

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held remotely via Zoom
on Thursday 15 January 2026 at 10:30am

PRESENT

Councillor Andrew McAuley	Chairperson
Councillor Rosie Kinnear	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
Mr John Peto	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Ms Julie Reid	Head of Service
Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Ciara Gault	Deputy Head of Service
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Strategic Communications and Marketing
Mr Conor McKee	Service Development Manager
Ms Clare Bell	Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular he welcomed Conor McKee, Service Development Manager with responsibility for Collections to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

1.1 An apology was received from Mr Adrian Driscoll, Councillor Julie Gilmour and Ms Bonnie Anley.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2.1 The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest associated with any item on the agenda, either now or at the relevant stage during the meeting. No conflicts of interest were declared.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 The Chairperson thanked Members for accommodating the change to facilitate the meeting to be held remotely. It was noted that the next meeting would be held in The Writers' Room, Belfast Central Library and would include a Heritage Service Presentation and viewing of treasures from the Fine Book Room.

4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

SC.01.01.26

- 4.1 The Director of Library Services reported that there had been library closures due to Storm Bram on 9 December 2025, resulting in 38 hours 5 minutes lost. She also reported that there were further closures due to snow on the 5 and 6 January 2026 resulting in a loss of 75 hours 30 minutes.
- 4.2 The Director of Library Services advised Members that The National Year of Reading (NYR) 2026 is a major UK-wide campaign led by the Department of Education and National Literacy Trust, aiming to reverse the decline in reading enjoyment by encouraging all ages to "Go All In" on reading, connecting it to passions including music, films, or baking, through school programmes, library events, and digital resources to build a lasting reading culture. Northern Ireland partners include Department of Education NI, Education Authority, Libraries NI, West Belfast Partnership and Belfast City of Learning. The NYR website was launched on 19 December 2025.
- 4.3 Ms A Adair informed Members that a Northern Ireland Stakeholder Roundtable and Official Launch event is planned for 2 February 2026 at Parliament Buildings and will be attended by the Chief Executive, Dr Jim O'Hagan and Julie Reid, Head of Service. This event will convene key stakeholders from across education, culture, libraries, community, and policy sectors to discuss a shared strategic vision for the NYR, and to support the development of a co-ordinated, cross-sectoral programme of activity for 2026.
- 4.4 Libraries NI has commenced work to create plans and programming to support the NYR 2026. Some plans will be implemented in January, and the aim is for an official launch in March in line with the rest of the UK.
- 4.5 The Director of Library Services reported that following a successful bid to the Department for Communities, £1.0 million of additional resource funding for library stock was received in December 2025. She advised that this brings the current 2025/26 stock fund to £3,320,000. Ms A Adair highlighted a selection of purchases to Members.
- 4.6 Ms A Adair informed the Committee that a collection of books to support the Empathy Day Festival 2026 'Jump into Someone Else's Story' is being purchased. She confirmed that the collection will be distributed to all libraries to support activities for the Empathy Day Festival week.
- 4.7 Ms A Adair advised Members that following a short pilot in larger libraries, the Comics, Graphic Novel and Manga Collection will be rolled out to all libraries in early 2026. She confirmed that staff awareness sessions have been held which covered the history of graphic novels, comics and manga, the differences between the formats, the literacy benefits of reading comics and tips for managing the collections in libraries. It was noted that some of the key benefits of reading Comics, Graphic Novel and Manga include boosting vocabulary, encouraging imagination, promoting visual literacy, and providing a gateway to reading by engaging reluctant readers.

- 4.8 The Director of Library Services informed Members that in January, the Bookcited! podcast will link to Blue Monday with a special episode dedicated to Comfort Reads.
- 4.9 Ms A Adair also advised that interviews are scheduled with Irish thriller author, Andrea Mara, whose book 'All Her Fault' is a recent acclaimed television programme (Sky Atlantic/Now) starring Sarah Snook and Dakota Fanning. It was noted that upcoming episodes will also feature renowned Irish writer Sheila O'Flanagan and multi award-winning author Chloe Dalton discussing her book 'Raising Hare' which describes the writer's experience of raising a young leveret during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.10 Ms A Adair reported that on Monday 12 January, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed to cement the partnership between Libraries NI and The Open University for the next three years. She advised that there have been several exciting projects created through the partnership so far with clear headline events such as the Changing Attitudes to Ageing initiative in Bangor Carnegie, Omagh and Derry Central libraries as well as the Study Breaks events.
- 4.11 The Director of Library Services informed Members that Study Break events were part of an initial pilot to test the level of interest amongst young people for help and support regarding studying, how to prepare for and how to cope with exams. The pilot provided feedback which is now being shaped into a Business Case targeting funding for further developments in this area.
- 4.12 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications shared a presentation on Libraries NI's current Advertising Campaign. He advised that a small advertising campaign started on the 5 January targeting social media, outdoor and radio. The outdoor adverts will be in place for two weeks in locations throughout key communities from the 12 January including Live Adshels in key transport hubs. The radio and social media advertising has begun and will continue sporadically at key times leading up to early March.
- 4.13 Mr G Beattie reported that due to the campaign being year two of a procurement expenditure there were limitations as to what could be changed so the key tagline of Opening Minds Together remains. The radio adverts are significantly different bringing a touch of the dramatic to the adverts and he hoped that members would hear these on local commercial radio stations over the coming weeks.
- 4.14 The Director of Library Services notified the Committee that the RAISE programme is a whole community and place-based approach in localities across Northern Ireland to support the Department of Education's vision that 'every child is happy, learning and succeeding'. It helps to deliver on the mission, set by the report 'A Fair Start', to ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life. The RAISE Programme is present within 18 localities across Northern Ireland and Libraries NI District Officer staff based in each locality are collaborating in the delivery of the programme.

- 4.15 Ms A Adair confirmed that Locality Led project funding was launched in November 2025, and Libraries NI was successful in securing funding for two programmes over two years for children in the Rathcoole area. Rathcoole Library will be able to offer daily after school support for children with funding of approximately £19K. Funding at approximately £25K, has also been secured to facilitate GCSE Mathematics and English support to students in the school holidays. It is anticipated that programming will start in April 2026.
- 4.16 Ms A Adair provided an update on Super Searchers. She commented that Information literacy is a key skill for people who are trying to navigate an increasingly complex information landscape. To help empower people to understand the tools and tactics that they can use to make sense of information online, Google partnered with CILIP UK to launch the Super Searcher training programme in the UK. Libraries NI participated in the project, training the trainers and to date we have trained 209 staff enabling our staff to disseminate the training and information to our customers.
- 4.17 The Director of Library Services updated Members on Capital Developments including the new build at Enniskillen and small refurbishments at Ballycastle and Rathcoole libraries.
- 4.18 The Director of Library Services updated the Committee on Ministerial and Departmental visits. Ms A Adair advised that Minister Gordon Lyons MLA visited Carrickfergus Library on 11 December to attend the Carols Around the Christmas Tree event with Carrickfergus Integrated Primary school. The short visit allowed the Minister time to enjoy the carol singing and talk with children and members of the audience attending the event.
- 4.19 It was also reported that Iain Greenway is scheduled to visit Larne Library on 23 January 2026 and a strategic briefing has been prepared. Margaret Bell, Head of Service will lead the library visit.
- 4.20 Ms A Adair drew attention to the following recent and forthcoming events and Libraries NI's participation:
- Lord Mayor's Visit to Belfast Central Library, 26 November 2025
 - Homelessness Awareness Week, 1-7 December 2025
 - Heritage Week, 9-14 March 2026
 - Fleadh Cheoil, 2-9 August 2026
 - Tracks from the Past: Fivemiletown Cultural Heritage Festival, 3-7 February 2026
 - Ballycastle Cultural Heritage Festival, 9–14 March 2026
 - Brew Monday, 19 January 2026
 - Burns Night, 25 January 2026
 - Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2026
 - Give it a Go Week, 9–14 February 2026
 - Children's Mental Health Week, This is My Place, 9-15 February 2026
 - NI Science Festival, 11- 22 February 2026
 - Armstrong Storytelling Trust - events in January 2026.

- 4.21 The Director of Library Services updated Members on exhibitions in libraries for January 2026.
- 4.22 The Director of Library Services then provided an overview of the attendance of Libraries NI's officers at recent conferences and strategic meetings, including:
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), 24 November 2025
 - Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2 December 2025
 - Libraries Connected AGM, 11 December 2025
 - Refreshed Code of Practice for Statistics, 11 December 2025
 - Core Cities Meeting, 17 December 2025
 - Libraries Connected Advisory Committee Meeting, 18 November 2025
 - Cross Sectoral Library Forum (NI), 21 November 2025.
- 4.23 Ms A Adair updated the Committee on CILIP Ireland. It was noted that the Head of Service, Julie Reid, has completed a three-year tenure as Chair of CILIP Ireland (2023 - 2025), culminating in the delivery of the 2025 AGM, held on 13 January 2026.
- 4.24 The Director of Library Services advised that during this time a range of activities including professional development have been delivered for the benefit of CILIP Ireland Members including:
- delivery of three Joint Conferences in partnership with the Library Association of Ireland
 - several bursary awards to attend conferences (The Edge Conference, Youth Libraries Conference, Libraries Rewired, IFLA etc.)
 - Webinars such as Green Libraries Initiatives, Leadership seminars and Research Skills webinars
 - two CILIP UK Presidential visits from Sue Williamson and Sue Lacey Bryant.
- 4.25 The incoming Chair of CILIP Ireland is Robert Whan formerly of Queen's University Belfast, now the National Library of Ireland. The Vice-Chair is Ross McDonald from Ulster University. There are five officers from Libraries NI still serving on the committee, in roles such as Treasurer, Activities Officer and Social Media Officer.
- 4.26 Ms A Adair provided an update on forthcoming strategic visits:
- Dr Audrey Whitty, Director of the National Library of Ireland, will visit Belfast Central Library and meet with the Chief Executive in late January or February 2026 with a reciprocal visit to the National Library of Ireland, Dublin in April 2026
 - the inaugural Five Nations Meeting, hosted by the Chief Executive of Libraries NI, will be held in Belfast Central Library on 10 and 11 February with representation from the Local Government Management Agency (Ireland), Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), Libraries Connected (England), Wales and Luke Burton, Director of Library Services, Arts Council England.

- 4.27 The Director of Library Services updated the Committee on the findings of the Continuous Household Survey 2024/25, the Department for Communities publication of Engagement in Culture, Arts and Heritage by Adults in Northern Ireland from the findings of the Continuous Household Survey 2024/25. It is noted that 23% of the adult population had used the public library service at least once within the previous year, this remains the same as the percentage for 2023/24. The percentage of adults who have used the public library service in the last 12 months is noted as a Public Library Standard.
- 4.28 The Chairperson thanked the Director of Library Services for the comprehensive report and welcomed comments and/or questions from Members. Members noted the scope of the report.
- 4.29 Mr J Peto requested that Mr G Beattie upload the advertising campaign information to SharePoint. Mr G Beattie confirmed he would check copyright and upload. Mr J Peto also asked if it was possible to advertise through Podcasts. Mr G Beattie advised that the adverts are fed through radio channels.
- 4.30 Mrs W Osborne asked if the NYR would provide an opportunity to automatically enrol school children as library members and Ms A Adair responded that this opportunity would be revisited with both the Education Authority (EA) and the Department of Education (DE).
- 4.31 On a further question on NYR, Ms J Reid confirmed that the lead across the UK is the National Literacy Trust. The team are working closely with the NI representative and looking outwards with other library authorities also. She advised that Libraries NI are also talking to colleagues in the Education Authority (EA) and that initiatives and programming will align closely with year three of the Reading and Reader Development Strategy action plan.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2025 SC.02.01.26

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley and seconded by Mr J Peto, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 20 November 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting. It was reported that these minutes had been adopted by the Board at its meeting held on 11 December 2025.

6. MATTERS ARISING

- 6.1 The Director of Library Services confirmed there were no matters arising to report.

7. BIG SUMMER READ 2025

- 7.1 Mr C McKee, Service Development Manager with responsibility for Collections, gave a presentation on the Big Summer Read 2025.
- 7.2 The Chairperson thanked Mr C McKee for his detailed presentation.

8. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES COMMITTEE 2025/26
SC.03.01.26

- 8.1 The Chairperson introduced the Committee Effectiveness and Compliance Review papers that had been circulated including the Scheme of Delegation for Services Committee.
- 8.2 The Chairperson spoke to the Scheme of Delegation for Services Committee and confirmed that there were no proposed amendments to the existing Scheme.
- 8.3 Services Committee considered the scheme and on a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Mr J Peto, the Scheme of Delegation was approved and Services Committee agreed to recommend approval of the Scheme of Delegation to the Board.
- 8.4 The Chairperson then referred to the Committee Effectiveness Review. Committee Members considered the comments provided on the 2024/25 checklist and agreed these remain relevant.
- 8.5 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Services Committee approved the Committee Effectiveness Review.
- 8.6 The completed checklist appears at Appendix One.

9. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION POLICY
SC.04.01.26

- 9.1 The Director of Library Services reminded Members that the Review of the Community Information Policy was deferred from the November meeting as the Chief Executive and the Chairperson of the Board were scheduled to meet with the Minister in December. Ms A Adair confirmed that the meeting took place on 16 December 2025.
- 9.2 Ms J Reid introduced and gave an overview of the revised policy, highlighting the proposed additions and confirming that the policy now clarified what community information is thereby removing any ambiguity as to what might be deemed to be community information. Ms J Reid also advised Members on legal advice that had been sought.
- 9.3 Mrs W Osborne drew Members attention to section 1.3 of the policy, '*i.e. information promoting specific timebound events that are aimed at the wider community*', and suggested the wording be amended to 'example' rather than 'i.e.', in order to be very clear on what community information means.
- 9.4 The Chief Executive thanked Mrs W Osborne for the suggested amendment and further suggested that the sentence within the brackets be removed altogether from the policy.

9.5 Dr J O'Hagan updated the Committee on a meeting with the Minister that had taken place on 16 December 2025 and advised that the Chairperson of the Board will provide an update at the Board Meeting.

9.6 On a proposal by Councillor Rosie Kinnear, seconded by Mr J Peto and subject to the suggested amendment, the revised policy was approved.

10. ERASMUS+ PRESENTATION

10.1 Ms C Gault, Deputy Head of Service, gave a presentation on the Erasmus+ study programme she attended in Sweden in November 2025.

10.2 The Chairperson thanked Ms C Gault for her detailed and very interesting presentation.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 There was no other notified business.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Services Committee would be held in The Writers' Room, Belfast Central Library, on Thursday 19 March 2026 at 10:30am.

13. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

13.1 The meeting ended at 12:18pm

13.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended.

Services Committee Effectiveness Review 2025/26

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
1.	Do we have a shared understanding of strategy and objectives and the challenges facing Libraries NI and are we clear about what we are trying to achieve?	√			
2.	Does our strategic direction align with the Programme for Government and Ministerial priorities?	√			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. Programme for Government 2024 - 2027 • Department for Communities Strategy 'Building Inclusive Communities 2020 - 2025'. • Work continues with DfC to develop a new Public Library Policy. • Libraries NI Corporate Plan: Delivering for People, Delivering for Communities 2025 - 2030
3.	How well do we understand the views of the public, service users, staff and other stakeholders?	√			Members value regular reports and presentations on this to continue to Services Committee.
4.	Is there open and regular communication between the Board and the Department and between officers and the Department?				N/A to Services Committee.
5.	Is our decision-making based on informed discussion and debate supported by appropriate documentation?	√			
6.	Do we exercise sufficient levels of challenge when considering key issues and information?	√			
7.	Do we receive information in a timely fashion?	√			
8.	Is the information we receive of good quality, appropriate and sufficient in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping us abreast of relevant developments both in Libraries NI and the broader library world? • setting key targets? • monitoring performance? • financial reporting and monitoring? • determining value for money? • gaining assurance? 	√			Members value opportunities to receive information about and presentations from other library organisations. The Director of Library Services to continue to engage speakers from other organisations.

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
9.	Are we confident that the risks facing the organisation have been effectively assessed and that appropriate plans are in place and being delivered to manage those risks?	√			The Services Risk Register is presented to Services Committee bi-annually and is aligned to the Corporate Risk Register
10.	Does the Board collectively have the right mix of skills and expertise, including an in-depth understanding and experience of public sector financial matters? Could the Board benefit from additional expertise provided by a co-opted member?	√			Acknowledge the value of new membership and that the Services Committee can co-opt if required.
11.	Are appropriate levels of delegation in place which makes clear when Board approvals are required?	√			
12.	Are Members' training needs being identified and addressed?	√			
13.	Is the organisation complying with the requirements to identify and manage conflicts of interest which may arise?	√			
14.	Are appropriate business cases/economic appraisals produced to justify expenditure? Are post-project evaluations completed as required?				N/A to Services Committee.
15.	Are there appropriate procurement, tendering and contract letting and management arrangements in place?				N/A to Services Committee.
16.	Are there appropriate arrangements in place to handle Raising a Concern?	√			
17.	Do we have the right Committees?				N/A to Services Committee. For Board consideration.
18.	Are the Committees operating effectively?	√			

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
19.	Does the Committee structure enhance our scrutiny work?	√			
20.	Is the Scheme of Delegation for each Committee, including the composition of the Committee appropriate?	√			
21.	Are there clear channels of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between the Committees and the Board? • between the Board and stakeholders? • between the Board/Committees and officers? 	√			
22.	Is the frequency of Board and Committee meetings appropriate?	√			
23.	Are the dates, times and venues for Board/Committee meetings suitable?	√			Services Committee recognises the benefits for Board Members of seeing libraries first hand and will continue to circulate the venue for Services Committee meetings.
24.	Is the length of Board/Committee meetings sufficient to enable key strategic issues to be discussed and debated fully?	√			
25.	Are the minutes of Board and Committee meetings sufficiently detailed to record key decisions?	√			