LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library on Thursday 23 April 2026 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

(IP) Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
(VL) Councillor Roisin Lynch	Vice-Chairperson

(IP) Councillor Alistair Cathcart
(VL) Councillor Julie Gilmour
(VL) Councillor Rosie Kinnear
(VL) Councillor Andrew McAuley
(IP) Councillor Martin McRandal
(IP) Ms Ursula O'Hare
(IP) Mr John Peto
(IP) Miss Linda Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

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

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Mr Adrian Driscoll
Mrs Wendy Osborne

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. No conflicts of interest were declared however, the position of Councillor A Cathcart and Councillor M McRandal as members of Ards and North Down Borough Council was noted in relation to Item 4 the Update on the Newtownards Library Project.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 The Chairperson drew attention to the following events which she had attended:

- Royal Visit, Randalstown Library, 3 March 2026
- Simon Armitage Poet Laureate event, Newcastle Library, 6 March 2026
- BBC Exhibition Launch, Lisburn City Library, 19 March 2026

3.2 She informed Members that the Appraisal process 2025/26 would commence shortly and thanked all Board Members who had provided information to DfC to inform her appraisal for 2025/26.

3.3 The Chairperson updated Members on the recruitment process for a new Councillor Board Member noting that a 'sift' of applications received had taken place on 22 April 2026 and interviews would be arranged for May 2026. Following appointment of the successful applicant a reserve list would be drawn up.

3.4 The Chairperson reported on the DfC/ALB Senior Leaders Forum held on 22 April 2026 to which the Chief Executive had also been invited. This was the first meeting to be chaired by the new DfC Permanent Secretary, Ms G Long. Unfortunately, as it coincided with the Libraries NI Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer is obligated to attend it was agreed that the Chairperson should attend to represent Libraries NI. She reported that she had a very positive engagement with the new Permanent Secretary and matters discussed in relation to libraries included the Big Summer Read, Programme for Government and Asset Management Strategy.

3.5 The Chairperson drew attention to the following items on the Agenda:

- Item 12: External Review of Board Effectiveness noting that both herself and Councillor A Cathcart were Board Members of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS)
- Item 15: Update on North West Development Project – this item would be taken in Committee.

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:

- Update on the Newtownards Library Project
- Update on the Enniskillen Library Project
- Head of Civil Service Visit to Belfast Central Library, 13 May 2026
- Visit to National Library of Ireland, 28 April 2026
- National Library/National Collection
- Libraries NI Response to the Government Green Paper BBC Charter Review Public Consultation

- Legal Advice – Inclusion Matter
- Libraries NI / Local Government Management Agency Shared Island Proposal
- Royal Visit, Randalstown Library, 3 March 2026
- An Evening with Simon Armitage, Newcastle Library, 6 March 2026
- BBC Exhibition Launch, 19 March 2026, Lisburn City Library
- Library Association of Ireland (LAI) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ireland Joint Conference 2026
- Ulster American Heritage Symposium, June 2026
- Belfast Central Library – update on reinstatement and other works
- Ulster Orchestra
- Assembly Questions

4.2 On behalf of Board Members the Chairperson congratulated the Director of Business Support, the Assets Manager and Assets Team for their work in the preparation of the Outline Business Case in respect of the redevelopment of Newtownards Library which has received formal departmental approval. Libraries NI has re-engaged with Council officers to take forward the next phase of the project's development.

4.3 The Chairperson reported that having received legal advice regarding the Inclusion matter the Chief Executive would seek further information from DfC.

4.4 Members noted the report.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2026 LNI 01.04.26

5.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 12 February 2026 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2026 LNI 02.04.26

6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the one matter arising at Item 11.7 in relation to further guidance to be issued to Board Members on the acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality and noted that the matter was completed as the issue had been addressed through the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. It was agreed that this guidance should be issued to all Board Members for information.

7. REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 APRIL 2026

7.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor A Cathcart, provided an oral report of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 2026. He confirmed that the formal minutes of the meeting would be available at the next Board Meeting to be held on 2 July 2026 and that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had recommended a number of items to the Board for approval. These items would be discussed under Agenda Item 8: Management Report and were as follows:

- Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2026
- Annual Board Assurance Statement 2025/26
- Corporate Risk Register (March 2026).

7.2 The Committee Chairperson drew attention to the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2026/27 which had been reviewed by Members of the Committee and recommended to the Board for approval. Due to the timing of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee it was agreed that prior to approving this document Board Members should have the opportunity to review it and it was agreed that copies would be made available at the meeting and Members would return to this item later on the Agenda.

7.3 The Committee Chairperson also highlighted the following items that were presented at the meeting:

- prior to the Committee meeting, the annual bi-lateral meeting had taken place with the Head of Internal Audit to discuss risk, control and governance. The Head of Internal Audit had given the Committee her assurance on these matters and confirmed that there had been no impairment to the independence of Internal Audit and that appropriate resources and support were in place to facilitate Internal Audit to carry out its responsibilities
- the Committee had considered the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report and Opinion which provided an overall satisfactory opinion in relation to risk, control and governance within Libraries NI
- the Committee had also considered the Chief Executive's draft Governance Statement which would be included in the Annual Report and Accounts 2025/26
- the Committee had received a report from Mr S Mungavin, Integritas Consultancy & Training who had carried out an External Quality Assessment (EQA) of the Libraries NI Internal Audit Service. The External Quality Assessment had concluded that Libraries NI fully conformed with the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the CIPFA public sector application note.

7.4 Members noted the report.

8. MANAGEMENT REPORT LNI 03.04.26

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

Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026) LNI 03.04.26 (i)

8.2 The Chief Executive presented the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2026 and drew attention in particular to Section 2: Board and Committees, Section 3: Risk Management, Section 5: Financial Planning and Monitoring and Section 9, Fraud and Raising Concerns (Whistleblowing). He also drew attention to those areas of the Statement which had been marked 'Working towards Compliance.'

8.3 Councillor A Cathcart, Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee confirmed that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period 1 October 2025 to 31 March 2026 had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting held on 22 April 2026 and that Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.

8.4 On a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, having exercised its challenge function and received the required assurances from the Accounting Officer, the Board was content to approve the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2026.

8.5 Members noted the signed Statement would be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Annual Board Assurance Statement 2025/26 LNI 03.04.26 (ii)

8.6 The Chief Executive presented the Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2026, noting that the document had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 22 April 2026. At that meeting Members had requested that a few amendments be made to the Statement prior to being submitted to the Board for approval.

8.7 The Statement was amended as per the discussion at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and on a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Ms U O'Hare, the Board was content to approve the Chairperson's Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2026.

8.8 Members noted the signed Statement would also be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Corporate Risk Register March 2026 LNI 03.04.26 (iii)

8.9 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Risk Management Group at its meeting held on 23 March 2026 and subsequently by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 22 April 2026.

8.10 He discussed each risk in turn explaining the difficulties and challenges faced by the organisation and the resulting risk rating. He noted that the Corporate Risk Register reflected a relatively stable financial and resource position as at year end and that the overall level of risk had not changed since the register was last reviewed in December 2025.

8.11 On a proposal by Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Mr J Peto, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as at March 2026.

Finance Report: February 2026 LNI 03.04.26 (iv)

8.12 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Capital and Recurrent Reports which detailed spending against budgetary allocations received up to the end of February 2026. It was noted that these reports had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 26 March 2026.

8.13 He informed Members that as at 28 February 2026 the overall expenditure position combined with projections to the end of the financial year suggested a potential underspend in the total resource allocation of £72,901 (0.2%). Work to complete drafting of the 2025/26 annual accounts was underway and year-end adjustments remain to be finalised. It was anticipated that the final accounting position would reflect an underspend of approximately 0.5% of budget or less.

8.14 He then drew attention to the capital expenditure noting that as at 28 February 2026 the overall expenditure position combined with projections to the end of the financial year suggested a potential underspend of £3,000 (0.3%) which would be within the <1% underspend margin permitted.

8.15 On behalf of Members the Chairperson commended all staff for their efforts in ensuring that the organisation remained within budget.

8.16 Members noted the report.

9. INTERIM FINANCIAL ALLOCATION 2026/27 LNI 04.04.26

9.1 The Director of Business Support reminded Members that on the 6 January 2026 the Finance Minister had published his proposals for a draft Budget 2026/30 setting out potential departmental allocations for day-to-day spending over the next three years and for capital investment for the next four years. An 8-week consultation period followed closing on 3 March 2026. To date the Executive has not reached agreement on the draft Budget 2026/30 proposals.

9.2 On 27 March 2026 correspondence was received from DfC detailing a 2026-27 Interim Budget Allocation which included a resource allocation of £8,504 million. The projected spend in the first three months of the financial year was projected to be some £10.1 million creating a potential shortfall of approximately £1.6 million. A similar approach has been adopted for capital funding with interim budgets being based on inescapable commitments previously notified to DfC including tails of existing projects from 2025/26 and existing contractual commitments.

9.3 The Director of Business Support confirmed that he has raised the issue with DfC and will formally write to the Department on this matter.

9.4 Members discussed the implications of the interim allocation and expressed concern that once again Libraries NI would be attempting to effectively manage expenditure and service delivery without sight of a full year's budget allocation.

9.5 Following discussion it was agreed that the Chairperson would write to DfC on behalf of Board Members highlighting immediate concerns and issues which may arise if a full budget allocation was not forthcoming. The Chief Executive confirmed that as Accounting Officer he would also write to DfC Accounting Officer on this matter.

9.6 Members discussed the approach proposed in the report and agreed the following actions:

- to acknowledge receipt of the interim allocation and take the opportunity to highlight the gap between contractual commitments (April through June) and the expenditure approval limit set and the need for a confirmed annual allocation ahead of the end of the first quarter and/or a revised interim allocation
- to approve a cautious and austere approach over the coming months, generally curtailing expenditure but not rushing into full blown financial controls just yet but with specific reference to minimising the stock budget at a figure as low as £250,000
- to note the work that has taken place to provide the Department with a detailed assessment of the financial requirement for delivering the public library service in 2026/27 and beyond (Resourcing the Public Library Service January 2026 refers).

9.7 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Council A Cathcart, the Board agreed the approach as detailed at paragraph 9.6 above as a framework within which expenditure would be monitored and controlled until such times as a formal budget proposal could be brought forward for consideration.

10. LIBRARIES NI ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27 DRAFT LNI 05.04.26

10.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the first draft of the Annual Business Plan 2026/27 noting that it draws on the updated vision, mission, priorities and strategic goals as set out in the Corporate Plan 2025 – 30 and other relevant planning frameworks, including the Programme for Government 2024 – 2027 published by the Northern Ireland Executive. He explained that the draft Business Plan targets and objectives for 2026/27 had been shared with the

Department and may be revised and updated, as appropriate, to take account of Departmental priorities.

10.2 He reported that as notification of a full year funding allocation for 2026/27 has yet to been received, it had not been possible to complete Section 6: Financing Our Services. When the full year funding allocation was received this section along with a number of other areas in the plan would be updated. He explained that the key planning assumption on which the draft plan had been developed was that funding would be at a similar level to that approved for 2025/26 adding that in the event of a more constrained funding allocation, a number of objectives / targets and KPIs may need to be reviewed and updated. While the funding position was uncertain it was important that there was some structure which staff could use as a basis to plan in 2026/27 and to allow more detailed Business Support and Service Plans to be developed.

10.3 A further iteration of the Annual Business Plan would be brought to the Board, when more information and clarification on the full year financial position for 2026/27 had been received.

10.4 Members noted the draft Libraries NI Annual Business Plan 2026/27.

11. BOARD OPERATING FRAMEWORK (REVIEW) — LNI 06.04.26

11.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated document and informed Members that it was last considered and approved by the Board in July 2023. He reported that after review only minor revisions had been made to align the document to the Corporate Plan 2025 – 30.

11.2 In response to a question regarding evaluating the progress of the targets contained in the Corporate Plan 2025 – 30 it was agreed that the Chief Executive and Chairperson would consider the best way to take this forward either as an item on a future Board Meeting or as a topic for the Board Planning Day.

11.3 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor R Lynch, the Board approved and adopted the updated Board Operating Framework.

12. EXTERNAL REVIEW OF BOARD EFFECTIVENESS — LNI 07.04.26

12.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the final report of the External Review of Board Effectiveness which had been carried out by Ms D Reynolds, Assistant Director Corporate Governance and Assurance at the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). This review had been carried out in line with the requirements of the Partnership Agreement.

12.2 Members noted that the overall assessment and conclusion confirmed that the Libraries NI Board and supporting Committees were performing, with the support of Executive colleagues, at a very high standard.

12.3 It was agreed that the Chairperson would write to the Department enclosing a copy of the report for their information.

12.4 The Vice-Chairperson of the Board, Councillor R Lynch thanked Ms Reynolds for carrying out a comprehensive assessment and thanked Committee Chairpersons for hosting Ms Reynolds at Committee meetings.

13. MINUTES OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 MARCH 2026 LNI 08.04.26

13.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Councillor A McAuley, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2026.

13.2 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, seconded by Mr J Peto, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 19 March 2026 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.

13.3 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, the Board approved and adopted the Rural Needs Annual Report 2025/26.

14. MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 26 MARCH 2026 LNI 09.04.26

14.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Councillor M McRandal, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2026.

14.2 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Ms U O'Hare, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 26 March 2026 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.

14.3 The Committee Chairperson referred to the minutes of the Business Support Committee held on 27 November 2025 which had been resubmitted to the Committee in March 2026 at which time they were agreed and ratified by the Committee as a true and accurate record of the Committee proceedings. The agreed minutes are available on the Extranet.

14.4 On a proposal by, Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the Board approved and adopted the Records Management Policy Review 2026.

14.5 On a proposal by Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the Board approved and adopted the Revised Disposal and Retention of Records Schedule 2026.

14.6 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the Board approved and adopted the Code of Conduct for Staff Review 2026.

14.7 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, seconded by Ms U O'Hare, the Board approved and adopted the Statement of Corporate Social Responsibility Review 2026.

Members agreed to move to Agenda Item 16 as follows:

(Item 16 on the Meeting Agenda)

15. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

15.1 The Chairperson drew Members attention back to the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2026/27 a copy of which had been made available to Members. Following review and on a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2026/27.

15.2 The Chief Executive drew attention to recent news reports regarding the Armagh City Library. He confirmed that there were no immediate plans for a new library in Armagh City and any development of such plans would require engagement with stakeholders and partner organisations.

Members agreed to move to Agenda Item 15 as follows:

(Item 15 on the Meeting Agenda)

16. UPDATE ON NORTH WEST DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – IN COMMITTEE

LNI 10.04.26

16.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Ms U O'Hare, the Board agreed to go into Committee.

16.2 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board agreed to come out of Committee.

16.3 The Chairperson reported that while in Committee, Members had received an update on the North West Development Project.

Members agreed to return to the running order of the Agenda at Item 17 as follows:

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 2 July 2026 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library

18. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

18.1 The meeting formally ended at 1:44 pm

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

Councillor R Kinnear joined the meeting at 11:04 am
Councillor J Gilmour joined the meeting at 11:25 am

Councillor J Gilmour left the meeting at 12:58
Councillor R Kinnear left the meeting at 12:57 pm
Councillor A Cathcart left the meeting at 1:15 pm
Councillor A McAuley left the meeting at 1:27 pm
Councillor R Lynch left the meeting at 1:35 pm

Signed: Bonnie Anley

Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date: 2nd July 2026