

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 25 May 2023 at 10:30am

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

VL – Attendance via video link

IP – Attendance in person

PRESENT

(IP) Miss Linda Wilson	Vice Chairperson (Acting as Chairperson)
(VL) Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
(VL) Councillor Peter Johnston	
(VL) Ms Stefani Millar	Boardroom Apprentice

IN ATTENDANCE

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

OBSERVERS

(VL) Ms Judith Norris	District Manager
(VL) Ms Danielle Thomas	District Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Professor Bernard Cullen
Councillor Cheryl Brownlee

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 The Chairperson reminded Members that as part of the Leadership Development Plan it had been agreed that some staff should attend and observe Board and Committee meetings as part of their personal development and welcomed Danielle Thomas, District Manager for Antrim and Newtownabbey and Judith Norris, District Manager for Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon.
- 3.2 The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Peter Johnston to the Business Support Committee and recorded thanks to Councillor Billy Webb and Alderman Thomas Burns for their valuable service to the Committee while serving as members of the Board of Libraries NI.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.05.23

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that the terms of Councillor Billy Webb and Alderman Thomas Burns had recently ended and they had stepped down from the Board of Libraries NI and the Business Support Committee. Consequently the Committee membership was generally depleted and the Chairperson's post was vacant. Councillor Peter Johnston had recently been appointed to the Committee, leaving membership one short of the minimum of six members. It was proposed that the position be revisited in September 2023 when Board membership may have stabilised and that the Vice-Chairperson stand in as Chairperson in the interim.
- 4.2 Miss L Wilson confirmed that if Members were content, she was willing to stand in as Chairperson until the September 2023 meeting.
- 4.3 The Director of Business Support advised that no Procurement Report had been included with the papers for the meeting, due to financial uncertainty and the cautious approach adopted pending confirmation of financial allocations, there was no procurement activity to report in the current period.
- 4.4 Miss L Wilson asked if a Procurement Report would be remain on the agenda for future meetings.
- 4.5 The Director of Business Support confirmed that a Procurement Report would continue to be a standing item on the agenda.
- 4.6 The Director of Business Support reported that the Assets Team were seeking funding from a range of energy cost support schemes. Applications had been made to the Non Domestic Energy Support Scheme and the Energy Bills Discount Scheme. In 2022 the DfE Invest to Save Programme had funded the installation of LED lighting to six libraries and the installation of photovoltaic (PV) panel arrays to two libraries; resulting in financial savings and carbon reduction. Bids had been submitted to the 2023/23 Invest to Save Programme for the refurbishment of three libraries to achieve low energy buildings to EnerPhit standard and to replace a number of diesel

and petrol vehicles with electric vehicles and provide the charging infrastructure. If the bids were successful the projects would have to be fully completed by 31 March 2024, while the timescale was extremely challenging it was achievable providing the funding was allocated in a timely manner.

- 4.7 Ms S Millar enquired regarding the level of savings.
- 4.8 The Assets Manger advised that it was too early to know what level of support would be available and that cost savings would directly reflect the quantum of support provided.
- 4.9 The Chief Executive advised that in addition to the financial savings, another important dimension was the carbon saving. These schemes would provide support with energy costs and investment to provide longer term savings.
- 4.10 The Director of Business Support reported that in March 2023 Libraries NI had been notified of an indicative financial allocation based on a 10% reduction against the 2022/23 resource allocation baseline. Subsequently DfC had launched an Equality Impact Assessment consultation and issued a revised indicative allocation based on a 5% reduction for Libraries NI. This was an improvement on the initial allocation, but remained substantially less than what would be needed to maintain services throughout 2023/24 and did not address library stock funding which was at an all-time low. A response to the departmental EQIA was being prepared and a special Board meeting to discuss the financial position was scheduled for 01 June 2023.

**5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE BSC.02.05.23
HELD ON 30 MARCH 2023**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee on 30 March 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 on 27 April 2023.

**6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BSC.03.05.23
MEETING HELD ON 30 MARCH 2023**

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support reported that further to the review of the Bullying and Harassment Policy Professor B Cullen and the Head of Human Resources were developing a draft narrative to expand on and clarify the approaches to the informal procedures. When complete revised operational procedures would be issued to support the policy implementation.
- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that the Business Support Risk Register 2023/24 had been transposed to the new agreed Risk Register format and Risk 4 Resources had been updated to include mitigating circumstances.

- 7 STUDENT WORKPLACE POLICY REVIEW BSC.04.05.23**
- 7.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Student Workplace Policy, which had been reviewed in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period, no substantive revisions were proposed.
- 7.2 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Student Workplace Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 8 MATERNITY/ PATERNITY/ PARENTAL POLICIES REVIEW**
- 8.1 MATERNITY LEAVE POLICY BSC.05.05.23**
- 8.2 The Head of Human Resources presented the Maternity Leave Policy, which had been reviewed in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period, no substantive revisions were proposed.
- 8.3 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Maternity Leave Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 8.4 PATERNITY LEAVE POLICY BSC.06.05.23**
- 8.5 The Head of Human Resources presented the Paternity Leave Policy, which had been reviewed in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period, no substantive revisions were proposed.
- 8.6 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Paternity Leave Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 8.7 PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY BSC.07.05.23**
- 8.8 The Head of Human Resources presented the Parental Leave Policy, which had been reviewed in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period, no substantive revisions were proposed.
- 8.9 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Parental Leave Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 8.10 SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY BSC.08.05.23**
- 8.11 The Head of Human Resources presented the Shared Parental Leave Policy, which had been reviewed in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period, no substantive revisions were proposed.

8.12 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Shared Parental Leave Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

9 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN 2023/24 BSC.09.05.23

9.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Business Support Service Plan 2023/24, which set out the targets for and action to be taken by Business Support Officers throughout 2023/24 to facilitate and support delivery of the organisational wide strategic objectives and goals. The Plan drew on and reflected the Outcome Areas, Strategic Actions and Key Performance Indicators of the 2023/24 Draft Libraries NI Business Plan and the 2020/24 Corporate Plan and had been developed taking cognisance of the impacts and constraints imposed by the current economic environment.

9.2 Mrs W Osborne noted that the development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy was scheduled for October 2023 and the Staff Development Plan was scheduled for September 2023 and suggested that it would be beneficial for both plans be developed at the same time.

9.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the Staff Development Plan was produced annually in September, agreed that the Health and Wellbeing Strategy would inform the Staff Development Plan and therefore the two should be aligned.

9.4 Councillor P Johnston commented that this was a very comprehensive Plan; enquired if there was a plan to achieve the Public Library Standard Stock spend and did the Partnership Agreement being worked on sit under the Plan.

9.5 The Director of Business Support advised the proposed Partnership Agreement was a high level relationship document, setting out roles, responsibilities and operational parameters between Libraries NI and DfC but as a replacement for the Management Statement and Memorandum its development did not impact on the annual planning process.

The scale of funding required to meet the Public Library Standard Stock spend was significantly more than Libraries NI could allocate with the indicative financial allocation. Historically this had been addressed by in year monitoring rounds, last year there had not been a monitoring round but funding had been gained through an easement process.

9.6 The Chief Executive advised that the Public Library Standard Stock Spend target was set by DfC, however funding to meet this target was not generally provided as part of the baseline allocation. Libraries NI were actively engaging with DfC regarding the historical under funding of library stock.

9.7 Miss L Wilson enquired about the role of Business Support in respect of fraud and audit.

- 9.8 The Director of Business Support advised that Internal Audit sat under the Chief Executive. Business Support played an active role in promotion of fraud awareness, the Director of Business Support monitored fraud related policies and led the Risk Management Group, bringing together Services and Business Support staff.
- 9.9 The Chief Executive commented that all directorates have a responsibility to promote audit and confirmed that mechanisms to do so were in place.
- 9.10 On a proposal by Councillor P Johnston, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Business Support Service Plan 2023/24 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

10 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER 2023/24 BSC.10.05.23

- 10.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Business Support Risk Register 2023/24 which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and the revised format adopted for the Corporate Risk Register. Further revisions may be required when the financial and resourcing position was confirmed.
- 10.2 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Business Support Risk Register 2023/24 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

11 RESOURCE MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 BSC.11.05.23

- 11.1 The Assets Manager advised that while the resource and capital allocations were yet to be confirmed DfC had provided indicative allocations to permit planning assumptions to be made. In order to maintain Libraries NI's estate and manage assets in a safe and efficient manner the Resource Maintenance and Capital Programme had been prepared detailing the activities and proposed areas of expenditure planned for 2023/24.

The resource allocation presented significant challenges and would be spent on statutory requirements, planned preventative maintenance, response maintenance and professional services. There was insufficient budget cover at present to support a planned maintenance/facilities enhancement programme and a list had been compiled of potential projects to take forward if funding became available.

The indicative capital allocation only allowed for inescapable and existing contractual commitments to be considered, again a list had been compiled of potential projects to take forward if funding became available. The reduction in capital funding presented significant challenges for the Libraries NI estate and reduced the ability to effectively plan and develop projects to support the future delivery of library services.

- 11.2 Mrs W Osborne commented that the Libraries NI estate was quite vast with buildings used daily, the lack of maintenance funding now could result in increased costs later.
- 11.3 Miss L Wilson enquired regarding the impact on ongoing development of investment projects, such as Belfast Central Library.
- 11.4 The Chief Executive advised that there was a more strategic approach to capital investment, a business case was developed and then funding sought. The Report highlighted the issue of the level of investment in Libraries NI services, while seeking to manage within very scarce resources there needed to be robust discussion with DfC regarding the funding of library services.
- 11.5 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Resource Maintenance and Capital Programme 2023/24 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**12 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME BSC.12.05.23
UPDATE REPORT MAY 2023**

- 12.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Information Systems E3 Programme Update Report, advising Members of progress made. The Public Sector Shared Network (PSSN) project was in essence complete, at the end of the financial year the new finance system had gone live and credit for the successful implementation was due to the hard work of the Finance, ICU, Fujitsu and Sysco teams. An external Gateway Review 4 (Readiness for Service) had been carried out in April and the findings were very positive. The new library management system had gone live and the E3 Project was on target.
- 12.2 The Chief Executive commended the E3 Team and wider Libraries NI staff who had engaged with the project and were a big part of the success of the project to date. E3 was a really positive example of what could happen when there was investment in the service.
- 12.3 Members noted the Report.

13 FINANCE REPORTS

**13.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO BSC.13.05.23
31 MARCH 2023**

- 13.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report detailing the provisional Outturn results for the year to 31 March 2023 which indicated an underspend of 0.7% of the available resource budget.
- 13.3 Miss L Wilson commented that it took considerable effort to bring the budget in at just 0.7% below target

- 13.4 Members noted the Report.
- 13.5 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2023 BSC.14.05.23**
- 13.6 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report advising of expenditure to 31 March 2023.
- 13.7 Councillor P Johnston commented that the work done at Greenisland Library had been very well received by the local community and enquired if photovoltaics would be considered when planning refurbishment projects.
- 13.8 The Director of Business Support advised that the Assets Team look to incorporate energy saving measures in capital investment projects where practical and affordable to do so.
- 13.9 Members noted the Report.
- 14 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO APRIL 2023 BSC.15.05.23**
- 14.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report to the end of April 2023, advising that the composite sickness absence level at 31 March 2023 had been 13.9 days (FTE equivalent) and at 31 April 2023 was now 13.97 FTE days. The target, subject to approval of the Libraries NI Annual Business Plan for 2022/23, being 9.5 days. The target was not currently being met, sickness absence rates continued to rise with the top absence reasons being anxiety, stress, depression and other psychiatric illnesses. A Health and Wellbeing Strategy was being developed and there was a need to train managers in mental health awareness to support employees and their own health and wellbeing when dealing with complex and sensitive people management matters. The new E3 management system would support the identification of trends and occupational health clinics were now being held in house which provided more detailed reports.
- 14.2 Miss L Wilson enquired regarding the procedure for managing sickness absence.
- 14.3 The Head of Human Resources advised that long term sickness was an absence of four weeks or more, the first course of action would be a meeting, following that discussion staff may be signposted to support or may be referred to Occupational Health depending on the nature of the illness.
- 14.4 Councillor P Johnston commented that sickness absence seemed remarkably high, particularly stress related absences and enquired if benchmarking had been carried out against other Arm's Length Bodies.
- 14.5 The Head of Human Resources advised that benchmarking was planned as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy but that post Covid public sector sickness absence levels had increased in general. The staff intranet provided information on stress, signposting, details of Inspire Services,

there were staff engagement days and flexible working options were in place to support staff through difficult circumstances.

- 14.6 The Chief Executive reported that traditionally sickness absence would have been 10-10.5 FTE, at a UK wide level long term sickness has high, COVID, the cost of living crisis and other factors seemed to be contributing to this.
- 14.7 Mrs W Osborne commented that the report was very comprehensive, while the situation may reflect a wider issue, 9.5FTE was the Libraries NI target and it was concerning that the positive actions which had been taken did not seem to be shifting the problem.
- 14.8 The Director of Business Support agreed that the level of sickness absence was unacceptable, the reporting format of a rolling year resulted in a report detailing the cumulative sickness absence since May 2022 and a disparity in seeing the impact of recent actions.
- 14.9 Miss L Wilson enquired if it would be possible to provide a comparison report against data from the 12 months previous.
- 14.10 The Head of Human Resources confirmed that this data would be provided.
- 14.11 Ms S Millar enquired if there were any positives.
- 14.12 The Head of Human Resources reported that there had been resourcing issues with Health and Wellbeing, these had been addressed and reports from Occupational Health had improved providing more robust information for managers to work with.
- 14.13 Members noted the Report.

15 PROMPT PAYMENT TARGET AND PERFORMANCE 2022/23

BSC.16.05.23

- 15.1 The Finance Manager presented the report on Prompt Payment Performance for 2022/23 updating the Committee on performance against the Prompt Payment of Invoices Key Performance Indicator for 2022/23.
- 15.2 Members noted the Report.

16 DRAFT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2022/23

BSC.17.05.23

- 16.1 The Finance Manager presented the draft 2022/23 Annual Accounts advising that they would be submitted to the Audit and Risk Committee for consideration and subsequently to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for detailed audit.
- 16.2 Members noted the Draft Annual Accounts 2022/23 and Miss L Wilson thanked all the Finance Team for their work.

17 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.18.05.23

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 between March 2023 and May 2023.

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 September 2023 at 10:30am.

20 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

20.1 The meeting ended at 12:35pm

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

Signed 

Dated 30th Nov 2023