Libraries NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a special meeting of the Board of the Authority held on Thursday 22 September 2016 at 10:30 am in Lisburn City Library

PRESENT
Professor Bernard Cullen
Alderman Tom Campbell
Alderman Thomas Burns
Councillor Janet Gray
Councillor Garath Keating
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Alderman Stephen Martin
Ms Angela Matthews
Mr Alastair McDowell
Councillor Séan McGuigan
Councillor Stephen McIlveen
Mr Harry Reid
Dr Margaret Ward
Ms Jane Williams

IN ATTENDANCE
Ms Irene Knox
Mr Terry Heron
Mr Desi Miskelly
Ms Helen Osborn

Chief Executive
Director of Business Support
Director of Business Support (Designate)
Director of Library Services

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE
Apologies were received from Mrs Deirdre Kenny and Alderman Marion Smith.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
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. REPORT ON THE OPENING HOURS CONSULTATION LNI 01.09.16(S)
3.1 The Director of Library Services presented the Report on the Opening Hours Consultation. She reminded Members that they had approved a number of Savings Delivery Plans in order to achieve savings of £2.143 million in 2016/17, including Plan B2 which related to a reduction in opening hours in
the 14 busiest libraries with effect from November 2016. This reduction in opening hours was set in the context of the Opening Hours Policy, approved by the Board in October 2015 and the public consultation process, which ran from 17 May – 17 July 2016, related to the preferred pattern of opening hours in each of the 14 libraries.

3.2 The Director of Library Services referred to the Minister’s announcement in August 2016 of an additional £225,000 for Libraries NI to avoid these cuts in opening hours. She explained that the purpose of the Report on the Opening Hours Consultation was twofold:

- to inform Members of the results of the consultation on the preferred pattern of opening hours for the 14 libraries; and
- to seek the Board’s agreement that Savings Delivery Plan B2 should not be implemented in November 2016 in light of the additional funding allocation.

3.3 Members noted that 9,499 responses to the questionnaires and 77 written submissions had been received. There were over 4,000 comments collated from the questionnaires that were available for Board Members to view. She drew attention to the summary of the responses, as set out in Appendix Two of the Report, and the following key points that emerged:

- opposition to the proposed cuts
- recognition of the valuable role libraries play in the lives of individuals and communities
- the important role of libraries in community planning
- some concerns about the consultation process e.g. length and timing of the consultation, lack of EQIA, lack of consultation on whether to reduce hours.

3.4 The Director of Library Services also reported that a number of customers chose to express their views using a customer feedback form and she shared a particularly poignant story that one individual had described. She highlighted key points from the comment forms, including the following:

- general opposition to the proposed cuts
- disappointment that further cuts in opening hours were being proposed after reductions last year and in previous years
- very positive comments about library staff
- recognition of the valuable role that libraries play for pre-school and school age children, students, job seekers and senior citizens
- recognition of the value of individual programmes and services
- some suggestions for alternative savings and income generation
- recognition of the value of libraries as a non-contested space and community hub.
3.5 Attention was drawn to the preferred pattern of opening hours for each library as indicated by respondents during the consultation process. Members were asked to note in particular that:

- in respect of Belfast Central Library, the preferred pattern of opening hours included closing on Saturday afternoons. There is a concern, however, that the preferred option, chosen mainly by frequent users of the library, would not meet the needs of less frequent users or indeed the general expectations of a major city library. The Director of Library Services explained that as a major city library, Belfast Central Library provides a broad range of functions, serving a wide range of user groups including researchers, local historians, tourists and visitors to Belfast. It was recommended, therefore, that the option ranked second by respondents, which includes opening on Saturday afternoons, be noted instead.

- in respect of Omagh Library, staff had suggested a minor amendment to the preferred option which would address some of the issues raised in the comments i.e. closing 30 minutes later on Mondays and closing 30 minutes earlier on Fridays. It was recommended that this minor alteration be noted.

3.6 The Director of Library Services reported that, in analysing use of Lisburn City Library to inform the consultation options, it became apparent that a minor alteration in the current 54 opening hours pattern would be beneficial to customers. Members were asked, therefore, to consider amending the current pattern of opening hours to close one hour earlier on Thursdays and open one hour earlier on Fridays.

3.7 Members commended the Director of Library Services on the comprehensive Report. Following discussion:

- on a proposal by Councillor S Mcllveen, seconded by Dr M Ward, the Board expressed its appreciation of the additional funding allocation announced by the Minister and, on the basis of receipt of that funding, agreed that the Savings Delivery Plan B2 (reduction in opening hours in the 14 busiest libraries) should not be implemented.

- on a proposal by Ms A Matthews, seconded by Councillor S McGuigan, the Board accepted the findings of the consultation process on reduced opening hours as set out in the Report including the proposed amendments to the preferred opening hours of Omagh and Belfast Central libraries.

- on a proposal by Councillor C Mallaghan, seconded by Councillor S Mcllveen the Board agreed that the minor alteration to Lisburn City Library's current opening hours should be implemented as soon as is practicable.

3.8 It was further agreed that:

- the Report should be published on the Libraries NI website following the Board Meeting.
the Report should be issued to a number of respondents who had asked to receive a copy

a press release would not be issued as there had been extensive media coverage followed the Minister’s announcement of the additional funding allocation

in the event of any further changes to opening hours being required, the findings of this Report and the recommendations contained therein would be considered in the first instance and a decision made at that stage as to whether or not any additional information would be required, prior to making a decision on the way forward.

4. PLANNING FOR 2017/18

4.1 The Senior Management Team delivered presentations on the priorities that would need to be considered in developing the Business Plan 2017/18.

4.2 Members thanked the officers for the informative presentations.

4.3 The Chairperson facilitated a discussion during which a number of observations and suggestions were noted including the following:

- the need to continue to raise the profile of libraries
- the value of libraries in communities
- the importance of data collection to the new Outcome Based Accountability approach
- the value of customer comments from the opening hours consultation in conveying the impact of libraries on people’s lives
- a greater recognition across all departments of the importance of collaborative working to achieve outcomes
- the opportunity from partnerships for data sharing
- although a positive concept, shared services would be resource intensive
- Libraries NI should exploit existing shared services
- the potential of the branch library network to extend access to services from other departments and organisations
- despite a continually declining budget, libraries are still making an impact
- further budget reductions will have a detrimental impact on services
- the role of volunteers in libraries
- the benefits of strategic partnerships
- the opportunities available through community planning

4.4 It was agreed the Senior Management Team would consider the points made by Members and return to the Board with their proposals.
5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1. The Chairman acknowledged that this was Terry Heron's last Board meeting before his retirement. He paid tribute to Terry's contribution to Libraries NI since its establishment and on behalf of the Board, wished him a long and happy retirement. He also extended the best wishes of the Board to his successor, Mr D Miskelly.

5.2 Mr T Heron conveyed his thanks to Board Members and colleagues in the Senior Management Team and Business Support for their support throughout his time with Libraries NI and conveyed best wishes to Mr D Miskelly in his new role.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 13 October 2016 at 10:30 am in Lisburn City Library.

7. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

The meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

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

- Councillor Garath Keating arrived at 12:25 pm.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 13/10/2016