

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library and by remote video link (Zoom) on Thursday 12 February 2026 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

Ms Bonnie Anley (IP)	Chairperson
Councillor Alistair Cathcart (IP)	
Mr Adrian Driscoll (IP)	
Councillor J Gilmour (VL)	
Councillor R Kinnear (IP)	
Councillor Andrew McAuley (IP)	
Councillor Martin McRandal (IP)	
Ms Ursula O'Hare (IP)	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE (IP)	
Mr John Peto (IP)	
Miss Linda Wilson (IP)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)	Director of Business Support
Ms Adrienne Adair (IP)	Director of Library Services

OBSERVER

Ms Deborah Reynolds (IP)	Assistant Director, Corporate Governance and Assurance, NI Fire and Rescue Service
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Note: IP denotes 'in-person' attendance, VL denotes 'virtual' attendance

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Councillor Roisin Lynch	Vice-Chairperson
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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 welcomed Members and staff to the meeting. She also welcomed Ms D Reynolds, Assistant Director, Corporate Governance and Assurance, Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) who was attending as an Observer in her role as assisting Libraries NI in carrying out its External Board Effectiveness Review. The Chairperson noted that both herself and Councillor A Cathcart were also Board Members of the NIFRS.
- 3.2 She reported that in order to facilitate the appointment of Chairpersons and Vice-Chairpersons on Committees it was necessary to add to the numbers of non-Councillor Board Members on the Business Support Committee indicating that Mr J Peto had agreed to join the Committee. On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved the appointment of Mr J Peto to the Business Support Committee.
- 3.3 The Chairperson reported that an initial meeting had taken place with Departmental officials to discuss the recruitment process for the vacant position on the Libraries NI Board of a Councillor Board Member. She explained that the recruitment process would commence shortly and a closing date of 9 April 2026 had been agreed with interviews being held in May 2026. The Chairperson asked Board Members, especially Councillor Members, to actively promote the recruitment process within local Councils. Discussion took place on the best way for the vacancy to be promoted to ensure that it reaches as wide an audience as possible in order that a high number of applications would be received.
- 3.4 The Chairperson reported on the following appointments to the positions of Permanent Secretaries by the Head of the Civil Service:
- Ms E Morelli, currently Deputy Secretary in the Department for Communities, Engaged Communities Group, had been appointed as Permanent Secretary in the Department for Infrastructure. The date of appointment was to be confirmed but was likely to be from 1 April 2026 and in the meantime, Ms Morelli would cover the current vacant position of Permanent Secretary in the Department for Communities (DfC)
 - Ms G Long, the current Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, would take up the post of Permanent Secretary in the Department for Communities. The date of appointment was likely to be from 1 April 2026
 - Mr I Greenway the current Director of Culture Division in DfC would temporarily act up to cover the Deputy Secretary position vacated by Ms Morelli. During this period Mr J Ball would temporarily take up the position as the Director of Culture Division.
- 3.5 On behalf of Board Members, the Chairperson congratulated all those involved and wished them well in their new roles.

3.6 The Chairperson referred to the meeting with the DfC Minister, Mr G Lyons MLA which she had attended with the Chief Executive on 16 December 2025. She reported that a number of matters relating to inclusion had been discussed, along with the Libraries NI Community Information Policy and the Public Libraries Policy which was still in draft and was presently with the Minister. Also discussed was Belfast Central Library and the possibility of it becoming a National Library. It was noted that the Minister was keen for a further meeting to take place in the New Year.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

4.1 The Chief Executive referred Members to the paper which had been circulated, drawing attention in particular to the undernoted items:

- Revised Budget Allocations – Capital and Resource, (as per letters attached to Chief Executive Business)
- Storm Chandra
- Government Green Paper – BBC Charter Review
- National Year of Reading
- Libraries Five Nations Meeting
- World Book Day on 5 March 2026 and Visit by Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage on 6 March 2026
- Open University / Libraries NI Memorandum of Understanding
- The Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 – Completion of the First Mitigation Reporting Cycle
- Northern Ireland Executive's Response to the Covid-19 Inquiry Module 2 Report
- Assembly Questions.

4.2 In response to a question regarding communication with library users in relation to library closures as a result of Storm Chandra, the Chief Executive outlined the current approach and agreed to liaise with the Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication to discuss ways in which this communication could be improved. The dynamic nature of the situation was noted.

4.3 Members noted the letter from Ms K Godfrey, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) regarding Climate Change Reporting and it was agreed that a presentation on the green library manifesto and the challenges faced be brought to a future meeting of the Board.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2025 LNI 01.02.26

5.1 On a proposal by Mr A Driscoll, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 11 December 2025 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2025 **LNI 02.02.26**

6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated paper noting the following:

Item 3.1: Chairperson's Business

6.2 Members noted that this item had been completed and that further instructions on accessing mandatory training provided by the Northern Ireland Centre for Applied Learning (NICAL) had been issued on 15 January 2026.

Items 11.1 and 11.3: Board Effectiveness 2025/26 and an update on External Review of Effectiveness

6.3 It was noted that these items were on the Agenda for discussion at Item 9.

7. UPDATE ON BUDGETING PROCESS AND ANNUAL BUSINESS PLANNING PROCESS 2026/2027 **LNI 03.02.26**

7.1 The Director of Business Support reminded Members that on 6 January 2026 the Finance Minister had published his proposals for the draft Budget 2026-2029/30 with proposed departmental allocations for day-to-day spending over the next three years and capital investment for the next four years. While these proposals provided no insight into how the departmental funding arrangements would subsequently translate into financial allocations the proposed multi-year approach provided a basis for estimating future year requirements.

7.2 He confirmed that the paper 'Resourcing the Public Library Service' had been updated and re-submitted to DfC in early January 2026 setting out the funding requirements for the service in 2026/27 and indicating a resource baseline requirement of £36.07 million.

7.3 The Director of Business Support explained that a similar approach was adopted in relation to 'Capital Investment' and while the quantum of capital funding potentially available to Libraries NI remains unknown, the evidence paper submitted to DfC considered the proposed four-year capital investment approach and the possibility of a multi-year capital funding envelope being provided within which Libraries NI would have greater autonomy to plan and deliver on a range of investment projects.

7.4 The Chief Executive reported that work had commenced on the draft Annual Business Plan for 2026/27. The process and format of the Annual Business Plan would follow that of previous years and would draw on the updated Corporate Plan 2025 – 2030. It was anticipated that the first draft of the Annual Business Plan would be completed by the end of February 2026 with a view to bringing it to the Board meeting on 23 April 2026. He reminded Members that notification of a funding allocation for 2026/27 has not yet been received and therefore, the key planning assumption on which the draft plan was developed was that funding would be at a similar level to that approved for 2025/26. In the event of a more constrained funding allocation, objectives / targets and KPIs would be reviewed and updated.

7.5 Members noted that the draft Business Plan targets and objectives for 2026/27 would be shared with the Department and would be revised and updated, as appropriate, to take account of Departmental priorities. They further noted that while the funding position was uncertain it was important that there was some structure which staff could use as a basis to plan in 2026/27 and to allow more detailed Business Support and Service Plans to be developed.

7.6 Following discussion, the Board noted the challenges and uncertainty impacting on the Budgeting Process and the preparation of the Annual Business Plan 2026/27 and in particular that:

- a Budget Plan would be prepared and brought back to the Board for approval once notification of a funding allocation was received
- a first draft of the Annual Business Plan 2026/27 would be completed, insofar as is practical, by 28 February 2026
- the draft Annual Business Plan would subsequently be updated to reflect the funding allocation for 2026/27 when this is known
- the draft Annual Business Plan 2026/27 would be brought to the Board meeting on 23 April 2026 for consideration and approval
- the Annual Business Plan draft targets and objectives for 2026/27 would be shared with the Department for Communities.

7.7 Members noted the report.

8. REMUNERATION COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2025/2026 **LNI.04.02.26**

8.1 The Chairperson, Ms B Anley presented the Remuneration Committee Effectiveness Review for 2025/26 which had been carried out at the meeting of the Committee held on 28 January 2026. It was agreed that a small amendment be made to Question 9 on page 3 of the Effectiveness Review Questionnaire i.e. the word 'impose' be changed to 'impede'.

8.2 On a proposal by Ms L Wilson, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved the Remuneration Committee's Effectiveness Review 2025/26 subject to the amendment at paragraph 8.1 above.

9. BOARD EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2025/2026 AND UPDATE ON EXTERNAL REVIEW OF BOARD EFFECTIVENESS **LNI.05.02.26**

9.1 The Chief Executive informed Members that individual Committees had reviewed their effectiveness including the continued relevance of the Schemes of Delegation. The review papers were appended to the minutes of the meetings at which the review was undertaken.

- 9.2 Members noted that at its meeting on 21 January 2026 the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had completed an effectiveness review using the effectiveness questionnaire produced by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).
- 9.3 The Chief Executive reminded members that a key action arising from last year's Review of Board Effectiveness was to undertake an External Review of Board Effectiveness in line with the requirements of the Partnership Agreement. This review was currently underway and the outcome would be reported at the April meeting of the Board.
- 9.4 Members considered the Effectiveness Review and draft Action Plan 2026/27 noting the deadlines for completion.
- 9.5 On a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, Members confirmed that they were content that all Committee reviews had been completed, they agreed the draft Action Plan and concluded the review of effectiveness by confirming they were content that the Board and its Committees were operating effectively.

10. MANAGEMENT REPORT

LNI 06.02.26

- 10.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Business Support briefed the Board on the Management Report as follows:

Key Performance Indicators 2025/26 Quarter 3: October – December 2025

LNI 06.02.26 (i)

- 10.2 The Chief Executive drew attention to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Report for Quarter 3: October to December 2025. He explained that at the end of Quarter 3 progress continued to be made in respect of the achievement of KPIs and reported on the five targets recorded as 'red' which were unlikely to be achieved explaining that in some cases such as the target for new members an ambitious target had been set. Members discussed the definition of 'active membership', and it was noted that when setting the KPI targets for 2026/27 consideration of measurable and achievable targets would be an important factor.

Finance Report: December 2025

LNI 06.02.26 (ii)

- 10.3 The Director of Business Support presented the Finance Reports for Capital and Recurrent spend to December 2025 which had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 29 January 2026.
- 10.4 He reported that an additional resource allocation had been received in December 2025 for book stock and for the development fees on the Newtownards Library redevelopment project. Staff and associated costs were under budget to date and this trend was projected to continue with an underspend projected by year end. Members noted that a budget review exercise had been carried out in November 2025 and as a result £150,000 had

been re-allocated to the stock budget and £30,000 to Belfast Central Library to assist with the clean-up and refurbishment due to damage caused by Storm Chandra. Members also noted that DfC had responded quickly and positively to allocate £30,000 to assist with this issue. He confirmed that at present a £30,000 underspend (0.8%) was projected at year end and although this figure could change it was projected that an underspend would be within the permitted <1% variance limit.

- 10.5 In respect of Capital Expenditure the Director of Business Support reported on work to date on each of the capital projects. He explained the current position regarding the replacement of a passenger lift in Belfast Central Library and that an easement of £312,000 had been made to DfC in respect of this issue. It was planned that a contractual commitment would be made this year and a capital 'tail' would be carried forward into the 2026/27 financial year for the work to be completed. He confirmed that based on current projections a potential underspend of £11,000 or (0.86%) was projected at year end which was within the <1% margin permitted.

Corporate Risk Register

LNI.06.02.26 (iii)

- 10.6 The Director of Business Support then drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register discussing each of the risks in turn. It was noted that the title of Risk 7 had been updated to include 'Cyber'. Additional updates to this risk had included arrangements now in place to manage the risks. He reported that since the Corporate Risk Register was last seen by members overall the risk levels had remained static reflecting the relatively stable risk environment.
- 10.7 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as at January 2025.
- 10.8 Members noted the report.

11. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2026

LNI 07.02.26

- 11.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Councillor A Cathcart presented the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2026 adding that he had been elected as Chairperson of the Committee at the meeting and Ms U O'Hare had been elected as Vice-Chairperson. Councillor Cathcart paid tribute to the outgoing Chairperson, Mrs W Osborne for her hard work and commitment during an extended period of time in the role as Chairperson of the Committee.
- 11.2 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by the Committee Vice-Chairperson the draft minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 21 January 2026 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.
- 11.3 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the Amendment to the Internal Audit Annual Plan.

- 11.4 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Board approved and adopted the Gifts and Hospitality Policy Review.
- 11.5 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by the Committee Chairperson, the Board approved and adopted the Risk Management Policy Review.
- 11.6 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Board approved and adopted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Effectiveness Review.
- 11.7 Members discussed the review of the Gifts and Hospitality Policy and it was agreed that further guidance would be issued to Board Members on the acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality.
- 11.8 The Committee Chairperson referred to the completion of the Committee's Effectiveness Review and reported that the NIAO Effectiveness Questionnaire was made up of Essential Requirements and Other Good Practice arrangements. All the Essential Requirements had been completed and it was agreed that a schedule be prepared and incorporated into the annual work programme for the Committee in 2026/27 to allow for the completion of the Other Good Practice arrangements for each of the areas within the NIAO Effectiveness Checklist.
- 11.9 On behalf of Board Members, the Chairperson of the Board congratulated Councillor A Cathcart and Ms U O'Hare on being elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Committee and thanked Mrs W Osborne for her diligence in chairing the Committee for an extended period of time.

**12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON
15 JANUARY 2026 LNI 08.02.26**

- 12.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Councillor A McAuley, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2026.
- 12.2 On a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 15 January 2026 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting
- 12.3 On a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, the Board approved and adopted the Review of Effectiveness of Services Committee 2025/26.
- 12.4 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Board approved and adopted the Review of Community Information Policy.

**13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE
HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2026** **LNI 09.02.26**

- 13.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Miss L Wilson presented the minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026.
- 13.2 It was agreed that a small amendment be made to paragraph 4.9 i.e. that the word 'members' be replaced with 'member' as there was currently only one vacancy on the Libraries NI Board.
- 13.3 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by the Committee Vice-Chairperson, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 29 January 2026 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting subject to the amendment at paragraph 13.2 above.
- 13.4 The Committee Chairperson explained that some amendments needed to be made to the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 and these minutes would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 26 March 2026 and then to the April meeting of the Board for approval.
- 13.5 The Committee Chairperson explained that her term was due to end and in line with Standing Orders the current Vice-Chairperson, Councillor M McRandal would take up the position effective from the date of the next scheduled meeting of the Committee on 26 March 2026. On a proposal by the current Chairperson of the Committee and seconded by the Chairperson of the Board, the Board approved the recommendation from the Committee that Councillor M McRandal would take up the position as Chairperson of the Business Support Committee effective from 26 March 2026. The Chairperson of the Board on behalf of Members thanked Ms L Wilson for her work and diligence during her time as Chairperson of the Business Support Committee.
- 13.6 The Board noted the outworking of the Committee's Effectiveness Review 2025/26 which included a review of the Scheme of Delegation and concluded that it remained fit for purpose and required no further revision or alteration.
- 13.7 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, seconded by the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, the Board approved and adopted the Lone Working Policy Review.

14. SMT STRUCTURES (IN COMMITTEE) **LNI 10.02.26 (T)**

- 14.1 Officers with the exception of the Chief Executive withdrew from the meeting.
- 14.2 On a proposal by Councillor R Kinnear, seconded by Mr A Driscoll, Members agreed to go into Committee.
- 14.3 While in Committee the Chief Executive presented a paper setting out a proposal for revisions to the Libraries NI organisation structure, including at Senior Management Team level.

14.4 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley and seconded by Mr A Driscoll the Board approved, in principle, the proposal presented in the paper. The Chief Executive was tasked with further developing the proposal and providing a further update at a future Board meeting.

14.5 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, Members agreed to come out of Committee.

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 23 April 2026 at 10:30 am in Lisburn City Library.

17. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

17.1 The meeting ended at 2:25 pm.

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

Mr J Peto left at 12:36 pm

Mrs W Osborne left at 1:10 pm

Ms U O'Hare left at 1:20 pm

Councillor A Cathcart left at 2:00 pm

Signed:


Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

23 April 2026