



Libraries for Living: **Creative and Healthy Places for** **Education, Learning and Inspiration**

A Strategic Plan for London Libraries 2026-2029

Version 4 - March 2026

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Executive Summary

London's 33 library services are embarking on an ambitious three-year strategic journey under the banner **Libraries for Living**. This plan represents a shift in how we articulate our work: distinguishing between **promises** (the excellent services we already deliver and want to amplify) and **priorities** (areas requiring development, investment, and new approaches).

Over 2026-2029, London Libraries will work as one region, **One London Voice**, making a city-wide commitment to three core priorities that ensure libraries remain vital to the lives of all Londoners. This strategy positions London Libraries as a regional leader, addressing gaps in joined-up strategic thinking across the wider libraries sector, while demonstrating clear alignment with local authority, Greater London Authority (GLA), and national policy frameworks.

Our Three Core Priorities:

- 1. One London Voice: Regional Collaboration Delivering Excellence Locally** - Working together to ensure we remain relevant to our communities and provide services that are vital to everyone's lives
- 2. A Skilled, Confident and Representative Workforce** - Building the workforce whose expertise makes everything else deliverable
- 3. Evidence, Insight and Advocacy** - Gathering evidence regionally and locally, providing insight, speaking with a compelling and unified voice to the decision-makers.

Within Priority One, we make three foundational **promises** to Londoners, backed by coordinated campaigns and shared resources across all 33 London library services.

We promise to be London's trusted gateway to information and digital confidence. Every Londoner will be able to access devices, connectivity, trusted information, and step-by-step support to build the digital and AI skills they need to navigate daily life and public services.

We promise to be a gateway to stories, reading, culture and creativity throughout life. From early years to older age, people in every borough will be able to discover books, ideas, cultural experiences and creative opportunities that reflect London's diversity and are free at the point of use.

We promise to be vital civic and social spaces where everyone belongs. Libraries across London will offer safe, welcoming places to connect with others, find support, and take part in community and civic life, helping to reduce isolation, improve wellbeing, and strengthen local communities.

Foreword

To be added - potential contributors: Fiona Tarn (London Libraries Chair), supportive council leader, or library champion

Libraries have long been essential community spaces at the heart of their neighbourhoods. Examples of excellence and outstanding service can be found throughout London, and the strength of the London Libraries network demonstrates that we believe "together we are stronger than the sum of our parts."

This strategic plan charts our course for the next three years, grounded in what we already do brilliantly while identifying where we need to grow, invest, and advocate. It reflects extensive consultation with library leaders, staff, partners, and stakeholders, and responds to the contemporary challenges facing Londoners: digital exclusion, literacy gaps, social isolation, cost-of-living pressures, and the need for trusted civic spaces.

The "Libraries for Living" framework is our commitment to every Londoner that their local library will be there for them - as a gateway to digital confidence, a cultural hub for reading and creativity, and a vital civic space promoting health, connection, and belonging.

Introduction: Why Libraries for Living?

The London Context

London's public libraries serve one of the world's most diverse, dynamic, and unequal cities. London's 33 library services welcome millions of visitors annually, providing free access to:

- Books, e-books, audiobooks, and digital resources in many languages
- Public computers, Wi-Fi, and assisted digital support
- Safe, warm, welcoming spaces for all ages
- Cultural events, author talks, and creative activities
- Health information, social connections, and community support
- Learning opportunities from early years to older adults.

Yet libraries face persistent challenges: funding pressures, workforce capacity constraints, fragmented regional and national support, and outdated public perceptions. At the same time, demand for library services has never been more acute, with residents navigating digital-first public services, cost-of-living crises, and increasing social isolation. London's public libraries welcomed over 32 million physical visitors and recorded more than 31 million loans in 2023/24, with more than one million active users across the capital, underlining how essential they are to everyday life.

Despite multiple national library organisations, there is limited strategic coordination or unified voice. A February 2026 DCMS roundtable on "Libraries in 2050" highlighted this fragmentation, with participants noting the absence of joined-up priorities at a national level.

London Libraries is uniquely positioned to provide leadership. As a regional network with a strong collaborative culture, we can demonstrate what coordinated strategic action looks like - creating a model that addresses gaps nationally while responding to London's specific social and economic needs.

Providing a Strategic Framework for London Libraries: Promises and Priorities

This plan introduces a key distinction within its framework:

Promises are commitments to Londoners about services we already deliver and want to amplify - our "badge of excellence" showcasing universal offers across all 33 library services. Promises are *sector-facing*: they tell residents what they can expect when they walk into any London library.

Priorities are strategic development areas requiring investment, partnership, and systemic change - internal capacity-building and external advocacy that make our promises sustainable and effective. Priorities are *system-facing*: they address workforce development, evidence-building, and advocacy to funders and policymakers.

This framework acknowledges that libraries simultaneously deliver excellent services *and* need support to do so sustainably. We celebrate our strengths while being honest about what we need to thrive.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

Libraries for Living: Creative and Healthy Places for Education, Learning and Inspiration

Every Londoner, regardless of background or borough, can access excellent library services that support their digital confidence, reading and literacy, health and wellbeing, social connection, and civic participation throughout their lives.

Mission

London Libraries will work collaboratively across 33 library services to:

- Deliver universal, high-quality services that all Londoners can depend on
- Build a skilled, diverse, and confident workforce equipped for 21st century challenges
- Generate compelling evidence of library impact and advocate effectively to secure sustainable investment
- Position libraries as essential civic infrastructure embedded in local authority priorities and regional policy frameworks.

Values

- **Excellence** - Celebrating and amplifying outstanding practice across London
- **Equity** - Explicit focus on reaching vulnerable and under-served populations
- **Collaboration** - Stronger together than the sum of our parts
- **Trust** - Libraries as trusted sources of information, support, and human connection
- **Representation** - Reflecting and celebrating London's extraordinary diversity
- **Sustainability** - Building approaches that can be maintained with realistic resources.



Strategic Priority 1: One London Voice - Regional Collaboration

Delivering Excellence Locally

Purpose

To provide regional collaboration delivering excellence locally, ensuring we remain relevant to our communities, and providing services that are vital to their lives. To fulfil this priority, we make three foundational **promises** to Londoners, backed by coordinated campaigns, shared resources, and a commitment to ensuring equal opportunities across all boroughs.

Promise 1: London Libraries as a Gateway to Cultural London - Reading, Literacy and Cultural Participation Throughout Life Without Barriers

Our Promise to Londoners

We promise to be your gateway to stories, information, creativity, and cultural life. All Londoners, at every life stage, can participate in reading, culture, and creativity within their communities without financial, or any other barriers. We offer high-quality cultural performances, films, events, and opportunities to develop creative skills and pathways into creative and cultural industries.

Purpose

To make reading and literacy visible cornerstones of London Libraries' work, improving life chances, wellbeing, and belonging. Position libraries as cultural hubs where every community can access creative participation, celebrate diverse stories, and develop skills that open doors.

What We All Offer: Universal Baseline

Every London library provides:

- Free access to diverse physical and digital collections (books, e-books, audiobooks, magazines, graphic novels, comics, manga)
- Collections reflecting London's extraordinary linguistic and cultural diversity
- At least one ongoing reading or cultural group/activity (under-5s story time, reading groups, cultural events)
- Support accessing digital reading platforms with clear guidance and assistance
- Quiet study spaces and areas designed for children and young people
- Free Wi-Fi and public computers supporting learning and creative work.

What Some of Us Offer: Enhanced Provision

Selected libraries across London provide some, or all of the following:

- Life-stage reading pathways: targeted offers for early years, primary (5-11), teenagers (13-19), adults with low literacy, and ESOL learners

- Author events, literary festivals, and cultural performances
- Creative skills workshops (writing, digital storytelling, filmmaking, music)
- Partnerships with schools, colleges, and cultural organisations
- Programmes celebrating local authors, communities, and stories
- Specialised support for teenagers and young adults (often under-served)
- Multilingual storytelling and ESOL-integrated reading programmes.

What We Could All Offer: Our Aspirational Regional Programme

With coordinated investment, all London libraries could provide:

- Unified **Read London** brand and campaign calendar across all 33 library services
- City-wide initiatives showcasing London's diverse authors, stories, and communities
- Cross-borough author visits and cultural events reducing individual borough costs
- Targeted programming for teenagers (13-19) co-designed with young people
- Integration with schools and colleges supporting reading, literacy, and creative skills development
- Coordinated participation in national campaigns (adapted for London context)
- Partnerships with literacy sector organisations avoiding over-reliance on any single provider.

Key Audiences

Children and young people (especially teenagers 13-19); families with young children; adults with low literacy or ESOL; schools, colleges, and education providers; arts and cultural partners; reading and literacy sector organisations; local communities seeking cultural participation.

Outcomes

Children, young people, and adults describe libraries as places that help them enjoy stories and build reading confidence. More teenagers and young adults regularly use library spaces, collections, and programmes. Adults with low literacy and ESOL learners report increased confidence and progression. Use of multilingual, diverse, and inclusive reading materials increases. Schools, colleges, and cultural partners routinely involve libraries in their plans.

Measures of Success

Reading confidence and progression measures; reach to teenagers and young adults; engagement with multilingual and diverse collections; library visits and programme attendance by age group; literacy and ESOL progression outcomes.

Promise 2: Digital Inclusion, Information and AI Confidence for All

Our Promise to Londoners

We promise to be London's trusted gateway to information and digital confidence. Every Londoner can access devices, connectivity, trusted information, and step-by-step skills development at their local library, with specialist support where available. We help you cross the digital divide, and participate fully in civic, economic, and cultural life.

Purpose

To position London's libraries as trusted, hyper-local essential infrastructure that help Londoners navigate digital-first public services, develop essential digital skills, and confidently engage with emerging technologies including artificial intelligence.

What We All Offer: Universal Baseline

Every London library provides:

- Free access to public computers, charging points, and high-speed Wi-Fi
- E-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines accessible with library membership
- Assisted digital support with online public services (benefits, housing, health appointments, immigration)
- Basic digital skills sessions covering "getting started online"
- Trusted information and signposting to local and national digital support services
- Staff trained in foundational digital support relevant to their community's needs.

What Some of Us Offer: Enhanced Provision

Selected libraries across London provide some, or all of the following:

- Specialist digital hubs with advanced equipment (AI confidence labs, gaming spaces, creative technology)
- Tiered digital skills pathways: from basic online navigation to work-ready skills, creative digital tools, and AI literacy
- Device lending schemes (laptops, tablets, mobile Wi-Fi) and in the medium to long term, looking to support device redistribution schemes
- Data sims and connectivity support for digitally excluded households
- Partnership programmes with tech companies, universities, and skills providers
- Information literacy and misinformation workshops.

What We Could All Offer: Our Aspirational Regional Programme

With coordinated investment, all London libraries could provide:

- Consistent device lending and data sim programmes following agreed London-wide protocols and in the medium to long term, looking to support device redistribution schemes
- AI confidence sessions helping residents understand everyday AI use, ethics, and risks
- Digital support charter guaranteeing minimum assisted-digital offer in every borough

- Pan-London digital coordinator role to curate partnerships and reduce duplication
- Registration as device and data banks with national digital inclusion programmes
- Tech hubs developed in partnership with RNIB for accessible technology support.

Key Audiences

Residents facing digital exclusion; people navigating online public services; job seekers and learners; local authorities; GLA digital programmes; Government Digital Inclusion Action Plan stakeholders; corporate and tech partners aligned with library values.

Outcomes

More Londoners report confident use of the internet, online services, and everyday AI tools, with particular improvements among those currently least confident. Residents who are digitally excluded know libraries as the first place to go for trusted support. Library staff feel equipped to handle a wide range of digital queries. People at greatest risk of exclusion regularly use libraries to resolve practical issues. Key partners recognise libraries as core delivery infrastructure within London's digital inclusion ecosystem.

Measures of Success

Digital confidence indicators for residents and staff; volume and reach of assisted-digital interactions; engagement by vulnerable and under-served groups; partnership referrals from agencies and local authority teams.

Promise 3: Libraries as Vital Civic and Social Spaces - Health, Connection, and Belonging Throughout Life

Our Promise to Londoners

We promise to be vital civic and social spaces where everyone belongs. London's libraries are safe, inclusive, culturally rich spaces that support health, social connection, representation, and democratic participation for all our diverse communities. We provide warm and welcoming spaces, social and cultural activities, health information and navigation, and targeted support to communities under most pressure.

Purpose

To position London's libraries as essential civic and social infrastructure, offering welcoming spaces that support health, reduce isolation, strengthen community cohesion, and promote democratic participation - particularly for those facing inequality, hardship, or exclusion.

What We All Offer: Universal Baseline

Every London library provides:

- Warm (winter) and cool (summer) welcoming spaces accessible to all
- Free access to facilities: Wi-Fi, public computers, charging, toilets
- Quiet study areas and dedicated children's and youth spaces

- At least one ongoing social or cultural group/activity fostering connection
- Basic health and benefits information, signposting, and navigation support
- Safe, inclusive space principles with trained, supportive staff
- Volunteering opportunities supporting community participation.

What Some of Us Offer: Enhanced Provision

Selected libraries across London provide some, or all of the following:

- Mental health support programmes and health literacy initiatives
- Trauma-informed practice with staff trained in safeguarding and mental health first aid
- Cultural and creative programmes in partnership with arts organisations
- Social prescribing partnerships with health providers and Integrated Care Systems
- Targeted interventions for priority groups (people experiencing homelessness, new arrivals and migrants, carers, older adults)
- Libraries of Sanctuary status supporting refugees and asylum seekers
- Democratic literacy and civic participation programmes (voter registration, community engagement)

What We Could All Offer: Our Aspirational Regional Programme

With coordinated investment, all London libraries could provide:

- Comprehensive "Libraries for Living" tiered offer clearly articulated to councillors, planners, and health partners
- Shared social value and economic modelling tools demonstrating library impact on health, wellbeing, and community cohesion
- Cross-borough resource-sharing for facilitators, creative practitioners, and training (reducing duplication and costs)
- Staff supervision and peer support for health and wellbeing work preventing burnout
- Co-located services with health, family hubs, and community partners
- Environmental wellbeing activities aligned with climate action and sustainability agendas
- Libraries embedded in capital investment frameworks and planning obligations (S106) as essential social infrastructure

Key Audiences

Residents experiencing cost-of-living pressures, social isolation, and health inequalities; people facing homelessness, new arrivals and migrants, carers, older adults; Directors of Public Health and Integrated Care Systems; councillors, planners, and housing bodies; civil society and cultural partners.

Outcomes

Libraries are widely recognised as accessible cultural and creative spaces. Residents see their local library as a safe, welcoming place where they can connect, get support, and feel they belong. People experiencing hardship report that libraries help them cope and access further support. Health and community partners actively refer people into library-based activities. Libraries evidence contributions to reduced isolation, improved wellbeing, and stronger community cohesion. Councillors, planners, and public health leaders treat Libraries for Living as essential local infrastructure.

Measures of Success

Reach to vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations; health and wellbeing outcomes (loneliness reduction, sense of belonging); use of warm and cool spaces; civic participation indicators; social prescribing referrals and outcomes; staff and volunteer training completion rates.

Our Plan for Upholding Our Promises: Advocacy to Residents and Communities

To bring our promises to life, London Libraries will develop coordinated campaigns that are visible across all 33 London library services. These campaigns will amplify our unified voice and help Londoners understand what their libraries offer.

Proposed London Libraries Poster Campaign Series

A coordinated and designed London-wide visual campaign promoting universal library services, deployed simultaneously across all boroughs, transport hubs, community venues, and social media platforms. Each poster features:

- Unified London Libraries branding
- Clear, compelling messaging in accessible language
- QR code linking to "Find Your Library" map and borough-specific information
- Multilingual versions reflecting London's diversity.

Campaign Themes

- *Volunteer at the Library* - Highlighting opportunities to give back and build skills
- *Explore gateways to reading, culture and creativity* – Showcasing libraries as doors into books, stories, ideas and experiences that connect every Londoner with the city's cultural and creative life.
- *Get Creative at the Library* - Celebrating cultural participation, creativity and reading
- *Make New Friends at the Library* - Promoting social connection and group activities
- *Learn at the Library* - Unlocking skills, and sparking curiosity for lifelong learning
- *Download Your Library* - Making digital collections visible and accessible
- *Go Digital at the Library* - Emphasising digital skills support and AI confidence

Implementation Approach

- Professional design required (manageable budget, potential GLA project funding)
- Launched in waves throughout 2026-2027
- Supported by coordinated social media campaign
- Multilingual versions reflecting London's diversity
- Aligned with potential GLA funding opportunities
- Adapted for transport advertising (Transport for London partnership opportunity)
- Co-branded with boroughs for local ownership while maintaining London-wide coherence
- Requires buy-in from all 33 library services for maximum impact

Connecting to National Context

While London Libraries campaigns are London-specific, they align with and complement:

- Universal Library Offers (national framework)
- National Year of Reading 2026
- Libraries Connected strategy and sector initiatives
- Arts Council England place-based programmes.

Strategic Priority 2: A Skilled, Confident, and Representative Workforce

Purpose

To ensure our workforce is central to our promises and underpins our aspirations. We commit to building and sustaining a diverse, confident, and future-ready workforce whose skills, creativity, and professional identity make our promises deliverable - and whose expertise is clearly visible to policymakers and the public.

Why Workforce is a Strategic Priority

Library staff are much more than service deliverers; they are trusted information professionals, digital inclusion champions, community builders, and cultural curators. Yet workforce development is often under-resourced, fragmented across 33 separate authorities, and vulnerable to cuts during financial pressures.

Current challenges:

- Limited training budgets in many boroughs
- Fragmented professional development opportunities
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled staff
- Workforce does not fully reflect London's diversity, particularly in leadership
- Staff and volunteers carrying complex community work (digital exclusion, mental health, homelessness) without adequate training or supervision
- Professional identity under-valued by some local authority leaders.

Strategic response: A coordinated London-wide approach reduces duplication, pools resources, creates communities of practice, and elevates the profession's visibility.

Key Offer

London Libraries will pursue a phased, realistic workforce and leadership strategy delivered through three interconnected strands: shared training and development, communities of practice, and cross-borough roles and coordination.

Core Components

London Training and Leadership Framework

Level 1: Core Induction and Mandatory Training

Essential for all library staff:

- Customer service and user engagement

- Safeguarding and duty of care
- Health and safety
- Core library skills (collections, cataloguing, reference)
- Inclusion, diversity, and belonging
- Data protection and information governance.

Level 2: Specialist Pathways

Targeted training for staff and volunteers delivering priority services:

- Digital literacy and AI confidence (supporting Promise 1)
- Reading and literacy development (supporting Promise 2)
- Health, wellbeing, and trauma-informed practice (supporting Promise 3)
- Cultural programming and creative practice
- Data, evidence, and impact measurement
- Community engagement and complex community work.

Level 3: Advanced CPD and Leadership

Professional development for career progression:

- Mental health and trauma-informed practice (advanced)
- Specialist subject expertise
- Strategic leadership and service design
- Mentoring and people development
- Advocacy and influencing skills.

Cross-London Learning and Development Programmes

- Regularly programmed training sessions on rotating topics (monthly or quarterly)
- Online e-learning platform with recorded content (partnership with CILIP and sector training bodies)
- Cross-authority communities of practice connecting staff working on similar challenges (digital, reading, health, culture, data)
- Train-the-trainer cascade models increasing impact through shared learning
- Peer mentoring schemes pairing junior staff with experienced librarians
- Bursaries or protected time for professional qualifications (e.g., CILIP chartership)
- Structured induction pathways for early-career professionals reducing barriers to entry.

Inclusion and Representation

- Recruitment and progression practices that mirror London's communities
- Support for early-career staff and those from under-represented backgrounds
- Leadership development pathways for frontline and middle managers
- Celebration of diverse career pathways (frontline, management, specialist roles)
- Addressing barriers to progression faced by part-time, lower-paid, and minoritised staff.

Enabling Conditions

For workforce investment to succeed, we need:

- Advocacy for permanent, development-oriented contracts (not short-term fixed contracts undermining retention)
- Protection of time for training and CPD (resist over-loading with compliance tasks)
- Senior leadership bandwidth for mentoring and supporting the tier below
- Multi-year, adequately funded training investment (secured through GLA, councils, external funders)
- Refreshed professional narrative linking library work to sector ambitions on literacy, health, digital inclusion, and social justice.

Key Audiences

Library staff and leaders across all 33 boroughs; GLA skills and talent programmes; CILIP and sector professional development bodies; local authority HR teams; potential funders for workforce investment.

Outcomes

Library staff feel valued, well-trained, and clear about their professional role. Frontline workers across London including volunteers have regular access to high-quality training, peer learning, and mentoring, with clear pathways for progression. The workforce at all levels more closely reflects the diversity of London's communities. Early-career staff are more likely to stay in the sector. Boroughs and partners recognise London Libraries staff as skilled public service professionals.

Measures of Success

Training completion rates and uptake; staff and volunteer confidence in priority areas; cross-London peer learning participation; retention and progression of early-career staff; diversity of workforce (ethnicity, gender, age, disability); staff satisfaction and sense of belonging; leadership pipeline development.

Strategic Priority 3: Evidence, Insight and Advocacy - One London Voice

Purpose

To create a light-touch, but evidence-based storytelling framework that enables London Libraries to speak with a compelling and unified voice explaining their value, influencing policy and funding decisions, advocating effectively to government and funders, and avoiding duplication of effort across 33 separate services.

Why Evidence and Advocacy are Strategic Priorities

Excellent service delivery is not enough. If libraries cannot demonstrate impact, align with policy priorities, and advocate compellingly for investment, services become vulnerable during funding cuts. Currently, each borough generates its own data and impact stories, resulting in:

- Inconsistent metrics making pan-London claims difficult
- Duplication of effort (multiple separate impact reports)
- Missed opportunities to speak with unified voice to GLA, DCMS, ACE and other funders and policy-makers
- Limited capacity to hold government accountable for supporting libraries
- Fragmented relationships with national stakeholders.

Strategic response: A coordinated London approach creates economies of scale, amplifies impact, and positions London Libraries as a credible regional leader - potentially modelling approaches for other regions and informing national policy.

Key Offer

London Libraries will develop a small, but useful set of shared indicators, tools, and stories to speak with one compelling voice to GLA, Transport for London, DCMS, Arts Council England, health partners, boroughs, and funders. This includes both evidence infrastructure (data, measurement, evaluation) and advocacy strategy (narrative, campaigns, stakeholder engagement).

Evidence and Insight Components

Shared Indicator Set

A concise, shared set of indicators aligned to the three promises and two additional priorities:

- **Digital Inclusion:** Digital reach, confidence levels, assisted-digital engagements, vulnerable population access
- **Reading and Cultural Participation:** Reading progression, reach to teenagers and ESOL learners, cultural participation rates
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Loneliness reduction, sense of belonging, reach to isolated populations, social prescribing referrals
- **Workforce:** Training completion, staff and volunteer confidence, diversity and representation, retention rates

- **Civic Engagement:** Volunteering, democratic participation, community group formation and engagement.

Simple, Pragmatic Impact Framework

Building on existing methodologies from organisations such as Transport for London, GLA, and sector bodies:

- Green Book-compliant social value tools (Social Return on Investment or alternatives better suited to libraries)
- Data governance and consistent counting guidance supporting fair benchmarking
- Audits ensuring data quality and comparability
- Explicit inclusion of reach to vulnerable and under-served populations (not just traditional usage metrics)
- Mixed-method evaluation combining quantitative data with qualitative stories and case studies.

Data and Analytics Infrastructure

- Unified pan-London data dashboard collating information from all 33 boroughs
- Enables benchmarking and comparison while respecting local variation
- Includes qualitative stories and case studies, not just numbers
- Accessible to staff, councils, GLA, funders, and public
- Clear roles and responsibilities for data submission, checking, and quality assurance
- Training and support for consistent counting across boroughs
- Feedback loops so data drives service improvement, not just compliance.

Advocacy and Narrative Components

Shared Advocacy Campaigns and Messaging

- Case-study bank and impact stories for bids and business cases
- Coordination of statistical responses and messaging on key policy areas
- Joint advocacy with Transport for London (GLA), sector bodies, and partners
- Annual public reporting on progress toward priorities
- Tailored versions of strategy for different audiences (DCMS version, GLA version, LA version, public version).

External Advocacy: Speaking with One London Voice

A coordinated external advocacy strategy targeting key stakeholders with tailored messaging:

National Level Stakeholders:

Stakeholder	Our Ask and Narrative
DCMS (Department for Culture, Media & Sport)	Clear articulation of what London Libraries needs from national government: investment in digital infrastructure (precedent: People's Network), cross-departmental advocacy (libraries deliver health, education, skills, digital agendas), recognition of libraries as essential civic infrastructure.
Arts Council England	Libraries as place-based cultural infrastructure delivering ACE priorities (cultural participation, diversity, community engagement); potential funding partnerships for cultural programming and capacity-building.
Libraries Connected	Alignment with national strategy while demonstrating regional leadership; sharing London model as potential framework for other regions; contributing to national sector voice
CILIP	Professional development partnerships; workforce advocacy; public library sector support and visibility

Regional Level Stakeholders:

Stakeholder	Our Ask and Narrative
Greater London Authority (GLA)	Demonstration of alignment with GLA missions (digital inclusion, skills, health equity, cultural participation, climate action); requests for project-specific funding and multi-year investment in coordinated programmes; positioning libraries as delivery infrastructure for GLA priorities
Transport for London	Partnership opportunities (poster campaigns, digital inclusion, accessibility programmes); potential funding for library-based community hubs in transport deserts
London Councils	Advocacy for protecting library budgets; shared services and economies of scale; positioning libraries as delivering cross-cutting local authority priorities

Conclusion: One London Voice for London's Future

London's 33 library services stand at a pivotal moment. Demand for what libraries offer has never been greater - yet funding, workforce capacity, and public understanding of libraries' contemporary relevance remain fragile. This strategic plan is our collective response.

Libraries for Living is more than a strategy document. It is a commitment to every Londoner that their library will be there for them - as a trusted gateway to digital confidence, a cultural hub for reading and creativity, and a vital civic space where everyone belongs.

It is a commitment to our workforce - that we will invest in their skills, celebrate their expertise, and support their professional development so they can deliver excellent services sustainably.

And it is a commitment to regional and national leadership - demonstrating what coordinated, evidence-based, equity-focused strategic action looks like in a fragmented national landscape.

Our Ask

To deliver this vision, we need:

- **From national government (DCMS and beyond):** Recognition of libraries as essential civic infrastructure delivering cross-cutting government priorities; investment in digital infrastructure at scale (as with the People's Network); cross-departmental advocacy connecting library value to health, education, skills, and digital agendas
- **From the GLA and London stakeholders:** Multi-year funding for coordinated programmes; recognition of libraries as core delivery infrastructure for GLA missions; partnership on transport, digital inclusion, skills, and cultural participation initiatives
- **From Arts Council England:** Support for libraries as place-based cultural infrastructure; capacity-building funding; integration into cultural strategy and funding frameworks
- **From local authorities:** Sustained core funding recognising libraries' strategic value; protection of workforce capacity and development investment; embedding libraries in capital investment, planning, and health partnerships
- **From health and social care partners:** Recognition of libraries as preventative health infrastructure; social prescribing partnerships; investment in health literacy and wellbeing programmes
- **From library staff and leaders:** Active participation in training, communities of practice, and shared programmes; commitment to data collection and impact measurement; willingness to try new approaches

Our Promise

In return, London Libraries commits to:

- Speaking with one compelling, evidence-based voice to funders and policymakers
- Demonstrating clear impact on digital inclusion, reading, health, community cohesion, and civic participation

- Building a skilled, diverse, confident workforce delivering excellence across all 33 boroughs
- Positioning London as a regional leader, modelling strategic approaches for the national library sector
- Remaining accountable, transparent, and responsive to the communities we serve

Looking Ahead

Over the next three years (2026-2029), we will transform how London's libraries work together, how we articulate our value, and how we advocate for the investment libraries deserve. We will move from fragmented individual borough efforts to coordinated regional action - stronger together than the sum of our parts.

This is not about uniformity. London's diversity is its strength, and each borough will continue to tailor services to local needs. But we will share infrastructure, pool resources, learn from each other, and speak with a unified voice when it matters most.

Libraries for Living is our commitment to Londoners, our workforce, and our sector. Together, we will ensure that London's libraries remain creative and healthy places for education, learning, and inspiration - now and for generations to come.

Appendices



Libraries for Living: Creative and Healthy Places for Education, Learning and Inspiration

A Strategic Plan for London Libraries 2026-2029

Version 4 - March 2026

Appendix 1 - Strategic Priorities Mapping Matrix

This matrix demonstrates how London Libraries' three strategic priorities and three promises align with the objectives of key stakeholders: DCMS, Libraries Connected, Arts Council England, the Greater London Authority, and common local authority priorities. This matrix can help to quickly demonstrate strategic alignment when making funding bids, advocacy cases, or reporting to leadership.

How to Use This Matrix

- For funding bids: Highlight the alignment points most relevant to the funder's priorities (e.g., when applying to GLA, emphasize GLA column alignments).
- For advocacy materials: Use specific language from stakeholder columns to demonstrate how London Libraries deliver its objectives.
- For council reporting: Show leadership how library priorities directly support corporate priorities in the Local Authority column.
- For national engagement: Reference DCMS and Libraries Connected alignments to position London as regional leader contributing to national strategy.

London Libraries: Our Three Priorities and Three Promises		
Priority 1: One London Voice - Regional Collaboration Delivering Excellence Locally Regional collaboration delivering excellence locally, ensuring we remain relevant and vital to communities through coordinated campaigns and shared resources.	Priority 2: A Skilled, Confident and Representative Workforce Building a diverse, confident, future-ready workforce whose skills, creativity and professional identity make our promises deliverable.	Priority 3: Evidence, Insight and Advocacy Gathering evidence regionally and locally, providing insight, and bringing libraries to decision-makers' table with unified voice.
Promise 1: Digital Inclusion, Information and AI Confidence for All Trusted gateway to information and digital confidence, devices, connectivity, and AI literacy for all Londoners.	Promise 2: A Gateway to Cultural London - Reading, Literacy and Cultural Participation for Life Gateway to stories, creativity, reading, literacy and cultural participation throughout life without financial barriers.	Promise 3: Vital Civic Spaces and Social Spaces - Health, Connection and Belonging Throughout Life Vital civic and social spaces supporting health, connection, belonging and democratic participation for all our diverse communities.

Strategic Alignment Matrix

London Libraries Promises and Priorities	DCMS Priorities	Libraries Connected	Arts Council England	GLA Priorities	London Borough Priorities
Promise 1: Digital Inclusion and AI Confidence for All	Digital Presence, Making Access Easier - raising awareness of online library offer; supporting digital-first public services; reducing digital exclusion; building AI confidence and literacy.	Digital Inclusion, Life Chances - positioning libraries as primary infrastructure for digital access, devices, Wi-Fi and supported skills for those at risk of exclusion; linking to employment, benefits, education.	Creative People, Dynamism - supporting digital skills pathways into creative industries; using technology to reach under-served communities; adapting to new digital models.	Communities & Social Justice, Economic Growth - increasing access to digital tools for civic participation, rights, employment; supporting inclusive economic growth through digital skills.	Digital Inclusion, Access to Services - reducing digital exclusion; offering assisted digital support for council and public services; supporting digital confidence for employment, benefits, health.
Promise 2: Gateway to Cultural London - Reading, Literacy and Cultural Participation for Life	Community Hubs, Reframing Value - positioning libraries as cultural hubs not just book lenders; showcasing children's and family activities; supporting literacy and learning outcomes.	Literacy & Learning, Cultural Participation - impact on early years, school-age and teen literacy; educational attainment; Summer Reading Challenge; cultural programming delivering multi-outcome benefits.	Cultural Communities, Creative People - ensuring every community has access to high-quality culture on the doorstep; developing creative potential of children, young people and under-served groups; celebrating local stories.	Love London, Creative Londoners - people experiencing and creating culture in every borough; removing barriers for under-represented communities; supporting diverse creative workforce pathways.	Children & Learning, Culture & Heritage - improving outcomes for children and young people around literacy and educational attainment; lifelong learning; ensuring culture accessible on the doorstep; amplifying local stories.

London Libraries Promises and Priorities	DCMS Priorities	Libraries Connected	Arts Council England	GLA Priorities	London Borough Priorities
Promise 3: Vital Civic Spaces and Social Spaces – Health, Connection and Belonging for All Our Diverse Communities	Welcoming Spaces, Hosting Services - comfortable, inviting spaces with toilets, Wi-Fi, seating; co-locating services (health, employment, benefits); positioning as community hubs tackling multiple aims in single visit.	Social Infrastructure, Health & Wellbeing - safe, free, universal community spaces; reducing loneliness; supporting mental health, older people, independent living; social prescribing; sanctuary for refugees and vulnerable populations.	Cultural Communities, Inclusivity - place-based work in deprived neighbourhoods; health, wellbeing and community resilience through cultural participation; cross-sector collaboration with health, education, housing.	Communities & Social Justice, Culture & Good Growth - supporting stronger, safer, connected communities; migrants, refugees, under-served groups; sustaining cultural spaces; embedding culture in regeneration and planning.	Communities & Resilience, Health & Prevention - building stronger communities; reducing social isolation; mental and physical health prevention; hosting health programmes, signposting, social prescribing; warm/cool spaces; cost-of-living support.

London Libraries Priorities	DCMS Priorities	Libraries Connected	Arts Council England	GLA Priorities	London Borough Priorities
Priority 1: One London Voice – Regional Collaboration Delivering Excellent Locally	Branding & Visibility, Regional Framework - demonstrating coordinated regional approach to visibility, branding, consistent messaging; modeling what joined-up strategic action looks like; providing evidence for national strategy.	Partnership & Leadership, Advocacy - regional network as test-bed for national programmes; sharing practice; strengthening collective voice to government; demonstrating system-wide impact at scale.	Place-Based Collaboration, Dynamism - cross-borough working; flexible, hyper-local approaches; joining up NPOs with council-funded bodies; innovative partnership and delivery models; long-term relationship-building.	Culture for All Londoners, World City - pan-London campaigns showcasing unified offer; positioning London as creative capital; coordinated approach to cultural participation across 33 boroughs.	Partnership Services, Innovation - working with cross-sector partners; co-locating services; economies of scale through collaboration; sharing resources and reducing duplication; sustainable alternative delivery models.

London Libraries Priorities	DCMS Priorities	Libraries Connected	Arts Council England	GLA Priorities	London Borough Priorities
Priority 2: A Skilled, Confident and Representative Workforce	Staff Capability, Quality Service - friendly, knowledgeable staff who can help with digital skills, navigating services, reader development; building capability to deliver a modern library offer confidently.	Professional Development, Representation - cross-London learning, CPD, peer support; increasing workforce diversity to reflect communities served; supporting early-career staff and career progression.	Creative Londoners, Ambition & Quality - investing in diverse creative workforce; opportunities for under-represented groups; skills, training, career pathways; high-quality programming requires skilled practitioners.	Creative Londoners, Equality & Inclusion - supporting diverse workforce pathways; skills and training; ensuring cultural workforce reflects London's communities; reducing inequalities in creative sector employment.	Skills Development, Financial Sustainability - supporting staff skills to deliver council priorities; shared training reducing costs; attracting and retaining talent; building capability while managing tight budgets.

London Libraries Priorities	DCMS Priorities	Libraries Connected	Arts Council England	GLA Priorities	London Borough Priorities
Priority 3: Evidence, Insight and Advocacy	Better Data, Evidence-Led Approach - demonstrating impact through COM-B framework, segmentation, evaluation; quantifying barriers and outcomes; testing interventions with robust data; informing national strategy with regional evidence.	Making Value Visible, Evidence-Led Advocacy - quantifying social value, cost avoidance, return on investment; robust research and evaluation; providing ready-to-use evidence for local advocacy; strengthening case with decision-makers.	Data & Evaluation, Joined-Up Governance - better data on who benefits and outcomes achieved; data-sharing between organizations; nuanced mapping of deprivation; robust long-term evaluation showing cultural impact.	Strategic Alignment, Partnerships - demonstrating delivery against GLA missions; clear read-across to Mayor's priorities; positioning for project funding; building relationships with GLA, Transport for London, London Councils.	Demonstrating Impact, Council Priorities - showing how libraries deliver corporate priorities; providing evidence for business cases; linking to health, skills, digital, cohesion, climate agendas; making a case for sustainable investment.

Appendix 2 - Implementation Framework 2026-2029

Phasing and Sequencing

Year 1 (2026): Foundations and Early Wins

Q1-Q2 (January-June 2026):

- Strategy approval and launch (Executive Meeting March, General Meeting April)
- High-profile launch event (post-April)
- Establish governance structures and working groups
- Launch first poster campaign series (digital inclusion focus)
- Begin workforce (Staff and volunteers) training needs assessment
- Identify early adopter boroughs for priority pilots

Q3-Q4 (July-December 2026):

- Launch "Read London" campaign aligned with National Year of Reading 2026
- Pilot digital support charter in 4-5 early adopter boroughs
- First cross-London training programme delivered (digital inclusion or trauma-informed practice)
- Establish communities of practice (digital, reading, health)
- Begin indicator development and data infrastructure planning
- Stakeholder mapping and advocacy framework development
- Event to embed strategy at London Libraries Conference

Year 2 (2027): Expansion and Embedding

Q1-Q2 (January-June 2027):

- Expand digital support charter to 15-20 boroughs
- Launch specialist health and wellbeing pilots (Libraries for Living)
- Cross-London training calendar fully operational (monthly sessions)
- Second wave poster campaigns (reading and cultural participation)
- Data dashboard prototype tested with early adopter boroughs
- First annual progress report published

Q3-Q4 (July-December 2027):

- Digital support charter rolled out to all 33 boroughs
- Workforce peer mentoring programme established

- Priority mapping matrix completed and distributed to all services
- External advocacy campaigns to DCMS, GLA, Arts Council England
- Mid-term evaluation of first 18 months (internal review)

Year 3 (2028): Full Implementation and Evaluation

Q1-Q2 (January-June 2028):

- All three promises fully operational across all 33 boroughs (universal baseline)
- Enhanced and specialist offers (Tier 2 and 3) operational in selected boroughs with secured funding
- Pan-London data dashboard live and accessible to all stakeholders
- Leadership development pathways launched
- Coordinated campaigns fully embedded (annual calendar established)

Q3-Q4 (July-December 2028):

- External evaluation commissioned (measuring progress toward all outcomes)
- Stakeholder consultation on next strategic period (2029-2032)
- Second annual progress report with three-year retrospective
- Celebration event showcasing achievements and impact stories

Year 4 (2029): Transition and Renewal

Q1-Q2 (January-June 2029):

- External evaluation findings published
- Strategy refresh process begins (informed by evaluation)
- Sustainability planning for successful programmes
- Scaling and replication guidance for other regions (if appropriate)

Early Actions (2026)

Immediate priorities identified by London Libraries senior leadership:

- Ensure clarity about national context (Universal Library Offers) and local framing (alignment with LA priorities: climate action, skills, housing, social cohesion, digital inclusion)
- Design agreed set of posters with London Libraries logo and QR code to "Find Your Library" map, available in different languages for sector-facing promises
- Shape "**One London Voice**" offer shareable with government departments and stakeholders
- Develop impact framework for London - analysis and measurement combining qualitative and quantitative approaches; discuss with Arts Council England

- Create young people-specific offer and campaign shareable across schools
- Explore shared cross-London role funded by all 33 services to coordinate cohesive approach
- Collate free, quality CPD offers (e.g., GLA trauma-informed training, digital skills, information literacy, CILIP Public Library professional development); create platform for frontline library staff to share and connect
- Investigate economies of scale for workshop providers supporting key campaigns (reducing costs through collective commissioning)

Timeline of Key Milestones

Date	Milestone
11 February 2026	Strategy prioritisation meeting
24 February 2026	Steering Group meeting (Priority 3 deep dive)
17 March 2026	Executive Committee approval
24 April 2026	General Meeting presentation and discussion
May-June 2026	Launch event and first poster campaign
Q3 2026	Read London campaign launch (National Year of Reading)
Q4 2026	Digital support charter pilots begin
Q2 2027	Data dashboard prototype testing
Q4 2027	Mid-term internal evaluation
Q2 2028	Full implementation across all boroughs
Q4 2028	External evaluation commissioned
2029	Evaluation findings published; strategy refresh begins

Appendix 3 - Governance and Decision-Making

Governance Structure

- **London Libraries Executive Committee:** Overall strategic direction, funding decisions, external advocacy, accountability
- **Steering Group:** Strategic guidance, priority refinement, stakeholder connections, broader sector input (includes non-executive members)
- **Working Groups (by priority area):**
 - Promise 1: Digital Inclusion Working Group
 - Promise 2: Reading and Cultural Participation Working Group
 - Promise 3: Libraries for Living Working Group
 - Priority 2: Workforce and Leadership Working Group
 - Priority 3: Evidence and Advocacy Working Group
- **Communities of Practice:** Peer networks for staff delivering similar work (digital leads, reading leads, health/wellbeing leads, data leads)
- **Frontline Practitioner Forum:** Quarterly or biannual input from frontline staff keeping strategy grounded in operational reality.

Decision-Making Principles

- **Co-design and co-delivery:** Priorities shaped collaboratively with frontline staff, partners, and stakeholders - not top-down mandates
- **Equity-led:** Explicit focus on reach to vulnerable and under-served populations; data designed to surface disparities and drive targeted responses
- **Evidence-informed:** Decisions rooted in data, learning from practitioners, and sector research - not assumptions or anecdote alone
- **Sustainability-focused:** Prioritise approaches that can be sustained with realistic funding and capacity - avoid over-reliance on short-term project funding
- **Flexibility and adaptation:** Quarterly review points to adjust to changing context, emerging opportunities, and learning from implementation
- **Transparency and accountability:** Progress publicly reported; decisions explained and open to consultation; willingness to learn from failure.

Appendix 4 - Resource Requirements and Sustainability

Funding Priorities

- **Workforce development and training (Priority 2):** Foundational to everything else - 35-40% of strategic investment
- **Campaign delivery and coordination (Promise 1-3):** Pan-London roles, marketing, shared resources - 30-35%
- **Digital access infrastructure:** Hardware, software, connectivity, device lending. There should be a medium to long term, move to support device redistribution schemes - 15-20%
- **Data and evidence infrastructure (Priority 3):** Dashboard, evaluation, impact measurement - 10-15%
- **Marketing and communications:** Launch event, campaigns, advocacy materials - 5-10%.

Potential Funding Sources

- **GLA project-specific funding:** Digital inclusion, skills, cost-of-living, health and wellbeing programmes
- **Arts Council England:** Cultural infrastructure, place-based programmes, capacity-building
- **DCMS and government investment:** Advocacy for national investment (precedent: People's Network) supporting digital infrastructure, literacy programmes, civic infrastructure
- **Public Health and Integrated Care Systems:** Social prescribing, loneliness reduction, health literacy partnerships
- **Local authority core funding:** Continued investment from boroughs recognising strategic value
- **Collective borough contributions:** Shared pan-London roles and infrastructure funded by all 33 services
- **Corporate and philanthropic partnerships:** Aligned with library values and partnership governance framework.

Sustainability Considerations

- Build internal capacity and expertise as primary model (not over-dependent on external delivery partners)
- Multi-year funding commitments where possible (avoiding short-term project cycle vulnerabilities)
- Collective commissioning and resource-sharing reducing individual borough costs
- Demonstrating social value and alignment with funder priorities to secure ongoing investment
- Advocacy for libraries embedded in capital investment frameworks, planning obligations (S106), and statutory service provision discussions.

Appendix 5 - Success Metrics and Evaluation

Annual Progress Indicators (reported publicly each year)

- Number of boroughs implementing each promises
- Digital inclusion reach (assisted-digital engagements, device lending, digital confidence assessments; in the medium to long term device redistribution schemes)
- Reading and cultural participation reach (by age group, including teenagers and ESOL learners)
- Health and wellbeing outcomes (loneliness measures, social prescribing referrals, sense of belonging)
- Workforce training completion rates and staff confidence levels
- Data dashboard adoption and use by boroughs
- Media coverage and stakeholder engagement metrics
- Funding secured attributable to coordinated evidence and advocacy.

External Evaluation (Years 3 and 5)

Conduct independent external evaluation measuring:

- Progress toward all stated outcomes across three promises and two priorities
- Reach to vulnerable and under-served populations (disaggregated by demographic group)
- Impact on digital confidence, reading progression, health and wellbeing, workforce capability across London's population
- Value for money and social return on investment
- Stakeholder perceptions of London Libraries' strategic leadership and unified voice
- Lessons learned and recommendations for the next strategic period.

Continuous Improvement Mechanisms

- Quarterly progress reports to Executive Committee
- Annual review of priorities and campaigns with opportunity for refinement
- Feedback loops from frontline staff through Steering Group or annual frontline staff survey
- Responsive adjustment to emerging opportunities (new funding, policy changes, sector partnerships)
- Learning from pilot programmes before full roll-out.