



### **3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

- 3.1 The Vice-Chairperson thanked Members for accommodating the change to facilitate the meeting to be held remotely. It was noted that the agenda was amended accordingly and that the Heritage Service Presentation and viewing of treasures from the Fine Book Room would be deferred to the March 2026 Services Committee Meeting.
- 3.2 The Vice-Chairperson referred to the schedule of Board and Committee meetings that was circulated at the Board meeting on 16 October 2025. He reminded Members that it was agreed to consider rescheduling the meeting of 18 March 2027 to the afternoon of 25 March 2027, following the Business Support Committee. Mr A Driscoll proposed to proceed with the change of date to which all Members agreed.
- 3.3 Ms B Anley drew attention to the review of the Community Information Policy which was also deferred from today's agenda. She informed the Committee that she would be attending a meeting with the Chief Executive and Communities Minister on 11 December and that the outcome of that meeting may require further consideration to the review of the Community Information Policy.

### **4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS**

**SC.01.11.25**

- 4.1 The Director of Library Services advised Members of the untimely passing of a former member of staff, Mr Gary Hill on Sunday 2 November 2025. Gary had worked for Libraries NI since 2018, initially as a Building Supervisor team leader in Belfast Central Library and latterly as the District Officer responsible for enhanced programming in libraries in the North Down and Ards area. Gary was instrumental in starting the Bangor Carnegie Library Walking for Health Group and securing the Ireland and the Birth of Europe Exhibition to tour five libraries. Gary sadly passed away following an illness. Ms A Adair recalled Gary's taste for adventure evidenced by his stories of a daring trip across the Atlantic Ocean in a sailing boat. She noted that Gary will be fondly remembered by colleagues across Libraries NI for his passion for libraries and love of his job but most of all, will be missed for his genuine warmth and interest in the people he worked with.
- 4.2 The Services Committee extended their condolences to Gary's family and colleagues.
- 4.3 The Director of Library Services referred to the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Book Week NI and confirmed an update would be provided by Ms J Reid and Mr G Beattie at agenda item seven. She also confirmed that a Memorandum of Understanding with BBC NI has been signed for a further three years.

- 4.4 The Director of Library Services then reported on a collaboration between Waterford City and County Library Service, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Libraries NI. She advised that following a successful programme of events on 8 and 9 October 2025 discussions are currently underway regarding a potential future funding application. It was noted that proposed projects for 2026/27 may include activities linked to The Year of the Normans in 2027.
- 4.5 The Director of Library Services informed the Committee that an Ulster History Circle plaque was unveiled at Carrickfergus Library on 30 September 2025 to commemorate Charlotte Eliza Lawson Riddell (1832 – 1906), a prominent Victorian ghost story writer. She wrote 56 books, novels and short stories and became part owner and editor of St James' Magazine, a prominent London literary journal in the 1860's.
- 4.6 The Director of Library Services reported on the Let's Talk About... Death, Dying and Grief, a week-long initiative held in libraries and online during 17 – 21 November 2025. The initiative looks at conversations around one of life's most universal experiences through history, culture, storytelling and practical guidance. The programme explores how people across time and place have understood death, and how we live with it today. Events include talks from leading experts, exhibitions, workshops and resources to support anyone curious about traditions of the past, other cultures, or ways to navigate grief in the present.
- 4.7 Ms A Adair confirmed that Ms C Gault, Deputy Head of Service, was currently attending the five-day Erasmus+ study programme to Sweden. The visit includes engagement with libraries in the Skåne region, Malmö, Lund, and Landskrona libraries, followed by visits to the Swedish National Library and Stockholm Public Library. The programme will conclude with a full-day itinerary in Uppsala, including the Swedish Study Circles Programme headquarters, Uppsala City Library, Carolina Rediviva University Library and Kulturhuset Stadsteatern. The Director of Library Services reminded Members that Ms M Bell, Head of Service, had attended this programme earlier in the year in the Netherlands and would be presenting on this to the Committee at agenda item eight.
- 4.8 The Director of Library Services provided an update on Super Searchers, a partnership between CILIP UK and Google to launch the Super Searchers training programme in the UK. The programme will help to empower people to understand the tools and tactics they can deploy to make sense of digital information. Library staff across the UK, including Libraries NI will be trained on best practices from information literacy experts to help evaluate information online. In turn, trained library staff will be able to educate, support and empower library customers.
- 4.9 The Director of Library Services referred Members to Libraries NI's closures over the Christmas and New Year holiday period.
- 4.10 The Director of Library Services informed the Committee that Mr I Greenway, Director of Culture, Department for Communities, visited Downpatrick and

Killyleagh libraries on 24 October 2025 meeting Service Development Manager, Ms B Steele and Deputy Head of Service, Ms C Gault. She reported that Mr I Greenway joined Book Week celebrations in Downpatrick Library and heard about the impact of the refurbished Killyleagh Library.

- 4.11 Ms A Adair drew attention to the recent award won by the Project Management and Architects of the Ballymoney Library Retrofit project. McLean & Forte Architects Ltd won the Retrofit of the Year Award Category at The Architectural Technology Awards (AT Awards) 2025 on 26 September. The AT Awards are the premier accolades that celebrate outstanding achievement in the discipline of Architectural Technology. She further reported that the contractor, Seaview Developments Ltd, won the Energy Efficiency Project of the Year 2025 award for Ballymoney Library Low Carbon Retrofitting at the Construction Employers Federation (CEF) Construction Excellence Awards 2025.
- 4.12 The Director of Library Services then reported on current library closures. Woodstock Library closed following flooding on Friday 31 October 2025. The flooding, caused by blocked drainage and heavy rainfall, resulted in damage to the ground floor, rendering the existing floor covering unsalvageable. Remedial works will include the application of self-levelling floor screed and new carpet installation. There is currently no confirmed date for reopening and customers are being redirected to the closest libraries and to digital services.
- 4.13 Warrenpoint Library which is located in premises owned by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust closed on 3 November 2025 due to the impact of alteration work being carried out by the Trust to the heating system. It will take a number of weeks to resolve the issue and customers are being directed to the closest library and to digital services.
- 4.14 The Director of Library Services notified the Committee that the minor refurbishment work to Ballycastle Library should be completed by the end of November with the library reopening to customers in December. She confirmed that a programme of events will be delivered to celebrate the upgraded library.
- 4.15 The Services Committee noted that following the amber weather warning issued by The Met Office on Friday 3 October, all libraries closed at 3:00pm as a precautionary measure for the safety of staff and customers. All libraries reopened on Saturday 4 October 2025.
- 4.16 The Director of Library Services referred Members to the ad hoc closures of libraries at the end of quarter two 2025/26 which equates to 0.23% of the total library opening hours available.
- 4.17 Ms A Adair drew attention to the following recent and forthcoming events and Libraries NI's participation:
- Macmillan Coffee Morning, 26 September 2025
  - Harry Potter Day, 17 October 2025

- Women's Aid Charity Card Packing, Belfast Central Library, 6 November 2025
- Learn@Lunch – Screenwriting with Mary Kate and Rachel O'Flanagan
- exhibitions in libraries
- Lisburn City Library 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, November 2025
- Christmas events and activities
- The Poet Laureate, Newcastle Library, 6 March 2026

4.18 The Director of Library Services then provided an overview of the attendance of Libraries NI's officers at recent conferences and strategic meetings, including:

- British Library, Living Knowledge Network Steering Group Meeting, 10 September 2025
- BookTrust Centenary Celebrations, 14 October 2025
- Period Products - Free Provision Independent Peer Review, 15 October 2025

4.19 The Vice-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.

## **5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2025 SC.02.11.25**

5.1 On a proposal by Ms W Osborne OBE, seconded by Mr J Peto, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 15 September 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 16 October 2025.

## **6. MATTERS ARISING**

6.1 The Director of Library Services confirmed that the Business Continuity Framework would be presented to the Business Support Committee on 27 November and that the committee papers are currently available on the Board Extranet and will remain accessible.

## **7. BOOK WEEK NI 2025 10<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

7.1 The Vice-Chairperson commended the scale and exceptional quality of events programmed for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Book Week NI and invited Ms J Reid, Head of Service, and Mr G Beattie, Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications to share their experience with the Services Committee.

- 7.2 Ms J Reid, Head of Service, described the partnership initiative between Libraries NI and BBC NI as focusing on the importance of books, writers, reading and libraries and referred to Book Week NI as an established feature in the cultural calendar of Northern Ireland. She drew attention to some new programming added this year and reflected on the broad variety of events, activities and content, aimed to engage with all ages.
- 7.3 The Head of Service informed Services Committee of the high-profile launch event held in Belfast Central Library on 6 October with an invited audience. She went on to highlight a number of selected headline library events with award winning authors, renowned BBC personalities and local stakeholders. She also gave an overview of BBC events and content and the invaluable exposure of Libraries NI to a mainstream BBC audience across Northern Ireland, with BBC augmenting much of its high-profile radio and television programming with content relating to books, reading and libraries. She then referred Members to the links provided in the Director's Business report and encouraged Members to review the recorded events and media coverage.
- 7.4 Ms J Reid expressed thanks to all staff and Board Members who contributed in any way to the success of Book Week NI and particularly the Marketing Team and Stock Team. She then confirmed that an evaluation of this year's Book Week NI will be completed to inform future decision making and that a meeting is scheduled with BBC NI on 21 November 2025.
- 7.5 Mr G Beattie, Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications, presented statistics to demonstrate the social media reach and online activity during Book Week NI. He shared the developing approach to Book Week NI, featuring on multiple platforms including video, social media, website, podcast, email and plasma screens. He emphasised the impact of investing a relatively small amount of money to create a high quality programme which provided the basis on which Marketing could develop promotional activity.
- 7.6 On behalf of the Services Committee, the Vice-Chairperson thanked Ms J Reid and Mr G Beattie and their respective teams for their excellent efforts in successfully executing Book Week NI 2025.
- 7.7 Ms B Anley reiterated thanks to everyone involved and particularly to Mr M Adair BBC NI for his personal commitment to the initiative. She suggested that it would be beneficial if Board Members were provided with a list of key events and attendees, and a co-ordinated list of library visits by members during Love your Library Day to facilitate promotion.

## **8. PRESENTATION ON ERASMUS+ STUDY VISIT TO THE NETHERLANDS**

- 8.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, gave a presentation on the Erasmus+ study programme, facilitated by Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), Ireland that she attended in the Netherlands from 18 – 22 May 2025.

- 8.2 The Head of Service advised that the programme included visits to libraries in Amsterdam, Utrecht, the Hague, Almere and Groningen as well as scheduled meetings with library leaders with a focus on five themes: digital innovation, leadership development, social engagement, supporting equality and library buildings.
- 8.3 Ms M Bell gave an overview of the discussions on each of the themes and highlighted Dutch approaches and perspectives to public and academic library principles, services and buildings aligning to similar in Libraries NI. The Head of Service went on to demonstrate innovative library buildings and spaces through visual images and described a variety of unique programmes, initiatives and themes to specific libraries.
- 8.4 The Services Committee conveyed thanks to Ms M Bell for the informative and inspiring presentation.

**9. REVIEW OF ROOM HIRE POLICY SC.03.11.25**

- 9.1 The Director of Library Services presented the revised Room Hire Policy with tracked changes. She reported that the policy was reviewed in line with the policy review cycle and, drawing on experience, changes were applied to strengthen the conditions that need to be met to facilitate the use and hire of library premises.
- 9.2 The Director of Library Services highlighted the proposed amendments and noted that at 3.4 wording would be added to indicate that should Libraries NI have to cancel a premises booking due to unforeseen circumstances payment would be refunded. On a question from Ms W Osborne OBE, Ms A Adair confirmed that room hire terms and conditions, room hire charges and staff guidelines for room booking would be updated.
- 9.3 Subject to the above amendment, on a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear seconded by Ms W Osborne OBE, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Review of the Room Hire Policy to the Board.

**10. FEES AND CHARGES 2026/27 SC.04.11.25**

- 10.1 Ms J Reid, Head of Service, presented the review of Fees and Charges 2026/27. She explained the rationale for fees and charges and outlined changes over recent years to remove barriers to access with the removal of some fees.
- 10.2 The Head of Service referred to the recommendation to implement the removal of the charge for non-members to use a computer or Wi-Fi. She confirmed that there has been no income generated from this charge over the past five years and therefore at no cost to Libraries NI, a perceived barrier is removed.

10.3 On a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear, seconded by Ms W Osborne, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Fees and Charges 2026/27 to the Board.

## **11. SERVICE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT QUARTER TWO AND RISK REGISTER** **SC.05.11.25**

11.1 Ms K Keys, Deputy Head of Service presented the Service Plan Progress Report 2025/26 which demonstrates progress on achieving targets as at 30 September 2025. She highlighted a number of significant achievements during the period. The Deputy Head of Service then gave a detailed overview of the Let's Talk About... Death, Dying and Grief initiative and provided an update on the implementation of the year-one action plan of the CustomerFirst Strategy.

11.2 In response to a question the Director of Library Services explained that a greater number of staff within the Services Directorate impacted on achieving the implementation of the appraisal process but confirmed managers are working to complete all staff appraisals.

11.3 The Deputy Head of Service went on to outline the associated Risk Register.

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

## **12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

12.1 There was no other notified business.

## **13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

13.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Services Committee would be a Hybrid meeting on Thursday 15 January 2026 at 10:30am in Lisburn City Library and accommodate remote attendance.

## **14. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

14.1 The meeting ended at 1:20pm

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

- Ms J Gilmour joined at 11:51am and left at 12:35pm
- Ms B Anley joined the meeting at 10:30am, was briefly disconnected and rejoined. Ms B Anley left at 12:43pm
- Mr J Peto left at 12:03pm