

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held in
The Writers' Room, Belfast Central Library
on Thursday 19 March 2026 at 10:30am

PRESENT

Councillor Andrew McAuley	Chairperson
Ms Bonnie Anley	
Mr Adrian Driscoll	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
Mr John Peto	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Sue Lacey Bryant	
Ms Linda Wilson	Board Member
Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Ms Julie Reid	Head of Service
Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Ciara Gault	Deputy Head of Service
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Strategic Communications and Marketing
Ms Lorraine Hart	HR Business Partner
Mr Conor McKee	Service Development Manager
Ms Brid Steele	Service Development Manager
Ms Kirsty McClelland	Service Development Manager
Mr Paul Kelly	Senior Services Manager
Ms Eileen McVerry	Senior Services Manager
Mr Michael Lynn	Services Manager
Ms Catherine Morrow	Services Manager
Mr Darren Topping	Services Officer
Ms Diane McGlynn	Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Sue Lacey Bryant, the immediate past President of CILIP UK, Chair of National Health and Digital Literacy Partnership (CILIP), a Visiting Professor in Knowledge and Information Mobilisation at Manchester Metropolitan University and Honorary Specialist Advisor to Health Innovation in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Formerly Chief Knowledge Officer for the NHS in England, Sue led the development and implementation of the Knowledge for Healthcare Strategy from 2014. Sue is currently a Knowledge Management consultant, a coach and mentor. He also welcomed Linda Wilson, Board Member, and senior library staff who were attending for Sue's presentation.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 An apology was received from Councillor Rosie 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. PRESENTATION BY SUE LACEY BRYANT

- 3.1 The Chairperson invited Ms S Lacey Bryant to give a presentation to the Services Committee on 'Libraries Change Lives: the impact of library and knowledge services'. Ms S Lacey Bryant thanked Committee Members and staff for inviting her to present and to be involved in other strategic planning discussions during her visit.
- 3.2 Ms S Lacey Bryant gave an overview of a case study that she led as former Chief Knowledge Officer in the National Health Service (NHS) England articulating the value proposition for library and knowledge services in the NHS, 'The Gift of Time', demonstrating the value of NHS knowledge and library services and the return on investment from these services using Treasury approved methods. She then applied the principles to public libraries, acknowledging the financial and economic benefits of helping customers connect with information and services contributes to social and economic wellbeing, providing positive outcomes for people and communities while recognising to a large extent that financial benefits arise downstream from libraries' activities. Ms S Lacey Bryant's presentation illustrated some of the ways in which libraries make a difference in supporting learning and literacy and therefore building the economy of the future and fostering social mobility, concluding that public libraries are agents of positive change and innovation at the heart of thriving communities.
- 3.3 Ms S Lacey Bryant finished by drawing the Committee's attention to the benefits to Libraries NI, as an employer partner of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) UK.
- 3.4 In response to questions Ms S Lacey Bryant shared her experience of educating people on misinformation, the benefits of AI, available research on the social and economic impact of libraries and how to apply this to Libraries NI's environment. She also clarified the role and value of Libraries Connected, particularly in delivering universal offers and sharing information to libraries which sit within Councils in England. The Chief Executive provided detail on the potential for research to be carried out on behalf of Libraries NI and the context of the Department for Communities expectations.

3.5 The Chairperson thanked Ms S Lacey Bryant for a very comprehensive and informative presentation.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

4.1 There was no Chairperson's Business.

5. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

SC.01.03.26

5.1 The Director of Library Services referred to the report that had been circulated highlighting the recent visit of Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Edinburgh to Randalstown Library on 3 March. She also confirmed that the visit to Belfast Central Library by Dr Audrey Whitty, Director of the National Library of Ireland, which was planned to take place on 27 January 2026 has been rescheduled to 23 March 2026.

5.2 The Director of Library Services advised Members that the removal of charges for non-library members accessing public computers and Wi-Fi has been paused until after a review of library membership procedures takes place.

5.3 Ms A Adair drew attention to a BBC News Story 'How NI sculptures are shaping our children's stories' which was published in the run up to World Book Day exploring how public sculpture can inspire young readers. Featuring Sian Cairns, Senior Services Manager, Collections, and sculpture at Holywood Arches Library the article discussed access points to reading through story trails such as the Narnia statues at CS Lewis Square and The Gruffalo Trail at Colin Glen Park.

5.4 The Director of Library Services highlighted that Libraries NI's Bookcited! podcast reached a milestone with the release of its 100th episode on Wednesday 11 March 2026. Hosted by colleagues from the Stock Team, Jillian (Just Jillian Blog) and Pete (The Book Club, BBC Radio 2), Bookcited! brings listeners thoughtful and engaging conversations with authors about the books, ideas and experiences behind their writing. Over the course of the series, the podcast has featured a wide range of writers including Anthony Horowitz, Joseph O'Connor, Lisa Jewell and Ann Cleeves.

5.5 The Director of Library Services gave Members an update on capital developments i.e. the newly refurbished Ballycastle Library reopened to the public on 2 February 2026, the reimagined children's area at Falls Road Library reopened to the public on 23 February 2026 and Rathcoole Library closed on 26 February for minor refurbishment works. She also reported on progress to repair damage from water ingress caused by heavy rainfall during Storm Chandra in January 2026 in Belfast Central Library.

5.6 Ms A Adair drew attention to the following recent and forthcoming events and Libraries NI's participation:

- Children's Mental Health Week, 9 – 15 February 2026
- NI Science Festival, 11 – 22 February 2026

- Children’s Books Ireland Visit, Ballycastle Library, 25 February 2026
- First Freeman Exhibition, Larne Library, 27 February to 27 March 2026
- Exhibitions in Libraries, March 2026
- Go On Sessions, March 2026
- Adult Storytelling Programme, March 2026
- Armstrong Storytelling Trust, Adult Events, March 2026
- Seachtain na Gaeilge, 1 – 17 March 2026
- World Book Day, 5 March 2026
- An Evening with Simon Armitage, Newcastle Library, 6 March 2026
- International Woman’s Day, 8 March 2026
- Heritage Week, 9-14 March 2026
- Ballycastle Cultural Heritage Festival, 9–14 March 2026
- An Evening in Conversation with Patrick Gale, 30 March 2026
- Ulster American Heritage Symposium, June 2026.

5.7 The Director of Library Services then provided an overview of the attendance of Libraries NI’s officers at recent strategic meetings, including:

- Commissioner for Older People, Siobhan Casey, 19 January 2026
- The Open University, 22 January 2026
- President of Ireland, Derry, 5 February 2026
- Royal Ulster Academy of Arts, 9 February 2026
- Five Nations Inaugural Meeting, 10 – 11 February 2026.

5.8 Ms A Adair informed Members that Sian Cairns, Senior Services Manager Collections, Stock and Reader Development, attended the Book Trust London offices on 19 February to take part in the judging panel for the 2027 BookTrust Storytime Prize. Participation on the judging panel gave Libraries NI the opportunity to play a key role in a UK wide initiative while BookTrust welcomed Libraries NI involvement to provide insight into how the longlisted books might be received by a Northern Irish audience which contributed to the shortlist. She highlighted that Sian has also been invited to participate in the Reading Rights Summit 2026 hosted by Children’s Laureate Frank Cottrell-Boyce. The Reading Rights Summit advocates for action to make reading a part of daily life for every child in the first seven years of life. Book Trust is a UK children’s reading charity.

5.9 The Director of Library Services reported that this year the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ireland Joint Conference will be held in the Peace Campus in Monaghan on 29 and 30 April 2026. The conference theme is ‘Stronger Together: Opportunities, Threats, Inclusion and Community Building’. Submissions have been invited from all types of libraries, knowledge and information centres for paper presentations, lightning talks and poster presentations. She confirmed that Libraries NI has submitted two abstracts to the conference committee for plenary and lightening sessions ‘Let’s Talk About... Death Dying and Grief’ and ‘Reading for Pleasure: A cross-sectoral and collaborative student focussed reading initiative’.

5.10 The Director of Library Services further reported that Libraries NI is a Premium Employer Partner of CILIP and that membership benefits include access to learning and development webinars, discounts or free access to CILIP training and conferences, organisational access to the Professional Knowledge and Skills Base tool and an invitation to attend the annual CILIP Employer's Forum. This year the forum will take place on 25 March 2026 at the Royal Armouries in Leeds and Ms J Reid, Head of Service, will represent Libraries NI.

5.11 The Chairperson thanked the Director of Library Services for the comprehensive report.

6. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2026 SC.02.03.26

6.1 On a proposal by Mr J Peto and seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the minutes of the Services Committee held on 15 January 2026 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 12 February 2026.

7. MATTERS ARISING

7.1 There were no matters arising.

8. RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26 SC.03.03.26

8.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, introduced the Rural Needs Annual Report 2025/26 reminding Members that The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 has applied to Libraries NI since 1 June 2018. She explained that the Act requires Libraries NI 'to have due regard to rural needs when developing, implementing, adopting or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services'.

8.2 The Head of Service gave examples of how Libraries NI has due regard for rural needs i.e. a mobile library service to Primary Schools and rural towns and villages, a homecall service and a variety of events and initiatives. She reported that based on the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) definition of rural i.e. settlements of fewer than 5,000 residents, there are 29 libraries designated as rural.

8.3 Ms M Bell went on to inform Committee Members 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. She reported that 18 libraries serve over 40% rural dwellers and highlighted that over 50% of Omagh Library active members are rural dwellers.

8.4 The Head of Service described Libraries NI's commitment to rural communities through a Memorandum of Understanding with DAERA who have funded a number of projects in libraries including the Out of Hours Service. She drew attention to the development of a new DAERA rural policy 'Rural NI: Our New

Approach' which was currently out for consultation with an event being held in Bangor Carnegie Library on 17 April and confirmed that Libraries NI would be submitting a response to the consultation. Ms M Bell reported that a number of Libraries NI's staff recently availed of training from the Rural Community Network for completing Rural Needs Impact Assessments and that she represented Libraries NI on Championing Rural Communities, as part of the co-design group for the Rural Policy.

- 8.5 The Head of Service 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 2025/26 year.
- 8.6 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Ms W Osborne OBE, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Rural Needs Annual Report 2025/26 to the Board.

9. NATIONAL YEAR OF READING 2026

- 9.1 Ms J Reid, Head of Service, gave a presentation on the National Year of Reading 2026. She informed the Services Committee that National Year of Reading 2026 is a UK-wide Department for Education initiative, delivered with the National Literacy Trust, designed to reverse the decline in reading for pleasure. The Head of Service highlighted the alignment of the objectives of the campaign with a number of government strategies and more specifically, Libraries NI's Reading and Reader Development Strategy 2024 – 2027.
- 9.2 The Head of Service went on to give an overview of the findings of The National Literacy Trust's report 'Children and young people's reading in Northern Ireland in 2025', setting the ambition of the campaign based on context of the decline in reading for pleasure. She described the benefits of reading and how The National Year of Reading aims to connect and reconnect people of all ages with reading as a modern, meaningful and social activity by setting reading in real moments.
- 9.3 Ms J Reid then gave examples of Libraries NI's activities and initiatives that would contribute to the campaign by ensuring people can access the benefits reading has to offer in fun and exciting ways, such as:
- Book Bingo
 - World Book Day
 - Poet Laureate's Visit
 - Bookcited! Podcast
 - Author Visits
 - Big Summer Read 2026
 - Book Week NI
 - engaging with the inaugural Children's Booker Prize
 - engaging with The Reading Rights Summit.
- 9.4 The Head of Service played a short promotional video of Libraries NI's Rhythm

and Rhyme showing the importance of libraries for reading at all stages of life which forms part of Libraries NI's marketing campaign against the backdrop of the National Year of Reading. Ms J Reid informed the Services Committee that unlike in England, Northern Ireland does not have additional funding for The National Year of Reading, however, Libraries NI will use the campaign as an opportunity to amplify what the organisation does to develop readers.

9.5 Ms J Reid responded to a number of questions from Services Committee Members, providing additional information and clarification around funding, other key stakeholders, existing collaborations with the Education Authority and other potential opportunities.

9.6 Members commended the Head of Service on the level of Libraries NI's participation without a dedicated resourcing allocation and on behalf of the Services Committee, the Chairperson thanked the Head of Service for the presentation.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 In response to a question from the Chairperson of the Board, Ms M Bell confirmed that the Ulster Orchestra would be performing in Antrim Library on 31 March 2026 at 2:30pm. There was no other notified business.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Services Committee would be held on Thursday 21 May 2026 at 10:30am. The Director of Library Services will liaise with the Chairperson on potential locations and welcomed suggestions from Members.

12. LIBRARIES NI HERITAGE SERVICES PRESENTATION

12.1 Ms E McVerry, Senior Services Manager, introduced herself and Mr M Lynn, Services Manager, from the Cultural Heritage Team. She thanked the Services Committee for the opportunity to present on Libraries NI's Cultural Heritage Services and to showcase a selection of resources.

12.2 The Senior Services Manager reported that there are nine heritage locations, seven of which are based within a library (Ballymena Central, Belfast Central, Derry Central, Downpatrick, Enniskillen, Newry City and Omagh libraries) and two standalone heritage locations, Cultural Heritage Service Library, Armagh, and the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies (MCMS). She gave a flavour of the collections and resources available in specific library locations, before moving on to focus on the largest cultural heritage collection located in Belfast Central Library. Ms E McVerry described the volume and scope of the material held in Belfast Central Library including the Newspaper Library and the Fine Book Room.

She then went on to give an overview of the each of the standalone heritage locations. Ms E McVerry informed the Committee that the extensive collections across the network draw a variety of visitors such as historians, researchers, genealogists, students and tourists.

- 12.3 Mr M Lynn, Services Manager, reported on the purpose and aim of the Cultural Heritage Team i.e. *to ensure the continued collection, preservation and exploitation of heritage materials relevant to and reflective of the diverse range of communities in Northern Ireland. Aiming to provide and promote access to heritage resources to the widest possible audiences and increase participation in heritage services.* He referred to collaboration with other Service Development Teams and operational staff as key to efficient delivery of heritage services and gave an overview of the ‘Lets Talk About... Death, Dying and Grief’ an initiative which was delivered with the Online Services and Services Support Team. The Services Manager then referred to the value of external partnerships highlighting existing successful partnerships with:
- Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)
 - Queen’s University Belfast (QUB)
 - Northern Ireland Screen
 - Family History Societies
 - The Linen Hall Library
 - British Film Institute.
- 12.4 Mr M Lynn went on to describe Libraries NI’s third annual Heritage Week which took place from 9 – 14 March 2026. This year’s programme was shaped around the theme Know Your Place and consisted of a variety on online and in-library events such as talks, workshops and exhibitions, which were all well attended. The Services Manager then invited Members to join Ms C Morrow and Mr D Topping to view a selection of resources and artefacts from the collections at Belfast Central Library.
- 12.5 The Chairperson thanked Ms E McVerry and Mr M Lynn for their presentation and Ms C Morrow and Mr D Topping for exhibiting resources.
- 12.6 Ms J Reid, Head of Service, gave Committee Members a tour of Belfast Central Library to see the extent of the water ingress caused by Storm Chandra on 26/27 January 2026, and again by heavy rainfall on 12 March 2026.

13. MEMBERS’ ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 13.1 The meeting ended at 12:45pm.
- 13.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:
- Mr G Beattie left at 11:20am
 - Ms L Hart joined at 12:35pm.