

Libraries NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of the Board Planning Meeting held on
Thursday 8 September 2022 at 10:30am in Bangor Carnegie Library

PRESENT

Professor Bernard Cullen	Chairperson
Councillor Julie Gilmour	Vice Chairperson
Councillor Cheryl Brownlee (Remotely)	
Alderman Thomas Burns	
Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
Mrs Deirdre Kenny	
Councillor Donal Lyons (Remotely)	
Councillor Cathal Mallaghan (Remotely)	
Ms Wendy Osborne	
Mr John Peto (Remotely)	
Mr Harry Reid	
Dr Margaret Ward	
Councillor Billy Webb	
Miss Linda Wilson	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
Ms Adrienne Adair	Head of Service
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Mr Sean Beattie	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Michelle Anderson	Head of Internal Audit
Ms Stefani Millar	Boardroom Apprentice
Mr John McCord	Department for Communities
Mr Gary Craig	Department for Communities
Mr Tony O'Neill	Department for Communities
Ms Pamela Tulloch (Remotely)	Scottish Libraries and Information Council
Mr Mark Waterworth	Senior IT Support Officer
Ms Diane McGlynn (Remotely)	Minutes

Ms Pamela Macrory, Branch Library Manager, welcomed everyone to Bangor Carnegie Library and gave a brief history of the building, an overview of current events and activities and provided housekeeping information.

The Chairperson welcomed Board Members and staff to the meeting. He particularly welcomed Ms Pamela Tulloch, Chief Executive Officer, Scottish Libraries and Information Council and Department for Communities representatives, Mr John McCord, Acting Director, Culture Division, Mr Tony O'Neill, Head of Museums and Libraries Branch and Mr Gary Craig, Museums and Libraries Branch. He extended a welcome to Ms Stefani Millar as this was her first meeting since she officially became Libraries NI's Boardroom Apprentice.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 There were no apologies.

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. ORAL UPDATE ON BUDGET POSITION

- 3.1 Mr D Miskelly referred to the indicative spending plan considered at the July Board meeting and reported that Libraries NI continued to plan and operate based on the indicative financial allocation provided by DfC in April. He highlighted the increasing financial pressures, largely as a result of increasing utility bills and anticipated staff costs, he referred to the current negotiations for the 2022/23 pay settlement and the further potential impact of national negotiations on pay. He confirmed a projected overspend and pressure of £1.4 million in terms of meeting current commitments.
- 3.2 The Director of Business Support reported that there was no indication at this stage of additional funding therefore the Board could potentially be considering significant savings plans in October which would directly impact on frontline service delivery. It was noted that the stock budget was set at an all-time low level of £0.5million this year with spend in a normal year expected to be in the region of £3.2million by year end.
- 3.3 The Chief Executive assured Board Members that Libraries NI has highlighted the current situation with Departmental officials, including at the most senior level, highlighting the role of libraries during the cost of living crisis.
- 3.4 Board Members discussed the current financial situation and a number of savings measures, recognising that the scope to implement appropriate saving measures within the required time frame is limited. It was agreed to pick up on the discussion at the October Board Meeting.

4. BOARD PLANNING DAY EVENT - PROGRAMME

Welcome and Introductions

- 4.1 The Chairperson reminded Members that the focus of the planning day was on the theme of a new library strategy for Northern Ireland. He referred to the existing strategy 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' that dates from 2006 and highlighted the importance of having an up-to-date and relevant library strategy to provide a high level framework within which to plan and deliver library services in line with statutory obligations while taking account of broader Departmental, Executive and Assembly policy and priority objectives.

4.2 He welcomed the opportunity of the planning day to provide Board Members the opportunity to contribute to the development of the new strategy and to find out about the work that is planned.

4.3 The Chairperson welcomed the input from Pamela Tulloch who led on the development of the Public Library Strategy in Scotland and John McCord who, as Acting Director of Culture Division in the Department for Communities, is the lead official for developing the library strategy for Northern Ireland, both of whom would be presenting to the Board.

Presentations

4.4 The Chief Executive set the scene with a presentation on the existing library strategy, 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries', and the need for a new strategy. He explained that the responsibility for library strategy and policy rests with the Department for Communities and he gave an overview of the timeline in developing the existing strategy.

4.5 He then gave a summary of Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries, including the role and vision of libraries, what the strategy set out to achieve and the performance monitoring and management. Mr J O'Hagan then highlighted the public library standards, the majority of which are largely out of date and need to be revisited.

4.6 The Chief Executive highlighted the following factors in the need for a new library strategy:

- current strategy is 16 years old
- typically a strategy like this would be updated every five to ten years
- current strategy pre-dates establishment of Libraries NI and needs to be updated to reflect this new context
- elements of Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries are dated and lack relevance e.g. Public Library Standards
- re-affirmation of libraries in a changed world and clear articulation of priorities
- a renewed basis for investment and funding including, in staff, the service, the library estate and technology
- opportunity for greater impact and alignment to wider government strategies, aims and priorities.

4.7 Ms P Tulloch, Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC), gave a presentation outlining the experience of the Scottish Libraries and Information Council in developing the Public Library Strategy for Scotland. She reflected on the previous Scottish strategy 'Ambition and Opportunity' which was in operation from 2015 to 2020 and highlighted the benefits of updating a strategy and keeping it current.

4.8 Ms P Tulloch went on to outline the approach SLIC took to developing the strategy including research, an advisory group, stakeholders and consultation. She reported that whilst the work commenced in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the virtual interaction worked in their favour permitting a global perspective, with virtual tours of libraries in Queensland and Oslo.

4.9 Ms P Tulloch highlighted the importance of customer and staff engagement and the value of an independent organisation to conduct workshops. She then gave an overview of the wider foundations for success and outlined the three main strategic pillars.

Developing a New Library Strategy for Northern Ireland

4.10 Mr J McCord, Acting Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities in addressing the Board, highlighted the Department's support for libraries, recognising that libraries are at the heart of communities and stressed their value to customers. He welcomed the opportunity to participate and acknowledged that the current library strategy was outdated.

4.11 He went on to outline the background to the Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy and the Department's role in developing it.

4.12 He also referred to the new Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service who has set out three missions and the opportunity for libraries to align to this:

- climate change
- the economy
- improving life opportunities

4.13 Particularly in respect of improving life opportunities there is a role for libraries reaching out to people slipping through the education system. There is also an opportunity to promote the role of the library in its widest sense and to make those links to a whole government approach.

4.14 Mr J McCord continued by stressing that we should not be constrained by the current environment but rather be as innovative as possible in developing a strategy.

4.15 Mr J McCord confirmed that he will set up a meeting with the Special Adviser to the Minister of the Department for Communities and Libraries NI to highlight the library strategy planning and how it delivers on other government priorities.

4.16 Mr J McCord also confirmed that DfC would provide resources to fund the development of the new Public Library Strategy.

Discussion

4.17 The Chairperson facilitated a discussion to consider the key elements of a library strategy and to provide feedback that can be used to help inform the process and content of a new strategy. A summary of the feedback is noted below.

4.18 What should a new library strategy contain?

- clearly articulate and reaffirm the aspiration and ambition for libraries
- amplify the role of libraries in supporting health, including in the important area of mental health
- the central core values of public libraries, including books, stock and related resources must be properly supported and reflected in a new strategy

- the role of libraries in helping to address inequality and promoting social inclusion
- showcasing how libraries can help address issues across a range of areas (use of case studies can be powerful)
- services and infrastructure
- outreach and people – libraries as trusted civic, social, cultural and community spaces
- promote links with education and learning, especially in areas where there are challenges
- encourage collaboration and partnership working, alignment with Community Planning
- role of libraries in improving lifetime opportunities, confidence building
- strategic marketing
- sustainable funding, funding to support the infrastructure, stock, programming, outreach.

4.19 What are Libraries NI's priorities – what do we want from a new library strategy?

- outreach contacts
- address inequalities
- children and young people, closer alignment with schools
- supporting learning and creativity, education deficit
- books, literacy and reading remain at the heart of libraries
- digital literacy and inclusion
- cultural heritage
- In a post Covid world building confidence for people to return to libraries should be a priority
- a basis for greater certainty in planning and longer term funding, supporting a sustainable public library service
- libraries as trusted information services and gateways to other services
- links to other strategies and government priorities to provide opportunities for the library service to contribute more.
- access to libraries and services (in broadest sense)
- influencing politicians, advocacy.

Concluding Remarks

- 4.20 The Chairperson thanked everyone for their contribution and asked for any further thoughts to be sent directly to the Chief Executive.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 5.1 The next Board Meeting will be held on Thursday, 13 October 2022 at 10:30am in Lisburn City Library.

6. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 6.1 The meeting ended at 1:00pm.

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

- Alderman Thomas Burns arrived at 11:22am
- Mr John Peto left the meeting at 12:37pm

Signed: Bernard Cullen
Professor Bernard Cullen, Chairperson

Date: 12 October 2022