LIBRARIES NI
The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority
held by remote video link (Zoom) on Thursday, 4 June 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 Cheryl Johnston
Councillor Garath Keating
Mrs Deirdre Kenny
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Ms Wendy Osborne
Mr John Peto
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
Ms Adrienne Adair Head of Service
Ms Trisha Ward Head of Service
Ms Diane McGlynn Minutes

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

1.1 An apology was received from Mr Ken Smyth.

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 welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded Members of basic video meeting etiquette based on previous experience, namely:
- if possible, mute microphones when not speaking to reduce background noise
- raise hand to draw attention or request speaking privileges
- if leaving meeting inform Chairperson/minute taker.

3.2 The Chairperson then recapped on the purpose of the meeting which was to focus on plans and preparations for reconnecting library services and re-opening physical libraries.

4. **CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS**

4.1 There was no Chief Executive Business.

5. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 23 April 2020**

5.1 On a proposal by Mr Neil Bodger, seconded by Miss Linda Wilson, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23 April 2020 were approved.

6. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 23 April 2020**

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.

6.2 He reported that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement and Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2020 had been forwarded to the Department.

6.3 The Chief Executive advised that an update on the Budget and Spending Plan for 2020/21 and the Annual Business Plan 2020/21 would be reported on at the next meeting of the Board on 2 July 2020.

7. **Operation ReConnect**

7.1 The Chairperson drew attention to the sensitive information relating to organisation matters and reminded Members that the report was not disclosable.

7.2 The Chief Executive introduced the report that had been circulated on a proposed approach to the initial reopening of branch libraries and other
elements of Operation ReConnect. He advised Members that the proposal was that of a phased reopening of branch libraries with a limited range of services, as well as a number of complementary parallel services. He highlighted online services as the main focus of service since libraries closed drawing attention to the existing and additional resources and online programmes.

7.3 The Chief Executive referred to The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 and ‘CORONAVIRUS Executive Guide to Decision Making’ which make specific reference to libraries. He reported that the approach to Operation ReConnect is based on The Executive guidance and that the timescales for re-introducing library services will be in line with further Government advice.

7.4 The Chief Executive also reported that since lockdown there was unprecedented contact other library services and library organisations in the Republic of Ireland, UK and Europe in order to share information. This proved useful in compiling the report and Libraries NI would be keen to continue such contact in the future.

7.5 The Chief Executive then outlined the approach to re-opening libraries in three phases:

*Phase 1: Planning*

7.5.1 Already underway, substantial work has been undertaken to prepare for re-opening libraries. Examples include, communicating with staff, customers and Unions, addressing maintenance issues, carrying out risk assessments and sourcing PPE.

*Phase 2: Pilot*

7.5.2 The Chief Executive described the proposal to pilot re-opening of five libraries, followed by a further 12 subject to learning from the pilot. The 17 libraries identified were chosen with the aim of maximising learning and achieving a measure of geographic spread.

*Phase 3: Remaining Libraries*

7.5.3 Phase Three would involve the phased re-opening of the remaining 79 branch libraries over a period of up to six weeks. The phasing, opening hours and timescale will be determined by the learning from the pilot. In conjunction with and building on the lessons learned from the re-opening of public libraries it was proposed to also commence a phased reopening of and return of staff to local administrative and support offices.

7.6 The Chief Executive then invited Ms Trisha Ward, Head of Service, to give Members a practical insight to how libraries will operate. The Head of Service described the scope of services that would be available, services that would initially be unavailable and systems that would be in place to provide a safe and welcoming environment for both staff and customers. She also outlined plans to accommodate families with young children and vulnerable people.
7.7 The Chief Executive then described two new initiatives, ‘Bookbox’ and ‘Book and Collect’, proposed to run in parallel with the phased re-opening of branch libraries. He confirmed that the online service offer will continue but online access to stock will be constrained by the very limited stock budget for 2020/21.

7.8 The Chairperson facilitated a discussion during which a number of observations and suggestions were made including the following:
- the need to actively review and amend the approach from lessons learned
- the additional budget pressure and the need to highlight this to the Department for Communities
- continue/expand the online services offer permanently
- communication with staff and customers is paramount
- appreciation for the level of work involved in planning under the challenging circumstances.

7.9 In response to questions, the Director of Business Support confirmed that there were no identified insurance implications for staff working from home and that any reasonable additional expenses incurred by working from home would be considered by Libraries NI. He also confirmed that Agency workers were retained in post in line with the Central Procurement Directorate guidance as Libraries NI operates under the Northern Ireland Civil Service contract.

7.10 Members noted the proposals outlined in the report and on a proposal by Councillor Billy Webb, seconded by Alderman Thomas Burns, the Board approved the approach to Operation ReConnect.

8. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

8.1 The Chairperson complimented the Chief Executive on the appropriate and informative weekly communication with staff and Board Members.

8.2 The Chairperson informed Members that Cara Hunter had been co-opted to the Northern Ireland Assembly as MLA for East Londonderry and had consequently resigned from the Libraries NI Board. He noted there are now two Councillor vacancies on the Libraries NI Board and that the Department would initiate an appointments process in due course. Members wished Cara every success in her new role.

8.3 The Chairperson also congratulated Councillor C Mallaghan on his election as Chair of Mid Ulster District Council.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

9.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday, 2 July 2020 at 10:30am.
10. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

10.1 The meeting ended at 12:12pm.

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

- Councillor Julie Gilmour left at approximately 12 noon due to a telecommunications failure which was outside of her control.

During the current Covid-19 pandemic and with remote working in place, these minutes, which were approved at the Board Meeting held on 2 July 2020 are published with an e-signature.

Signed: [Signature]

Date: 2 July 2020