

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library on
Thursday 17 April 2025 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

(IP) Ms Bonnie Anley Chairperson

(IP) Councillor Alistair Cathcart
(VL) Mr Adrian Driscoll
(IP) Councillor Martin McRandal
(IP) Ms Ursula O'Hare
(IP) Mr John Peto
(IP) Councillor Gareth Sharvin
(IP) Miss Linda Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

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| (IP) Mr Jim O'Hagan | Chief Executive |
| (IP) Mr Desi Miskelly | Director of Business Support |
| (IP) Ms Adrienne Adair | Director of Library Services |
| (VL) Mr David McLoughlin | Capital Project Manager |
| (VL) Mr Stephen Hegarty | Senior IT Support Officer |

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Councillor Julie Gilmour Vice-Chairperson
Councillor Rosie Kinnear
Councillor Roisin Lynch
Councillor Andrew McAuley
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE

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 interests were declared.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

- 3.1 The Chairperson drew attention to the following events which she had attended:
- Official Opening of Fivemiletown Library on 19 February 2025
 - Visit by Her Majesty the Queen to Banbridge Library on 21 March 2025
 - Meeting with Mr I Greenway, DfC on 7 April 2025
 - Launch of NI Museums Corporate Strategy on 9 April 2025.
- 3.2 She drew attention to the role of Vice-Chairperson of the Board and reminded Members that Councillor J Gilmour had now held that position for four years having been re-appointed for one year at the meeting held on 27 June 2024. She reported that the Board would therefore, be required to make an appointment to the position at its next meeting on 3 July 2025 and asked for expressions of interest before the next meeting to be sent to either herself or to the Chief Executive's Office. She added that the role of Vice-Chairperson was normally appointed from Councillor Board Members but this was not prescribed in Standing Orders.
- 3.3 The Chairperson informed Members that the Appraisal process 2024/25 would commence shortly. She thanked all Board Members who had provided information to the department to inform her appraisal.
- 3.4 She informed members that the Head of Internal Audit, Mrs M Anderson would be retiring at the end of June 2025 and on behalf of Members and Officers wishes Mrs Anderson a long, happy and healthy retirement. She noted that a further update on staffing matters would be provided In Committee at Agenda Item 14.
- 3.5 The Chairperson welcomed Mr S Hegarty, Senior IT Support Officer and Mr D McLoughlin, Capital Projects Manager who as part of the Leadership Development Plan were attending the meeting as observers.

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:
- Revised Financial Allocations 2024/25
 - Interim Budget Allocation 2025/26
 - DfC/ALB Senior Leaders Forum
 - Visit by Her Majesty The Queen, 21 March 2025
 - Fivemiletown Library Official Opening, 19 February 2025
 - Summer Opening Hours 2025

- Visit by CILIP President, Sue Lacey-Bryant, 12 March 2025
 - Free Period Products in Libraries Funding Application 2025/26
 - EDGE 2025 Conference Awards
 - The Library Association of Ireland (LAI) and Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ireland Joint Conference, 10 and 11 April 2025
 - Assembly Questions.
- 4.2 The Chief Executive reported that at the recent EDGE 2025 Conference Libraries NI had been awarded Runner-Up in the EDGE AWARDS Physical Category for the refurbishment of Ballymoney Library. This recognition highlighted the importance of sustainability and innovation in library design, reinforcing Ballymoney Library's role as a model for future refurbishments. On behalf of Board Members the Chairperson congratulated Mr D McLoughlin, and all involved in this project.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive referred to previous discussions at the Board Meeting regarding information and cyber security. He informed Members that training had been sourced through the Northern Ireland Civil Service. All Board Members should have received an email providing them with a username, password and a link to the website. He added that a number of courses were available on the website for completion. The Chairperson encouraged all Board Members to avail of this opportunity and in particular to complete the Data Protection training.
- 4.4 Members noted the report.
- 5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2025**
LNI 01.04.25
- 5.1 On a proposal by Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 13 February 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.
- 6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2025**
LNI 02.04.25
- 6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the one matter arising at Item 9.4 noting that the Chairperson had written to Mr I Greenway, DfC on 24 March 2025 to agree the approach for an external review of Board Effectiveness due to take place during the 2025 calendar year.

7. REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 16 APRIL 2025

7.1 The Vice-Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor A Cathcart, provided an oral report of the Committee meeting which he had chaired on 16 April 2025. He confirmed that the formal minutes of the meeting would be available at the next Board Meeting to be held on 3 July 2025 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 2025
- Annual Board Assurance Statement 2024/25
- Corporate Risk Register (March 2025).

7.2 Following discussion and on a proposal by the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Councillor M McRandal the Board approved and adopted the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2025/26.

7.3 The Committee Vice-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 2024/25
- the Committee considered a report from the Head of Internal Audit in relation to a Raising Concerns case. This issue would be discussed in more detail at Agenda Item 14: Matters in Committee.

7.4 Members noted the report.

8. MANAGEMENT REPORT

LNI 03.04.25

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

Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025)

LNI 03.04.25 (i)

- 8.2 The Chief Executive presented the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2025 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, Vice-Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee confirmed that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting held on 16 April 2025 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 G Sharvin, 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 2025.
- 8.5 Members noted the signed Statement would be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Annual Board Assurance Statement 2024/25

LNI 03.04.25 (ii)

- 8.6 The Chief Executive presented the Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2025, noting that the document had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 16 April 2025. At that meeting Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.
- 8.7 On a proposal by Ms U O'Hare, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board was content to approve the Chairperson's Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2025.
- 8.8 Members noted the signed Statement would also be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Corporate Risk Register

LNI 03.04.25 (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 19 March 2025 and subsequently by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 16 April 2025.

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' position as at year end.

8.11 On a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as at March 2025.

Finance Reports: February 2025

LNI 03.04.25 (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 2025. It was noted that these reports had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 27 March 2025.

8.13 He informed Members that as at 28 February 2025 the overall expenditure position combined with projections to the end of the financial year suggested a potential underspend in the total resource allocation of £45,006 (0.1%). Work to complete drafting of the 2024/25 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 2025 the overall expenditure position combined with projections to the end of the financial year suggested a potential underspend of £46,000 (1.01%). An easement/pressure bid process has been worked through with DfC resulting in an amended capital allocation being confirmed at the end of March which better reflects the anticipated actual expenditure which it was projected would be within the permitted 1% variance limit.

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 2025/26

LNI 04.04.25

9.1 The Director of Business Support introduced this report. He reminded Members that the NI Executive had published the draft Budget for 2025/26 but that DfC had not undertaken a formal consultative process ahead of 31 March 2025 and in the absence of the opportunity to engage further the evidence and information previously submitted to the Department in January 2025 had become the de facto 'bid' for a realistic and sustainable level of resource/capital funding to support the delivery of the public library services in 2025/26. He reported that correspondence had been received from DfC on 2 April 2025 which explained the challenges facing the Northern Ireland Executive in setting 2025/26 budgets. The correspondence also sets out interim arrangements for resource and capital funding until such times as full year budgets were confirmed. The interim arrangements were based on 25% or three months of the 2024/25 resource budget as confirmed at 14 February

2025. This interim allocation has been made on the basis of providing 'a level of budget certainty' enabling Libraries NI to 'maintain existing services' and to allow for planning assumptions to be made. In confirming the interim resource allocation the Department also stipulated a number of cautionary caveats.

- 9.2 In respect of capital funding, a similar approach has been adopted with interim budgets being based on inescapable commitments previously notified to the Department, including tails of existing projects from 2024/25 and existing contractual commitments.
- 9.3 Members discussed the implications of the interim allocation and acknowledged the work that went into producing the report 'Resourcing the Public Library Service 2025' which was issued to DfC in January 2025. Ms L Wilson drew attention to the rise in Employers National Insurance contributions noting that it was potentially going to be a difficult year financially for Libraries NI. Members expressed their frustration in relation to good governance if a budget allocation is not available at the start of the financial year. Board Members asked that their support for the Chief Executive as Accounting Officer be noted and they would support any steps that he felt necessary to escalate the matter further if no additional funding was made available.
- 9.4 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 2025/26 and beyond (Resourcing the Public Library Service 2025 refers).
- 9.5 The Board agreed the approach as detailed in the Interim Financial Allocation 2025/26 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.

It was agreed to move to Agenda Item 14: Matters in Committee

10. MATTERS IN COMMITTEE

- 10.1 Officers with the exception of the Chief Executive withdrew from the meeting.
- 10.2 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, Members agreed to go into Committee.
- 10.3 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, Members agreed to come out of Committee.
- 10.4 The Chairperson reported that while in Committee Members received an update in relation to two staffing matters and an issue that had been raised under the Libraries NI Raising a Concern (Whistleblowing) Policy.
- 10.5 The Chairperson also reported that while in Committee, Members received an update on potential development affecting the North West region.
- 10.6 The meeting went into recess at 12:45 pm and re-commenced at 12:55 pm at Agenda Item 10: Draft Annual Business Plan.

11. LIBRARIES NI ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2025/26 DRAFT LNI 05.04.25

- 11.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the first draft of the Annual Business Plan 2025/26 noting that it draws on the updated vision, mission, priorities and strategic goals set out in the draft 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 2025/26 will be shared with the Department and may be revised and updated, as appropriate, to take account of Departmental priorities.
- 11.2 He reported that as notification of a full year funding allocation for 2025/26 has yet to be received, it has not been possible to complete Section 6: Financing Our Services. When the full year funding allocation is received this section along with a number of other areas in the plan will be updated. He explained that the key planning assumption on which the draft plan has been developed is that funding will be at a similar level to that approved for 2024/25 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 is uncertain it is important that there is some structure which staff can use as a basis to plan in 2025/26 and to allow more detailed Business Support and Service Plans to be developed.
- 11.3 A further iteration of the Annual Business Plan will be brought to the Board, when more information and clarification on the full year financial position for 2025/26 has been received.
- 11.4 Members noted the first draft of the Libraries NI Annual Business Plan 2025/26.

12. LIBRARIES NI CORPORATE PLAN 2025 – 30 DRAFT LNI 06.04.25 (T)

- 12.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the latest version of the Libraries NI Draft Corporate Plan 2025 – 30 which had been tabled at the meeting. He reported that there had been some slippage in the department's timeline for the new Library Policy.
- 12.2 Following discussion of the draft Corporate Plan it was agreed that a working group consisting of some Board Members and the staff involved in the Corporate Plan Working Group would meet to review the plan again before it was brought to the July Board Meeting for approval. When it had been approved by the Board it would then be submitted to DfC for departmental approval and discussions would then take place regarding the launch of the Corporate Plan.
- 12.3 The Chairperson encouraged Members to review the Corporate Plan and to send feedback or comments to either herself or the Chief Executive.

**13. MINUTES OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 MARCH 2025
LNI 07.04.25**

- 13.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Mr J Peto, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025.
- 13.2 On a proposal by Mr A Driscoll, seconded by the Committee Chairperson, Mr J Peto, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 20 March 2025 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.
- 13.3 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Mr J Peto, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Board approved and adopted the Rural Needs Annual Report 2024/25.
- 13.4 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Mr J Peto, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Board approved and adopted the Review of Partnership Policy.
- 13.5 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Mr J Peto, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Board approved and adopted the Review of Social Media Policy.

**14. MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON
27 MARCH 2025 LNI 08.04.25**

- 14.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Miss L Wilson, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2025.
- 14.2 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 27 March 2025 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.

- 14.3 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the Freedom of Information Policy 2025 Review.

15. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

- 15.1 There was no other notified business.

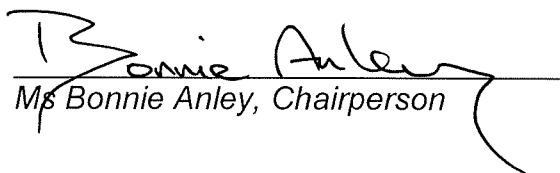
16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 16.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 3 July 2025 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library
- 16.2 Councillor M McRandal and Mr J Peto gave their apologies for the next meeting of the Board. The Chairperson agreed to email out to Board Members to check availability for the meeting.

17. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 17.1 The meeting formally ended at 1:19 pm.
- 17.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:
- Mr S Hegarty left at 12:12 pm
- Mr D McLoughlin left at 12:12 pm
- Councillor G Sharvin left at 12:35 pm
- Councillor A Cathcart left at 12:55 pm
- Mr A Driscoll left at 1:16 pm

Signed:


Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

