LIBRARIES NI
The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a special meeting of the Board of the Authority held on
Thursday 16 March 2017 at 10:33 am in Lisburn City Library

PRESENT
Professor Bernard Cullen  Chairperson
Alderman Thomas Burns
Alderman Tom Campbell
Councillor Dr Janet Gray
Mrs Deirdre Kenny
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Alderman Stephen Martin
Mr Alastair McDowell
Councillor Seán McGuigan
Mr Harry Reid
Alderman Marion Smith
Ms Jane Williams

IN ATTENDANCE
Ms Helen Osborn  Acting Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly  Director of Business Support
Ms Adrienne Adair  Assistant Director
Ms Mandy Bryson  Assistant Director
Ms Trisha Ward  Assistant Director

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE
Councillor Garath Keating
Ms Angela Matthews
Dr Margaret Ward

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS 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 No interests were declared.
On behalf of Members, Alderman M Smith welcomed Ms H Osborn to the meeting of the Libraries NI Board in her new role as Acting Chief Executive of Libraries NI. Ms Osborn thanked Members for their good wishes.

*Members agreed to take Agenda Item 5: The Boardroom Apprentice Scheme as the next order of business*

3. THE BOARDROOM APPRENTICE SCHEME

3.1 The Acting Chief Executive reminded Members that at the Board Meeting in July 2016 it had been agreed in principle to participate in the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme, a programme designed to help aspiring Non-Executive Directors gain experience to enable them to apply for posts as Board Members.

3.2 She reported that, as funding for the pilot programme had not been obtained prior to the dissolution of the Northern Ireland Assembly, the scheme would be implemented on the basis of good will. It was anticipated that the recruitment of 'apprentices' would commence after Easter and therefore a decision by the Board on whether to participate was required.

3.3 The Acting Chief Executive reminded Members that in addition to overall participation in the scheme there were a number of specific commitments involved:

- the provision of a 'Board Buddy'
- a Board Member willing to participate in café conversations with the participants at one of the training days (time commitment would be 1 hour 15 minutes over a lunch break)
- dissemination of marketing material

3.4 Members discussed the scheme and were generally supportive. The need to ensure the widest possible range of participants was expressed. The Acting Chief Executive explained that all participating organisations would be involved in promoting the scheme and she would be happy to receive suggestions as to how this could be done to maximise diversity. Members identified that there was a parallel issue which would need to be addressed by Government if the overall aims of the scheme were to be achieved i.e. a review of the criteria for Board Members. The criteria currently includes experience which a more diverse pool of applicants may lack and which the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme cannot address.

3.5 On a proposal by Alderman T Campbell, seconded by Councillor C Mallaghan, the Board agreed that Libraries NI should be involved in the 'Boardroom Apprentice' scheme.
4. The Acting Chief Executive drew attention to the tabled letter from Mr L O'Reilly, Permanent Secretary, Department for Communities dated 10 March 2017. The letter states:

4.1 The outgoing Executive did not agree a Budget for 2017/18 for presentation to the NI Assembly for approval.

4.1.1 There is a small window of opportunity to allow a new Executive to agree a budget and put it to the Assembly before the start of the new financial year, provided that agreement can be reached very quickly. If the budget is not agreed by the end of March the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Finance has limited powers under Section 59 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to release cash to departments until such times as a budget is agreed and enshrined in legislation through a Budget Act.

4.1.2 This means that there is currently no agreed budget allocation to Departments for 17/18. In addition, you will also be aware of various public expenditure pressures in the system. The scale of any budget reductions which might be required to accommodate these and the resulting budget allocations to individual Departments will be determined in due course by the new administration.

4.1.3 Meanwhile, you and your Board should take the necessary steps to carefully manage your expenditure for 2017/18 in the light of these uncertainties, and especially in the first quarter. We recommend that you plan somewhere in the region of a 5% reduction with plans in place to scale up or down activities once a budget has been set by an incoming administration. For current spending, the objective is to maintain existing levels of public service provision.

4.2 The Acting Chief Executive explained that the Department required spending proposals for 2017/18 and associated cash requirements by 24 March 2017. She reported that a meeting would be held with representatives from the Department on Tuesday 21 March 2017 at which the proposals would be discussed before a final return was submitted.

4.3 It was noted that the impact of maximum allocation based on 95% of the 2016/17 opening resource budget equates to £26,369,000, a reduction in the net available resource of £1,388,000 from the previous financial year.

4.4 The Director of Business Support, Mr D Miskelly, drew attention to the proposed Spending Plan 2017/18, explaining that the plan was subject to review and revision as the financial situation is clarified. He drew attention to each area of the spending plan and explained in detail the impact of reductions in resource funding and how the savings would impact on service delivery. Members noted that the areas where the largest savings would need to be made were the largest areas of spend i.e. Staff, Stock and Planned Maintenance.
4.5 Members discussed each area at length.

Staff

4.5.1 The Director of Business Support explained that despite a significant reduction in staff costs arising from previous Voluntary Exit Schemes and subsequent reorganisation, a significant reduction in costs is required (£574,000 in total) to meet the 2017/18 resource limits. It is proposed the balance will be secured generally through a reduction in expenditure on agency staff.

4.5.2 He highlighted the important role of agency staff within the organisation in providing cover for vacancies eg maternity leave, annual leave and sickness absence adding that they are a vital resource in supporting the delivery of public library services and it would not be possible to maintain the current pattern of opening hours in all libraries without their use.

4.5.3 In the short term there may be ad hoc closures as a result of this budget reduction although this will be kept to a minimum.

4.5.4 A more structured approach to a reduction in agency staff, and therefore access to services, will be developed in the coming weeks.

Stock

4.5.5 The Director of Business Support reminded Members that during the 2016/17 financial year the stock spend per head of population was £1.24 which was significantly lower that the £2.25 target specified in the framework policy “Delivering Tomorrow’s Libraries” (DTL). The proposed spending plan for 2017/18 further reduces the stock spend initially to £1.00 per head of population which is a 44% of the DTL target and may not be considered consistent with the policy.

4.5.6 He explained that the reductions would affect all of the categories of stock that are purchased and would also affect participation levels, customer satisfaction and Libraries NI’s contribution to government priorities. A reduced budget would determine that priority be given to mainstream requirements such as adult fiction and non-fiction and children’s books which would result in lesser budgets for minority interest material including those in languages other than English, large print and talking books. The number of newspapers currently purchased would also be reduced.

4.5.7 A number of the online subscriptions that are due for renewal at the end of March will not be renewed. Ebooks and Emagazines will be retained, as will a reduced level of resources relating to business and employability. However genealogy resources and information resources for young people will be reduced.

4.5.8 Members noted that in previous years additional bids had been made in-year to the Department for additional monies for stock and that, although these had been successful, there was no guarantee that this process would be available or successful in the 2017/18 financial year.
Planned Maintenance

4.5.9 The Director of Business Support explained that the Spending Plan proposed to reduce the planned element of the maintenance budget by 42% on the previous year’s baseline. He reminded Members that planned activity is designed to prevent longer term maintenance problems arising and to ensure that buildings are safe, attractive and welcoming. He confirmed that in the short-term, planned maintenance could be reduced without significant immediate impact on frontline services, but this would provide poor value for money in the medium term and would be more costly in the longer term as it would result in increased spend on response maintenance.

4.5.10 Members expressed concern that a reduction in the planned maintenance budget would impact on the regular preventative maintenance programme. The Director of Business Support gave his assurance that all legislative and Health and Safety requirements would be met to ensure that premises were safe. He added that there would be an increased risk that some systems may fail and that ad hoc closures could occur necessitating a bid to the Department for emergency funding.

4.5.11 Members noted with concern the long term effect of reducing planned maintenance and the additional pressure that this would impose on Response Maintenance and the availability of resources in the future.

4.6 Discussion took place on ways in which the financial situation and the implications for service delivery could be highlighted.

4.7 The Chairperson informed Members that he would be conveying their concern to the Permanent Secretary, DfC and making him aware that it would be impossible for Libraries NI to retain current services with only 95% of the 2016/17 baseline budget.

4.8 On a proposal by Mr H Reid, seconded by Councillor S McGuigan, the Board approved the proposed initial spending plan for 2017/18, subject to review and amendment taking account of Departmental Guidance, confirmation of allocations and other relevant factors.

5. DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2017/18

5.1 The Acting Chief Executive drew attention to the second draft of the Business Plan targets for 2017/18, noting in particular the changes suggested by Members at the February Board meeting and other revisions made in light of the financial situation. She reminded Members that targets remain tentative only at this stage, due to lack of firm information regarding budgets for 2017/18 and uncertainty in relation to the draft Programme for Government and Departmental priorities.

5.2 Members noted that it will be necessary to review and revise at least some of the targets, especially those relating to participation and activities but that
some structure is necessary to which staff can work with effect from 1 April 2017 so that Service Plans can begin to be developed and to aid in the staff appraisal process.

5.3 On a suggestion by Mrs D Kenny it was agreed to amend the wording on Page 2 regarding mobile library usage which would now read as follows:

*Maintain mobile library usage (as measured by loans/renewals) at 2016/17 levels*

5.4 It was also agreed to amend the wording on page 6 regarding the outcome of the review by the Department for Communities of its ALBs which would now read as follows:

*Explore further opportunities for shared services or service provision to other organisations by December 2017*

5.5 Following discussion, on a proposal by Ms J Williams, seconded by Mrs D Kenny, the Board approved the second draft of the Business Plan and in doing so recognised the importance of having a structure to which staff can work, as well as the difficulties in developing meaningful actions and targets, given the current uncertainty. A further iteration of the Business Plan would be brought to the Board when the financial position is clarified.

6. **ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS**

6.1 There was no other notified business.

6.2 The Chairperson asked that all papers relating to items 3 and 4 on the agenda be given back to officers for confidential shredding.

6.3 It was agreed that the meeting of the Services Committee would commence at 12 noon.

7. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

7.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 13 April 2017 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library.

8. **MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

8.1 The meeting ended at 11.45 am.

8.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:
Alderman S Martin arrived at 10.56 am

Signed: Bernard Cullen

Date: 13/04/17