

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library and remotely via video link (Zoom) on Thursday 16 October 2025 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

(IP) Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
(IP) Councillor Roisin Lynch	Vice-Chairperson
(VL) Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
(IP) Mr Adrian Driscoll	
(IP) Councillor Julie Gilmour	
(IP) Councillor Rosie Kinnear	
(VL) Councillor Andrew McAuley	
(IP) Councillor Martin McRandal	
(VL) Ms Ursula O'Hare	
(IP) Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
(IP) Mr John Peto	
(IP) Miss Linda Wilson	

IN ATTENDANCE

(IP) Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
(IP) Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
(IP) Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services

Note: IP denotes 'in-person' attendance, VL denotes 'virtual' attendance.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

1.1 There were no apologies.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

2.1 The Chairperson reminded Members and Officers of the need 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. Councillor A Cathcart and Councillor M McRandal declared an interest at Agenda Item 11(i) Finance Report in relation to Newtownards Library. No other interests were declared.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 The Chairperson reported on the following events:

- Visit by the DfC Minister, Mr G Lyons to Belfast Central Library on 18 September 2025
- Launch of the Libraries NI Corporate Plan 2025 – 2030 which took place on 24 September 2025
- DfC/ALB Senior Leaders Forum which took place on 1 October 2025

3.2 Members noted that a Draft Consultation Pack regarding the development of a new Public Libraries Policy, was received from DfC on 10 October 2025. This item would be discussed further at Agenda Item16: Any Other Business.

3.3 The Chairperson reminded Members that Mr G Sharvin had stepped down as a Councillor and consequently could no longer serve on the Libraries NI Board. On behalf of Members, she thanked Mr Sharvin for his service and wished him every success for the future. As a result, a vacancy had arisen for the position of Vice-Chairperson of the Libraries NI Board to which a Councillor Board Member was usually elected.

3.4 On a proposal by the Board Chairperson, Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, Councillor R Lynch was elected as Vice-Chairperson of the Libraries NI Board for a period of two years until October 2027. Members congratulated Councillor Lynch on her appointment. Councillor Lynch thanked Members for the opportunity and honour to serve as Vice-Chairperson of the Libraries NI Board.

3.5 The Chairperson drew attention to the information which had been circulated to Members regarding Book Week 2025 which would take place from Monday 20 October to Sunday 26 October 2025. This was the tenth year of this joint initiative between Libraries NI and the BBC, and she congratulated all those involved in the preparation and promotion of this initiative and encouraged as many Members as possible to visit libraries and support the numerous events.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

4.1 The Chief Executive referred Members to the paper which had been circulated, drawing attention to the undernoted items:

- Corporate Plan Launch, 2025 – 30 on 24 September 2025
- UK-Ireland Strategic Culture Partnership, 20 November 2025
- 175 years of the Public Libraries Act, 9 October 2025
- Visit by DfC Minister to Belfast Central Library, 18 September 2025
- DfC / ALB Senior Leaders Forum, 1 October 2025
- Book Week NI 2025, 20 – 26 October 2025

- Ballymoney Library – Winner Retrofit of the Year
- Five Nations Libraries Meeting
- Assembly Questions.

4.2 He also highlighted a number of events and activities which had taken place over the summer period and forthcoming events over the next few months.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 3 JULY 2025
LNI 01.10.25

5.1 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 3 July 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 3 JULY 2025
LNI 02.10.25

6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated paper noting the following.

Item 11.4: Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25

6.2 The Chief Executive reported that this item had been completed as the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 had been submitted to the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) for audit on 26 August 2025.

Item 14.4: Libraries NI Corporate Plan 2025 - 30

6.3 Members noted that this item had been completed as the draft Corporate Plan 2025 – 30 had been submitted to the Department for approval on 10 July 2025 and departmental approval had been received on 12 August 2025.

Item 15.3: Draft Annual Business Plan 2025/26

6.4 The Chief Executive reported that this item had been completed as the draft Annual Business Plan 2025/26 had been submitted to the Department for approval on 10 July 2025 and approval had been received on 12 August 2025.

Item 16.4: External Board Effectiveness Review

6.5 The Chief Executive reported that work was on-going to identify an external facilitator to carry out the external review of Board Effectiveness. A further update will be provided at the December meeting of the Board.

Item 21.2: Date of next meeting

6.6 It was noted that this item had been completed and that a draft itinerary for the Board Planning Day held on 11 September 2025 had been prepared and circulated to Board Members prior to the event for information.

**7. MINUTES OF THE BOARD PLANNING MEETING HELD ON
11 SEPTEMBER 2025** LNI 03.10.25

7.1 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Councillor M McRandall, the minutes of the Board Planning Meeting held on 11 September 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

7.2 It was agreed that the feedback from the Board Planning Day would be summarised in a simple format by theme.

**8. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE BOARD PLANNING MEETING HELD ON
11 SEPTEMBER 2025** LNI 04.10.25

8.1 The Chief Executive reported that there had been only one matter arising at *Item 3.3: Chief Executive's Update on Media/Social Media Coverage* and confirmed that the reviewed Room Hire Policy would be brought forward to the Services Committee at its meeting to be held on 20 November 2025. He also confirmed that engagement had taken place with departmental officials and clarification had been obtained in respect of the Minister's statement regarding a library event.

8.2 He reminded Members that the Board is to review its position on 'inclusivity' in relation to the Public Library Service and a draft statement would be prepared and brought to the December meeting for approval.

**9. REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE
COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2025**

9.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne, reminded Members that a meeting of the Committee had taken place on 15 October 2025, the formal minutes of which would be available at the next Board Meeting to be held on 11 December 2025. She reported that prior to the Committee meeting, the annual bi-lateral meeting had been held with representatives from the NIAO and Sumer NI to discuss the conduct of the audit, and confirmed that Members had received a positive report and had been assured that the NIAO and Sumer NI had received all the co-operation and access necessary to carry out their audit.

9.2 Mrs W Osborne reported that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had recommended approval of the following items to the Board:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report 2024/25
- Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25
- Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April to September 2025)
- Corporate Risk Register September 2025.

9.3 The Committee Chairperson reminded the Board that a vacancy had arisen on the Committee due to the resignation of Mr G Sharvin. The Chief Executive confirmed that he had made the Department aware of the situation and had asked if a recruitment process could be considered. He also reported that he would raise the matter at the Partnership Meeting with the Department to be held on 21 November 2025.

9.4 Members noted the report.

10. LIBRARIES NI ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2023/24

LNI 05.10.25

10.1 The Chief Executive presented four documents for the consideration of the Board and reported on each in turn.

Draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2024/25 LNI 05.10.25 (i)

10.2 The Chief Executive reported that the NIAO had completed the audit of the 2024/25 Annual Accounts and had indicated that the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) would certify the 2024/25 financial statements with an 'unqualified' audit opinion.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report 2024/25 LNI 05.10.25 (ii)

10.3 The Chief Executive reported that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee was required to report annually to the Board on the External Audit Statement in respect of the Accounts, the state of the organisation's finances and on the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management and other governance and control issues within the organisation.

10.4 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne, confirmed that Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee were content to provide this assurance based on the work carried out by the Committee during the year. Members also noted the Head of Internal Audit's assurance contained in the report.

10.5 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the Board adopted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's Annual Report 2024/25.

Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 LNI 05.10.25 (iii)

10.6 The Chief Executive drew Members' attention to the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 and in particular to sections which had been updated since it was last reviewed by Members.

10.7 Following discussion of the presentation of graphical information in the Annual Report it was agreed that a review of the best way to present statistical information to emphasise positive aspects of performance would be carried out before the commencement of the Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26.

10.8 The Chief Executive then referred to a discussion which had taken place at the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on 15 October 2025 regarding the reporting of an incident of data loss to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Since the preparation of the document a response had been received from the ICO confirming that they had closed the case. The Annual Report 2024/25 had been updated on the advice from the NIAO to reflect the response from the ICO.

10.9 The Chairperson on behalf of the Board thanked all staff involved in the preparation and production of the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 and those involved in the audit process which had resulted in a positive audit opinion.

10.10 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, the Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 for submission to the Comptroller and Auditor General for certification.

10.11 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, Members agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, in the event that any revisions were subsequently required by the NIAO.

Letter of Representation LNI 05.10.25 (iv)

10.12 The Chief Executive referred to the Letter of Representation and reminded Members that as Accounting Officer he was required to submit a Letter of Representation when the signed Annual Report and Accounts were being sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General for certification.

10.13 Members noted the Letter of Representation.

11. MANAGEMENT REPORT LNI 06.10.25

11.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Business Support briefed the Board on the Management Report.

Finance Report: August 2025 LNI 06.10.25 (i)

11.2 The Director of Business Support presented the Finance Reports for Capital and Recurrent Spend to August 2025 which had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 25 September 2025.

11.3 He drew attention to the Capital Report and explained that currently there was a small but challenging programme of works and with a significantly restricted capital allocation the margin to manage expenditure within 1% of the budget had become increasingly difficult. He updated Members on the progress of each capital project. It was noted that as of 31 August 2025 the total projected expenditure to 31 March 2026 was £1,106,000 against a total budget of £1,303,000. The projected variance of £197,000 arose from two projects i.e. Newtownards Library and Enniskillen Library. He reported that work was ongoing to bring capital expenditure within the 1% threshold limit by year end.

11.4 Members discussed the challenges involved in providing services with an indicative budget and the difficulties faced by Officers when planning for short and long term expenditure. It was suggested that Officers inform the Department of how this type of budget allocation process prevents the organisation from being cost effective and results in an additional financial cost in the long term.

11.5 The Director of Business Support then drew attention to the Recurrent Report noting that as part of an on-going budget review and adjustment exercise internal re-allocations had been made and as a result an additional internal allocation of £250,000 had been made to the Stock Procurement budget and £100,000 reallocated to the Planned Maintenance budget, to meet pressures in these areas. He confirmed that as of 31 August 2025 a potential underspend of 0.3% (£118,000) was projected by year end.

Corporate Risk Register

LNI 06.10.25 (ii)

11.6 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 15 October 2025, noting that there had been very little change to the actual risk levels which reflected the current relatively stable business environment. He drew attention to Risk 6: Planning and to the 'Threat/Opportunity' narrative which had been redrafted to take account of discussions at Board and Committees.

11.7 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne confirmed that the Corporate Risk Register had been reviewed at the Committee meeting held on 15 October 2025 and that Members were content to recommend the Corporate Risk Register to the Board for approval.

11.8 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as of September 2025.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 2025/26: Quarter One: April to June 2025

LNI 06.10.25 (iii)

11.9 The Chief Executive drew attention to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Report for Quarter One: April to June 2025. He reported on the targets which were coded 'Amber' providing an update on progress to date. He drew attention to the Customer Survey which would now take place in November 2025 and not October as previously reported.

11.10 The Chief Executive drew particular attention to the Sickness Absence target and also the target for the completion of Staff Appraisals noting that there had been a slight improvement in the sickness absence figures. He reported that good progress had been made over the summer months in respect of the completion of staff appraisals. Miss L Wilson, Chairperson of the Business Support Committee (BSC) stated that the Committee had a particular focus on all personnel issues and that these reports received a high level of scrutiny at Committee meetings. She added that BSC Members had been encouraged

by progress made to date in both these areas and would keep both matters under review.

- 11.11 Members noted the KPI 2025/26 Quarter One Report.
- 11.12 Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April to September 2025) LNI 06.10.25 (iv)
The Chief Executive drew attention to the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (Bi-AAS) for the period ended 30 September 2025 noting each section and highlighting areas indicated as 'Working towards Compliance' and explained, where applicable, actions being taken to remedy the situation.
- 11.13 He referred to Item 11: Information and Security Assurance and drew attention to Note 3 regarding a potential data breach which had been reported to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). He confirmed that a response had now been received from the ICO who had closed the case. It was agreed that the Bi-AAS would be updated to include this response.
- 11.14 The Chief Executive confirmed that the Bi-AAS had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the Committee meeting held on 15 October 2025 and that Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval with the above amendment.
- 11.15 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 30 September 2025 subject to the amendment at paragraph 11.13 above.

12. LIGHT TOUCH REVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2025

LNI 07.10.25

- 12.1 The Director of Business Support referred to the 'Light touch review of the Partnership Agreement' which had recently been completed. He reported that the majority of the revisions made related to standardising the format and terminology across all the DfC ALB's Partnership Agreements and some typographical changes which did not impact on the content / intent of the agreement. A small number of specific sections in the document mostly relating to the statutory purpose and strategic objectives of Libraries NI had been subject to more substantial revision.
- 12.2 He confirmed that an updated Partnership Agreement for internal use has been provided by DfC. The version of the Agreement published on the DfC website in July 2024 will remain for general reference purposes. The next annual 'light touch review' is due to take place between March – May 2026 followed by a formal review in 2027 at which point an updated version will be published on the DfC website.
- 12.3 It was agreed that this document would be reviewed as part of the Board Effectiveness Review and feedback issued to the Department.

13. SCHEDULE OF BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS: NOVEMBER 2025 TO MARCH 2027 **LNI 08.10.25**

13.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the proposed Schedule of Board and Committee meetings for the period 1 November 2025 to 31 March 2027. It was agreed that diary invitations would be issued to all Board Members.

14. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2025 **LNI 09.10.25**

14.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Councillor A McAuley, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2025.

14.2 On a proposal by Mr A Driscoll, seconded by Mr J Peto, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 18 September 2025 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting. There were no items considered at the meeting for which the Committee was required to make specific recommendations on or to seek approval of the Board.

15. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2025 **LNI 10.10.25**

15.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Miss L Wilson, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025.

15.2 The Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley asked that an amendment be made to paragraph 10.2 which will now read as follows:

Ms B Anley enquired regarding vehicle maintenance, were Libraries NI pushing on with reactive temporary repairs and how effective would that investment be.

15.3 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Ms B Anley, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 25 September 2025 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting subject to the amendment at paragraph 15.2 above.

15.4 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved and adopted the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2025/26:

16. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

Draft Public Libraries Policy – Consultation Pack

16.1 The Chief Executive reminded Members that Mr J Ball, Head of Culture Policy Branch, DfC had undertaken at the Board Planning Day on 11 September 2025 to share with Officers and Board Members the Draft Consultation Package for the Public Libraries Policy. This information was received late on

Friday afternoon 10 October 2025 with a deadline for feedback to be sent to the Department by close of play on Thursday 16 October 2025.

16.2 He then drew attention to the document and talked Members through each section. Following discussion, the following comments were noted from Board Members:

- the policy aims matrix should be set out on a separate full page as it is currently difficult to read
- in some places the document refers to 'digital' and in other places to 'online'. You may wish to review the document to adopt a more consistent approach to terminology
- some changes to the wording of the vision are suggested to better relate it to the public library service and to set a more forward-looking tone:- *'An ambitious, forward-looking public library service that is innovative, trusted, valued and community centred, informing, inspiring, empowering all'*
- reference to the advocacy role for public libraries would be important, if not in this document in the Public Libraries Policy itself
- the role of libraries as trusted sources of information in an age of social media, AI and uncertainty should be considered / strengthened
- there was scope to place greater emphasis on the ways in which the public library service contributes and makes a positive impact to the PfG Societal Well-being Framework and to wider Departmental priorities such as health and well-being, positive ageing, social inclusion, education and learning, rurality, and community cohesion
- under section 6, in the Consultation Questionnaire it would be useful to include an additional free text question along the lines of: - *'What more could the public library service do for you?'* This could possibly replace or be combined with the existing question '*What improvements would you suggest could be made by the public library service?*'
- Library staff are key to services provided in our libraries. It would seem appropriate to include a question covering this area, perhaps along the following lines after question 35: - *'The staff working in libraries are skilled, helpful and provide a good service. (Strongly agree / agree / neither agree nor disagree / disagree / strongly disagree)'*
- suggest including a wider range of partners at paragraph 22 and some have been suggested in the tracked change document attached
- it will be important to reflect the need for public library services to develop and evolve to promote, engage and meet the changing needs of library users – perhaps something added to paragraphs 23, 24 or 25
- the legislation emphasises the need to promote awareness of the public library service and encourage / increase participation and this would be worth reflecting in the narrative of the document

- the positive social, economic and community impacts associated with the visible and physical presence of public libraries on high streets in towns and villages across Northern Ireland could be amplified in the preamble to Section 3, Places.

16.3 The Chief Executive thanked Members for their feedback which he would forward to the Department with a reminder of the feedback provided by Members at the Board Planning Day in September. He confirmed that in his response he would refer to the tight timescale for providing feedback and note the Board's concern that the full draft Public Libraries Policy should be subject to consultation and ask the Department to reconsider their decision. A copy of the Chief Executive's response to the Department will be issued to Board Members for information.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 11 December 2025 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library.

18. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

18.1 The meeting ended at 1:36 pm.

18.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:

Ms U O'Hare joined the meeting at 10.43 am

Mrs W Osborne left at 12:25 pm
Councillor R Lynch left at 1:00 pm
Councillor R Kinnear left at 1:27 pm
Councillor J Gilmour left at 1:27 pm
Ms U O'Hare left at 1:35 pm

Signed:



Ms Bonnie Anley
Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

11th December 2025