An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

21 March 2019

Ref: PAC32-I-1362

Ms Éilis Fallon
Committee Secretariat
Committee of Public Accounts

Dear Ms Fallon

I refer to your letter of 6 March 2019 on behalf of the Committee of Public Accounts in relation to the *My Open Library* service. As requested, an information note on the service is attached for the Committee's attention.

The *My Open Library* service is part of a suite of actions under the new public libraries strategy (Our Public Libraries 2022) to provide more accessible and flexible library services. The service complements regular staffed times, ensuring users can access libraries at times that suit them best and facilitating users who may not be able to use them during normal staffed hours.

The service will not result in reduced staffed hours or staff reductions, and libraries operating the service will continue to provide the regular staffed times for ongoing delivery of service.

I trust that the attached information note is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin McCarthy
Secretary General

Trinity Point, 10-11 Sráid Laighean Theas, Baile Átha Cliath 2, D02 EF85
Trinity Point, 10-11 Leinster St South, Dublin 2, D02 EF85
T +353 (0) 76 106 4900 | www.drcd.gov.ie

INFORMATION NOTE ON *MY OPEN LIBRARY*

Background

The *My Open Library* initiative was introduced on a 'proof of concept' or initial pilot basis in Banagher, Tullamore and Tubbercurry libraries in 2014. It is currently being rolled out to another 23 libraries, with seven additional libraries operating the service in recent months (See Appendix 1 for list of libraries).

The service offers **extended opening hours,** providing library access to members from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days per week, 365 days per year. It complements regular staffed hours and ensures optimum delivery of the service, support for customers, community engagement and development of programming activities. The staffed hours, combined with the extended *My Open Library* hours, allow library members to access the library on a self-service basis at times that suit them, particularly those who may not be able to access their library during regular staffed times.

The services available to the public during these additional hours include borrowing and returning items, using the internet via library PCs or via Wi-Fi using their own devices, browsing, printing, photocopying, individual study areas and community meeting rooms.

The new public library strategy, *Our Public Libraries 2022 – Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities,* was launched in June 2018. The strategy seeks to improve access, use and visibility of the library as a community hub and develop it as a focal point for community development. To this end, a key action in the strategy is to extend opening hours, ensuring each library provides the optimum user-friendly staffed service and operates *My Open Library* in appropriate branches in addition to staffed hours.

Extended Pilot

The initial pilot was opened to additional libraries on foot of a call for proposals and a further 23 libraries were approved for funding by the Department in 2016. The extended pilot commenced roll-out in mid-2018 following agreement with the FORSA trade union and subject to certain terms and conditions. Funding conditions under the libraries capital programme require all new builds to be *My Open Library* enabled. The service will be rolled out in these libraries in accordance with the agreement with FORSA and completion of the extended pilot phase.

Staffing

Staffing levels and staff hours are not impacted by the *My Open Library* service. Experienced and committed library staff are key to the success of our public libraries and the full, staffed service continues to be provided during the regular staffed hours.

Indeed, it is likely that libraries operating *My Open Library* may increase staffed opening hours, as is the case in Banagher library where staffed hours have increased from 14 hours to 21 hours per week.

Accessing the Service

Members signing-up to the service undergo induction training to brief them on how to use the service and health and safety requirements. The *My Open Library* user uses a pre-approved membership card and authorised pin number to gain access via an automated system at the door. There is clear signage throughout the library indicating the relevant information on the service and a PA system that informs the public when the library is due to close. If people are still present at that time, the alarm will activate as normal and the relevant security company is automatically called.

As agreed with FORSA, local authorities must carry out a full risk assessment of the relevant library before commencing the *My Open Library* service. This includes a review of fire safety and health and safety requirements to ensure the library is safe and secure for staff and library members. The library is also equipped with alarms and CCTV systems. There have been no health and safety incidents since the service has commenced.

My Open Library **Use**

The *My Open Library* service is being used by families with working parents, commuters, students, people up-skilling and community groups for meetings. People are also using the service to help with starting their own business. Recently, at a remote working conference in Tullamore a young man explained how he started his business in Tullamore library.

- In **Dungarvan**, Co Waterford, 48% of usage is during 5pm and 8pm, with a further 27% of usage on Sundays and Mondays when the library has been traditionally closed.
- In **Offaly**, during Christmas 2018 there were over 780 *My Open Library* visits to Banagher and Tullamore libraries over the Christmas.

- In **Deansgrange,** Dublin, 571 users are registered as *My Open Library* members. There are approximately 240 users of the service per week, with Sunday being the busiest day.

Library users are responding very positively to *My Open Library*. It has strengthened the prominence of the library in local communities by providing a non-commercial, indoor meeting place that is open and welcoming to all at times that suit users best.

Recent Progress

Seven additional libraries are operating *My Open Library* since October 2018 bringing the total to 10. These are –
- Ferbane, Co. Offaly
- Deansgrange, Co. Dublin
- Muine Bheag, Co. Carlow
- Trim, Co. Meath
- Dungarvan, Co.Waterford
- Gorey, Co. Wexford
- Ardee, Co. Louth.

A further seven libraries will offer the service from end April, with the remaining pilots to commence on a rolling basis in the following months.

Next Steps – Further Roll-Out

Our ambition is to introduce the *My Open Library* service in up to 100 libraries by end-2022, and in a further 200 by end-2027. To this end, the Department will issue a call for proposals for the next round of *My Open Library* in Q3, 2019 with a view to opening these in 2020.

Appendix 1 – Approved *My Open Library* Service Branches

Local Authority	Branch	Current Position
Carlow	Muine Bheag (Bagenalstown)	Open
Dún Laoghaire Rathdown	Deansgrange	Open
Louth	Ardee	Open
Meath	Trim	Open
Offaly	Tullamore	Open
Offaly	Banagher	Open
Offaly	Ferbane	Open
Sligo	Tubbercurry	Open
Waterford	Dungarvan	Open
Wexford	Gorey	Open
Kilkenny	Castlecomer	April 2019
Laois	Portarlington	April 2019
Limerick	Cappamore	April 2019
Longford	Ballymahon	April 2019
Mayo	Swinford	April 2019
Monaghan	Carrickmacross	April 2019
Wicklow	Arklow	April 2019
Cavan	Johnstown	Post April 2019
Clare	Ennis	Post April 2019
Donegal	Buncrana	Post April 2019
Galway	Oranmore	Post April 2019
Galway	Ballinasloe	Post April 2019
Mayo	Ballina	Post April 2019
Offaly	Edenderry	Post April 2019
Tipperary	Nenagh	Post April 2019
Westmeath	Moate	Post April 2019