities which encourage greater community participation (F4F6.8, Shared Priorities- safer & stronger communities)
- Identify opportunities for partnering family-centred activities which foster positive messages about the value of reading at all ages (Vital Link, Shared Priorities- raising standards)
- Advocate the inclusion of material which can be read for pleasure in Health Information Points and in other Health partnerships (NWRDA Economic Strategy , Shared Priorities- Healthier communities)
- Share best practice and new ideas about library design and furniture to support the modernisation of library services' image (F4F6.3)

5.4 Delivering Change

Framework For the Future acknowledges that libraries need to modernise and work in closer partnership with other services to address changing demands. Reader development is key to addressing change by placing the needs of the reader at the centre of all activity. Rather than being passive providers, libraries are actively creating new opportunities that enable people to add quality to their lives.

Libraries across the North West region will:

- Recruit staff with genuine enthusiasm for reading and ensure that reader development is reflected in job descriptions, an integral part of induction and continuous staff training (F4F 7.19, 7.21)
- Empower staff to benefit fully from participation in *Time To Read* in order to work creatively in developing new ways of encouraging reading (F4F7.23)
- Improve methods of evaluation of local reader development activities so that impact is monitored and recorded and to enable future activities to be improved. (F4F 7.13)

***Time To Read* will:**

- Act as a strong advocate for reader development activity in the northwest region (F4F7.23, 7.24)
- Provide information and advice to encourage the establishment of reader development networks in other regions (F4F 7.26)
- Carry out an annual training needs analysis and deliver regional reader development training programmes to satisfy identified demands and help improve services (F4F 7.21, Libraries For Life)
- Collate monitoring and evaluation reports from libraries and partners to deliver reports to SCL on the progress of reader development activity across the region (F4F 7.23, 7.30)
- Collect case studies and examples of best practice and pilot impact assessment of reader development activity (F4F7.23, 7.40)
- Identify new opportunities for cross-regional working in partnership with regional and national agencies (F4F 7.26)
- Organise training and provide support to ensure that staff are able to offer creative reader-centred activities (F4F 4.9, 7.23)

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Progress with the strategy will be monitored every six months via reports from Time To Read network members to the co-ordinator, who will collate local reports into a single report to SCL NW

A full report will be made to SCL NW during 2007 to enable planning for a renewal of the strategy in 2008.

Reference to progress with the strategy will be made during the annual Business Planning process, which SCL will also approve.