

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held on
Thursday 11 September 2025 at 10:30 am in Holywood Library

PRESENT

(IP) Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
(IP) Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
(IP) Councillor Julie Gilmour	
(IP) Councillor Rosie Kinnear	
(IP) Councillor Roisin Lynch	
(IP) Councillor Andrew McAuley	
(IP) Councillor Martin McRandal	
(IP) Ms Ursula O'Hare	
(IP) Ms Wendy Osborne OBE	
(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

ATTENDANCE AT WORKSHOP/STRATEGIC DISCUSSION

(IP) Mrs Margaret Bell	Head of Service - North and West Region
(IP) Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service - North and West Region
(IP) Ms Julie Reid	Head of Service - South and East Region
(IP) Ms Ciara Gault	Deputy Head of Service – South and East Region
(IP) Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Marketing and Strategic Communications
(IP) Mr John Ball	Culture Policy Branch Department for Communities (DfC)
(IP) Dr Simon Morton	Culture Policy Branch Department for Communities (DfC)
(IP) Mr Gary Craig	Culture Policy Branch Department for Communities (DfC)

Note: IP denotes 'in-person' attendance.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Mr Adrian Driscoll
Mr John Peto

The Chairperson informed Members that Councillor G Sharvin had resigned from the Board with immediate effect to take up a senior position in a housing association which resulted in him stepping down from his role as a Councillor of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council. On behalf of Members and Officers the Chairperson offered her congratulations to Mr Sharvin and thanked him for his contribution to the Libraries NI Board and wished him well for the future.

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.
- 2.2 Councillor A Cathcart reminded the Board that he was a member of the same political party as the DfC Minister and advised no discussion had taken place on the matter the Board was about to discuss and therefore no conflict of interest arose. The Chairperson thanked Councillor Cathcart and this was noted.

3. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE ON MEDIA/SOCIAL MEDIA COVERAGE

- 3.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor R Lynch, Members agreed to go into Committee.
- 3.2 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, Members agreed to come out of Committee.
- 3.3 The Chairperson reported that while in Committee the Chief Executive had provided an update on media/social media coverage of a recent library event. Following a thorough discussion by Members the following points of action were noted:
- Review the room hire policy and update or clarify it as appropriate
 - Conclude engagement with Departmental officials in respect of the policy
 - The Board to review its position on inclusivity in relation to the public library service.

- 3.4 The meeting adjourned at 11:43 am

4. BOARD PLANNING DAY EVENT – PROGRAMME LNI 01.09.25

- 4.1 The meeting resumed at 11:55 am.

- 4.2 The Chairperson welcomed the Heads of Service Ms J Reid and Mrs M Bell and Deputy Heads of Service Ms K Keys and Mrs C Gault and Mr G Beattie, Head of Marketing and Strategic Communications who were in attendance for the Workshop/strategic discussion. She also welcomed Mr J Ball, Dr S Morton and Mr G Craig who were attending to take part in the strategic discussion and to provide an update on the new Library Policy.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive explained the format for the Workshop which was designed to ensure all Board Members had the opportunity to engage and contribute on each topic, while also getting a sense of the broader and collective view on each area. He confirmed that output from discussions would be used by the Senior Management Team to inform development of strategic approaches in the three areas identified. The three topics for discussion were as follows:
- a strategic performance framework for Libraries NI
 - strategic challenges and opportunities for capital investment
 - strategic approaches to communications and engagement
- 4.4 Following the strategic discussion, the Chairperson thanked Members for their contribution and confirmed that notes would be circulated on the outworkings of the exercise.
- 4.5 The Chairperson then introduced Mr J Ball, DfC who updated Members on the progress of the Public Library Policy.
- 4.6 Mr Ball drew attention to the Draft Policy Aims document which had been circulated to Members. He reminded Members that it was part of the wider DfC document: The Heritage, Culture and Creativity Programme Purpose and Framework. He referred to the emergence of six cross sectoral issues:
- Research and Evidence
 - Skills
 - Funding
 - Capital Strategy
 - Collaboration and Partnership
 - Organisational review (although this may not be applied to Libraries NI)
- 4.7 The library policy aims were highlighted, noting that a series of questions would be ready for public consultation at the end of Sept/beginning of October and the responses would inform the drafting of the Public Library Policy. The consultation period would last approximately 12 weeks. It was noted that the consultation questionnaire would be available in digital format on social media and paper format from libraries, arts centres and local councils and confirmed that Libraries NI would be involved in the process. Mr Ball spoke of the

importance of investing in the library estate and the changing habits of library users from printed copy to digital resources.

4.8 Members discussed the Draft Policy Aims document at length and had a number of questions on the content of the proposed policy and the consultation exercise. Members expressed the view that it would have been better to consult on the new Library Policy itself rather than through a series of questions prior to the policy having been drafted. Mr Ball explained that alternative models had been considered and that he was content with the process that had been adopted.

4.9 The Chairperson thanked Mr Ball and his DfC colleagues for attending.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

5.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 16 October 2025 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library.

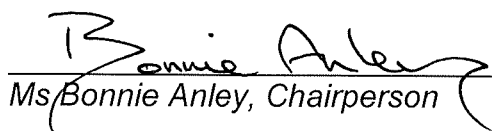
6. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

6.1 The meeting ended at 2:00 pm.

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

Councillor J Gilmour left at 11:45 pm
Councillor R Kinnear left at 12:15 pm
Miss L Wilson left at 13:35 pm
Councillor A Cathcart left at 1:38 pm

Signed:


Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

16-10-25

Libraries NI Board Planning Day – Strategic Discussion Exercise

11 September 2025

Membership of the three groups was as follows:

Group 1

Ms Bonnie Anley

Councillor Alistair Cathcart

Councillor Martin McRandal

Jim O'Hagan

Margaret Bell

John Ball (DfC)

Group 2

Councillor Roisin Lynch

Ms Ursula O'Hare

Councillor Andrew McAuley

Desi Miskelly

Kim Keys

Ciara Gault

Simon Morton (DfC)

Group 3

Councillor Rosie Kinnear

Mrs Wendy Osborne

Miss Linda Wilson

Adrienne Adair

Glenn Beattie

Julie Reid

Gary Craig (DfC)

Board planning meeting, 11 September 2025 - Feedback from strategic discussion workshop

Topic 1: Strategic approaches to communications and engagement

Group 1

- Engagement with schools
- Social media
- Digital inclusivity
- Not all about books
- Wider reach
- Marketing strategy
- Rural libraries
- Engagement to meet bespoke needs within the community
- Using local networks to reach new customers
- Importance of promoting library services
- Use community groups to reach others e.g. councils/councillors – libraries as a place in all communities
- Diversified marketing approaches – reach different demographics, broad number and range of library users
- How do we reach people who are disengaged
- Libraries as a gateway to services – promote, engage with other services but don't forget the library identity.

Group 2

- Complexity of the communications landscape
- Communication to users is good
- Reach where we are not yet –
- Distinguish between engagement with stakeholders and communications - engagement/communications for example schools, partnerships et cetera
- Raise the profile in the public consciousness
- Complex communications landscape, social media platforms – promote
- Stakeholder and partner community
- Work needs to be done to message – what is the big message
- Community outreach is good and needs to be built on
- Events are positive
- How do you reach new users

- Trusted safe space - strong selling point
- What is the big message?
- Public library members and – non-library members
- Partnerships are key.

Group 3

- Number of distinct user and customers and what their broad uses of the library service is
- Understand the habits of library use
- Connections with other government services/funding
- Nostalgia
- Drive objectives of the corporate plan
- Communications campaign to drive library use
- Libby is a fantastic service not well known
- Lack of funding

Topic 2: Strategic challenges and opportunities for capital investment

Group 1

- Size of estate – no grand plan to reduce that
- Utilisation of space
- Sweat the asset base – optimise use
- Demand and use should determine need and investment
- Return on social value/investment is key
- Infrastructure supporting a changed and changing operating model
- Transformation - including transformation of libraries and library services and also aspects like administration and stock
- How to measure users
- Measure social value and asset-base
- Expansion with other agencies
- Fewer but different use of libraries?
- Social enterprise cafes
- Investment is more than just our estate and buildings it encompasses areas such as fleet, information technology, emerging areas such as AI et cetera

Group 2

- Contradiction between requirement to plan strategically (Libraries NI) and absence of parallel investment strategy at departmental level.
- Conflicting demands e.g. climate/environmental issues putting pressure on increasingly scarce resources
- Competition with others in the public sector?
- Library estate a significant asset to communities - how do we use this to leverage funding?
- Should we consider developing a 'transformation' programme rather than continuing to bring forward individual projects?
- Better metrics to support bids – social value, contribution to economy rather than empirical counts of people etc?
- Are there really viable alternative sources of investment?
- Are we trying to be too many things to too many people, could a simpler operating model for physical assets create lower cost projects?
- Condition of building impacts on public perception of service.
- Investment now is for the future benefit – we need another Carnegie!
- Already on the 'backfoot' – historic underinvestment – can we ever catch up?
- Making the arguments to support that investment encourages use, underinvestment discourages – disparity with safeguarding public assets?

Group 3

- Trends in building design
- Investment strategy – doesn't exist?
- New concepts for layout
- Funding
- Number of buildings – size, contents, cost
- Impact of poor facilities on services (toilets, lifts, general appearance et cetera)
- Health and safety
- Balance of maintaining existing versus build/re-build
- Level of investment - how the public perceive the service through our estate and library buildings
- Tie back to the corporate plan, then to PFG
- Work space – which is essential but how do you measure
- Asset portfolio in the Department
- Inescapable versus investment (to develop)
- Capital investment when there is no public funding – how does this work (check word?) for capital is difficult
- Belfast Central library – Slipping timeline causes damage

A strategic performance framework for libraries NI – demonstrating the value and contribution of libraries

Group 1

- More analysis – members, reading habits, experiences et cetera
- Demonstrating the range of impacts delivered through the library service – literacy levels, social, health, education et cetera
- Measurement of impact of library services
- Measurement of members
- Translating measures to impact is important
- Breath of indicators also to be considered
- A strategic performance framework is separate to the business plan
- Consider concept of a strategic scorecard
- Surveys and strategic scorecard
- Timescales of measurement – long-term
- People elements are important – staff and customers
- Staff are our ‘secret sauce’

Group 2

- Focus on impact – individual and community level (demonstration)
- Expand the body of evidence
- Assumptions of economic value??
- Baselines to build from
- Impact on areas – health/well-being, lifestyle, learning, employment new line surveys – continuous household survey, YBAS, customer survey Libraries NI
- Need to consider social and economic value
- Policy will promote value of libraries (departmental policy will promote value of libraries)
- Use academic research to measure social impact and value of libraries
- Use of surveys, public polling and focus groups
- How do you measure the value of the service provision of Libraries NI – challenging / difficult?
- Impact on individuals and in impact on communities
- Make use of UK research and local information, statistics and stories
- Identify best way to demonstrate impact – statistics, user stories et cetera

Group 3

- Footfall as a metric will be important
- Savings that the service library service has already delivered
- Impact on health, education – showing the savings and benefits
- BSR – children's reading test
- Chicken and egg – need resource to get the evidence, need the evidence to get the resource
- Follow the corporate plan
- Government strategy – will be a? Does it still exist?
- Qualitative – measuring change
- Output – timelines, one year versus 10 years
- Longitudinal approach to areas like literacy, early years interventions, et cetera – need an agreed framework
- Agreed measures that will not be questioned
- Government silos – adopting an overall approach
- Health, education – moving programme of targets