

## **LIBRARIES NI**

### **The Northern Ireland Library Authority**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 26 September 2024 at 10:30am

(Hybrid via Video Link and in person at Lisburn City Library)

VL – Attendance via video link

IP – Attendance in person

### **PRESENT**

Councillor Martin McRandal (VL)

Ms Bonnie Anley (VL)

Councillor Julie Gilmour (IP)

Wendy Osborne (VL)

Chairperson of Libraries NI Board

Attending as a guest of the Chairperson

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)

Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)

Mr Desi Curry (IP)

Mrs Jacqui McKinstry (VL)

Mr Tim Neeson (IP)

Mrs Rita McNamee (IP)

Chief Executive

Director of Business Support

Head of ICU/ICT

Head of Human Resources

Assets Manager

Finance Manager

## **1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE and ACTING CHAIRPERSON**

Apologies were received from Ms Linda Wilson

In the absence of the elected Committee chairperson and there being no nominated Vice-Chairperson the Director of Business Services opened the meeting and advised that an apology had been received from Miss Linda Wilson, the Committee Chairperson.

The Board had previously resolved that *'any Board Member attending a Committee at the request of the Committee Chairperson may do so as an appointed Member of the Committee.'* Councillor Gilmore was attending in such a temporary capacity at the invitation of the Chairperson, and this would be reported to the Board at its next meeting.

In line with standing orders it was permissible for one member to act as Chair, Councillor Gilmore was willing to act as Chairperson for this meeting with the agreement of the other members.

Members agreed that Councillor Gilmore should chair the meeting.

## **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.
- 2.2 No interests were declared.

## **3 CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS**

- 3.1 There was no Chairperson's Business.

## **4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS**

**BSC.01.09.24**

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that on 18 June 2024 it had been confirmed that the Libraries NI indicative Opening Budget Allocation for 2024-25 would be £31,189,000. Further details would be discussed under the Expenditure Reports and the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2024-25. DfC had prioritised the allocation of capital funding across their whole department and therefore Libraries NI had a very limited capital programme this year.
- 4.2 The Director of Business Support reported that new Members had recently joined the Board and attended induction, the new Members had been asked to consider which Committee they would join. Therefore, at the November Business Support Committee meeting the issue of electing a Vice-Chairperson should be able to be addressed.
- 4.3 The Chief Executive advised that progress was being made and steps taken to find new members and allocate them to committees, this would be discussed at the Board meeting in October 2024.

## **5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 30 MAY 2024**

**BSC.02.09.24**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee on 30 May 2024, were approved as a correct record of the meeting. It was reported that these minutes had been adopted by the Board at its meeting on 27 June 2024.

## **6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 MAY 2024**

**BSC.03.09.24**

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support advised that following Member's comments on Objective 10.1 of the Business Support Service Plan 2024/25 wording had been added to the Plan regarding making the best use of resources.

- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that a summary report had been provided with benchmarking information from similar organisations regarding the profile of sickness absence

- 6.3 Ms B Anley thanked the Head of HR for this information.

**7 DISCIPLINE POLICY REVIEW BSC.04.09.24**

- 7.1 The Chairperson reported that in line with the scheduled review period the contents of the Libraries NI Discipline Policy and associated equality screening and rural needs impact assessments had been reviewed. The policy was considered to remain fit for purpose without substantive revision however the opportunity had been taken to refresh dates, references and to expand the list of related documents. Updates proposed had been highlighted in blue font.

- 7.2 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Ms B Anley, the Discipline Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**8 RESOURCE MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2024-25 BSC.05.09.24**

- 8.1 The Director of Business Support reported that the absence of financial allocations early in the year delayed the development of the 2024/25 Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme. Subsequently, in late June, the Department for Communities confirmed the capital funding allocation as being £4,762,000 and following confirmation of the overall resource allocation for the Organisation an internal budgeting exercise had provided some £982,000 of resource funding to support estates maintenance activities.

- 8.2 The Asset Manager presented the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2024-25 detailing the activities and areas of expenditure planned for the remainder of 2024/25. There was not sufficient budget for planned maintenance, but a list of projects had been compiled should money become available, the timing of additional funding would limit what could be done. The Capital Funding allocation largely covered contractually committed projects and IFRS16. There was no funding for new capital schemes, a list of indicative projects had been compiled should funding become available.

- 8.3 Councillor J Gilmore commented that it was helpful to have list of projects which needed to be done but had not been funded.

- 8.4 Ms B Anley thanked the Assets Manager for the helpful paper, noted the list of Contingency Projects at 8.1, that the priority list was growing and enquired regarding concerns that the Organisation was storing up issues that will need to be addressed in the years ahead.

- 8.5 The Assets Manager advised that this lack of funding was recurring year on year, that some libraries were very tired and that this was storing up trouble down the line.
- 8.6 The Director of Business Support commented that the priority list was becoming longer, making it harder to get on top of. The type of funding was also an issue, the Assets Team make the best use of funding available at the time, however an under supply of resource funding puts pressure on capital spend and vice versa. Funding did not address the priority at the time and therefore potential issues were accumulating. The auditors had asked specific questions regarding the impact of long-term under-investment.
- 8.7 The Chief Executive reported that this had been flagged up to Department for Communities in the EQIA response, there was also an increase in response maintenance rather than planned maintenance. The need to address this issue had been identified in the new Corporate Plan, but there was no easy solution.
- 8.8 Mrs W Osborne advised that accumulated under resourcing was a growing risk for the Organisation, last year the external auditors had raised the need to flag up the impact of under investment in the estate.
- 8.9 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Resource Maintenance and Capital Development Programme 2024-25 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**9 HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT FOR 2023/24, Inc BSC.06.09.24  
PUBLIC AND EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY EXPERIENCE**

- 9.1 The Asset Manager presented the Health and Safety Report for 2023/24, including Public and Employers Liability Experience detailing the health and safety actions taken and summarising the number, nature, severity and impact of accidents occurring, and claims experienced between April 2023 and March 2024.
- 9.2 Councillor M McRandal noted the number of motor accidents appeared to have jumped in the last year and enquired if there was an explanation for this.
- 9.3 The Assets Manager advised that in the previous years the level of motor accidents had been extraordinarily low, at that time the fleet had not been busy because of Covid; there did not appear to be any particular cause or pattern to account for the jump in the last year.
- 9.4 Ms B Anley enquired how live was the reporting system, how did this translate into preventative measures, was there a pathway for staff to report risks, were the risk assessment and governance system working, were they robust enough and overseen by the Board in an appropriate way.

- 9.5 The Director of Business Support advised that accident reporting was live, with accidents reported when they occur, Assets compiled a report to check for trends. At individual locations accident reporting was feedback into the risk assessment process for that property, to check that risk assessment was adequate and was being followed. There were well established and embedded health and safety mechanisms, and statistical information was provided to this Committee. Internal Audit also looked at this in terms of continuity planning.
- 9.6 The Chief Executive commented that it might be useful to set out how health and safety processes generally work in the Organisation and detail what other controls are in place.
- 9.7 Ms B Anley welcomed the Chief Executive's suggestion.
- 9.8 Members noted the Report.

**10 REPORT ON PROCUREMENT ACTIVITY BSC.07.09.24  
2023/24**

- 10.1 The Finance Manager presented the Report on Procurement Activity 2023/24 providing the Committee with an overview and analysis of the procurement activity undertaken throughout 2023/24 (including the sources of goods and services).
- 10.2 Mrs W Osborne enquired regarding the new property maintenance contract, did the new contract cover Libraries NI's expectations and what might be done if expectations were not met.
- 10.3 The Director of Business Support advised that as part of the formal access to the contract there was a new Service Level Agreement which contained a series of more robust service indicators and a more robust mechanism to measure under performance.
- 10.4 Members noted the Report.

**11 DRAFT 2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS BSC.08.09.24**

- 11.1 The Director of Business Support presented the updated final draft of the 2023/24 Annual Reports and Accounts (subject to final review by the NIAO) for the Committee's information. The final draft of the Annual report and Accounts 2023/24 along with the NIAO Report to those charged with governance would be presented to the Audit and Risk Committee on 16 October 2024 and on their recommendation to the Board on 17 October 2024 for approval and subsequent certification of the accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General.
- While 2023/24 had been a most challenging financial year it was encouraging to see how much had actually been delivered.

11.2 Ms B Anley commented that was a very visual and comprehensive document and noted that text on page 64 was highlighted.

11.3 The Finance Manager advised that the text of page 64 would remain highlighted until the auditor's final clarification was received.

11.4 Members noted the draft report and accounts

**12 LIBRARIES NI AND DEPARTMENT FOR  
COMMUNITIES PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT  
2024**

**BSC.09.09.24  
BSC.09.09.24a**

12.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the governance arrangements between Libraries NI (an arm's length body – ALB) and the Department for Communities (the sponsor Department) has been set out, since the inception of Libraries NI, in a Management Statement Financial Memorandum (MSFM). Paper BSC.09.09.24 provided information on a fundamental change to that arrangement and the introduction of a new governance framework set out in a Partnership Agreement between the Department for Communities (DFC) and Libraries NI. There was a significant change in terms of delegated authorities, increasing the Chief Executive's authority to spend. The Partnership Agreement would be embedded in the governance framework, there would be regular robust reviews and a feedback mechanism.

12.2 Ms B Anley commented that there was a need to work closer with our sponsoring department regarding Libraries NI Strategy and the Corporate Plan. She was scheduled to meet with Ian Greenwood of Department for the Communities.

12.3 The Chief Executive advised he would also be meeting with Ian Greenwood and advised that the new Partnership Agreement would be reviewed by ARAC in October.

12.4 Members noted the Agreement.

**13 INFORMATION SYSTEMS e3 PROGRAMME  
UPDATE REPORT SEPTEMBER 2024**

**BSC.10.09.24**

13.1 The Head of ICT/ICU presented the Information Systems e3 Programme Update Report September 2024 advising that the move to Public Sector Shared Network (PSSN) was in essence complete, work to move from the legacy data centres to cloud based services was ongoing. The Library Management System had been operational since April 2023. A card payment pilot had been run, following feedback and learning this would be rolled out across the Organisation. Work continued on corporate services for HR and Finance and was on target to be completed this year. The e3 Project Board had given approval for the Project Support Officer and three Implementation Support Officers to remain on the project to 30 June 2025. The e3

implementation plan remained on track and the associated payment milestones had been achieved.

- 13.2 Mrs W Osborne enquired if the resolution of the Branch Library Manager dispute would help with the implementation of training and roll out of e3.
- 13.3 The Director of Business Support advised that industrial action had impacted implementation including the card payment pilot and the formal end of industrial action had triggered a return to more normal participation.
- 13.4 Members noted the Report.

## **14 FINANCE REPORTS**

### **14.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO AUGUST 2024** **BSC.11.09.24**

- 14.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report detailing results to 31 August 2024. The resource budget of £31,189,00 had been confirmed in June and results were on track to date.

- 14.3 Members noted the Report.

### **14.4 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO 31 AUGUST 2024** **BSC.12.09.24**

- 14.5 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report for the five months to 31 August 2024.

- 14.6 Ms B Anley enquired if Fivemiletown and Killyleagh Libraries would have soft launches; how far the Enniskillen Library Project could progress with the funding received and was there a risk that this funding could not be spent within the year.

- 14.7 The Assets Manager advised the keys for Killyleagh Library had been handed over, it was being fitted out with furniture and he would find out when it would be open to the public. DfC had allocation £400,000 to Enniskillen, an addendum to the business case needed to be approved before engaging the design team. The next step would be to review the scheme and proceed to procurement.

- 14.8 The Director of Business support advised that Department for Communities had been informed when the funding was allocated that Libraries NI could not spend £400,000 within the year. £50,000 could be spent in project development, the remainder would be eased back to DfC with a list of contingency projects.

14.9 Ms B Anley enquired if this funding could hook some work to secure the potential of getting a new library for Enniskillen. Was the delay in DfC approving the addendum connected to whether DfC could afford/approve a new library for Enniskillen.

14.10 The Director of Business Support reported that there was significant pressure in DfC, there was a sense that they were still committed to the project but a lack of understanding of the impact their delays have on what can be achieved this year. Libraries NI will complete procurement, then DfC will have to decide whether or not to further fund the project.

14.11 Members noted the Report.

**15 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.13.09.24  
AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000**

15.1 The Finance Manager presented the Procurement Report updating the Committee on procurement activity for the period from June to September 2024.

15.2 Members noted the Report.

**16 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO AUGUST 2024 BSC.14.09.24**

16.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report advising that the sickness absence level for the 12 months up to 31 August 2024 was 12.48 days (FTE equivalent). The performance target set for 2024/25 was to maintain sickness absence (composite average full time equivalent days lost) at or below 10.5% by 31 March 2025. A workshop had been organised for 15 October 2025 to provide managers with training in managing attendance, training for managing stress was available to staff through CAL elearning and the end of industrial action was welcomed.

16.2 Ms B Anley thanked the Head of HR for this paper and the benchmarking information, commented that absence levels were disappointing and enquired what pro-active measures are in place when a member of staff go off with stress.

16.3 The Head of HR advises that a manager should arrange a contact meeting with the employee to understand the underlying issues, advise on support that is available e.g. Inspire. There was also access to Occupational Health.

16.4 Ms B Anley enquired regarding the timescale for contact and was contact compulsory.



- 16.5 The Head of HR advised that a contact meeting should be arranged within a week so staff understand their employer wants to support them. Engagement with Occupational health was part of staff's terms and conditions, if necessary HR would write to staff regarding engagement and training planned for managers would cover engaging with staff who don't want to participate.
- 16.6 Mrs W Osborne commented that industrial action had not helped with managing sickness absence, that managers were key to addressing this. With training being given to managers there should be a positive trend and hopefully an improvement in the next six months.
- 16.7 The Head of HR advised that the age profile of the staff also contributed. Moving forward with the Organisational Structure Review and having frontline managers more involved should bring a better understanding of absence management
- 16.8 Ms B Anley enquired if there was a system of acknowledging staff with zero absence or libraries with good attendance.
- 16.9 The Head of HR advised that staff with zero absence were communicated with, however had to be cautious about acknowledging 0% absence.
- 16.10 Members noted the Report.

**17 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.15.09.24**

- 17.1 The Assets Manager presented the Report on the Use of the Common Seal, detailing the two occasions on which the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority had been applied in the period May 2024 to September 2024.
- 17.2 Members noted the Report.

**18 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS**

- 18.1 There was no other notified business.

**19 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

- 19.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be hold on Thursday 28 November 2024 at 10:30am.

**20 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

- 20.1 The meeting ended at 12:28 pm.

20.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended.