Cork County Library:

Age Friendly Strategy: 2018-22

Background:

Cork County Library's Age Friendly Strategy has been developed in the context of Cork County *Council's* Age Friendly Strategy 2016-21 and Cork County Library Age Friendly Policy Dec2017.

In keeping with predicted future demographic trends, the number of adults over 65 in County Cork is set to increase dramatically in the first half of the 21st Century. The strategy which the library is developing is the service's response to these demographic changes and outlines our commitment to providing an excellent service to older adults into the future.
The library service acknowledges the diversity of this demographic including as it does: retirees, homemakers, those who are actively helping to raise a third generation, those who are in the best of health as well as those who have particular requirements in terms of physical and mental health.

Cork County Council Age Friendly Strategy 2016-21

Cork County Council, the library service's parent authority, has in its age Friendly Strategy committed *"to making County Cork a great place in which to live and grow old" (P5)* The Council's strategy identifies 9 different strategic goals which will contribute to making Cork an Age Friendly county.
   These include the age-proofing of buildings , accessibility of information regarding services, the promotion of inclusiveness for the older person in all aspects of service provision and cultural life, a good quality of life on the Islands, and provision of supports for older people in their own home. These goals are very relevant to the library service.

Cork County Library Age Friendly Policy2017

Cork County Library Age Friendly Policy Dec 2017 states that the service *has always prided itself in its commitment to serving the older library user……. Serves to solidify that commitment by stating how we currently address the needs of the older adult and how we aim to ontinue to meet those needs into the future.*

Cork County Library Survey of Services to Older Adults

While library staff and service providers could be relied upon to make very close estimation of what older people want from their library service and what barriers they experience in using the service, a truly accurate picture of how we best might serve the older person could only be obtained by consulting with the service users themselves.

Working on the *Nothing for me without me* principle, our first step was to survey of needs and wants of the older person and the barriers the might encounter to using the library service.

Library Management needed to discover what was preventing or making it difficult for older people to use the library service .A number of representative areas across the County were chosen:

- Midleton, a larger urban town with a busy Branch library),
- Skibbereen, a large rural town with medium sized relatively busy full time branch.
- A variety of locations on the of the west Cork mobile route to represent our Rural Mobile Libraries.
- Kinsale, already an age friendly town, a tourist area with a very small part time library.
- Millstreet, a small rural town with a small fulltime branch.

a. **Number of respondents**

Approx 650 surveys were distributed to Library Users and non Users of which 433 were returned: 255 from Library Users,188 from Non Users.

b. **Awareness of Services**

Respondents were asked if they were aware of services including audio books, local information, free wifi, local history, e books, free online courses, book clubs, newspaper availability and special events. It was found that 39 % of Library Users and 79% of Non Users were unaware of some or all of the services listed.

c. **Barriers**

The barriers an older person experiences around using the library service can be complex and individual. These barriers are often identified in conversation rather than in a written survey. One person's bad memories of school put him "off books for life," another may have literacy difficulties; another may feel libraries "are only for children". People who are not avid readers may not be aware of the breadth of the library service, as was discovered. Many are shy or even suspicious of using a service.

The non-physical barriers are best discovered through conversation and need complex solutions involving other services for older people and much interaction with groups and organisations which represent the older person. It was decided therefore to focus on the physical barriers for the purpose of the survey as surveying about emotional or educational barriers would be somewhat intrusive, and counterproductive.

It was felt that it was of utmost importance to discover what made it difficult for older people to use the service. The lack of Parking

close to the library is a major issue for older people 30% citing it as a barrier. Accessing the library either on foot or by public transport also proved to be a major problem. The survey results also highlighted concerns about inadequate seating and lack of facilities (bathrooms) as well as opening hours in some branches.

Barriers :

	Parking	Accessibility	Seating	Opening hours	Difficulty Returning Books	Steps	Lack of Facilities	0ther
Users	25 %		6%	9.5%	9.5%	5.5%	3%	
Non Users	34.4%	17.2%	18%	8.2%	8.2%	5.7%	8.1%	

Breaking down barriers.

The physical barriers identified in the survey were perhaps not very surprising, especially to branch staff who engage with customers every working day.

While some branches are well facilitated with ample parking, the majority are not and depend on on-street parking, or nearby public car parks. In terms of accessibility, we discovered in discussion with those surveyed, that they identified the lack of transport as a barrier to library use. In many cases when a person or their partner can no longer drive, this prevents them from getting to their library, choosing their books, attending groups and activities in the library (craft groups, book clubs etc) and thereby loosing an important social outlet.

Limited opening hours was identified as a barrier where the branch was part time or where the only service was a mobile stop. In adequate seating, lack of bathroom facilities and steps were also identified as barriers to use.

The challenge to the library service is therefore to seek possible solutions to resolve the physical barriers identified. How can the library service address these barriers, within the context of budget and staff time constraints?

d. What Older People want from Library Service.

The survey gave the participants a choice of activities: educational, cultural and recreational, so that the service could discover what activities and events would attract older people.

Training and tutoring in computer use, smart phone and tablets were the top choices in the results with an average of 37.5 % choosing IT tuition.

Talks, lectures and seminars in the library also proved very popular with an average of 23.5% expressing an interest in health, retirement, cultural and lifestyle talks. Music and drama are always popular as are craft workshops. A possibility of university courses in libraries was also a popular choice with an average of 7% of participants citing them as desirable.

Wants and Needs.

	Computer and Smart Tutoring	Talks on health lifestyle, retirement	Music, Drama	Craft workshops:	University courses
Non Users	38%	26%	16%	13%	4%
Library Users	37%	21%	14%	12 %	11%

Focussing on what people want: challenge to the service.

The overall picture of the additional services that older people require can be summed up as: the service should increase the frequency and broaden the scope of the activities already provided.

Computer lessons are already provided in a few of our branches, an average of 2talks and lectures per year per branch currently take place, music and drama events take place on an ad hoc basis in the larger branches. Art and craft workshops take place in May for the Bealtaine Festival in some branches and occasionally through the year when funding allows. University lectures had not hitherto been a feature in our libraries but provision can be investigated. Funding to provide what people would like and staff time to organise them would seem to be the major issues the library is to face in delivering the full gamut of activities requested by the older person.

> It is worth noting that while comments on the staff were unsolicited by this survey, many respondents commented on the professionalism and excellence of the service they received from branch and mobile library staff.

The next step:

The survey is now complete and analysed to a certain depth: the challenge for the service now is to formulate a plan based on the information from the survey, in harmony with the Council strategy and from the experience of staff and service providers. The need to publicise the library services has been highlighted: the extent of our services is not widely known, we know that there are barriers to using the service, we know to a certain extent what people want from the service. How will the library service act on this information or more importantly is the service in a position to act given restrictions on funding and on staff time?

The library service knows what older people require, it needs to analyse its capacity to provide for those requirements over the duration of this strategy. A basic SWOT analysis is needed to define the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to the library's service to the older person.

SWOT analysis:

STRENGTHS:	WEAKNESSES:
- Trained enthusiastic staff. - Library Management totally committed to improving the service to older people. - Library staff's experience of organising events and activities. - Strong network of HQ/branches and mobiles. - Linked to Co Council Age Friendly service where the local Authority has already committed to providing an Age Friendly service. - The service has already multiple links with a variety of service providers, government departments, community groups, and voluntary services.	- Staffing levels very low and currently operating at subsistence level. - Lack of staff and management time due to multiple roles. - Lack of funding specifically allocated to promotion of service or to age friendly service. - Large number of branches and mobiles requiring activities and events. (28 branches and 4 Mobile services in 2018.)
OPPORTUNITIES:	THREATS:
- Possibility of funding via government programmes. - Multiple programmes which can overlap in delivering training and activities. - Variety of services targeted to older people already part of the library service. - The improvement of the country's economic state may bring an improvement in library funding.	- Increase in the older age population numbers means library service will be challenged to keep up with their needs. - Other services will take part of the library role if the service can't develop to fulfil the needs. - Reduction in staff numbers or increase in self service will reduce the sociability factor of the service. - High cost of quality cultural activities.

Building a strategy:

The SWOT analysis would suggest that the factors in the library service's favour: quality staff, management commitment, good communication network, support from County Council are challenged mainly by the low staff numbers and lack of allocated funding for service delivery to the older person. These challenges act as restraints but by no means as brakes to the library's delivery of service strategy for the older person. We form our strategy in the context of the overall Council Strategy (*Cork County Council Age Friendly Strategy 2016-21*) and in the context of the library Age Friendly policy 2017 and we prioritise certain actions and activities which form the library's 4 to 5 year strategy for serving the older person better.

Priority 1: Raising Awareness.
 The Library service seeks to inform and consult with the public on an ongoing basis. Cork County Council regards keeping the older person informed as a basic pillar of its AF strategy and in this context and in the context of less than 30% of non library users bring aware of the services offered , promoting the library through every means possible will be a priority. Currently Cork County Library has made strong links with the Older People's Council and with a variety of age focussed groups and societies. The Council's communication service and the 2018 training of library staff in basic promotion skills all help increase the scope of service promotion. Furthermore, the service is building a contact list from those who requested contact at survey time, and from those who request notification of events from their local branch, this is a constant reminder of the services the library offers,
It is, however a work in progress and will take many and varied means to inform the public about the service and about specific events. We will constantly seek improved ways to inform the older person about the library service.

Priority 2: **Transport and parking**
Before the survey was even distributed, library staff in different branches identified lack of parking and lack of transport to the library as being huge barriers to older people.
"If there were one age friendly parking space near the library, it would help."
"Mrs M doesn't come to book club anymore because she no longer drives and her daughter works on Tuesdays"

"We haven't seen Frank since he broke his hip**"**

These are common stories in branch libraries as proved by the amount of accessibility and parking issues raised in the library survey.
The library service is well placed to lobby and liaise with colleagues in the general Council to request that age friendly parking spaces be located near the library in each town.
The possibility of liaising with rural transport providers, adding a small number of service points to some mobile library routes may also be investigated.

Priority 3: Age proofing the collection.
Given the projected increase in the percentage of the older age group population, it is vital that the library service's collection both physical and electronic reflect possible additional needs of this demographic. This will include broadening the selection of audio and audio eBooks, large print books, and DVD's. The bibliographic staff will be alert to improvements in format that increase ease of access in terms of vision and manipulation. For example new formats of audio books are now delivered on one CD instead of multiples making them less challenging for people with vision or dexterity issues.

Priority 4: **Age-proofing buildings**
Again in reference to Cork County Council's Older Person's strategy the library service must look to ways of eliminating barriers

if possible and age proofing our buildings. This was borne out by the findings of the Library's Age Friendly Survey where steps and seating were counted among the barriers. While all our branches are mainly disability friendly many would benefit from extra investment: some libraries need the addition of public toilets , some library doors are heavy and difficult to open or shut, very few are actually automatic. Library management will be mindful to replace any old furniture or fittings with age friendly items. Most of these improvements will require additional funding and library management can only commit to requesting these resources.

Priority 5: Answering needs: Education and learning:
Given the high proportion of older people who expressed an interest in acquiring computer and smart technology skills, attending talks and seminars and in doing university courses, it behoves the library service to seek out ways in which these needs may be met. To do this in a most economic way possible and to avoid overstepping the library role, the best and most efficient way of answering this need is by actively seeking partners in the fields of voluntary and government sectors. Organisations such as Age Action, development agencies, the health sector, mental health promotion groups, colleges and cultural groups are all possible partners in bringing a variety of tuition and courses to our libraries. The library also is committed investigating the hosting of a variety of university and third level lectures or workshops and look into the possibility of hosting a third level course.

Priority 6: Culture and enjoyment:
The Bealtaine festival celebrates creativity in the older person and Cork County Library has always celebrated with a varied programme of music, drama art and craft. These activities are popular as borne out by the survey with a high demand for more creative activities. The library will seek ways to bring more culture and creativity to the libraries, through its book clubs, craft groups, art clubs and also by partnering with programmes such as Creative Ireland, or liaising with local arts festival.

Conclusion:

The population of older people is set to grow radically in the first half of the 21st Century, all organisations, government bodies and service providers should plan for this dramatic demographic change. Cork County Council has developed a plan in its Age Friendly Strategy 2018-22; Cork County Library committed itself to the service of the older person in its Age Friendly Policy 2017. This document: Cork County Library's Age Friendly Strategy has been developed in the context of Local Authority Policy and in response to the outcomes of the library's age friendly surveys and informal submissions from staff and service providers.

To successfully implement our Age Friendly Strategy, the library service seeks to age proof its buildings its collection and its service and to present a broad range of programmes, activities and events which are a vital ingredient in the older person's pursuit of lifelong learning, self development and cultural enjoyment.

Cork County Council is committed to supporting those older people who live at home; the mobile library serves rural areas including those who are housebound, while the branch library network provides a vast range of cultural and educational services which enhances the life of the older person.

While many of the library service's goals and ambitions are dependent on increased staffing and funding, a high proportion depends on staff commitment and goodwill and the strong relationships the library builds with its national, organisational and community partners. Implementation of older person's strategy will require a lot of hard work and input from library management and staff, but it will also look for commitment from the Council, from funders and from a variety of partners.

In time we hope to investigate deeper into those emotional, educational and social barriers mentioned earlier and look closer at the possibility of a solution.

The library service looks forward to an enriched future of serving all its community especially those in the older bracket and hopes that the library services will enrich more and more lives in this age group in the years ahead.

This strategy was adopted at the Cork County Library Committee meeting on 28/05/2018