LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 27 November 2025 at 10:30am

(Hybrid via Video Link and in person at Lisburn City Library)

VL – Attendance via video link

IP – Attendance in person

PRESENT

Miss Linda Wilson (IP)	Chairperson
Ms Bonnie Anley (VL)	Chairperson of Libraries NI Board
Councillor Martin McRandal (VL)	Vice-Chairperson
Councillor Roisin Lynch (VL)	
Ms Ursula O'Hare (VL)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)	Director of Business Support
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry (IP)	Head of Human Resources
Mr Tim Neeson (IP)	Assets Manager
Mrs Rita McNamee (IP)	Finance Manager
Mr Desi Curry (IP)	Head of ICU/ICT

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Julie Gilmour.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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.

2.2 Councillor M McRandal advised that may need to leave for Item 15, depending on the nature of the business.

No other interests were declared.

3 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 There was no Chairperson's business.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS **BSC.01.11.25**

4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that on 24 October 2025 the Comptroller and Auditor General had certified and signed the Libraries NI 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts, without qualification. Subsequently on 7 November the Annual Report and Accounts were formally submitted to and laid with the Northern Ireland Assembly. Proofs were with the printers for production of a limited number of hard copies and an electronic version had been published on the website.

4.2 The Director of Business Support advised that as part of the approach to managing the potential risk of disruption the Libraries NI Business Continuity Framework had been drafted and been circulated to Members. This was an overarching framework setting out roles, responsibilities and effective communication channels. Within the framework there were a number of more detailed subject specific continuity plans e.g. Cyber Incidents Response Plan

4.3 Ms B Anley enquired if the Plan impacted long-term disruption or was it for short term disruption? And from a governance perspective where did these documents sit?

4.4 The Director of Business Support advised that this was a corporate continuity plan, a launching platform for actions to deal with significant long-term disruption and provided a structure for local or disruption relating to a specific service area. This framework sat underneath Libraries NI's Business Plan.

4.5 Miss L Wilson enquired if the relevant staff had hardcopies of the Plan at home and if it had been tested?

4.6 The Director of Business Support advised that testing and reviewing was part of the process and that staff had been advised to retain hardcopies.

4.7 Ms U O'Hare enquired if there was a way to capture any near misses? And enquired about lone working, noting the reference to staffing levels under People - Issues to Consider on page 9.

4.8 The Director of Business Support advised that the Continuity Framework was about the risk of disruption, issues relating potential risks of lone working were dealt with at an operational level under other processes and risk assessments.

4.9 Members noted the Libraries NI Business Continuity Framework.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2025 **BSC.02.11.25**

5.1 On a proposal by Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Councillor R Lynch, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

25 September 2025, were approved as a correct record of the meeting subject to the following amendment: -

- At 7.4 “works” be amended to “working”.

It was reported that these minutes had been adopted by the Board at its meeting on 16 October 2025 as an as read record of the Business Support Committee’s proceeding of 25 September 2025.

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF 25 SEPTEMBER 2025 **BSC.03.11.25**

6.1 The Director of Business Support advised that there were three matters arising from the minutes of the meeting on 25 September 2025

Firstly, Agenda Item 7 Lone Working Policy, unfortunately due to timing the Lone Working Policy would not be presented to ARAC until its meeting in January 2026, it would subsequently return to the Business Support Committee for consideration at the March 2026 meeting.

Secondly, Agenda Item 6, Health and Safety Report for 2024/25 Inc. Public and Employers Liability Experience. It had been suggested that a section be added relating to lessons learned from claims, this would be added to future reports and data had provided for 2022/25 claims. Most accidents/claims were the result of isolated incidents or related to specific locations or activities and lessons learned tended to be general in nature e.g. reminders of good housekeeping practices to minimise risks.

Finally, Agenda Item 15 Sickness Absence Report, Members had enquired how Libraries NI’s sickness rate compared with the wider Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), NICS sickness absence data was not available for 2025 but for 2024/25 was 13.4 sickness days per staff member. However, as differing methodologies were used for measuring absence rates, comparison was at best indicative.

7 COMMITTEE/BOARD EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2025/26 **BSC.04.11.25**

7.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the Committee was required to review its effectiveness annually, including the continued relevance of the Scheme of Delegation. It was proposed that the process should commence immediately with a view to completing it at the next Committee meeting on 29 January 2026.

It was agreed that the Review would be emailed to Members and that responses should be forwarded to the Director of Business Support by 16 January 2026.

8 LIBRARIES NI STATUTORY EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25 **BSC.05.11.25**

8.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Report 2024/25, which was based on a template provided by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The Report demonstrated progress made in 2024/25 in implementing the Libraries NI Equality Scheme commitments and highlighted equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice and progress on Equality Scheme commitments.

8.2 Ms B Anley noted that a five yearly review had been referenced and enquired if this was an annual report for 2024/25.

8.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the Report covered one year, specifically the period from April 2024 to March 2025; there was a five-year review which would be addressed under Agenda Item 9.

8.4 Ms U O'Hare noted that page 3 paragraph 1d referenced constraints and suggested that it be noted that despite restraints the service was delivered. Also, that the Report did not reflect that Libraries NI had attended the Great Refugee Picnic.

Ms U O'Hare also enquired if pulse surveys were done and if new members or loans were or could be analysed by Section 75 categories. While noting that for some categories this wasn't appropriate, the data would be helpful for strategic planning for all services user groups and for scrutiny of statutory obligations.

8.5 The Director of Business Support advised that the operational constraints were the impact of constrained resourcing. He would research Libraries NI's attendance at the Great Refugee Picnic and add it into the Report if appropriate. With regard to analysis on Section 75 categories the Equality Commission had advised that data should not be collected unless for a specific purpose, therefore less Section 75 data was collected than previously.

8.6 The Chief Executive suggested the wording on page 3 be amended to indicate that although there were resourcing constraints the service continued. It was possible to do some customer analysis e.g. by age, as well as leaning into other surveys to source information. Another consideration in collating information was that customers could find it off putting.

8.7 Ms B Anley referred to page 24 and enquired if there had been or was likely to be issues with disabled access in relation to age of the estate.

8.8 The Director of Business Support reported that occasionally there were issues with disabled access e.g. due to mechanical failure but these were generally short term. The Assets Team had surveyed access across the estate, technically Libraries NI was compliant with access requirements, but there were buildings where improvements could be made to improve access.

8.9 Miss B Anley enquired if this should be added to the Report?

8.10 The Director of Business Support advised that there was an attempt to address this on page 25, Section 3.

8.11 Ms B Anley requested that wording be added to indicate this was limited by financial means.

8.12 The Chief Executive suggested that difficulty may be the inclusion of the word "all".

8.13 The Director of Business Support advised that he would update the Report in line with this feedback.

8.14 Miss L Wilson enquired if feedback was received when the Report had been submitted previously.

8.15 The Director of Business Support advised that feedback was received however it tended to be relatively brief in nature.

8.16 On a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Libraries NI Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Report 2024/25 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

9 LIBRARIES NI – FIVE YEAR REVIEW OF EQUALITY SCHEME BSC.06.11.25

9.1 The Director of Business Support advised under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 Libraries NI was required to have and operate an Equality Scheme and for the Scheme to be reviewed every five years. The review was intended to examine how the arrangements set out in the scheme had been applied and how effective they had been in assisting the authority in complying with Section 75 duties.

The Audit of Inequalities and the Five-Year Review of Equality Scheme Report had been circulated for information along with the reviewed and updated Libraries NI Equality Scheme, no substantive changes were proposed.

9.2 Ms U O'Hare enquired if this was being submitted to the Equality Commission as the 2025 version and advised that she would propose changes to the consultees to reflect changes in the community sector.

9.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the Scheme was as approved by the Equality Commission in 2011 and remained fit for purpose, substantive changes would require a new scheme, however non-substantive changes could be applied to maintain relevance. Changes to the consultee list were non-substantive and would be welcomed.

9.4 Ms U O'Hare agreed to email changes to the consultee list of the Director of Business Support.

At 11:35am Ms U O'Hare left the meeting

9.5 Councillor M McRandal advised there was a typo at page 14 6a in the word "commitment".

9.6 In response to an enquiry from Ms B Anley the Director of Business Support reported that the Equality Commission advised that data regarding both gender and sexual orientation should not be sought unless there was a specific purpose to do so.

9.7 Ms B Anley enquired as to the monitoring arrangements that were in place.

9.8 The Chief Executive advised that information could be sought through household surveys as Libraries were unlikely to have a justification for collecting detailed information.

9.9 Ms B Anley enquired if there was a tracked change version of the reviewed document.

9.10 The Director of Business Support advised that he could provide a tracked change version, if the Committee were content to recommend the Reviewed Equality Scheme to the Board, the tracked changed version would be available in the Committee papers for members to access.

9.11 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Ms Anley, the Libraries NI Five Year Review of the Equality Scheme was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

9.12 Miss L Wilson thanked the Director of Business Support for all his work on this very labour-intensive review.

10 ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGIC PLAN 2025/30 BSC.07.11.25

10.1 The Assets Manager advised that in line with the scheduled review cycle the Libraries NI Assets Management Strategic Plan has been reviewed and updated to better reflect the current delivery environment and to align with the recently approved five-year Libraries NI Corporate Plan 2025-2030. Delivery of the Plan was highly dependent on the timing and availability of funding; it was a live document subject to review and revision.

10.2 Ms B Anley commented that the list of what had been achieved was impressive, but the new boiler system installed at Enniskillen Library wasn't included in the list on page 11. Also, the Plan didn't appear to include any plans for developing further Out of Hours facilities.

10.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the boiler for Enniskillen Library may be included under maintenance rather than development. To date all out of hours schemes had been supported by the Department for Agriculture, as DfC consider customer density it would be challenging to gain their support for an Out of Hours Scheme. However, an Out of Hours Scheme could be added to the Plan as an aspiration.

10.4 The Assets Manager reported for new projects the cabling and basic infrastructure was included to allow for development of an out of hours facility.

10.5 Ms B Anley enquired if EnerPHit refurbishments should be included as an aspiration, even if there were not the resources to fund this.

10.6 The Assets Manager reported that EnerPHit was built into the figures, but locations had not been identified.

10.7 The Chief Executive advised that EnerPHit was on Libraries NI's radar and was referenced at 7.21.

10.8 The Director of Business Support suggested that EnerPHit projects be added to the Plan under Section 7 Actions to Address Climate Change.

10.9 Miss L Wilson commented that the historic information in the Plan was very interesting, but as a plan it should provide a better idea of what Libraries aspire to do, a list of priorities, even in the constrained funding environment.

10.10 The Director of Business Support reported that DfC required Libraries NI to produce an Asset Management Plan, it was difficult to produce a meaningful plan with no concept of what could be delivered in the short medium and long term. While the document was referred to as a Plan it was in fact a framework created in an uncertain planning environment.

10.11 The Chief Executive advised that the Plan was a useful helpful and essential document, reporting what has been achieved in the last 4 years and what Libraries NI would hope to do in the next 5 years, pointing to longer term priorities. It created a focus for the next 5 years but was not an estate strategy.

10.12 Ms B Anley suggested the title might be better amended to read as the Assets Strategic Plan.

10.13 The Director of Business Support confirmed that he would make the amendments.

10.14 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor R Lynch, subject to the agreed amendments, the Assets Management Strategic Plan 2025/30 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

11 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN 2025/26 – PROGRESS REPORT BSC.08.11.25

11.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Business Support Service Plan 2025/26 – Progress Report which detailed progress to date in delivering on a range of targets as set out in Business Support Service Plan 2025/26. Individual actions and targets had been assigned a Red/Amber/Green status reflecting progress to date and taking account of the anticipated position in March 2026 (i.e. delivery confidence)

11.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if 4.3 should focus on what Libraries NI could do and if 11.1 should reflect the available resources?

11.3 The Director of Business Support reported that Libraries NI were delivering what they had said they could deliver but had assigned amber rather than green because it was recognised that this was not sufficient.

11.4 The Chief Executive commented that the greater constraint this year had been working through the issue on business cases.

11.5 Councillor M McRandal referred to 8.4 and enquired why appraisal targets were not being met.

11.6 The Director of Business Support advised across the whole Organisation 83% of appraisal had been completed by September against a target of 90%, within Business Support 95% had been completed. While staff absence had contributed, there had been some resistance to the new system with some staff resistant to uploading what they saw as personal information to the new system. The other challenge was that not all parts of the Organisation had the enthusiasm and drive to complete appraisals.

11.7 The Chief Executive reported that during the recent industrial action no appraisals had been done, there had been a big drive to get appraisals completed, the Organisation was moving to a much better position to build on for next year.

11.8 Ms B Anley advised that while she appreciated the context and that the system was so improved but there should be zero tolerance. 8.3 and 8.4 should be red, there was slippage in the wellbeing strategy and appraisals, there was a need to be more cohesive from a governance point of view. There also needed to be an improvement in staff sickness absence.

11.9 Miss L Wilson enquired if senior managers would be judged against achievement of the appraisal target.

11.10 The Head of Human Resources advised where necessary HR were providing support with completing appraisals and Ms Anley's comments had been noted.

11.11 The Director of Business Support confirmed that he would amend 8.3 and 8.4 and place an amended paper in the Business Support Committee folder.

11.12 Miss L Wilson commented that the capital one should also be reviewed.

11.13 Members noted the Plan.

12 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER 2025/26 – UPDATE REPORT **BSC.09.11.25**

12.1 The Director of Business Support presented the revised Business Support Risk Register 2025/26 which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and take account of mitigating actions taken to date and new or emerging risks which had been identified in the period from May 2025.

12.2 Members noted the Update Report

13 INFORMATION SYSTEMS REPORT NOVEMBER 2025 **BSC.10.11.25**

13.1 The Head of ICU/ICT advised that the Information Systems Report November 2025 reflected the new format as agreed at the September meeting, replacing the Information Systems e3 Programme Update Report. The PSSN contract had been extended to 2030, the e3 implementation phase was coming to an end with some work to complete on corporate systems for Finance and Human Resources. Section 5 focused on cyber security, there was a monitoring meeting every month, the weak link was people, and it was important to raise awareness.

13.2 Ms B Anley enquired how embedded Libraries NI were with Fujitsu and were there any concerns regarding the relationship with Fujitsu?

13.3 The Head of ICU/ICT advised that most of the intellectual property, the knowledge and experience, did rest with Fujitsu, on a quarterly basis Fujitsu had to submit a report to central government detailing how they were meeting the service. There were consequences for Fujitsu when they failed to perform.

13.4 The Director of Business Support reported that Libraries NI hadn't been afraid to apply penalties as they were entitled to do, and Fujitsu had been accepting of these. While there was a close relationship it was a business relationship and there were no concerns.

12:50pm Councillor R Lynch left the meeting.

13.5 Members noted the Report.

14 CUSTOMER FEEDDBACK REPORT 2024/25 BSC.11.11.25

14.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Customer Feedback Report detailing the volume of feedback received from library service users, the nature and the focus of that feedback and providing examples of feedback received, the subject matter and responses issued for the period 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2025.

14.2 Councillor M McRandal commented that it was reassuring that there were more compliments than complaints and enquired if the figures could be skewed by the number of responses to situations that some sections of the community may consider contentious.

14.3 The Head of Human Resources advised that a watching brief was maintained, and learning was taken onboard.

14.4 Ms B Anley referred to Section 4, Themes of Customer Feedback Received, which had been broken down by complaints and compliments and enquired if this could be broken down further to identify a location or issue. Also had there been any complaints to the Public Service Ombudsman?

14.5 The Chief Executive advised that he was the Designated Officer, there had been complaints to the Public Service Ombudsman in the past, a detailed response had been provided, and the Chairperson would be informed when this happens.

14.6 Members noted the Report.

15 FINANCE REPORTS

15.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2025 BSC.12.11.25

15.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report detailing the results for the seven months to 31 October 2025.

15.3 Members noted the Report.

15.4 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2025 BSC.13.11.25

15.5 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report detailing the position for the seven months to 31 October 2025.

15.6 The Director of Business Support advised the position regarding capital funding was very complicated, if everything that was in track regarding easements and re-allocations proceeded the position would be relatively balanced.

15.7 Ms B Anley enquired if the capital allocation for the Newtownards project could be fully expended?

15.8 The Director of Business Support advised this would be eased back to the Department with an alternative resource funding scheme agreed for design costs while the Newtownards Library Project approval was being progressed.

15.9 Ms B Anley asked if this had been done before and had the Risk Register been appropriately informed?

15.10 The Director of Business Support reported that this had been done before, that it was almost impossible to get an approved business case before expending the resource. The easements to date, the £200K for Newtownards provided a margin of comfort.

15.11 Miss L Wilson enquired if the funding for Newtownards could still be surrendered at a later date?

15.12 The Director of Business Support confirmed that the funding could be surrendered later.

15.13 Members noted the Report.

16 PROCUREMENT REPORT - TENDERS OVER £1,000 AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000 BSC.14.11.25

16.1 The Finance Manager presented the Procurement Report informing the Committee of procurement activity over £1,000 and Single Tender Actions for the period September/November 2025. The eBooks contract had been extended for a further two months and was expected to be awarded before the January meeting.

16.2 Members noted the Report.

17 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2025 BSC.15.11.25

17.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Report detailing sickness absence statistics to end of October 2025. The performance target set for the 2025/26 year was to maintain sickness absence (composite average Full Time Equivalent days lost) at or below 11.5 days by 31 March 2026. The current absence rate was 12.58 FTE days.

17.2 Miss L Wilson enquired how long-term sickness was defined and if it was appropriate for this to be managed locally?

17.3 The Head of HR advised that long term was sickness absence of four weeks or more; in cases of cancer treatment or serious illness it was appropriate to manage this locally, but HR would come on board and provide support.

17.4 Ms B Anley commented that it was important to support staff while continuing to maintain a focus on the sickness absence rate.

17.5 The Head of HR outlined the process, advising that staff could self-certify for the first seven days and thereafter were required to provide a doctor's certificate. Staff were required to report their absence on the first day and contact their manager again on the fourth day. Managers were advised that they should be engaging, phoning staff, texting wasn't appropriate. If an employee says they were too stressed or upset to talk or that the phone call is causing more stress, the manager should arrange to phone them back later, HR would then come on board to provide advice and support.

17.6 Ms B Anley asked about the approach to supporting Branch Library Managers and frontline staff.

17.7 The Head of HR reported that there was a lot of work going on, Health and Wellbeing were attending Branch Library Manager meetings to provide advice and guidance. Information on bereavement had been increased, signposting staff to support and working with managers to provide information to HR for early engagement with Occupational Health.

17.8 Ms B Anley advised that it was important to manage absence in a consistent way.

17.9 The Head of HR advised that correspondence was issued acknowledging zero absence, but more could be done to acknowledge this.

17.10 Members noted the Report.

18 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.16.11.25

18.1 The Chairperson advised that the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority had been applied on one occasion between September 2025 and November 2025.

18.2 Members noted the Report.

19 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

19.1 There was no notified business.

20 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

20.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be held on Thursday 29 January 2025 at 10:30am.

21 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

21.1 The meeting ended at 1:41pm

21.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and were present throughout, with the following exceptions:

- Ms U O'Hare left the meeting at 11:35am
- Councillor R Lynch left the meeting at 12:50pm

Signed M McRandal

Dated 26/3/26