

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held in Omagh Library
on Thursday 20 March 2025 at 10:30am

PRESENT

Mr John Peto	Chairperson
Mr Adrian Driscoll (joined remotely)	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	
Councillor Andrew McAuley	
Mrs Wendy Osborne	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Ms Julie Reid	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications
Ms Patricia Curran	Area Manager
Mrs Bernie McCann	Area Manager
Mr Stuart Temple	District Manager
Ms Diane McGlynn	Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting. In particular, he welcomed Mr Stuart Temple, District Manager, for the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area who was attending as an observer.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

1.1 An apology was received from Ms B Anley and Councillor R 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 congratulated Ms J Reid on her appointment to Head of Service and wished her well in her new role that she would commence shortly.

4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

SC.01.03.25

- 4.1 The Director of Library Services referred to the report that had been circulated. She informed Members of the stock spend at 19 March 2025 as £3,503,890 representing a per capita spend of £1.84.
- 4.2 Ms A Adair reported on a recent visit to Omagh and Fivemiletown libraries by Iain Greenway, Director of Culture, Department for Communities, and also referred to the recent successful Ministerial launch of Fivemiletown Library.
- 4.3 She then informed Members that the project to refurbish Ballycastle Library was delayed. Libraries NI was, however, able to complete aspects of the work to re-site the IT equipment and purchase new furniture in preparation for hopefully finishing the planned work in the early summer. Members enquired about Libraries NI's dependency on the Education Authority as the Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) and the potential impact on libraries in the future. Ms A Adair stated that she understood the impact and timing of Storm Éowyn was a significant factor on this occasion but that she would seek clarity from the Director of Business Support.
- 4.4 The Director of Library Services gave an update on the Marketing Campaign and referred to a video posted on the Cool FM Facebook page on World Book Day by Melissa Riddel, Cool FM presenter. It was noted that the video would be shared on the Extranet for Committee Members to view.
- 4.5 Ms A Adair reported that Libraries NI was successful in its application to The Executive Office (TEO) for a second year of funding to deliver the universal offer of free period products through the library network. Up to £250,000 has been secured to deliver the project in the 2025/26 financial year including funding to cover administration and promotion. She also reported that Libraries NI has been supporting TEO at a series of road shows in shopping centres across the country to promote the free period products initiative and that the report on responses to The Free Period Products Survey 2024 is now available.
- 4.6 The Director of Library Services drew Member's attention to the overview and link to the report on eBook Lending in Public Libraries, Arts Council England. She confirmed that a report outlining the complexities of the eBook market would be presented to the Services Committee in May.

4.7 The Director of Library Services then went on to highlight the following recent events and initiatives and significant forthcoming dates:

- Online Yoga and Mindfulness Sessions
- Learn at Lunch – Online Learning
- Children's Mental Health Week, 3 - 9 February 2025
- Give it a Go Week, 10 – 14 February 2025
- NI Science Festival, 12 – 23 February 2025
- Irish Astronomy Week, 1 – 8 March 2025
- World Book Day, 6 March 2025
- International Women's Day, 8 March 2025
- Seachtain na Gaeilge le Energia, 1-17 March 2025
- Heritage Week, 10 – 14 March 2025
- Mental Health Awareness Week, 12 – 18 May 2025
- Empathy Day, 12 June 2025
- Refugee Week, 16 – 22 June 2025
- Summer Reading Challenge 2025.

4.8 Ms A Adair gave an overview of Libraries NI's participation in the following meetings:

- Open University (OU), Lisburn City Library, 15 January 2025
- Archiving Conflict and Reconciliation Project Symposium, Dublin Castle, 20 February 2025
- CILIP President, Sue Lacey-Bryant, 12 March 2025
- Department of Education (RAISE), 19 March 2025

She confirmed that she would keep Members informed of progress on each of the above.

4.9 The Director of Library Services highlighted that Libraries NI was awarded Runner-Up in the EDGE Awards Physical Category for the refurbishment of Ballymoney Library and that feedback from the judges noted the application as excellent. She also informed the Services Committee that Paul Kelly, Senior Services Manager, has been successful in his submission to present at a parallel session at the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ireland Joint Conference in April. He will give a 20 minute presentation on Learn at Lunch, Move with Libraries NI and Mindfulness Initiatives at Libraries NI.

4.10 The Services Committee thanked the Director of Library Services and noted the Director's Business report.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JANUARY 2025 SC.02.03.25

5.1 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 16 January 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 13 February 2025.

6. MATTERS ARISING

6.1 There were no matters arising.

7. LIBRARIES NI AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

SC.03.03.25

7.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, referred to the report that had been circulated to inform Members of the context and background to the Rural Needs Annual Report 2024/25, Libraries NI's partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and to give an overview of library services to rural communities.

7.2 The Head of Service explained that The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 has applied to Libraries NI since 1 June 2018 and that the Act requires Libraries NI 'to have due regard to rural needs when developing, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services'.

7.3 Ms M Bell reported that based on the DAERA definition of rural, there are 29 libraries in the network designated as rural i.e. located in settlements of fewer than 5,000 residents and highlighted the variety of the size and facilities of these libraries. She also highlighted that an analysis of active borrowers (using the Central Postcode Directory, NISRA) shows that all libraries serve at least some rural dwellers with a number of libraries serving a larger number of rural dwellers than a designated 'rural' library.

7.4 The Head of Service then gave an overview of Libraries NI's partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) through a Memorandum of Understanding and outlined a number of projects that DAERA has funded for Libraries NI.

7.5 Ms M Bell went on to highlight the scope of investment in a number of rural libraries in the last two years and gave a flavour of the range of services, resources and programming available highlighting the following events that were held during 2024/25:

- Ulster Orchestra performances in Downpatrick Library
- Public Records Office NI: PRONI on Tour Exhibition in Fivemiletown and Lisnaskea libraries
- the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) Exhibition and Roadshow in Cookstown, Enniskillen, Limavady, Newry City and Omagh libraries.

7.6 The Chairperson commended the achievement of the new Fivemiletown Library and the services provided to rural communities and Members noted the report.

8. RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25 SC.04.03.25

- 8.1 Ms M Bell presented the Draft Rural Needs Annual Report 2024/25 and confirmed that no specific rural needs were identified in any of the policies, strategies or plans which were subject to a Rural Needs Impact Assessment during the 2024/25 year.
- 8.2 In response to a question, Ms M Bell confirmed that the rural needs annual report was a template provided by DAERA and that the detail of the report was in line with the information they required. Members commented that the level of detail in the Libraries NI and Rural Communities Report gave a greater insight into the due regard of rural needs and enquired if it could be appended to the annual report.
- 8.3 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Rural Needs Annual Report 2024/25 to the Board.

9. REVIEW OF PARTNERSHIP POLICY SC.05.03.25

- 9.1 Ms K Keys presented the revised Partnership Policy that was reviewed in line with the policy review cycle and highlighted minor tracked changes to strengthen the parameters of the policy to ensure that partnership work is carried out in a way that maximises the benefits for library users and services.
- 9.2 In response to a question the Deputy Head of Service confirmed that staff guidelines and a template are being developed to assist staff in decision making on whether a proposal is suitable to consider progressing.
- 9.3 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Partnership Policy to the Board.

10. REVIEW OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY SC.06.03.25

- 10.1 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications introduced the revised Social Media Policy highlighting that the policy was reviewed in line with experience and best practice and that other public sector policies were also reviewed in the process.
- 10.2 Mr G Beattie drew attention to minor amendments that were made to update terminology in line with the social media platforms used by Libraries NI and confirmed that the Education Authority legal services had reviewed the revised policy.

- 10.3 The Services Committee discussed the reach of social media and use of the platform X and recognised the 24/7 availability of social media and the capacity to respond to customer demand. Mr G Beattie thanked Board Members for their support and interaction on social media and on behalf of Members, the Chairperson commended the Marketing Team on managing Libraries NI's social media.
- 10.4 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Social Media Policy to the Board.

11. LIBRARY SERVICES IN FERMANAGH AND OMAGH DISTRICT COUNCIL AREA

- 11.1 Mrs B McCann, Area Manager with responsibility for the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area, gave a presentation to the Committee on library services in the area. She informed Members that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council is the largest geographical area with the lowest population in Northern Ireland.
- 11.2 The Area Manager highlighted headline statistics from the 2021 Census and gave an overview of service provision in the area through five libraries, two mobile libraries and one homecall service. She highlighted that three libraries in the area offer an Out of Hours service and two libraries hold dedicated cultural heritage collections.
- 11.3 Ms B McCann spoke to each of the five libraries in turn, describing the history of the building, the area the library serves, the volume of use and partnerships, initiatives and events specific to each. The Area Manager went on to describe the mobile library service to rural communities and the homecall service to people who are housebound or unable to get to a library.
- 11.4 On behalf of the Services Committee, the Chairperson thanked Mrs B McCann for the presentation and wished her well in her pending retirement.

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 on Thursday 15 May 2025 at 10:30am in Dungiven Library.

14. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

14.1 The meeting ended at 12:15pm and was followed by a tour of Omagh Library.

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