

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 27 March 2025 at 10:30am

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

VL – Attendance via video link

IP – Attendance in person

PRESENT

Miss Linda Wilson (IP)	Chairperson
Councillor Martin McRandal (VL)	Vice-Chairperson
Councillor Roisin Lynch (VL)	
Councillor Julie Gilmour (IP)	
Ms Ursula O'Hare (VL)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)	Director of Business Support
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry (IP)	Head of Human Resources
Mr Tim Neeson (IP)	Assets Manager
Mrs Rita McNamee (IP)	Finance Manager
Mr Desi Curry (IP)	Head of ICU/ICT

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson of Libraries NI Board

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.01.03.25

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that no financial allocation had as yet been received from DfC, he had written to DfC highlighting the governance responsibilities and risk to Libraries NI of continuing to incur expenditure beyond 31 March 2025 without any 'technical' budget cover.

Councillor M McRandal joined the meeting at 10:37am.

- 4.2 Ms U O'Hare commented that it was a disappointing position and enquired regarding ability to incur costs from 01 April 2025.
- 4.3 Miss L Wilson enquired regarding the basis of authority to spend in the absence of a financial allocation for 2025/26.
- 4.4 The Director of Business Support advised that he would ensure that in the absence of a financial allocation that Libraries NI had authority to incur costs from 01 April 2025. The basis of authority to spend was not yet known, previously this had been based on committed spending only and had not had a financial element defined i.e. authority to spend on normal operational costs but with no financial quantum set.

5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2025 BSC.02.03.25

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmore, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 30 January 2025, were approved as a correct record of the meeting subject to the following amendment:

- at 4.7 remove "the Report didn't make it clear that ethical funding doesn't appear to have happened"

It was reported that these minutes had been adopted by the Board at its meeting on 13 February 2025 as an as read record of the Business Support Committee's proceeding of 30 January 2025.

6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JANUARY 2025 BSC.03.03.25

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support reported that the outworkings of the Committee Effectiveness Review 2024 had been incorporated in the action plan arising from the Board Effectiveness Review 2024/25. The revised Scheme of Delegation of the Business Support Committee was adopted by the Board at its meeting of 13 February 2025. A copy of the amended Scheme of Delegation had been circulated for member's information.

- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that at its meeting on 13 February 2025 the Board had considered and approved the Committee's recommendation to proceed with the disposal of the former Dunmurry Library property. A deed of surrender had subsequently been drawn up allowing the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust to progress the joint disposal of the former library and health centre properties.
- 6.3 The Director of Business Support advised following the Committee's discussion of lessons learned from the British Libraries Cyber Attack the Risk Management Group had reviewed the Corporate Risk Register on 19 March 2025 and revised the 'additional action plan' relating to Risk 7: Information Security to take on board comments provided by Committee Members. The updated Corporate Risk Register would be considered by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting on 16 April 2025.
- 6.4 The Head of Human Resources advised that work on revitalising the staff appraisal scheme had begun, senior managers had been contacted emphasising the importance to re-invigorating this process. There had been a formal meeting on 26 March 2025 to look at organisational development and learning which provided time to consider the staff appraisal process. Appraisal documentation had been reviewed by Human Resources, the process would be managed through People Live and communications would be issued to all staff. HR staff would attend managers' meetings to provide training and advice on the appraisal process and ensure managers focused on individual appraisals. A review meeting was scheduled for mid-May and progress would be monitored.
- 6.5 Miss L Wilson commented that it would be critical that senior managers drive this forward, ensuring it cascaded down through other levels; and a cultural and learning change was required.
- 6.6 The Head of Human Resources commented that the leadership role of managers would be important in taking the appraisal process forward, managers had been advised that it was not appropriate to do group appraisals. There were a lot of new staff for whom the process would be new, Human Resources were going out in person to support and build up confidence in the process.
- 7 2024/25 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN BSC.04.03.25
PROGRESS REPORT**
- 7.1 The Director of Business Support present the Progress Report which detailed the progress to date in delivering on a range of targets as set out in the Business Support Service Plan 2024/25. Individual actions and targets had been assigned a Red/Amber/Green status reflecting their position at March 2024.

- 7.2 Councillor J Gilmore commented that there was clearly an ambition to meet the targets, where targets had been missed there were factors which were beyond the Organisation's control including finance and industrial action short of strike.
- 7.3 The Director of Business Support advised that some of the outcomes had been very much influenced by the lack of funding and a further challenge was planning early in the year without knowing what funding would be provided.
- 7.4 Miss L Wilson commented that the red indicators reflected areas of concern for the Board, funding and staffing issues.
- 7.5 Ms U O'Hare enquired if an audit of Health and Wellbeing had been done to provide a baseline.
- 7.6 The Director of Business Support reported that work was being progressed to procure a baseline survey.
- 7.7 Members noted the Progress Report.

8 2024/25 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER BSC.05.03.25 **UPDATE REPORT**

- 8.1 The Director of Business Support presented the revised Business Support Risk Register 2024/25 which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and to take account of mitigating actions implemented to date and new or emerging risks which have been identified in the period from November 2024. Where relevant revisions had been introduced to reflect the current Corporate Risk Register.
- 8.2 Members noted the Report.

9 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY–2025 REVIEW BSC.06.03.25

- 9.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Freedom of Information Policy which had been reviewed, no changes had been made, the intent and scope of the policy were unchanged and it was considered to remain fit for purpose.
- 9.2 Councillor J Gilmour enquired regarding the quantity of Freedom of Information requests received.
- 9.3 The Director of Business Support reported that a lot of requests were received covering contractual issues, business related information, as well as equality diversity and inclusion. Personal data requests were addressed as Subject Access Requests.
- 9.4 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor M McRandal the reviewed Freedom of Information Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**10 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME UPDATE BSC.07.03.25
REPORT MARCH 2025**

10.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Information Systems e3 Programme Update Report March 2025 advising that the move to the Public Sector Shared Network and cloud computing were now complete. In the last quarter card payments had been rolled out to 75% of libraries, this should be completed by 17 April 2025. Development of the Management Accounts Report had been completed and tested by Finance. Work was being progressed on Events Management and Room Booking. There were outstanding issues with the HR Recruitment system. All corporate and public access PCs would be replaced, this work would be done library by library and be completed by July 2025.

10.2 Members noted the Report.

11 FINANCE REPORTS

**11.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO BSC.08.03.25
FEBRUARY 2025**

11.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report detailing the results for the 11 months to 28 February 2025 and advised that there had been no significant change to the projections at 28 February.

11.3 Councillor J Gilmour thanked the Finance Manager for explaining the Report so clearly and was amazed that tolerances could be calculated so well.

11.4 The Director of Business Support commented that it was not ideal or an efficient use of funding, it would be much better to be able to plan spending.

11.5 Members noted the Report.

**11.6 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO BSC.09.03.25
FEBRUARY 2025**

11.7 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report detailing capital spend for 11 months to 28 February 2025.

11.8 The Director of Business Support advised that since this Report had been written DfC had advised of a reduction in the capital allocation, they were under significant pressure on capital funding. The Assets Manager was working to re-allocate funding between projects.

11.9 Ms U O'Hare enquired if final accounts still had to be agreed for Fivemiletown and Killyleagh Libraries and if there was any indication that the costs might change.

- 11.10 The Director of Business Support advised that at the post-delivery phase Assets work through a process of negotiating costs with the contractor; throughout the delivery phase it was known where issues could arise and therefore know what additional or reduced costs were likely to be incurred. For both these projects it was unlikely there would be additional costs.
- 11.11 The Assets Manager advised that the Design Teams included a Quantity Surveyor who would build in allowances for risk items, therefore potential additional costs were covered.
- 11.12 Ms U O'Hare enquired regarding the Enniskillen Library Project.
- 11.13 The Director of Business Support reported that a business case for this project had been approved several years ago, a design team had previously been engaged but DfC did not initially fund the project and therefore the Design Team had been stood down. The Design Team procurement allowed for a delay, the original contract was still in place so while the recent funding allocation has allowed reengagement to take place the Design Team fee bid needed to be revisited.
- 11.14 Miss L Wilson thanked the Director of Business Support, the Finance Manager and the Finance Team for their work.
- 11.15 Members noted the Report.

**12 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.10.03.25
AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000**

- 12.1 The Finance Manager presented the Procurement Report updating the Committee on procurements over £1,000 and Single Tender Actions for the period from 18 January 2025 to 18 March 2025.
- 12.2 Miss L Wilson noted the procurement of pottery workshops and enquired if there was feedback to indicate that these types of activities increase library membership.
- 12.3 The Director of Business Support advised that there was feedback, post project evaluations were carried out and he would liaise with the Library Services Directorate to provide more information.
- 12.4 The Chief Executive advised that these activities were designed to generate interest, improve footfall and increase engagement within communities.
- 12.5 Councillor J Gilmour reported that the Repair Café had been held in Antrim and Newtownabbey Libraries, this had brought people in who had never visited these libraries before, resulted in new joiners and raised awareness of the services provided.
- 12.6 Members noted the Report.

13 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO FEBRUARY 2025 BSC.11.03.25

- 13.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report to 28 February 2025. The performance target set for 2024/25 was to maintain sickness absence (composite average full time equivalent days lost) at or below 10.5 days by 31 March 2025, the current absence rate was 13.5 FTE days. The HR Team were providing a lot of support, emphasising the importance of communication and contact in managing attendance. Inspire had recently rebranded and were now called Lena, their services were being actively promoted including their wellbeing hub and a recent ezine focusing on stress. Information was available to staff on SharePoint, through Vivia Engage and Inform, staff were being encouraged to avail of the information that was available. The need to provide emotional intelligence training had been identified for the Organisation Development Learning Plan.
- 13.2 Councillor M McRandal commented that it was disappointing that the sickness absence was at an 18-month high and enquired regarding pro-actively reducing illness, managers' skills for identifying signs of stress and taking appropriate action.
- 13.3 The Head of Human Resources advised that managers working with staff on a daily basis were well placed to see changes in their staff and it would be concerning if they didn't address this. The Health and Wellbeing Team had been out providing training, working to build manager's confidence, encouraging managers to arrange contact in person with staff who are off, to listen and ask questions. Emotional intelligence and resilience was important for managers.
- 13.4 Councillor M McRandal enquired if a line manager has met with their staff member and perhaps signposted them to help, is it then left to the employee to take action.
- 13.5 The Head of Human Resources advised that the manager would report back to their line manager, and may then contact HR. There was a duty of care to staff, and there were many options that could be considered to provide support e.g. working pattern changes, redeployment.
- 13.6 The Chief Executive commented that sickness absence was a complex and multi-faceted issue, impacted by the workforce age profile and societal issues. There were interventions which could be used to support staff, a lot of good work was being done to try and improve the situation and would continue.
- 13.7 Members noted the Report.

Ms U O'Hare left the meeting

14 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.12.03.25

14.1 The Chairperson present the Report on the Use of the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority, detailing the two occasions on which the seal had been applied between November 2024 and March 2025.

14.2 Members noted the Report.

**15 ANNUAL BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE WORK BSC.13.03.25
PLAN 2025/26**

15.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Work Plan informing Members of meeting dates and proposed business items to be considered throughout 2025/26. The plan was indicative of business items to be considered and may be subject to revision or addition in response to developing business needs.

15.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if work on the health and wellbeing strategy should sit under strategic issues.

15.3 The Director of Business Support advised that he would incorporate Miss Wilson's comments.

16 NORTH WEST LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL BSC.14.03.25

16.1 The Director of Business Support advised that this agenda item was sensitive and potentially commercially confidential, and suggested that it be considered as a 'Matter in Committee'.

16.2 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the meeting went into committee. At 12.04pm the minute taker and the officers, except for the Director of Business Support and the Chief Executive, left the meeting.

16.3 The Committee were briefed on a potential infrastructure development proposal in the northwest area.

16.04 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the meeting came out of committee at 12.20pm.

17 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

17.1 There was no other notified business.

18 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING


18.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be held on Thursday 29 May 2025 at 10:30am.

19 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

19.1 The meeting ended at 12.20pm

19.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting with the following exceptions:-

- Councillor M McRandal joined the meeting at 10.37am
- Ms U O'Hare left the meeting at 12noon
- The minute taker and the officers, except for the Director of Business Support and the Chief Executive, left the meeting at 12.04pm.

Signed 

Dated 29th May 2025