

Briefing Note

Elected Member Briefing – *Shetland Library Performance Report 2025/26*

Elected Member Briefing Note Ref. No. 2026-25

About this Briefing Note

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Date: 26.05.2026

Subject: Shetland Library Performance Report 2025/26

Public / ~~Exempt~~ / ~~Confidential~~

if exempt or confidential explain risks and consequences.

Purpose

This briefing note provides members with a summary of activity at the Shetland Library during the 2025/26 financial year.

Background

The Shetland Library service is made up of the public library in Lerwick, one Mobile Library, seven school libraries at each of our secondary schools, and three community libraries in Baltasound, Brae and Aith. The community libraries are open during term time and are situated within, and staffed by, the corresponding school library.

Annually we report on our main projects and achievements for the year, any notable feedback and any considerable movements in our annual statistics. The report, attached, is distributed to Elected Members, Staff and available for the public.

Key points

A key statistic to note is that our physical book issues are down, but electronic formats- such as ebooks and eaudiobooks are up.

Footfall across all library branches has increased, indicating that Library spaces are valued and necessary for a number of reasons beyond borrowing books.

In 2025/26 we provided 89 individual users with 221 loans of electronic devices and/or data.

The Library hosted a wide, varied programme of events during the year. 288 events for adults and 226 for children, with over 7000 people attending. Some of these events were in partnership with other council departments and external agencies, to further diversify our service offer.

We hosted more than double the number of Book Group sessions this year, to encourage reading as more of a socially inclusive activity. Attending a book group is a great way to meet new people.

Our 2025 Young Writer competition had over 300 entries on the theme 'A Secret'.

Bookbug sessions continue to be popular. We have seen the benefits of expanding to having later sessions so that working parents can attend with their children. Isleshavn Care Centre in Yell has been praising the positive impact that hosting intergenerational Bookbug sessions has had with their residents.

Our staff worked hard to produce our first Shetland-focused Summer Reading Challenge in 2025. This new approach proved successful, with lots of meaningful interactions with families over the holidays.

The Anderson High School became the first Shetland school to be awarded a silver Reader School accreditation from Scottish Book Trust.

The network outages in 2025 were an opportunity for us to shine. Our DVD loans increased, with the absence of online streaming services and we had more people using our public access computers.

Overview

Shetland Library has had a busy year. The attached report highlights all the work that we have done during the year, focusing on our three main strategic areas- People, Place and Partnerships. We have intuitively responded to the needs of our community and provided a Library service tailored to these needs.

Statistics show that physical book issues are down, but this is not an indication that our population is reading less. How literature is consumed is evolving, and so are we.

The library is providing more opportunities for connection- digitally and socially. In an increasingly digital world, we are providing help and support so that nobody is left behind or at a disadvantage due to a lack of skills or equipment. Yet, we are also providing more opportunities and support for social inclusion,

beyond a screen. The ability to meet with other people with shared interests, in person.

We are looking forward to another engaging year ahead!

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Please return this form to memberssupport@shetland.gov.uk to be logged and circulated to all Councillors.

END



This report highlights what we've done over the last financial year, focussing on our key strategic areas - People, Place & Partnerships

Young Writer 2025

Our annual Young Writer competition, on the theme 'A Secret', attracted over 300 entries. We partnered with Shetland Forwards to provide additional support for teachers & young people interested in writing Shetlan.



The 2026 theme is 'The Map', and we hope this continued focus on creativity and local language will further encourage young writers throughout the isles.

People

Championing literacy and learning and empowering citizens



We said farewell to Executive Manager, Karen Fraser. After over 25 years of service, she handed the reins over to Team Leaders Nicola Sinclair & Catherine Jeromson (both pictured above, sitting bottom right.)

Bedtime Bookbug Sessions

We re-introduced Bedtime Bookbug sessions in the Library on Thursday evenings during the winter months. These later sessions give the opportunity for working parents to join in. We've found it particularly successful with Dads, enabling them share the Bookbug experience with their young children.

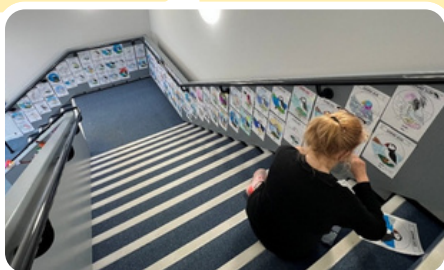


"This made a genuinely meaningful and positive difference to their daily lives. This intergenerational approach benefits everyone."

Isleshavn Care Centre, Yell reflecting on a daytime Bookbug session

Summer Reading Activities

In 2025 we launched our first locally created Summer Reading Challenge, complete with a new collector's card, a postcard-writing activity and competitions including our ever-popular treasure hunts. Our activities room was set up with craft materials kindly donated by Tesco's Community Champion. Hundreds entered our colouring competition (see below), with prizes kindly donated from the Sumburgh Head Lighthouse.



"The response from families was excellent, creating a lively buzz around the library all summer." **Library Staff**

Memories Shetland



"Friendly Staff. Good Company. Lots of laughs remembering the good times"

We run two monthly Memories reminiscence sessions, both at capacity. These are as rewarding for staff as they are for participants. Hearing first hand accounts of our social history is fascinating and the ability to share these stories has given new confidence to our elder community.



Rachael Boxall



Events for Everyone



288 adult events & 226 children's events
A total of 7,002 people attending

We've continued to offer a range of diverse events to get people of all ages and interests inspired by reading, culture and learning, and we keep them free of charge wherever possible.



Ann Marie Anderson

Place

Engaging communities and promoting community wellbeing

Authors launching books in the library last year included: Ann Marie Anderson, Rachael Boxall, Marsali Taylor, Donald Murray, Sheenagh Pugh, Jonathan Wills, Jane Cockayne & Lauren Bulter (pictured below)



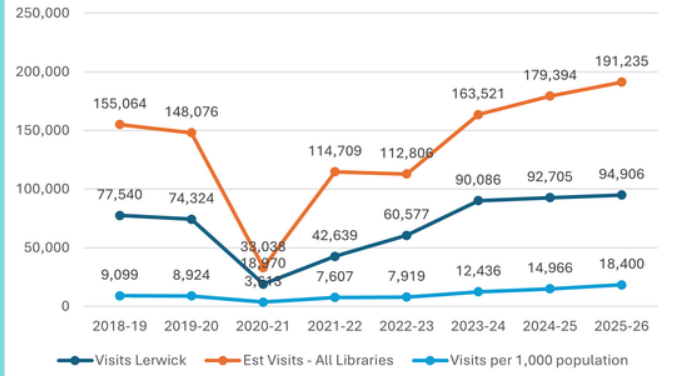
Open Mic evenings (above) encouraged writers to share work with a captive audience.

- AUTHOR TALKS
- BOOK LAUNCHES
- BOOK GROUPS
- BOOKBUG SESSIONS
- LEGO CLUB
- STEM EVENTS
- OPEN MIC SESSIONS



The place to be!

Library visits by year



Graph shows the steady increase in library footfall since Covid restrictions in 2020/2021 and exceeding pre-Covid visit figures.

We were selected to host one of CLAN's book trail benches.



Makkin a Difference

Shetland Library Makers met in the library to knit and crochet hanging decorations for sale, with the proceeds going to the Trussell Trust.



Our Year in Statistics

We had 184 loans from our jigsaw collection - that's 92,000 pieces!

Visits - 191,235 across public, community, mobile and school libraries, up from 179,394



108 Book Group meetings, with 724 attending, up from 47 meetings with 332 attending in 2024/5

eBook, eAudio and eMagazine issues - 36,764 up from 33,316 in 2024/25



Adult Non-Fiction loans up from 12,789 last year to 14,611

Physical issues - 102,089 down slightly from 106,242 for the year 2024/25



There are 481 items of stock which are 'long overdue' (please bring them back - we miss them!)

AHS Silver Reading Award

Anderson High School became the first school in Shetland to be awarded a silver Reading School accreditation by Scottish Book Trust, supported by our dedicated AHS library staff. The Reading Schools programme supports schools to build a reading culture, where every pupil is encouraged to feed their imagination through books.

Reading for pleasure is central to supporting wellbeing, improving attainment across the curriculum, and boosting critical thinking, creativity, empathy and resilience.



“The Reading Schools programme has been an excellent whole school initiative inspiring an uptake in young people reading across year groups and involving a number of staff and departments across the school. We really appreciate the work of all involved, and a particular mention to our library staff for driving this excellent project forward”.

**Robin Calder, Head Teacher,
Anderson High School**

Members of the Pupil Reading Leadership Group 'The Book Dragons' in the library.
L to R: Amelia Ward (S2), Jade Mockford (S3), Olga Lewandowska (S2)

Partnerships

Strengthening advocacy & investment, whilst demonstrating service impact & improvement

Perfect Partnerships

We have enjoyed coming together with other departments and external agencies this year to enhance our service offer to the community.



1,266 people attended organised learning sessions in the library last year, up from 625 in 2024/5

Connecting Shetland

From 2024- 2026 we ran a two-year project with Connecting Scotland, providing devices & data to lend to customers. **In 2025/26 we provided 89 individual users with 221 loans of devices and/or data.** At the end of the project, we retained the hardware, and although no longer available through Connecting Scotland, we are now a National Databank Hub, meaning the Library can continue to provide free data for low income households.

Remember us if you need to use a PC, printer, scanner or to borrow a tablet, Chromebook, MiFi unit or podcasting equipment - or get help and support from our staff to use digital devices.



Shetland Author Successes

The Library supports and promotes local authors and has a fantastic 'Shetland Room'. It was good to see Shetland books lending really well in 2025, boosted by eAudio loans. Jen Hadfield, Malachy Tallack and Marianne Brown did especially well at the 'top for the charts', even rivalling publishing phenomenon Richard Osman! You can browse our 'Most Borrowed' charts on our website.



Problems

Challenges we faced in 2025/26

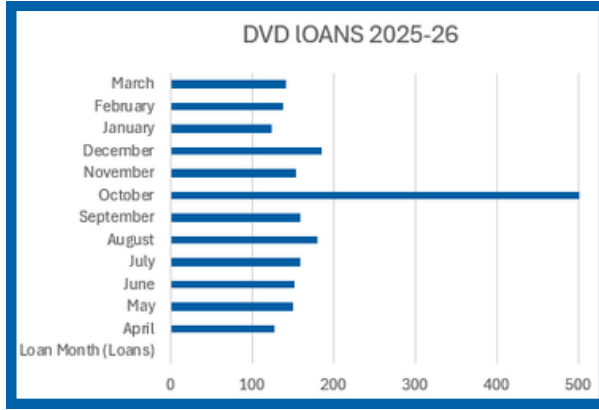
Doors



We had to apologise again for our automatic doors at Lerwick library not working, in what became a long term and expensive problem. The good news that we should have replacements installed by Summer 2026.

Network outages

The network outages in 2025 were an opportunity for us to shine. Our DVD loans increased, with the absence of online streaming services and more people using our public access computers.



Tourist Office Closure

The loss of the Lerwick Tourist Office put pressure on the Library last summer. We printed and displayed extra visitor information and bus timetables and our staff rallied round, as always. In an increasingly digital world many people do get left behind and even the digitally-savvy need an actual human being to speak to sometimes. We've received lovely feedback from visitors.

I read that the library had a visitor membership. The incredibly welcoming and helpful staff issued me a card on the spot and helped me install the eBook app. I borrowed books about history, tradition and handicrafts. I am a world traveller and have never found another library willing to lend me their books.

USA visitor

Plans

Looking ahead to 2026/27



NLS comes to Shetland

We are hosting our 'big sister'

the National Library of Scotland from 12 - 14 May. Some of their excellent and knowledgeable staff will be coming to Shetland to do events and spread the word about their resources. You can explore the fantastic NLS online resources anytime - maps, old newspapers, reliable reference words and much more - do have a browse.

Summer Reading 2026



Building on the success of our own Shetland-specific summer reading challenge for children and the Summer Reading Spree for teens & adults in 2025, we are developing new themes for this year to continue inspiring young readers and strengthening community engagement.

National Databank

The Library has been accepted as a National Databank Hub and plans to launch this service at the end of May 2026. This service provides low income households with access to free data.



ICAN for Net Zero

Shetland Library has joined organisations from other islands as part of the Islands Community Action Network (ICAN). This was launched in September 2024, as part of the UK and Scottish Government funded Islands Centre for Net Zero (ICNZ) programme.

Edinburgh Book Festival also coming to Shetland!

We're excited to be partnering with the Edinburgh International Book Festival to offer FREE live-streamed screening events during the festival in 2026 and pre-recorded events beyond this. Hosting author events in Shetland can be limited & costly, so we are grateful for this opportunity to increase access.

National Year of Reading

2026 is the National Year of Reading and our strategy to mark the occasion is to offer more ways to engage with reading and shout even louder about the many diverse ways we already promote reading and the benefits of regularly reading. In all our school libraries, pupils (and staff!) are being encouraged to read six books in 2026 and to hand in their '6 in 26' bookmarks for a chance to win prizes.

