**LIBRARIES NI**

**The Northern Ireland Library Authority**

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held in
Ballycastle Library on Thursday 21 May 2026 at 10:30am

**PRESENT**

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| Councillor Andrew McAuley | Chairperson |
| Ms Bonnie Anley | |
| Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE | |
| Mr John Peto | |

**IN ATTENDANCE**

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| Dr Jim O'Hagan | Chief Executive |
| Ms Adrienne Adair | Director of Library Services |
| Ms Margaret Bell | Head of Service |
| Ms Ciara Gault | Deputy Head of Service |
| Mr Glenn Beattie | Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications |
| Mr Conor McKee | Service Development Manager |
| Ms Kendra Reynolds | Area Manager |
| Ms Julie Campbell | Marketing Manager |
| Ms Heather Mallon | Graphic Designer |
| Ms Diane McGlynn | Minutes |

The Director of Library Services welcomed everyone to Ballycastle Library, she gave an overview of the spend on the recent micro-refurbishment, highlighting the project as an exemplary example of a big impact arising from a relatively small investment. She attributed the success of the project to the knowledge and expertise of Libraries NI's Assets Officer, Matthew Dickinson, and the input from a professional design consultant from Work Rest and Play Interiors. She went on to give a flavour of the programming, events and levels of participation since the library reopened in February 2026 and the Area Manager, Ms Kendra Reynolds, then led Members on a walk around of the library.

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the Services Committee Meeting, in particular, he welcomed Ms Kendra Reynolds, Area Manager, Causeway Coast and Glens and Derry City and Strabane Council areas, Ms Julie Campbell, Marketing Manager and Ms Heather Mallon, Graphic Designer, who were attending as observers.

## 1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

1.1 Apologies were received from Mr Adrian Driscoll, Councillor Julie Gilmour and Councillor Rosie Kinnear.

## 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 On behalf of the Services Committee, the Chairperson, commended staff on the refurbishment of Ballycastle Library and the programme of activities.

## 4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS SC.01.05.26

4.1 The Director of Library Services referred to the report that had been circulated, she reported on progress of the repairs on the first floor in Belfast Central Library and welcomed £80,000 capital funding from the Department towards replacing damaged furniture. She went on to report on foul water ingress in Dungannon Library on 6 May 2026 causing the library to close. Ms A Adair confirmed that a small pop-up library with study space for students is currently operating from Mid Ulster Council's premises, Ranfurly House. Repair work to the value of £30,000 is progressing and the Director of Library Services reported that £20,000 has been provided from the Department to replace furniture in Dungannon Library. In response to a question, the Chief Executive explained how the situation occurred in Dungannon Library and Members commended Libraries NI on the swift action to put alternative service provision in place.

4.2 The Director of Library Services advised Members that the Summer Opening Hours schedule will operate from Monday 29 June to Saturday 29 August inclusive.

4.3 Ms A Adair informed Members of the successful completion of the Solus Library App self-check-out facility pilot in Bangor Carnegie and Magherafelt libraries, with no technical performance issues identified. Online messaging and rollout of the self-check-out facility on the Solus App will go live on the website on Tuesday 26 May followed by a series of social media posts from 1 June supporting customer access to borrowing via mobile devices. She went on to report that Libraries NI has rolled out Read & Write software across all public library computers. Read & Write is a literacy support tool designed to help people of all ages and abilities to access support with reading, writing and studying.

4.4 The Director of Library Services highlighted a new collaboration between Libraries NI, Open University and King's Trust. The 'Pathways to your Future' programme is to support young people aged 17 to 24, specifically targeting those not engaged in formal education to make informed, supported decisions about their working lives. The programme will provide group and individual support from

skilled facilitators from both Open University and King's Trust, delivered in a library environment. A pilot of the programme will be delivered in Antrim Library on 24 June 2026.

4.5 The Director of Library Services drew attention to the following reading and reader development events and initiatives branded under National Year of Reading 2026:

- Big Summer Read
- Shared Reading Initiative in Partnership with Queen's University Belfast
- Booker Prize Quick Read Give Away
- Crime Writers Association National Crime Reading Month, June 2026.

4.6 The Director of Library Services reported on significant library visits. Mr J Ball, Acting Director of Culture, Department for Communities (DfC), recently visited Ballycastle and Ballymena Central libraries, Ballymena Regional Administration Centre, Belfast Central and Coleraine libraries. She gave an overview of the visit of Dr Audrey Whitty, Director, National Library of Ireland, to Belfast Central Library on 23 March 2026 and a reciprocal visit that she attended with the Chief Executive to the National Library of Ireland in Dublin on 28 April 2026. She outlined areas of common interest and confirmed that further visits would be arranged between staff from both organisations. She also noted that on 13 May 2026, Ms Jayne Brady, Head of Northern Ireland Civil Service, together with Louise Hyland, DfC, met with the Chairperson of Libraries NI, the Chief Executive, Director of Library Services and Head of Service (South and East) in Belfast Central Library. A discussion about the strategic vision for the redevelopment of Belfast Central Library was followed by a tour of the building and Fine Book Room.

4.7 The Director of Library Services gave Members an update on the micro-refurbishment, including a re-imagined children's space, in Rathcoole Library and proposed to host the next meeting of the Services Committee in Rathcoole Library.

4.8 The Director of Library Services referred to a minor loss of 0.38% of the total available opening hours due to ad hoc closures during 2025/26.

4.9 Ms A Adair drew attention to the following recent activity:

- 'Lisnagarvey – The Good Companion', BBC NI Exhibition Launch, Lisburn City Library, 19 March 2026
- The Ulster Orchestra performance in Antrim, Ballymena and Coleraine libraries, March 2026
- Public Record Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) Behind the Scenes Tour for Libraries NI staff, 22 April 2026
- Book Sale, Bangor Carnegie Library, 25 April 2026
- Commemorative Plaque Unveiling, Falls Road Library, 25 April 2026
- BBC NI Louis MacNeice Exhibition, Lisburn City Library, May 2026, followed by Antrim Library during June and July

- Exhibitions in libraries, May 2026
- Armstrong Storytelling Trust, May 2026 Programme
- Mental Health Awareness Week – Time for Tea, 11 – 17 May 2026.

4.10 The Director of Library Services then drew attention to Libraries NI's forthcoming participation in the following significant events and initiatives:
- HiVis Fortnight, 1 – 14 June 2026
- Belfast Learning Festival, 8 – 14 June 2026
- Refugee Week, 16 – 22 June 2026
- Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, 2 – 9 August 2026.

4.11 Ms A Adair informed Members that the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Ulster American Folk Park coincides with the Ulster American Heritage Symposium 2026 and will be incorporated into the commemorations together with the 250th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence.

4.12 The Director of Library Services then provided an overview of the attendance of Libraries NI's officers at recent strategic meetings, including:
- BookTrust Reading Rights Summit 2026
- Developing a Customer Health and Wellbeing Strategy Workshop and Workforce Development Round Table with Sue Lacey Bryant
- Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Employer's Forum
- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) World Library and Information Congress (WLIC), London 2027 Programming Sub Committee
- IFLA WLIC Satellite Meetings Webinar
- Library Association of Ireland (LAI) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ireland Joint Conference 2026
- Erasmus+ Study Programme to Norway.

4.13 The Chairperson thanked the Director of Library Services for the comprehensive report.

## 5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 MARCH 2026 SC.02.05.26

5.1 On a proposal by Mr J Peto and seconded by Ms B Anley, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 19 March 2026 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 23 April 2026.

## 6. MATTERS ARISING

6.1 There were no matters arising.

## 7. SERVICE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT 2025/26 SC.03.05.26

7.1 The Director of Library Services introduced the Service Plan Progress Report 2025/26 which demonstrates progress on achievement of targets at 31 March 2026. She reported that the majority of targets were achieved and provided the context and rationale for the few that were not achieved.

7.2 In response to a question, Ms C Gault, Deputy Head of Service, clarified that the adult storytelling groups were externally facilitated by professional storytellers and that our approach would be to test adult storytelling groups in different library locations to gauge where the groups would be best supported.

7.3 The Deputy Head of Service, then highlighted significant achievements and successes including:

- Big Summer Read
- Heritage Week
- Customer Survey
- Ards and North Down Reading Borough Project
- 878 digital learning opportunities delivered
- reading for pleasure initiatives with Queen's University Belfast and South-Eastern Regional College
- Adult Storytelling Groups
- Creative Bursaries
- Transfer Test Tutor Workshops delivered in Cregagh and Whiterock libraries
- re-imagined children's spaces at Falls Road and Rathcoole libraries
- Libraries NI's 'Let's Talk About... Death, Dying and Grief' initiative.

7.4 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications then drew attention to the significant growth in social media (9.44%) on the previous year and he thanked Board Members for their support in promoting Libraries NI's posts. Mr G Beattie gave examples of successful stakeholder activity and referred to a number of potential future collaborations. The Chief Executive commended the substantial impact and achievements by a comparatively small Marketing Team.

7.5 Services Committee Members discussed the Service Plan Progress Report 2025/26. Concern was noted at not achieving the full implementation of the CustomerFirst Strategy year-one action plan and in particular noted the challenges of meeting the needs of the mobile library service and homecall service. Members thanked the officers for the progress report, acknowledged the substantial volume and breadth of activity across the network together with the significant impact of what libraries do, however, felt that the report did not adequately reflect this.

7.6 The Director of Library Services advised that a number of factors had impacted on the degree of progress made with regard to implementation of the CustomerFirst Strategy year one action plan and this included implementation of the organisational structure review. In response to discussion on the nature of

reporting in the Progress Report, the Chief Executive explained its purpose as providing a broad overview of achievement of targets using a RAG status with narrative and supporting evidence notified to Board Members through presentation of the report by officers. He also highlighted that presentations and reports on specific events and initiatives together with Director's Business Reports and the Annual Report supplement the progress report process.

7.7 A further discussion followed with Members welcoming the progress on the organisational structure review recognising the importance of this work in the context of the Investor in People survey and any actions flowing from it to build and strengthen workplace culture, including areas like pride and ownership. Committee Members welcomed the update and indicated they looked forward to further updates in due course either through the Committee, or to the Board as appropriate.

7.8 Services Committee Members noted the Service Plan Progress Report 2025/26.

## 8. NATIONAL YEAR OF READING 2026 AND BIG SUMMER READ 2026

8.1 Mr C McKee, Service Development Manager, gave an overview of the Big Summer Read 2026, a key initiative of Libraries NI's programming for the National Year of Reading 2026. He outlined the Big Summer Read 'Story Tree' theme, designed to align with the theme of the National Year of Reading 'Go all in' and circulated the promotional material. The Service Development Manager drew attention to ambitious targets and a strong evidence-based evaluation. He reported that Libraries NI would be working with at least one primary school in each council area to assess the impact of the Big Summer Read on children's reading habits, through a questionnaire comparing participating and non-participating pupils.

8.2 In response to a question, Mr G Beattie summarised the promotion of eBooks for children and the difficulties in balancing mixed views on children's use of eBooks. Ms J Campbell also highlighted the promotion of eAudio books and it was confirmed that libraries have designated areas for collections for readers with dyslexia.

8.3 The Chairperson thanked Mr C McKee and commended the Story Tree theme and promotional material.

## 9. DRAFT SERVICE PLAN AND RISK REGISTER 2026/27 SC.04.05.26

9.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, presented the draft Service Plan 2026/27 which identifies targets in line with the draft Business Plan which was presented to the Board in April 2026. The Head of Service informed Members that the draft Services Plan was subject to refinements pending confirmation of a final budget allocation.

9.2 Ms M Bell highlighted a number of significant and ambitious elements of the Service Plan such as:

- National Year of Reading 2026
- implementation of new strategies i.e. Children and Young People's Strategy and Customer Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- events and initiatives supporting reading and reader development, digital literacy, health and wellbeing and cultural heritage
- engagement with key stakeholders, other government departments and staff
- capital projects.

9.3 Services Committee discussed the draft Service Plan 2026/27 and suggested the following:

- target 5.5 'Update and refresh the CustomerFirst Strategy and action plans by 31 October 2026', add 'to align with the Corporate Plan 2025 – 2030'
- reword targets at 8.1 and 8.4 regarding sickness absence and appraisals respectively, to clarify there are policies and procedures in place
- add a target at 11.3 to promote use of the refurbished space in Belfast Central Library (The Reading Room).

9.4 Subject to the above amendments, on a proposal by Ms W Osborne OBE, seconded by Ms B Anley, the Services Committee approved the draft Service Plan 2026/27.

9.5 The Head of Service, then presented the Risk Register which details the risks identified in relation to the draft Services Directorate Services Plan for 2026/27. Ms M Bell outlined each risk, noting any change in the risk status and the associated actions to mitigate the risks. She highlighted the impact arising from the uncertainty of a final budget allocation.

9.6 Services Committee discussed the draft Risk Register and suggested the following:

- Risk 5: Resources – increase the likelihood of the treated risk from 3 to 4
- Risk 6: Planning – add 'monitoring progress of Public Library Policy' to how the risk is currently being managed.

9.7 Subject to the above amendments, on a proposal by Ms W Osborne OBE, seconded by Mr J Peto, the Services Committee approved the draft Risk Register 2026/27.

## 10. DIGITAL BRAND GUIDELINES SC.05.05.26

10.1 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications referred to the report that had been circulated setting out how Libraries NI's brand should operate in the digital environment, ensuring that it reflects both the organisation's values and the expectations of modern audiences. Mr G Beattie then gave a presentation to

Committee Members to show examples of how Libraries NI's brand remains consistent, recognisable and adaptable across all platforms in line with the guidelines.

## 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 on Thursday 17 September 2026 at 10:30am in Rathcoole Library.

## 13. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

13.1 The meeting ended at 1:30pm

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