Libraries NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of the Board Planning Meeting held on
Thursday 13 September 2018 at 10:30 am in Lisburn City Library

PRESENT

Professor Bernard Cullen
Alderman Thomas Burns
Councillor Janet Gray
Alderman William Leathem
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan
Alderman Stephen Martin
Mr Alastair McDowell
Councillor Séan McGuigan
Mr Harry Reid
Alderman Marion Smith
Dr Margaret Ward
Councillor Billy Webb
Ms Jane Williams

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Jim O'Hagan
Ms Helen Osborn
Mr Desi Miskelly
Ms Adrienne Adair
Ms Mandy Bryson
Ms Amy Lucas
Ms Deborah Brown
Ms Allison Cosgrove
Ms Diane McGlynn

Chief Executive
Director of Library Services
Director of Business Support
Assistant Director
Assistant Director
Boardroom Apprentice
Department for Communities
Department for Communities
Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed the Boardroom Apprentice, Ms Amy Lucas, to her first meeting of the Board. He also welcomed Ms Deborah Brown and Ms Allison Cosgrove from the Department for Communities.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE**

1.1 Apologies were received from Alderman Tom Campbell, Councillor Garath Keating, Mrs Deirdre Kenny and Ms Angela Matthews.
2. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

2.1 The Chief Executive recapped on the purpose of the meeting, namely, to:
- reflect on the wider spending and policy context and challenges facing Libraries NI
- identify and explore key external and internal issues that will need to be taken into account in developing the 2019/20 Business Plan
- agree priority areas for inclusion in the 2019/20 Business Plan
- authorise the Senior Management Team to develop a draft Business Plan 2019/20 for discussion and approval by the Board.

3. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

3.1 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.

4. PLANNING FOR 2019/20

4.1 Ms D Brown, newly appointed Deputy Secretary, Department for Communities, thanked the Chairperson for the opportunity to attend and outlined her previous experience in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure. She recognised that Libraries NI is well positioned in the Department for Communities and making a valuable contribution to Government priorities across a number of Departments. She sympathised with the current environment of uncertainty in which staff are operating and planning.

4.2 Ms A Cosgrove, Department for Communities, set the scene with a presentation outlining the strategic challenges and issues that would be faced in 2019/20 such as:
- continued political uncertainty
- Outcomes Delivery Plan
- Innovation Lab and the Arms' Length Body review
- new Permanent Secretary, December 2019
- Public Library Standards Review in 2019
- likelihood of further cuts and single year budget.

4.3 Ms A Cosgrove acknowledged that Libraries NI is named in the draft Programme for Government Outcomes Delivery Plan. She stated that she was confident that libraries were well placed to deliver on outcomes in a range of key areas. She also confirmed that the Department for Communities would be engaging with Libraries NI in due course with the imminent review of Public Library Standards.

4.4 The Chief Executive delivered a presentation on the priorities that would need to be considered in developing the Business Plan 2019/20. He underlined the challenging planning environment, the uncertainty that exists and the continuing constrained financial position.
4.5 The Director of Library Services then delivered a presentation outlining the challenges from a service delivery perspective that would need to be considered in developing the Business Plan for 2019/20.

4.6 The Director of Business Support then delivered a presentation outlining the financial challenges that would need to be considered in developing the Business Plan for 2019/20.

4.7 The Chairperson facilitated a discussion during which a number of points and observations were made including the following:
- general acknowledgement of the challenge involved in trying to plan in an environment of political and financial uncertainty
- inability to protect the range and quality of services and the library estate with further budget cuts
- recognition of need to review services and also the timeframe and workload involved in introducing any fundamental changes
- the Belfast Central Library project remains a strategic priority
- Libraries NI should seek to include content creation in its digital learning opportunities
- concern about the age profile of Libraries NI staff, coupled with a lack of recruitment
- funding opportunities through strategic partnerships, especially those partnerships enshrined in MOUs should be considered
- partnerships, crosscutting delivery and the need to gather empirical evidence to support and demonstrate the value of libraries in this work is seen as important
- need to promote services to non-users, increase membership and raise the profile of libraries in a cost effective way
- the Board and Committees to consider activities at meetings to support the planning process
- opportunities for volunteer roles in the promotion of services the importance of supporting literacy
- the issue of cybersecurity
- consider measures needed in the shorter term to address financial pressures, including consultation with stakeholders/public.

4.8 In addition to the above, it was suggested that running costs of Belfast Central Library and the possible efficiencies to be achieved through the redevelopment of the building be outlined in a way that strengthens the case for the project and used for advocacy purposes.

4.9 Members requested that the recent letter, from the Chief Executive to the Department for Communities, about progressing the Belfast Central Library development be brought to the Business Support Committee.

4.10 Members also requested that a summary of the corporate risks be included as part of the Business Plan.

4.11 The Chief Executive concluded the discussion by recapping on the key themes that emerged and reminded Members of some of the positive work that was continuing despite the current political and financial uncertainty. He set out a two pronged approach for moving forward:
4.11.1 Make the case to secure the best financial settlement possible for Libraries NI in 2019/20. This will entail commencing a process of gathering information and building an evidence base to support the wider contribution libraries make in areas such as health, well-being, education, digital inclusion etc. Under this approach there will be a need to engage with the Department to present a strong and robust case for funding Libraries NI.

4.11.2 Prudently begin developing proposals in the event the funding allocation for 2019/20 results in a substantive reduction. If the reduction in the budget allocation is significant then the measures and proposals that will need to be brought forward to manage this will equally need to be significant in nature. Such measures will have implications and consequences for service delivery and should address the impact on Libraries NI aims/objectives/targets, statutory equality obligations, social need implications, rural needs, timescales to deliver and estimates of cost savings. It is likely that consultation with library users, stakeholders and the general public will need to take place.

4.12 It was noted that timing will be a critical issue in that it would be premature to bring proposals forward before funding allocations are announced. With announcements not likely to take place before early 2019 this leaves a very tight window in which to consult on proposals and bring forward implementation plans. Such measures will need to be implemented from the beginning of the financial year commencing April 2019 or early in that year.

4.13 It was agreed that the Senior Management Team would consider the above points in drafting the Business Plan 2019/20.

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

5.1 There was no other business

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6.1 The next meeting will be held on Thursday 11 October 2018 at 10:30 am in Lisburn City Library.

7. MEMBERS’ ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

7.1 The meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

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

Councillor C Mallaghan arrived at 12:00 pm
Alderman Thomas Burns left at 12:55 pm
Alderman Marion Smith left at 12:55 pm