



Invitation to tender: development of a four year strategy for Libraries Connected

1. Introduction

We are seeking an expert contractor to support our work to develop an ambitious and focused strategy for the period 2027-2031.

2. About us

2.1 About Libraries Connected

Libraries Connected is a national charity and the membership organisation of public libraries across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies.

We are an independent charity that supports, promotes and represents public libraries. Our work is driven and led by our membership, which includes almost every library service in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Crown Dependencies (Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man). Across the areas we serve there are 176 individual library services with around 3,000 library branches serving over 61 million people.

Our unique approach is to bring these services together to share experience, expertise and evidence – driving innovation and impact across the public library sector. While senior library leaders sit on our board and committees, we work with library staff at all levels.

As well as providing practical support, training and advice to libraries, we represent them to government and raise their profile in the media. We also develop and lead national library projects with cultural, academic and corporate partners.

2.2 Our operating context

We are in a period of great change for public libraries and their operating context. The forces driving change include:

- Financial pressures facing local government, and budget cuts and service restructures
- Local government reorganisation
- Devolution
- Changes, and potential changes, to key funding providers

- Co-location
- Changing, and increasing, user demand
- Higher turnover of heads of service, with less experienced people with wider remits

There are also opportunities we want to seize including the current government's missions and policy priorities that relate directly to the work of libraries.

2.3 Our current strategic plan

We currently work to [a strategic plan that runs until 2027](#), organised around four themes:

- Drive
- Grow
- Connect
- Engage

The current strategic plan has provided a comprehensive framework for our ambitious programme of work, during a period of great change for our sector.

Our organisation has also greatly developed, and we now have dedicated teams for regional development, commercial activities, programme delivery and policy and research.

However, in practice the current strategy has not provided sufficient focus for our work across a very wide landscape and has not worked very effectively to identify areas of work to prioritise.

2.4 Our new strategic plan

We want the new strategy to:

- Set a compelling vision for library services and their societal role in 2031 and beyond
- Be ambitious and focus on development and positioning of the sector, not just defending current provision
- Provide a clear focus and limited set of priorities for our work, whilst allowing flexibility to respond to changing opportunities
- Remain rooted in our membership, responsive to their needs, built on their expertise and representing their voice
- Use the expertise of our staff team
- Be financially realistic
- Be aligned with the work of our core partners
- Enable us to build powerful partnerships and alliances with partners alongside and outside the public library sector.

3. Deliverables

- Notes from workshops and consultations
- A concise strategy document to cover the period 2027-2031

4. Outcomes

Libraries Connected has a clear strategic framework for its work over the next four years.

5. Contract governance

The contractor will report to the Libraries Connected CEO, and a project board with representatives from Libraries Connected trustees, staff and members.

6. Methodology, and timeline

6.1 Methodology

The strategic plan should be developed through a process of co-creation with our staff, trustees and members, and consultation with key partners, stakeholders and funders.

We envisage that contractors will use a variety of channels such as surveys, online discussions, structured workshops and targeted interviews

6.2 Timeline

This is an indicative timeline, and we are open to suggestions from the contractors for alternative approaches. NB the dates of the Board awayday and Board meetings are fixed in diaries.

Phase 1: getting prepared: Sept – Oct 2025

- 1st week of September: contractors appointed
- September: induction and background research to set context for the strategy
- September/October: discussions with staff team on the effectiveness of the current strategy and ambitions for the new one
- 23rd October: Board awayday in Peterborough to set the key parameters for the strategy
- 11 December: Board meeting to approve the approach and key parameters for developing the strategy

Phase 2: consultation and ideas generation: April – June 2026

- Consultation and co-creation with staff team
- Consultation and co-creation with members
- Consultation with partners, funders and stakeholders
- Synthesis of consultation and recommended focus, themes and structure for the strategy
- 25th June: present the synthesis report to the Board for approval of the focus, themes and structure for the strategy.

Phase 3: writing a compelling strategy

- Drafting the strategy document
- 24th September: Board to review and sign off the strategy document
- Project completion

7. BUDGET

There is a budget of £30,000 for this work, inc VAT and expenses.

8. PROCESS FOR SUBMITTING PROPOSALS

8.1 Timetable

- Invitation to Tender published: 13th August 2025
- Deadline for clarifications: 9am Monday 1st September
- Closing date 9am Monday 8th September
- Appointment of successful contractor w/b 15th September

8.2 Proposal content

Proposals should be no more than 2500 words and should include:

- Understanding of the brief
- An outline methodology for achieving the brief
- A statement of your skills and experience in context of this brief including names and experience of each person assigned to the project. Examples and links to relevant reports you have written or contributed to should be included
- An outline work plan and timetable for this work
- A clear breakdown of costs which includes all rates, fees, and expenses you are anticipating for the project. If you are VAT registered this must be included in your costings
- A statement showing understanding of and commitment to the values of Libraries Connected <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/about-us>
- Two contactable referees who could provide a relevant reference of your suitability to work on this project

8.3 Proposal submission

Please email proposals to info@librariesconnected.org.uk by 9am on Monday 8th September.

8.4 Evaluation of proposals

We will evaluate proposals using these criteria:

- Extent to which proposal demonstrates an understanding of the brief 25
- Knowledge and experience relevant to the project, including experience of running consultation processes and strategic planning within a complex context 25
- Quality of methodology 25
- Proposed team composition and management 15
- Cost (Value for money) 10

9. TERMS OF CONTRACT

We usually pay an instalment at the start, and then staged payments at project milestones and a final payment when the work is fully signed off. However, this is negotiable depending on the size, nature and length of the project. We are conscious of the cashflow needs of smaller organisations, so we make sure we pay invoices promptly.

10. COMPLIANCE

Libraries Connected reserves the right to disqualify any provider's response to this ITT if it does not fully comply with the requirements contained therein. This is particularly relevant in relation to the stated closing date and time of applications.

Libraries Connected is not responsible for and will not pay for any expenses or losses you incur during, but not limited to, the application preparation, visits, negotiations, or interviews in relation to this procurement process.

It is your responsibility to ensure that any consortium member, sub-contractor, and adviser abide by the conditions set out by Libraries Connected. In submitting a response to this ITT, it will be implied that you accept all the provisions of this ITT including these conditions.

If Libraries Connected needs to change any information contained within this ITT before the closing date, you will be written to advise you of these changes, which includes the extension of any submission deadlines.

Libraries Connected reserves the right to cancel or suspend this ITT process at any time but will notify you in writing as soon as possible if this occurs.

It is expected that the contractor will work within the values and behaviours of Libraries Connected and this will be part of the contract of engagement.

11. FURTHER INFORMATION

For an informal discussion about the work please contact:
Isobel.hunter@librariesconnected.org.uk