

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held in Bangor Carnegie Library
on Thursday 21 March 2024 at 10:30am

PRESENT

Mr John Peto	Chairperson
Ms Bonnie Anley	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
Mr Sean Beattie	Head of Service
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication
Ms Julie Reid	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Michelle Anderson	Head of Internal Audit
Ms Patricia Curran	Area Manager
Ms Finola Guinnane	Boardroom Apprentice
Ms Diane McGlynn	Minutes

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to Bangor Carnegie Library, in particular he welcomed Ms B Anley, Chairperson of the Board, to her first meeting of the Services Committee and Ms M Anderson and Ms P Curran who were attending the meeting as observers. He invited everyone present to introduce themselves and then invited Deputy Head of Service, Ms J Reid, to give Members an overview of Bangor Carnegie Library. The Deputy Head of Service informed Members of the history of the building and gave a flavour of the events, initiatives and services provided.

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

- 1.1 An apology was received from Councillor A McAuley and Dr J O'Hagan.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

- 2.1 The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation 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 conflicts of interest were declared.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

- 3.1 There was no Chairperson's business.

4. DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

SC.01.03.24

- 4.1 The Director of Library Services referred to the report that had been circulated stating the purpose of the report to inform Committee Members of service developments, highlight the volume of activity in libraries and stakeholder engagement. In addition to the written report she provided an update on the impact of industrial action and the role of District Managers in Libraries NI.
- 4.2 The Director of Library Services highlighted that in late December 2023 the Department for Communities confirmed the release of £1.2 million of earmarked library stock funding and that subsequently a further £1 million was made available in February. She reported that these allocations together with internal budget adjustments increased the original 2023/24 budget of £260,000 to £3.010 million.
- 4.3 Ms A Adair confirmed the planned return to standard opening hours (including late nights) noting the value of late night opening for students to study. She also recapped on the pilot of extended opening hours for studying in two libraries from April to June 2023 and the approach to implementing seasonal opening hours.
- 4.4 The Director of Library Services drew attention to the number of ad hoc closures during February giving examples. The Chairperson of the Board suggested that a visual comparison of ad hoc closures would be useful and the Director of Library Services agreed to incorporate this going forward.
- 4.5 Ms A Adair reported on progress of a number of refurbishment and capital projects including Ballynahinch, Castlederg, Creggan, Fivemiletown, Killyleagh and Waterside libraries. The Chairperson of the Board referred to a Conservation Act in place in Killyleagh and requested that it is given due consideration in completing the exterior of Killyleagh Library.
- 4.6 The Director of Library Services informed the Services Committee of a recent meeting with the Chairperson of the Services Committee and the Boardroom Apprentice that discussed the logo and associated graphics relating to the Libraries NI brand which have been in place since 2009 when Libraries NI was established. She reported that SMT subsequently approved an initial investigation to assess the volume, scope and cost to implement a brand refresh and that she would keep the Committee informed. The Chairperson of the Board expressed an interest in being involved in this area of work.
- 4.7 Ms A Adair reminded Members of the Creative Space project in Belfast Central

and Omagh libraries drawing attention to some highlights. She reported that SMT approved an extension of a further year to the existing resident in Omagh Library and a proposal to create a second bursary offer there.

- 4.8 In response to a question about promotion of the creative space initiative, the Director of Library Services confirmed that Ms J Reid is collating information on the social value from the creative industries in Belfast Central Library and that it will inform the vision for the future of Belfast Central Library. The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication also confirmed that the initiative has featured in the internal news issued to the Department for Communities.
- 4.9 The Director of Library Services invited Ms J Reid to update Members on the implementation of free period products (Universal Access) in libraries in partnership with The Executive Office. Ms J Reid gave an update on progress to date and reported that a project delivery group is working to raise awareness, deliver training, plan a marketing campaign and to provide all the information and support needed to deliver the project for the implementation date of 13 May 2024.
- 4.10 The Director of Library Services then went on to highlight the following recent events and initiatives:
- Children's Mental Health Week
 - 'Hope' Art Exhibition, Belfast Central Library
 - 'Ireland and the Birth of Europe' Exhibition, Bangor Carnegie Library
 - Seachtain na Gaeilge le Energia Irish Language Festival
 - World Book Day
 - Irish Astronomy Week
 - Heritage Week.
- 4.11 The Director of Library Services also drew Member's attention to a variety of forthcoming events:
- Ballymena Music Festival
 - World Poetry Day
 - Shakespeare Week
 - Ulster Orchestra events in libraries.
- 4.12 Ms A Adair informed the Committee of Libraries NI's participation in the following meetings:
- Department for the Economy, Project in South West College, 11 January 2024
 - Design Concept, Lisburn City Library, 31 January 2024
 - Ministerial Visits, Chichester Library, 21 February 2024 and Lisburn City Library, 7 March 2024
 - Department for Communities, Holywood Library, 28 February 2024
 - Lisburn and Castlereagh City Strategic Community Planning Partnership, 5 March 2024.
- 4.13 The Director of Library Services reported that two members of staff attended the recent EDGE Conference in Edinburgh on 14 and 15 March 2024, the theme this

year was 'EVOLVE: Engage. Embrace. Empower'. with speakers from the USA, Canada, Netherlands and UK. She also referred to the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Ireland/Library Association of Ireland Annual Joint Conference 2024 that will take place on 24 and 25 April at the Canal Court Hotel, Newry, Co Down, addressing the theme 'Building for the Future'. Libraries NI will be supporting the programme with a reading presentation and as part of an expert reading panel. Libraries NI also successfully submitted an application to feature the Belfast Central 135 Flickr Book promotion as a poster session. The Director of Library Services confirmed that a further update on both conferences will be brought to the next meeting of the Services Committee.

- 4.14 The Chairperson thanked the Director of Library Services for a very informative report.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2023 SC.02.03.24

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor A McAuley (via email as he was not present at the meeting), the minutes of the Services Committee held on 16 November 2023 were approved as a correct record of the meeting. It was reported that these minutes had been adopted by the Board at its meeting held on 14 December 2023.

6. MATTERS ARISING

- 6.1 The Chairperson referred to the Review of Effectiveness of the Services Committee and Scheme of Delegation that had been circulated to Members for comment in January as the scheduled meeting did not take place due to the meeting being inquorate. He reported that comments on the checklist for the Review of Effectiveness of the Services Committee were submitted to the Board Meeting held on 8 February 2024. The checklist is attached at Appendix One.
- 6.2 The Chairperson then referred to the Scheme of Delegation that had also been circulated in January with no proposed changes and confirmed that the Services Committee were required to consider the Scheme of Delegation and make a recommendation to the Board.
- 6.3 On a proposal by the Chairperson, Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour the Committee agreed to recommend approval of the Scheme of Delegation to the Board.

7. RURAL NEEDS ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 SC.03.03.24

- 7.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, introduced the Rural Needs Annual Report 2023/24 reminding Members that The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 has applied to Libraries NI since 1 June 2018. She explained that the Act requires Libraries NI 'to have

due regard to rural needs when developing, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services’.

- 7.2 The Head of Service confirmed that no specific rural needs were identified in the policies, strategies or plans which were subject to a Rural Needs Impact Assessment during the 2023/24 year. Ms M Bell reported that the template is provided by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and gave an overview of the Memorandum of Understanding and annual action plan that is adhered to through a joint working group with DAERA. She went on to provide details of collaborative projects in rural areas funded by DAERA and delivered by Libraries NI such as the Health in Mind project, SAD lamps and the Out of Hours Service. It was noted that in line with the DAERA rural definition there are 29 libraries currently designated as rural.
- 7.3 Following a discussion, the following points were noted:
- a number of Libraries NI staff have been trained in completing Rural Needs Impact Assessments
 - a comprehensive review of the Out of Hours Service is underway
 - potential for submitting cross departmental/ALB Business Cases.
- 7.4 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Ms B Anley, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Draft Rural Needs Annual Report to the Board.

8. REVIEW OF MEDIA HANDLING POLICY

SC.04.03.24

- 8.1 Mr G Beattie, Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication, introduced the Media Handling Policy that was presented to the Committee in line with the policy review cycle. He outlined the purpose of the policy to ensure a consistent approach to working with the media in a way that achieves the objectives of Libraries NI.
- 8.2 Mr Beattie confirmed that there were no significant changes as a result of the policy review and highlighted minor amendments to include agency staff and contractors, to clearly define the procedure in the event of a breach of the policy and to note the increase in use of social media and online platforms by media outlets.
- 8.3 Services Committee discussed the Media Handling Policy and highlighted a need to share information with Board Members on items that receive media interest. The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communication agreed to consider this with the suggestion that an update could be posted on the Extranet. He also confirmed that Marketing would provide a standard line for Board Members should they be approached by the media.
- 8.4 Services Committee Members requested that additional information is added to

the policy to clarify the Chief Executive as the person of final authority on messages.

- 8.5 Subject to the addition outlined at 8.4 above, on a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Media Handling Policy to the Board.

9. READING AND READER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY SC.05.03.24

- 9.1 Mr S Beattie, Head of Service, introduced the Reading and Reader Development Strategy that had been circulated and outlined what reader development is in the context of Libraries NI's service provision and the wider strategic context. He reported that progress on achieving the year one action plan targets would be included in the service plan progress report at the next meeting.
- 9.2 The Head of Service highlighted the aim of the strategy to foster a love of reading, to promote the benefits of reading and enhance the reading experience for people of all ages. He then informed the Services Committee of the objectives of the three year strategy with examples of how these would be achieved and he highlighted the impact and benefits of reading.
- 9.3 Services Committee discussed the Reading and Reader Development Strategy in detail and requested that further detail is added to the Reader Development Strategy Action Plan.
- 9.4 The Head of Service agreed to add the details requested and present the strategy at the next meeting of the Services Committee for consideration.

10. ENGAGING WITH CUSTOMER GROUPS

- 10.1 Ms M Bell, Head of Service, gave a presentation to the Services Committee on how Libraries NI engages with a range of customer groups to encourage everyone to enjoy the positive benefits of active membership of the library service.
- 10.2 The Head of Service highlighted libraries as a welcoming and trusted space for everyone and the importance of identifying barriers to access and gaps in provision bearing in mind equality and diversity. She referred to recent mitigations to identified barriers to access and collaboration, partnership and co-design in developing and delivering programmes to meet user needs. Ms M Bell also referred to the Northern Ireland Census 2021 data and how it is used to capture the demographic and diversity of the population surrounding a library and inform decision making.
- 10.3 The Head of Service went on to highlight the following specific customer groups that were identified in the service plans for 2022/23 and 2023/24:

- families
- older people
- newcomers
- autism and dementia
- homeless.

- 10.4 Ms M Bell then gave an overview of the customer and stakeholder engagement involved in addressing barriers to access, developing actions plans for these groups and gave examples of targeted service offers for each of the groups. She highlighted the importance of evaluating the offers and taking cognisance of the factors influencing the evolving environment for both Libraries NI and our customers.
- 10.5 The Chairperson thanked the Head of Service for an informative presentation.

11. Public Library Standards 2020/21 and 2021/22

SC.06.03.24

- 11.1 Ms K Keys, Deputy Head of Service, introduced the report on Public Library Standards (PLS) following a publication by the Department for Communities on performance for 2020/21 and 2021/22. The Deputy Head of Service highlighted that the targets set in the standards relate in many cases to 2012/13 or 2013/14 as the baseline year and that that the standards form part of the Department for Communities Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries Policy which was published in 2006. It was noted that the policy and standards are out-dated and that there have been substantial changes since this period.
- 11.2 The Deputy Head of Service drew attention to the three standards that relate to participation and informed the Committee that work is ongoing to review core activities and highlighted the impact of a continued lack of dedicated funding for stock, marketing and programming. She also explained that the lack of data available in respect of public library standard three was due to a shorter version of the Continuous Household Survey being conducted by telephone during the period 2020 – 2022.
- 11.3 The Services Committee considered the report and discussed the potential to target adults aged 20 – 30 years and how to measure progress on customer engagement and experience in the future.
- 11.4 The Services Committee noted the report on the Public Library Standards 2020/21 and 2021/22.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 12.1 There was no other business.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Services Committee would take place on Thursday 16 May 2024 at 10:30am in Derry Central Library.

14. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 14.1 The meeting ended at 1:32pm and was followed by a tour of Bangor Carnegie Library.
- 14.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended.

Board and Committee Effectiveness Review 2023/24

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
1.	Do we have a shared understanding of strategy and objectives and the challenges facing Libraries NI and are we clear about what we are trying to achieve?	✓			
2.	Does our strategic direction align with the Programme for Government and Ministerial priorities?	✓			Draft Programme for Government. Department for Communities Strategy 'Building Inclusive Communities 2020 – 2025'. Other departmental strategies to include Anti-poverty and Social Inclusion.
3.	How well do we understand the views of the public, service users, staff and other stakeholders?	✓			Members value regular reports and presentations on this to continue to Services Committee.
4.	Is there open and regular communication between the Board and the Department and between officers and the Department?				N/A to Services Committee.
5.	Is our decision-making based on informed discussion and debate supported by appropriate documentation?	✓			
6.	Do we exercise sufficient levels of challenge when considering key issues and information?	✓			
7.	Do we receive information in a timely fashion?	✓			
8.	Is the information we receive of good quality, appropriate and sufficient in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping us abreast of relevant developments both in Libraries NI and the broader library world? • setting key targets? • monitoring performance? • financial reporting and monitoring? • determining value for money? • gaining assurance? 	✓			Members value opportunities to receive information about and presentations from other library organisations. The Director of Library Services to continue to engage speakers from other organisations.

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
9.	Are we confident that the risks facing the organisation have been effectively assessed and that appropriate plans are in place and being delivered to manage those risks?	✓			The Services Risk Register is presented to Services Committee bi-annually and is aligned to the Corporate Risk Register
10.	Does the Board collectively have the right mix of skills and expertise, including an in-depth understanding and experience of public sector financial matters? Could the Board benefit from additional expertise provided by a co-opted member?	✓			Acknowledge that Services Committee can co-opt if required.
11.	Are appropriate levels of delegation in place which makes clear when Board approvals are required?	✓			
12.	Are Members' training needs being identified and addressed?	✓			
13.	Is the organisation complying with the requirements to identify and manage conflicts of interest which may arise?	✓			
14.	Are appropriate business cases/economic appraisals produced to justify expenditure? Are post-project evaluations completed as required?				N/A to Services Committee.
15.	Are there appropriate procurement, tendering and contract letting and management arrangements in place?				N/A to Services Committee.
16.	Are there appropriate arrangements in place to handle whistleblowing concerns?	✓			
17.	Do we have the right Committees?				N/A to Services Committee. For Board consideration.
18.	Are the Committees operating effectively?	✓			
19.	Does the Committee structure enhance our scrutiny work?	✓			
20.	Is the Scheme of Delegation for each Committee, including the composition of the Committee appropriate?	✓			

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
21.	Are there clear channels of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • between the Committees and the Board? • between the Board and stakeholders? • between the Board/Committees and officers? 	√			
22.	Is the frequency of Board and Committee meetings appropriate?	√			
23.	Are the dates, times and venues for Board/Committee meetings suitable?	√			Services Committee recognises the benefits for Board Members of seeing libraries first hand and will continue to circulate the venue for Services Committee meetings.
24.	Is the length of Board/Committee meetings sufficient to enable key strategic issues to be discussed and debated fully?	√			
25.	Are the minutes of Board and Committee meetings sufficiently detailed to record key decisions?	√			