LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held by remote video link (Zoom) on Wednesday 23 April 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT
Professor Bernard Cullen Chairperson
Mr Neil Bodger
Alderman Thomas Burns
Councillor Alistair Cathcart
Councillor Glenn Finlay
Councillor Julie Gilmour
Councillor Cara Hunter
Mrs Deirdre Kenny
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Ms Wendy Osborne
Mr Harry Reid
Dr Margaret Ward
Councillor Billy Webb
Miss Linda Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE
Mr Jim O’Hagan Chief Executive
Ms Helen Osborn Director of Library Services
Mr Desi Miskelly Director of Business Support
Mr Ken Smyth Boardroom Apprentice
Ms Maeve Walls Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Mr John Peto

In addition, the following Board Members did not attend the meeting:
- Councillor Cheryl Johnston
- Councillor Garath Keating

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 began the meeting by referring to the exceptional circumstances created by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the restrictions that are in place regarding social distancing and attending at places of work. Consequently, he sought formal approval of the Board to hold this meeting and any future meetings by remote video link for as long as the current emergency requires. The Board noted that Standing orders are silent on the subject of remote attendance at meetings.

3.2 On a proposal by the Chairperson, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, the Board resolved to hold the meeting and future Board meetings by remote video link for as long as the current emergency requires.

3.3 The Chairperson:
   • drew attention to the guidelines on etiquette for video/remote meetings that are available for Members on the Extranet.
   • welcomed new Board Member Julie Gilmour to her first meeting.
   • asked the Board to formally note Stephen McIlveen’s resignation which was effective from 29 February 2020.

3.4 The Chairperson referred to the current vacancy on the Services Committee and suggested that Julie Gilmour is appointed to that Committee.

3.5 On a proposal by the Chairperson, seconded by Councillor G Finlay, Councillor J Gilmour was appointed to the Services Committee.

3.6 On a sadder note Members noted the passing of Nuala McAuley's father (Nuala is a co-opted appointment to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee) and offered condolences on behalf of the Board.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS

4.1 The Chief Executive presented a pre-circulated paper and drew attention to the undernoted items:
   • Funding 2020/21 Financial Year
   • Delegated Authority – Direct Award Contracts (DAC) under £30,000
   • Minister for Communities’ Visit to Belfast Central Library, 5 March 2020
   • First Minister’s Constituency Visit to Enniskillen Library, 14 February 2020
   • BBC in Lisburn City Library, 18 February 2020

4.2 Members noted the positive nature and benefits of the ongoing partnership with the BBC and that the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is examining the future of public service broadcasting and has invited written evidence. Ms M Walls, Director, Culture Division, informed the Board that the Minister met with BBC officials on the morning of 18 February 2020 and commented positively on the partnership between the BBC and Libraries NI. It was agreed
it would be appropriate for Libraries NI to make a submission highlighting the positive impact of public service broadcasting in the context of the library service in Northern Ireland.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2020
LNI 01.04.20

5.1 On a proposal by Dr M Ward, seconded by Ms D Kenny, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 13 February 2020 were approved.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2020
LNI 02.04.20

6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated paper detailing action taken as a result of discussions at, and decisions of, the Board at the previous meeting. He noted that all actions were either completed or on the Agenda for further discussion.

7. DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES REPRESENTATIVE

7.1 Ms Maeve Walls, Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities addressed the Board. She referred to the ongoing disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic and on behalf of the Department acknowledged and recognised the positive response, to the current situation, by Libraries NI. She referred to the Department for Communities as being the largest department in the Northern Ireland Civil Service and that it is facing wide-ranging issues and challenges. She advised that the Department has been keeping in close contact with Libraries NI throughout the current crisis and is very much aware of the immediate challenges the organisation is facing, and in particular the budget pressures and also referred to the need, in the longer term, to progress strategic projects such as the Belfast Central Library and the e2/e3 project.

7.2 The Chairperson thanked Ms Walls for the update she provided and for acknowledging and recognising the positive response and work being done by Libraries NI in supporting and delivering the library service in Northern Ireland, particularly during these most extraordinary times.

8. CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND IMPACT ON LIBRARIES NI

8.1 The Chief Executive presented a paper providing information and an update on the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and its subsequent impact on the provision of library services. In particular, he drew attention to key decisions that were taken and set out the response by Libraries NI to the unprecedented public health emergency.
8.2 Key decisions and actions taken included:
- mobilisation of the Senior Management Team and the Senior Leadership Group to lead and manage the Libraries NI response
- withdrawing programming and activities in libraries
- closure of all libraries to the public from 20 March 2020
- all staff, with the exception of those needed for essential services, to begin working from home or to staying at home from 23 March 2020
- The Department was informed of the decision to close libraries to the public
- communications were issued to staff, Board Members and Trade Unions.
- priority given to the promotion of eBooks, eMagazines and audio books in the aftermath of the closure of physical libraries
- development and delivery of programming and activities through online and social media channels.

8.3 The Chief Executive informed Members about how Library Services staff have responded during these exceptional times by developing new online programmes, materials and activities, as well as adapting existing programmes in innovative and interesting ways. He also highlighted the efforts of Business Support staff who have been working remotely to ensure important services necessary to the functioning of the organisation and support of our staff continue. These include Human Resources, Payroll, Finance and IT and Information Services. The Marketing and Communications Team have also been extremely busy particularly with the increased online and social media activity that has taken place.

8.4 During the course of the discussion that followed Councillor B Webb indicated he was very impressed with the response and work to date by Libraries NI and its staff, while Ms W Osborne encouraged the continued use of social media and other channels to let people know libraries are still open for online services. Councillor A Cathcart asked about the application of social distancing measures in libraries while Dr M Ward expressed concerns about the changing and challenging role for library staff when libraries re-open. The Chief Executive responded on a number of issues referring to the differing shapes and sizes of library premises and how this will present challenges in respect of social distancing. He indicated that preliminary work has begun in respect of planning and preparations to re-open libraries and he stated this will be done within the framework and guidelines approved and set out by government for returning to workplaces and re-establishing a level of business as usual.

8.5 The Board was further advised that re-opening of libraries and the re-establishment of services is likely to take place on a phased basis, over a period of time and will undoubtedly require modifications to the way in which services are delivered. The Board was asked to note the ongoing nature of the current disruption and that it is likely to continue for the foreseeable future and will have longer term impacts stretching through the 2020/21 operational year.

8.6 On a proposal by Mr N Bodger, seconded by Alderman T Burns, the Board:

1. Noted the impact of the on-going coronavirus pandemic on Libraries NI, its staff and the provision of library services, and
2. Confirmed its support for decisions taken to close library buildings to the public and to ask staff to work from home or to stay at home in line with public health and government advice.

9. BUDGET AND SPENDING PLAN 2020/21

9.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Budget and Spending Plan 2020/21 to the Board. He explained that due to the cancellation of the Business Support Committee meeting, due to be held on 26 March 2020, as a result of the disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Budget and Spending Plan was being presented directly to the Board for consideration. He advised the Budget and Spending Plan has been prepared following notification from the Department for Communities of an indicative financial allocation for 2020/21 which ‘may be subject to change during 2020-21 in line with Minister’s priorities and the changing landscape due to COVID-19’.

9.2 The Board was informed of the opening indicative resource budget for 2020/21 which is **£26,165,000**, representing an extremely challenging financial settlement and a decrease of some £5,786,000 from the final total 2019/20 resource budget position in March 2020. A number of planning assumptions, issues and pressures were highlighted to the Board, including:
- staff costs projected to increase by some £615,000 taking account of factors such as, increases in legacy pension contributions, incremental progression of staff pay scales, provision for the 2020/21 pay settlement, and costs associated with accrued annual leave entitlements that could not be taken due to the Covid-19 pandemic
- inflationary uplift to the e2 managed services contract
- indexation and inflationary uplift to the Lisburn City Library PFI contract
- the stock budget has been set at an unprecedented low level of £500,000
- disruption to normal library operations as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant adverse impact on the budget including reduced income
- uncertainty regarding our ability, in the current circumstances, to apply savings delivery options such as those that have been deployed in previous years e.g. summer opening hours and releasing staff engaged on agency contracts
- additional costs associated with re-opening of libraries including Social distancing measures remaining in place for some time, purchase of PPE, physical alterations required to libraries, and changes to operating procedures.

9.3 The Board was advised that in preparing the spending plan significant steps have been taken to reduce internal budget allocations, however the pressures exceed the resource allocation by some **£652,000**. Councillor B Webb expressed concern about starting the financial year in deficit and asked if the Department was aware of the budgetary pressure faced by Libraries NI. Ms M Walls indicated the Department was aware of the budget position and that it will monitor the situation and will work with Libraries NI officials to try to resolve the
pressures. Following further discussion by Board Members it was agreed the budget should be approved as an interim budget to be reviewed at 30 June 2020 and that officials should provide an update at that time, including details of measures that would need to be applied if additional resources are not available.

9.4 On a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Ms W Osborne, the Board approved the Budget and Spending Plan for 2020/21 and for the position to be reviewed as at 30 June 2020 with an update being brought to the July Board meeting.

10. **DRAFT ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN 2020/21**

10.1 The Board was asked to note the draft of the Annual Business Plan 2020/21 which had been updated using a red, amber and green (RAG) status indicator to highlight the impact of the uncertainty and disruption caused by the current coronavirus situation. Consequently, the delivery of many of the targets, objectives and KPIs included in the draft plan will no longer be realistic and a further revision and update will be required. The Board was asked to note that much of the corporate effort during 2020/21 will be focused on a series of priority tasks and actions aimed at re-establishing and reconnecting library services following the coronavirus pandemic and this will be reflected in the updated plan.

10.2 Members noted the plan and accompanying paper and that a further update will be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

11. **MANAGEMENT REPORT**

11.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Business Support briefed the Board on the Management Report.

**Bi-Annual Assurance Statement 1 October 2019 – 31 March 2020**

11.2 The Chief Executive presented the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2020 and drew attention to issues which had been identified under a number of sections in the document, areas which had been marked ‘Working towards Compliance’ and reference to the uncertainty and disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

11.3 Ms D Kenny, Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee confirmed that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period 1 October 2019 to 31 March 2020 had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting held on 22 April 2020 and that Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.

11.4 On a proposal by Mrs D Kenny, seconded by Alderman T Burns, having exercised its challenge function and received the required assurances from the Accounting Officer, the Board was content to approve the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2020.
11.5 Members noted the Statement would be forwarded to the Department for their records.

**Annual Board Assurance Statement 2019/20**

11.6 The Chairperson presented the Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2020. He noted that the document had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 22 April 2020. At that meeting Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.

11.7 On a proposal by Ms D Kenny, seconded by Ms W Osborne, Members approved the Chairperson’s Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2020.

11.8 Members noted the Statement would be forwarded to the Department for their records.

**Corporate Risk Register**

11.9 The Director of Business Support referred to the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Risk Management Group at its meeting held on 31 March 2020 and also by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 22 April 2020.

11.10 He explained that in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic the Corporate Risk Register had been extensively updated, including revisions to risk ratings reflecting the increased level of risk in a number of areas and the addition of a new risk specifically related to the pandemic situation. In addition, a new field has been added to the Corporate Risk Register providing a short definition of each risk. The Horizon scanning document has been reviewed and updated to add one new item relating to the economic outlook arising from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

11.11 Ms D Kenny, Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, confirmed that the Corporate Risk Register had been considered by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting of the Committee held on 22 April 2020, and that Members had been content to recommend it to the Board for approval.

11.12 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Ms D Kenny, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart, Members approved the Corporate Risk Register as at March 2020.

**Finance Report**

11.13 The Director of Business Support presented the Finance Reports for Capital and Recurrent spend to February 2020.

11.14 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Resource Report and informed Members that as at the end of February 2019 a potential underspend was projected within the 1% margin permitted by the Department.
11.15 He then drew attention to the Capital Report and reported that an underspend of £193k, equating to 9.5% was projected and that DfC had been informed of the position. The Board was further advised that due to the coronavirus lockdown in March 2020 that projected year-end capital expenditure was likely to be further impacted.

11.16 Members noted the Finance Reports for February 2020

12. REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 APRIL 2020

12.1 Ms D Kenny, Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee reminded Members that a meeting of the Committee had been held on 22 April 2020, the formal minutes of which would be available at the Board Meeting to be held on 2 July 2020.

12.2 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Ms D Kenny, seconded by Ms W Osborne three papers were recommended to the Board for approval:
  • Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2020
  • Annual Board Assurance Statement 2019/20
  • Corporate Risk Register as at 31 March 2020

13. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

13.1 There was no other notified business.

14 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 2 July 2020 at 10.30am.

14.2 Members were also asked to hold the 4 June 2020 as a potential date for meeting to provide a further update on the coronavirus pandemic situation.

15. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

15.1 The meeting ended at 1.10pm.

15.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:
  • Councillor C Mallaghan left at 12:10pm
  • Mr Neil Bodger, due to a telecommunications failure which was outside of his control (specific time not known).

15.3 Ms M Walls, Department for Communities, left the meeting at 12:25pm.