

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held
on Thursday 21 November 2024 at 10:30am in Lisburn Road Library

PRESENT

Mr John Peto	Chairperson
Ms Bonnie Anley	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	
Councillor Andrew McAuley	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Ms Julie Reid	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Ciara Gault	Service Development Manager
Dr Mary-Ellen Lynn	Area Manager
Ms Diane McGlynn	Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to Lisburn Road Library, in particular he welcomed Ms C Gault who was attending the meeting as an observer and Dr ME Lynn who would be giving a presentation later in the meeting. He paid tribute to Helen Poston, Service Development Manager, who was unable to join the meeting and was instrumental in the refurbishment of Lisburn Road Library, working with the architects, contractors and furniture suppliers to deliver such an outstanding building.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 An apology was received from Mr A Driscoll, Councillor R Kinnear, Mrs W Osborne and Ms A Adair.
- 1.2 On behalf of the Committee, the Chairperson conveyed condolences to Ms A Adair on her recent family bereavement.

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 There was no Chairperson's business.

4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

SC.01.11.24

4.1 In the absence of the Director of Library Services, the Chief Executive presented the Director's Business report. He referred to the ad hoc closures and highlighted that the total hours of ad hoc closures equated to 0.66% of the total available opening hours. In response to questions from Members, the Chief Executive and Head of Service reported on the current recruitment exercise for Library Assistants and the steps taken to minimise the risk of ad hoc closures occurring.

4.2 The Chief Executive went on to give an update on the recent reopening of Ballymoney, Bessbrook and Killyleagh libraries and the status of Fivemiletown Library.

4.3 The Chief Executive informed the Services Committee of the Christmas and New Year library closures and confirmed that messaging to inform customers in advance of the extended period of closure was in hand. Marketing will also promote the opportunity to borrow up to 18 items over the holiday period and access to the online library will continue to be available 24/7.

4.4 The Chief Executive welcomed a number of recent visits by stakeholders to libraries, such as:

- Communities Minister Mr Gordon Lyons to Carrickfergus Library on 20 September 2024 on the invitation of the High Sheriff of Co Antrim, Patricia Perry, to launch her exhibition on the History of the role of the High Sheriff
- Councillor A Cathcart, Mayor, to Bangor Carnegie Library on 10 October 2024 for a digital detox event
- Education Minister Mr Paul Givan to Lisburn City Library on 17 October 2024 to meet with Ms B Anley, Dr J O' Hagan and Ms A Adair. The Minister also took the opportunity to record a short video to promote Book Week NI
- Councillor M Murray, The Lord Mayor of Belfast, to Belfast Central Library on Love Your Library Day, 23 October 2024. The Lord Mayor had a tour of the library and took part in the 'Secret Stories' event which showcased materials from the Fine Book Room and archives
- Mr I Greenway, Director of Culture, and Mr J Ball, Head of Culture Policy Branch, Department for Communities (DfC), to Belfast Central and Whiterock libraries on 23 October 2024 with Libraries NI staff. Mr I Greenway also visited Maghera Library on 15 November 2024
- Communities Minister Mr Gordon Lyons to Carrickfergus Library on 6 November 2024 to announce the publication of Make the Call results 2023/24.

- 4.5 The Chief Executive drew attention to recent partnership working with Deafblind UK, following a successful funding application the organisation will work with Libraries NI to:
- create information hubs in each library location. These will house information and resources available to the public
 - provide training for library staff
 - give support, as appropriate, as to how to make libraries as accessible as possible for customers who are experiencing sensory loss.
- 4.6 The Chief Executive also drew Members attention to the launch of a new initiative which features a dedicated Book Club and Reading Corner in the Cancer Centre for patients and their families. Libraries NI, in collaboration with the Macmillan Support and Information Centre aims to provide emotional comfort and community support to patients through a monthly reading group. He informed the Services Committee that an informal launch and photocall with the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, representatives from the Macmillan Support and Information Centre, together with users of the facility took place on 13 November 2024 and that feedback so far has been very positive.
- 4.7 The Chief Executive went on to highlight Action Mental Health's Festive Splash which will take place on Sunday 1 December at Crawfordsburn beach. He reported that Libraries NI's Charity Working Group are promoting the fundraising event and that all fundraising money will go directly to supporting Action Mental Health's work in Northern Ireland.
- 4.8 The Chief Executive also drew Member's attention to the following recent and forthcoming significant events and initiatives:
- Big Summer Read
 - Macmillan Coffee Mornings, 27 September 2024
 - Lurgan Pride, 5 October 2024
 - Tour of Armagh City Chapter Libraries, 10 October 2024
 - Book Week NI, 21 – 27 October 2024
 - Changing Attitudes to Ageing Event, Derry Central Library, 25 October 2024
 - BBC Comes to Town
 - Ulster Scots Week, 25 – 29 November 2024
 - Christmas Jumper Day, 12 December 2024
 - Brew Monday, 20 January 2025
 - Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2025
 - Burns Night, January 2025
 - Exhibitions in libraries during November 2024.
- 4.9 The Services Committee discussed a number of the events and initiatives in detail. In response to a question from Ms B Anley, the Chief Executive explained that the differing approaches to the Big Summer Read over the last number of years included targets that did not enable meaningful comparisons of year on

year participation. Ms B Anley reminded Members of the concerns raised about maintaining young adult library members and the promotion of the Reading and Reader Development Strategy being fundamental to its success. It was agreed that an update on progress to deliver the Reading and Reader Development Strategy be brought forward to a future Services Committee meeting.

- 4.10 Councillor A McAuley referred to changing reading habits of children and the availability of a new children's reading Kindle, he enquired if it was compatible with Libraries NI's eResources. Ms J Reid reported that it was not compatible. The Chief Executive noted the new Kindle and agreed to consider the potential of providing digital reading devices as a prize for the summer reading challenge next year. Councillor A McAuley highlighted the buy in from parents as key to the Big Summer Read and suggested it would be useful to promote it in the end of term school newsletters. Ms J Reid gave an overview of the collaboration with, and support from, the Education Authority in promoting the Big Summer Read.
- 4.11 Ms B Anley drew attention to the 10th anniversary of Book Week NI next year and the importance of having a clear strategic direction of what Libraries NI want to achieve from it and to collaborate with BBC NI as soon as possible. Ms J Reid confirmed that work had already commenced on planning for the 10th anniversary.
- 4.12 Services Committee noted that Christmas Jumper Day coincides with the Board meeting and Partnership Celebration event in Lisburn City Library on 12 December 2024. As staff and customers are encouraged to join in a festive fundraising day to raise money for Save the Children, Members suggested that Board Members and guests are also encouraged to take part.
- 4.13 Following a discussion the Chief Executive confirmed that a post project evaluation (PPE) would be carried out on the EnerPHit buildings and will include comparison of performance with other buildings. It was agreed that a simplified report of the PPE findings with graphical images would be presented to a future Board meeting, possibly via the Business Support Committee.
- 4.14 Ms B Anley informed the Services Committee of an exercise by Translink where the Chief Executive travelled on the network wearing a blindfold to test their accessibility for users with visual impairments. She highlighted the value of the learning from the exercise. Ms M Bell, Head of Service, outlined the approach that Libraries NI takes when designing new builds and refurbishments such as engagement with RNIB and other stakeholders including local community groups.
- 4.15 The Chief Executive then referred to the Greening Libraries in Ireland webinar by CILIP Ireland and the Consortium of National and University Libraries (CONUL) which brought together colleagues from across the island of Ireland to discuss their Green Library initiatives. It was noted that Tim Neeson, Head of Assets, presented on the EnerPHit Projects at Ballymoney, Bessbrook and Killyleagh libraries.

4.16 The Chief Executive reported on the appointment of Alison Nolan as the new Chief Executive of the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) and Rebecca Lawrence who had been appointed as the new Chief Executive of the British Library. He also informed Services Committee that he would be visiting the British Library with the Director of Library Services on 10 December 2024.

4.17 The Chairperson congratulated everyone on the delivery of another successful Book Week NI and commended the volume of activity across the network.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2024 SC.02.11.24

5.1 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 12 September 2024 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 17 October 2024.

6. MATTERS ARISING SC.03.11.24

7.3 - Public Library Standard Stock Target

6.1 The Chief Executive referred to the enquiry about the inclusion of the target to achieve £2.25 per capita on stock in line with the Public Library Standard and whether it was necessary to include a standard that was over ambitious considering the budget allocation which was beyond the control of Libraries NI. He confirmed that, in his view, it was appropriate to highlight to the Department for Communities the need for a stock fund based on the population. He also noted that with the development of a new Departmental public library policy this potentially may change.

7. CUSTOMERFIRST STRATEGY SC.04.11.24

7.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, introduced the CustomerFirst Strategy that had been circulated highlighting the aim to set the corporate direction over three years to achieve a transformation of the frontline library service, service delivery and service offers to provide customers with an inclusive, aspirational and unique physical and virtual library experience. Ms M Bell highlighted the five key objectives:

- create a unique customer experience
- promote brand loyalty and ensure library use becomes a habit
- increase and retain an active customer base reflective of the NI population
- maximise participation in library programming, events and activities
- widen access to Libraries NI spaces, facilities, resources and collections.

- 7.2 The Head of Service outlined each of the key strands to deliver the strategy including; customer landscape, library experience, library service standards, customer engagement and service offers. She informed the Services Committee that the Customer Experience Team will develop a framework to implement the CustomerFirst strategy, develop key actions and key deliverables together with annual action plans. Ms M Bell also explained that the strategy would be evidenced in Libraries NI's new Corporate and Marketing Plans, the new Library Policy, Annual Business Plan and the Services Directorate Service Plan.
- 7.3 The Head of Service gave an overview of the monitoring, evaluation and review plans for the strategy and welcomed questions from Members. Following a discussion and in response to questions, the Head of Service confirmed that the Customer Experience Team would be the dedicated team with responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the strategy and sourcing funding streams. The Chief Executive reiterated that a framework for implementing the strategy would be developed with subsequent specific actions incorporated into annual Business and Service Plans and progress reported accordingly. The Services Committee welcomed the development of the CustomerFirst Strategy and the renewed focus on library customers and thanked Ms M Bell for her presentation.
- 7.4 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the CustomerFirst Strategy to the Board. It was further agreed that the presentation on the strategy would also be made available to Board Members.

8. REVIEW OF MANAGING UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR POLICY/SAFE AND WELCOMING LIBRARIES POLICY SC.05.11.24

- 8.1 Ms J Reid, Deputy Head of Service, presented the review of the Managing Unacceptable Behaviour Policy in line with the policy review cycle, highlighting the strategic context in conducting the review as taking consideration of recent publications such as Managing Safe and Inclusive Public Library Services by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Creating Safer Libraries by Libraries Connected. Ms J Reid drew attention to the change of the policy name to Safe and Welcoming Libraries Policy reflecting more positive and inclusive language.
- 8.2 The Deputy Head of Service gave an overview of the amendments in line with the guidance provided by CILIP and Libraries Connected which significantly enhances the customer experience with a focus on safety, inclusivity and accessibility. She confirmed that the accompanying staff guidance and exclusion procedures were also updated and that the Joint Trade Unions were consulted.
- 8.3 In response to a question Ms J Reid gave examples of ways to manage the diverse needs and expectations of library users and confirmed that staff training

would address these, giving staff the skills to deal with a range of situations. She also informed the Services Committee that the policy would form part of the induction for new staff. The Deputy Head of Service commended Ms C Gault, Service Development Manager, Ms M Gavin, Area Manager and Ms N Terlik, Senior Services Manager, for their contribution to the policy review by horizon scanning and benchmarking.

- 8.4 On a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Safe and Welcoming Libraries Policy to the Board.

9. REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING POLICY SC.06.11.24

- 9.1 The Chief Executive introduced the review of the Safeguarding Policy in line with the policy review cycle and reported that the review included advice from external experts Volunteer Now and the Education Authority Legal Services and consultation with Joint Trade Unions. He gave an overview of the tracked changes to the policy highlighting more inclusive and simplified terminology, updated references to statutory safeguarding legislation and the recognition of bullying and online as types of abuse.

- 9.2 Ms B Anley welcomed the inclusion of The Executive Office Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and asked for confirmation of no further updates from the Department of Justice.

- 9.3 Subject to the confirmation requested above and on a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Ms B Anley, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Safeguarding Policy to the Board.

10. SERVICE PLAN QUARTER TWO PROGRESS REPORT AND RISK REGISTER SC.07.11.24

- 10.1 The Head of Service presented the Service Plan Progress Report 2024/25 which demonstrates progress on achieving targets as at 30 September 2024. Ms M Bell highlighted that the first six months was during the period of industrial action and confirmed that programming and activities recommenced in September. She then gave an overview of each of the amber targets, particularly noting those that aligned with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which were stretch targets as requested by the Board. The Head of Service highlighted a number of significant events and activities that took place in the reporting period.

- 10.2 Committee Members highlighted that the Risk Register was omitted from the papers that had been circulated but agreed they were content to receive the overview and note the Risk Register. It was agreed that the Risk Register would

be uploaded to the Extranet and a link emailed to Committee Members following the meeting in order for them to view it ahead of the Board meeting on 12 December 2024.

10.3 Ms M Bell then referred to the associated Risk Register and highlighted the reduced risk status of a number of risks as a result of the budget allocation and the end to industrial action. The Head of Service explained the status of each risk in turn, noting that the risk associated with planning was the only one remaining as red.

10.4 Services Committee noted the Service Plan Progress Report and Risk Register.

11. LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE BELFAST CITY COUNCIL AREA

11.1 Dr ME Lynn, Area Manager with responsibility for the Belfast City Council area, gave a presentation to the Committee on library services in the area including an overview of the combined active library members and the range of core activities and programming for the 16 libraries within her remit.

11.2 The Area Manager outlined the history of Lisburn Road Library including the significant investment to refurbish the library in 2016/17. She also outlined the planned investment to upgrade furniture and equipment in Chichester Library and the recent investment to transform Whiterock Library to a predominantly focussed children's library. In addition to the aesthetic upgrade of the internal space of Whiterock Library, Dr ME Lynn advised that £20,000 funding had been allocated for the children's delivery plan which would include GCSE Maths tuition, programming of enhanced activities and additional resources to support children's clubs and activities in the library.

11.3 Dr ME Lynn then described the following successful recent events and initiatives in the Belfast City Council area:

- Biodiversity Projects, Cregagh and Lisburn Road libraries
- Library of Sanctuary, Ormeau Road Library
- Féile an Phobail, Shankill Road and Whiterock libraries
- Book Week NI
- Macmillan Cancer Centre Partnership
- The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, visit to Holywood Arches and Whiterock libraries.

11.4 The Chairperson thanked Dr ME Lynn for the very positive and informative presentation and stated that he would be keen for the Services Committee to visit Whiterock Library in the future.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

12.1 There was no other business.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Services Committee would be held remotely on Thursday 16 January 2025 at 10:30am via Zoom.

14. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

14.1 The meeting ended at 1:21pm and was followed by a tour of Lisburn Road Library.

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