

# Written Ministerial Statement

*The content of this written ministerial statement is as received at the time from the Minister. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.*

## Department for Communities

### AMENDMENT TO THE DIGITAL ECONOMY ACT 2017 TO EXTEND THE PUBLIC LENDING RIGHTS SCHEME TO INCLUDE E-LENDING BY PUBLIC LIBRARIES HERE

*Published at 12.00 noon on 25 May 2021.*

**Ms Hargey (The Minister for Communities):** This Statement will provide you with information on my Department's decision, following engagement with Executive Colleagues and Committee for Communities, to consent to an amendment to the Digital Economy Act 2017 to extend the Public Lending Rights scheme to include the lending of e-books and e-audio by public libraries here.

My Department has been working with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DDCMS) to amend the Digital Economy Act 2017 in order to extend the Public Lending Rights (PLR) scheme to include the lending of e-books and e-audio by public libraries here.

The PLR scheme is an arrangement provided by the Public Lending Right Act 1979 for authors to receive payment from a central fund in relation to loans of their books to the public by local library authorities. The arrangement is a transferred matter here.

The PLR scheme originally covered the lending of physical books. However, recent changes include the provision to be extended for the loan of e-books and e-audio books from public libraries. This change was introduced by the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA 2017), and was brought into force for England, Scotland and Wales in 2018.

In the absence of an Assembly during the period when DEA 2017 was passing through Westminster it was not possible to obtain a Legislative Consent Motion (LCM) and therefore a separate route of approval was required. Having obtained legal advice, I engaged both the Communities Committee and Executive colleagues in respect of my intention to consent to the commencement of provisions of the Act that relate to devolved matters.

The commencement of the regulations, at a time when we have seen significant increased usage of e-books and e-audio books due to the Covid19 pandemic, will ensure that authors are fairly remunerated for access to their books which are downloaded by customers of public libraries.

There are no financial implications for DfC or Libraries NI. Payments in connection with e-lending are paid from a central fund administered by the British Library, and funded by DDCMS.