

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 25 September 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)
Ms Bonnie Anley (VL)
Councillor Roisin Lynch (IP)
Ms Ursula O'Hare (VL)

Chairperson
Chairperson of Libraries NI Board

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry (IP)
Mr Tim Neeson (IP)
Mrs Rita McNamee (IP)
Mr Desi Curry (IP)

Chief Executive
Director of Business Support
Head of Human Resources
Assets Manager
Finance Manager
Head of ICU/ICT

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Martin McRandal and 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 No interests were declared.

Ms B Anley joined the meeting at 10:31am

3 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 The Chairperson congratulated the Chief Executive and his team on a very successful event to Launch of the Corporate Plan on 24 September.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.09.25

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that at the last meeting he had been unable to divulge the details of the 2025/26 allocation, subsequently following the Minister's statement the Board of Libraries NI had been informed that indicative Opening Budget Allocations of £34,017,00 (resource) and £1,759,000 (capital) had been made. The allocations were subject to the Department's Equality Impact Assessment which had closed on 07 August 2025, no outcomes had been published and financial allocations continued to be "indicative". The resourcing position remained largely unchanged, the capital funding allocation had been reduced to £1,303,000 as a result of an easement of funding relating to the redevelopment of Enniskillen Library which would now be expended in 2026/27.
- 4.2 The Chairperson enquired when the allocations would be confirmed and if Libraries NI still had authority to spend.
- 4.3 The Director of Business Support confirmed that Libraries NI did have authority to spend and advised that the allocations were still indicative, in previous years it had been December before they were confirmed.
- 4.4 The Director of Business Support advised that at the July Board meeting Councillor Alistair Cathcart had requested details of the extent of property rental commitments for Libraries NI. A response had subsequently been provided to Councillor Cathcart who had suggested that the information should be shared with other Board Members, and this information had been included in the papers.
- 4.5 The Director of Business Support reported that entrance arrangements to Bangor Carnegie Library had become unreliable. The main access was through two sets of automatic doors in a dramatic entrance through a three-storey glazed façade, the automatic doors had become increasingly unreliable and difficult to repair over recent years, with replacement components obsolete and almost impossible to source. The automatic doors and cylindrical shaped lobby were part of the same structural glazing system. In order to address the risk of the building being left without effective access a design team had been appointed to explore options and develop a proposal for a long-term solution. It had become apparent that integrating a new lobby into the existing three storey planar glazed façade may interfere with the structural integrity of the glazing and carried a significant risk of failure. The design team had come up with an alternative proposal which was to replace all the planar glazing with a curtain wall system, this appeared to be the only viable option with an estimated cost of £350,000. There was no supporting funding allocation to progress to construction stage, work would continue with the design of proposal to pre-tender stage, submit a planning application and a business case to DfC supporting a formal bid for the necessary capital funding.

- 4.6 Ms U O'Hare enquired if the access was currently effective and if disability needs access were being met.
- 4.7 The Director of Business Support confirmed that the building was currently accessible providing the automatic doors continued to work.
- 4.8 Miss L Wilson advised that there was a single leaf door to the left of the entrance to Bangor Library, the whole glass front of the library was a feature looking out on to Ward Park and was very striking. There would be perception and publicity issues around the project.
- 4.9 The Chief Executive commented that it seemed remarkable that Libraries NI should have to spend £300,000+ to fix the access issues.
- 4.10 The Assets Manager advised that as there was no frame, the doors could not be replaced and a curtain wall would have to be constructed, this would be a better solution for long term maintenance.
- 4.11 The Director of Business Support advised that he would keep the Committee informed regarding this project.

**5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE BSC.02.09.25
HELD ON 29 MAY 2025**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Ms B Anley, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 29 May 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 on 03 July 2025 as an as read record of the Business Support Committee's proceeding of 29 May 2025.

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 MAY 2025 BSC.03.09.25

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support advised that There were two matters arising from the minutes of the meeting on 27 May 2025.

Firstly, Agenda Item 4. – Directors Business - 2025/26 Financial Allocation, subsequent to the embargo being lifted by the Department for Communities Board Members were informed of the detail of the interim resource and capital allocations. A budget and spending plan was presented and approved by the Board at its meeting of 3 July 2025.

In relation to Agenda Item 16. – Sickness Absence – Staff Appraisals, at 22 September 2025 68% of appraisals had been completed, whilst this was

positive progress the target of 90% by 30 September 2025 was unlikely to be met.

- 6.2 Miss L Wilson commented that this was encouraging but the rate of completion suggested that the process of getting the appraisal embedded had been more difficult than anticipated. There would be learning for next year with the focus this year on completion and next year on quality.
- 6.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the rate of completion varied across the Organisation within Business Support almost 100% of appraisals had been completed, in other areas there had been more challenges.
- 6.4 The Chief Executive advised that completion of appraisals had been a bigger challenge and more complex than anticipated, with the biggest challenge from the Services side, progress had been impacted by key staff being out at times and also coming off the back of industrial action. A good start had been made, and momentum would be maintained to complete the appraisals.
- 6.5 The Head of Human Resources advised that the Learning and Development Officer had delivered appraiser training across the Organisation by the end of June, feedback had been very positive in general. The learning and development team were proactively following up with managers regarding outstanding appraisals and if necessary, copying in the next line manager. Lessons learned would be noted and Internal Audit were carrying out an audit and their feedback would be taken on board.
- 6.6 Councillor R Lynch enquired when the 90% target was likely to be met
- 6.7 The Chief Executive advised that work to support appraisals would continue and he was hopeful that by the end of the calendar year the 90% target would be close.
- 6.8 Ms B Anley enquired regarding the feedback, had barriers or impediments been identified.
- 6.9 The Head of Human Resources advised that she was aware that some managers had been absent, some appraisals for cleaners were outstanding and the Learning and Development Officer was going to support managers to get these completed. New managers shouldn't be doing appraisals alone within the first two months in post but should have input from the previous manager.
- 6.10 Ms B Anley commented that a better process was in place, but slightly behind target, and it was good to see the headway that had been made.

7 LONE WORKING POLICY - REVIEW

BSC.04.09.25

- 7.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Lone Working Policy which had been reviewed and revisions agreed with Trade Unions through the platform of the formal Libraries NI Negotiating Committee. The Policy covered agency staff as well as Libraries NI employees and recognised that temporary lone working may be necessary on an ad hoc basis.
- 7.2 Ms B Anley enquired if Libraries NI were advising that at times it was necessary to lone work, that the Trade Unions were content with this, had there been substantive changes to the policy since it was last reviewed and could staff opt out of lone working?
- 7.3 The Director of Business Support advised that there had been no substantive changes to the Policy, at times lone working was necessary but recognised there were health and safety concerns which were addressable. Trade Unions were concerned that risk assessments should be done for lone working but with risk assessments done were content that processes were in place to manage the risk.
- 7.4 The Head of Human Resources advised that there was an expressed term in staff's employment contracts that they may be required to lone work. Audit and ARAC had recommended that where ad hoc lone working occurs it must be safe for the library to operate with one person and be evacuated. Lone working would be discussed with staff, individual staff concerns taken on board and this would be covered in the Procedures associated with this Policy.
- 7.5 Ms U O'Hare commented that because the safe operation depended on mitigation this Policy should go to the Audit and Risk Committee.
- 7.6 The Director of Business Support advised that the Audit and Risk Committee didn't have a role in approving this Policy but had recommended that it be reviewed and this was detailed in their Outstanding Recommendations Report.
- 7.7 Miss L Wilson and Ms B Anley suggested that the Policy be referred to the Audit and Risk Committee for review.
- 7.8 The Director of Business Support advised that the Policy would be brought to the Audit and Risk Committee for their opinion and subsequently brought back to Business Support along with the Procedures, which would show how the Policy translated operationally.

8 RESOURCE MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2025/26 **BSC.05.09.25**

- 8.1 The Director of Business Support advised that officers normally look to present the annual maintenance and capital development programme to the Committee in May of each year, the provision of an interim funding allocation for the Organisation in the early months of 2025/26 prevented presentation of the plan, consequently it was brought to the Committee at this later point.
- 8.2 The Assets Manager presented the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2025/26 based on the capital funding allocation of £1,303,000 and an internal resource budget allocation for estates maintenance totalling £1,300,000 and detailed the activities and areas of expenditure planned for the remainder of 2025/26.
- 8.3 Miss L Wilson noted the design fee for Bangor Carnegie Library and enquired regarding a timescale for this project.
- 8.4 The Assets Manager advised that the Design Team was on board, would progress the design, submit it to planning and should be at pre-tender stage by the end of the financial year.
- 8.5 Ms U O'Hare enquired how Libraries NI responds to immediate pressures, plans for refurbishments and replacement projects and how this was framed as part of the Strategic Plan.
- 8.6 The Director of Business Support advised that planning for those types of activities was in the Strategic Asset Management Plan, a five-year plan which sets out the needs and priorities of the estate. The plan categorised major capital projects and the more minor refurbishment projects, the Plan was being reviewed to align it to the Corporate Plan. While it was straightforward to plan it was not easy to deliver and was impacted by funding and the timeframe for spending funding.
- 8.7 The Chief Executive advised that it was frustrating that Libraries NI could not proceed as it should because of funding, a five-year funding allocation would allow planning, and discussions with Department for the Communities regarding this had been initiated.
- 8.8 On a proposal by Councillor R Lynch, seconded by Ms B Anley, the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2025/26 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT FOR 2024/25 BSC.06.09.25
Inc. Public and Employers Liability Experience

- 9.1 The Assets Manager presented the Health and Safety Report for 2024/25 providing the Committee with information on Health and Safety actions taken to date, summarising the number, nature, severity and impact of accidents occurring, and claims experienced between April 2024 and March 2025.
- 9.2 Ms B Anley enquired regarding claims experience, what did the claims relate to and what changes had been made following the claims. As health and safety was a Board responsibility it would be pertinent to know what actions had been taken.
- 9.3 The Assets Manager reported that one claim related to someone getting squirted in the eye by a sanitiser, another to a ceiling panel in a lift falling on someone's head, others to trips and one member of staff got dust in their eye lifting a box from the top of a cabinet. When notified of an accident photographs were taken, a record kept and any necessary repairs done. Managers were tasked with reducing risks and mitigating risks e.g. grit is provided to be used when frosty.
- 9.4 The Director of Business Support advised that while the potential settlement value had been estimated; the claims process was live and ongoing to check if claims could be substantiated. Claims tended to be location specific requiring a localised response, rather than a pattern across the Organisation.
- 9.5 The Chief Executive commented that the Report was helpful in summarizing activity to re-assure Board Members, it detailed the risk assurance procedures, standard reporting procedures, the work of the Health and Safety Committee and training needs being met.
- 9.6 Miss L Wilson advised that perhaps there would be value in having a section which detailed the lessons learned from the claims.
- 9.7 The Director of Business Support advised he would pick this up under Matters Arising at the November meeting and provide further information.
- 9.8 Members noted the Report.

10 REPORT ON PROCUREMENT ACTIVITY 2024/25 BSC.07.09.25

- 10.1 The Finance Manager presented the Report on Procurement Activity providing Members with an overview and analysis of the procurement activity undertaken throughout 2024/25 (including the sources of goods and services).

- 10.2 Ms B Anley enquired regarding vehicle maintenance, were Libraries NI pushing on with reactive temporary repairs and how effective would that investment be.
- 10.3 The Director of Business Support reported that the Vehicle Maintenance Contract covered planned maintenance and scheduled services and also had a repair/breakdown element; in the absence of vehicles being replaced there was an increase in repairs, quickly reaching the point where repair was not economically viable. The size of the fleet had been reducing, currently there were just sufficient vehicles to deliver the service
- 10.4 The Chief Executive advised that this was another area of the estate where there wasn't sufficient capital investment. The Department had been made aware; these types of vehicles can take over two years to build and these timescales needed to be considered in the operational model.
- 10.5 Ms B Anley commented that this needed to be addressed from a capital investment point of view.
- 10.6 Members noted the Report.

11 2024/25 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS BSC.08.09.25

- 11.1 The Director of Business Support presented the draft Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 for the Committee's information. The final draft of the Annual Report and Accounts 2024/25 along with the NIAO Report to those charged with governance would be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on 15 October and on their recommendation to the Board on 16 October for approval and subsequent certification of the accounts by the C&AG.
- 11.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if the draft had been subject to audit since it had last been shared with Members.
- 11.3 The Finance Manager advised that the auditors had been very thorough, there had been no substantive issues, and the audit would be concluded within a week.
- 11.4 Members noted the draft Annual Report and Accounts.

12 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME UPDATE BSC.09.09.25 REPORT SEPTEMBER 2025

- 12.1 The Head of ICT/ICU presented the Information Systems e3 Programme Update Report advising that implementation of the e3 systems was almost complete with work still required on the Finance CISCO system and the eRecruitment system. Since the last meeting every library had been visited as part of the refresh and Disaster Recovery had been successfully tested

on 21 September. Work would commence on procurement for PSSN in the next 6-12 months to ensure the correct requirements were specified before going out to procurement. An update would be provided at the next meeting along reporting on maintenance and cyber security which would be important going forward.

- 12.2 Miss L Wilson reported that following the desktop rollout in Bangor Library a lot of computers had been removed and enquired if there were fewer computers across libraries in general.
- 12.3 The Head of ICT/ICU advised that he would check regarding Bangor Library, there had been a reduction in desktop computers, but the reduction was calculated to ensure that there was sufficient capacity. People were using the library differently and bringing in their own devices.
- 12.4 The Chief Executive advised that a change in way people use libraries had been noted, that this would be kept under review, feedback would be responded to, and Libraries NI may consider addressing this by using mobile devices.
- 12.5 Members noted the Report.

13 FINANCE REPORTS

13.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE AND INCOME REPORT BSC.10.09.25 TO AUGUST 2025

- 13.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure and Income Report detailing the results for the five months to 31 August 2025.
- 13.3 Miss L Wilson noted the challenge to the e-book contract and enquired if there was a risk that this would impact Libraries NI's ability to purchase e-books should funding become available late in the year.
- 13.4 The Director of Business Support advised that at this time the risk was manageable, a preliminary notice had been received, and it was expected that this could be worked through and an established supplier would come on board.

- 13.5 Members noted the Report.

13.6 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO AUGUST 2025 BSC.11.09.25

- 13.7 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report detailing expenditure for the five months to 31 August 2025 against the total revised allocation of £1,303,000.
- 13.8 Members noted the Report.

**14 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.12.09.25
AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000**

- 14.1 The Finance Manager presented the Report detailing contracts awarded valued at over £1,000 for goods and services and lease renewals, including Single Tender Actions for the period from 14 May 2025 to 31 August 2025.
- 14.2 Ms U O'Hare enquired if transfer test tuition was a new initiative?
- 14.3 The Director of Business Support reported that tutors were providing tuition, this was a new initiative in conjunction with education. Whiterock Library had a new focus on children and very close links with local schools. Consultation with the local community had highlighted that children need curriculum support.
- 14.4 The Chief Executive advised that DfC had found real challenges in parents being able to support their children in education in this area and were looking at settings like libraries to provide support. There were a lot of children in the Whiterock area, but they had not been engaging with the library, the decision had been made to change the library to be children focused and support the community. Traditionally libraries had provided revision resources, and the focus of this initiative was to support children and their parents.
- 14.5 Ms U O'Hare enquired how long the pilot would last?
- 14.6 The Director of Business Support advised that the pilot had started on 04 August and would last for eight weeks, Services Teams should be able to provide some preliminary feedback when the pilot ended, and a Post Project Evaluation was due to be carried out in February 2026.
- 14.7 Members noted the Report.

15 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO AUGUST 2025 BSC.13.09.25

- 15.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report for the 12 months from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025. The target set for 2025/26 was to maintain sickness absence (composite average full time equivalent days lost) at or below 11.5 days by 31 March 2026. Sickness absence levels in August 2025 were 12.42 days (FTE equivalent), having decreased by 8.54% from the March 2025 position.
- 15.2 Miss L Wilson commented that it was encouraging to see the long-term sickness absence reducing and important to have a clear framework of support services.
- 15.3 Ms B Anley was pleased to see the progress, enquired how the 12.42 composite days compared with the wider NCIS and if Investor in People would provide better understanding of sickness absence.

15.4 The Head of Human Resources advised that she would find out how 12.42 compared with the wider NCIS. The approval process was in place for Investors in People, the survey would start in October, communication would be issued to all staff with a QR code so they could complete the survey anonymously, staff would be encouraged to participate, and analysis was expected in January.

15.5 Members noted the Report.

16 REPORT ON OUTCOMES OF PROCUREMENT EXERCISE BSC.14.09.25

16.1 The Assets Manager informed the Committee of the formal appointment of a consultant to undertake design team services in relation to the health and safety programme at Belfast Central Library to upgrade the passenger lifts.

16.2 Ms B Anley enquired if Libraries NI had previously worked with these architects.

16.3 The Assets Manager advised that Libraries hadn't previously worked with these architects.

16.4 Members noted the Outcome of the Procurement Exercise.

17 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.15.09.25

17.1 The Assets Manager presented the Report on the Use of the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority, detailing the five occasions on which the seal had been applied between May 2025 and September 2025.

17.2 Members noted the Report.

18 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

18.1 There was no other notified business

19 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

19.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be held on Thursday 27 November 2025 at 10:30am.

20 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

20.1 The meeting ended at 12.30 pm.

20.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and were present throughout.

Signed Lademo

Dated 27 Nov 2025