

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 30 May 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

Miss Linda Wilson (IP)	Chairperson
Councillor Martin McRandal (VL)	
Ms Bonnie Anley (VL)	Chairperson of Libraries NI Board
Councillor Julie Gilmour (IP)	Attending as a guest of the Chairperson

IN ATTENDANCE

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

1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Apologies were received from Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE, and Ms Finola Guinnane, Board Apprentice.

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 advised that the Board had considering the generally reduced Board membership and resultant pressure this has caused on Committee membership and had 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, in a temporary capacity for the purpose of the Committee meeting'* and where this was necessary it

should be noted in the minute accordingly and reported to the Board at its next meeting. The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julie Gilmour who was attending the Committee in such a temporary capacity.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.05.24

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that there was as yet no confirmation of the resource allocation for 2024/25. The profile of expenditure for the Organisation was not even across the year, with expenses such as rates incurred early in the year; therefore by meeting statutory and contractual commitments Libraries NI was likely to exceed its interim financial allocation by the end of June. The Chief Executive and Director of Business Support had flagged this risk up with DfC.

Councillor M McRandal joined the meeting at 10:33am

- 4.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if there was going to be a June monitoring round? If so, was it likely to drift into July when Libraries NI would require additional funding earlier.
- 4.3 The Director of Business Support advised that he understood that technically there would be a monitoring round, but it was unlikely that there would be a call for bids to organisations such as Libraries NI; Management would be engaging with DfC before July and would be requesting covering authority for resource expenditure.
- 4.4 The Director of Business Support advised that membership and the vacant vice chairperson post had previously been discussed and deferred in the hope that the Committee would have been able to address. As competitions were underway for new board members the Director of Business Support suggested that this matter be deferred to the September meeting.
- 4.5 Miss L Wilson commented that the situation may not have changed by September.
- 4.6 Councillor J Gilmour reported that the competition process had actually commenced.
- 4.7 Miss L Wilson commented that the process could be managed but delayed when it reaches the Minister.
- 4.8 Ms B Anley reported that it had been made clear to DfC that appointments by 12 September 2024 would be welcomed; this would allow new members to be appointed at the October Board meeting.
- 4.9 The Director of Business Support reported the sudden passing of Neil Bodger, a former Committee and Board member on 13 April 2024.
- 4.10 Miss L Wilson requested the Committee record their sadness at hearing of Neil's passing.

**5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE BSC.02.05.24
HELD ON 28 MARCH 2024**

- 5.1 Subject to the addition of “rather than accessing online services “at 14.2 on a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Ms B Anley, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee on 28 March 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 25 April 2024.

**6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BSC.03.05.24
MEETING HELD ON 28 MARCH 2024**

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support reported that the reviewed Vehicle Management Policy and the reviewed Use of Privately Owned Vehicles for Business Purposes Policy were adopted by the Board at its meeting on 25 April 2024 and the updated policies had subsequently been published and were operational.

The Chief Executive left at 10:40am and returned at 10.44am.

- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that the Assets Management Policy had been further reviewed to reflect Member's views that the policy should describe the requirement for Libraries NI to highlight concerns and seek funding from DfC and to ensure value for money is obtained from investment. The revised policy document would be further considered under agenda item 7.

7 ASSETS MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW BSC.04.05.24

- 7.1 The Assets Manager presented the Assets Management Policy which had been reviewed taking on board comments provided by the Committee in March 2024 that the policy should make reference to the onus for Libraries NI to highlight concerns, seek funding from DfC and to ensure value for money.
- 7.2 Ms B Anley enquired if health and safety concerns formed part of the review.
- 7.3 The Assets Manager confirmed that the review that looked to address such health and safety concerns as were apparent.
- 7.4 On a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor M McRandal the Assets Management Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**8 PAYMENT OF TRAVEL AND SUBSISTENCE BSC.05.05.24
EXPENSES POLICY REVIEW**

- 8.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Payment of Travel and Subsistence Expenses Policy which had been reviewed, the policy was considered to remain fit for purpose, there were no substantive changes however the opportunity had been taken to refresh dates, references and expand the list of related documents.
- 8.2 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Payment of Travel and Subsistence Expenses Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 9 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK POLICY REVIEW BSC.06.05.24**
- 9.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Customer Feedback Policy which had been reviewed, the policy was considered to remain fit for purpose and had required only minor amendments to update terminology.
- 9.2 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Customer Feedback Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 10 DATA PROTECTION POLICY REVIEW BSC.07.05.24**
- 10.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the reviewed Data Protection Policy, which was generally considered to remain fit for purpose, the opportunity had been taken to revise the drafting in Section 3.3 with regards to Individual's Rights to better reflect the wording and terminology used in the Libraries NI privacy Statement.
- 10.2 On a proposal by Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Data Protection Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.
- 11 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN 2024/25 BSC.08.05.24**
- 11.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Business Support Service Plan 2024/25 which set out the targets for and actions to be taken by Business Support Officers throughout 2024/25 to facilitate and support delivery of the organisational wide strategic objectives and goals. At the time of drafting resource and capital funding allocations had not been confirmed, consequently outputs and targets contained in the plan assumed that sufficient resources would be available to facilitate delivery. The Plan would need to be revised if actual financial allocations for the Organisation were significantly different to planning assumptions. Members comments regarding focusing on measurable outcomes had been considered when drafting the Plan.

- 11.2 Miss L Wilson commented that the Plan was shorter but clearer, enquired regarding the funding sources referenced at 10.1. and if the Plan should reference making best use of resources and efficiency.
- 11.3 The Chief Executive suggested that a direct quote from legislation could be added in to cover making the best use of resources.
- 11.4 The Director of Business Support advised that 10.1 referred to sustainable funding from DfC and suggested that when the Plan was reviewed in line with resourcing additional wording be added in regarding making the best use of resources.
- 11.4 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Business Support Service Plan 2024/25 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

12 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER 2024/25 BSC.09.05.24

- 12.1 The Director of Business Support presented the 2024/25 Business Support Risk Register which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and the revised format adopted for the corporate risk register. Further refinements/revisions would be required when the financial and resourcing position was confirmed.
- 12.2 Miss L Wilson referred to Risk Three - Corporate Governance enquired regarding the impact of the Partnership Agreement, while providing greater autonomy would this increase risk and require additional actions.
- 12.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the introduction of a Partnership Agreement didn't sufficient change autonomy, but financial levels had the most significant impact.
- 12.4 The Chief Executive advised that the challenge of this change was more cultural and behaviours, the need to ensure high standards are maintained and not allow slippage to creep in. This would need to be kept under review over the first 18 months.
- 12.5 Ms B Anley enquired if the Register should reflect the general election, purdah and the impact on negotiations with DfC and limitations on ministers. Should the risk be more critical than amber in relation to staff relations with negotiations on industrial relations ongoing.
- 12.6 The Chief Executive reported that priority focus was being maintained on resolving the industrial dispute working through a confidential process with the LRA. With regard to the general election this was more in the scope of the horizon scanner, guidance had been issued to staff and managers on how to conduct themselves in this period. While the election may impact

public relations e.g. rescheduling events due to election, the key issue for Libraries NI was the setting of a budget.

- 12.7 On a proposal by Ms B Anley, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Business Support Risk Register 2024/25 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**13 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME BSC.10.05.24
UPDATE REPORT MAY 2024**

- 13.1 The Head of ICT/ICU presented the Information Systems E3 Programme Update Report May 2024 advising that the implementation plan remained on track with 90% of the implementation complete. The Library Management System had been signed off, additional elements were being introduced to virtual library services and the entire virtual system would move to the Azure Cloud, work was ongoing on the Finance and HR systems, service delivery and support services were being tested and introduced. Three e3 implementation support officers would remain on the project until October 2024.
- 13.2 Miss L Wilson enquired regarding the timescale for the roll out of card payments and if this incurred a cost to Libraries NI.
- 13.3 The Finance Manager advised that card payments had been rolled out in five libraries to date, staff needed to be trained and it was expected to take the full year to complete the rollout. The card payment system incurred a small cost but a saving in staff time and resolved some issues with banking cash.
- 13.4 Ms B Anley enquired if there was a significant cost in supporting staff with getting used to new systems.
- 13.5 The Head of ICU/ICT advised that there had originally been six implementation support officers, this had been reduced to three in September and would be kept under review. This was part of the capital expenditure and a small contingency had been set aside.
- 13.6 The Director of Business Support reported that DfC had confirmed cover for existing contractual commitments, including e3 and the training required.
- 13.7 Members noted the Report.

14 FINANCE REPORTS

**14.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO BSC.11.05.24
MARCH 2024**

- 14.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report detailing provisional outturn results to 31 March 2024.

- 14.3 Miss L Wilson noted that the underspend had changed from figures previously provided to the Board and enquired if this was likely to change again before being finalised.
- 14.4 The Finance Manager advised that over-projected staff and utility costs had contributed to the variance in the underspend, along with significantly lower PFI costs due to a change in accounting treatment. There may be some further small changes dependent on audit's review.
- 14.5 Ms B Anley commented that it was a shame to see the reduction in the marketing budget due to the financial constraints and hoped that this situation would improve.
- 14.6 Members noted the Report.
- 14.7 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO 31 MARCH 2024 BSC.12.05.24**
- 14.8 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report advising of expenditure for the year ended 31 March 2024.
- 14.9 Councillor M McRandal thanked the Finance Manager for two comprehensive reports and enquired regarding the health and safety projects.
- 14.10 The Assets Manager reported that the health and safety projects had included new fire alarm systems for Antrim Library and Ballymena Regional Admin Centre, replacing the roof and revamping the interior at Creggan Library while repairing damage due to anti-social behaviour and a new roof and insulation at Ballynahinch Library.
- 14.11 The Director of Business Support cautioned that the title health and safety project could be misleading, if a project had an element of health and safety this helped prioritise it and secure funding.
- 14.12 The Chief Executive advised that these projects were designed to address a health and safety issue and add in value e.g. replacing carpets that have been damaged by a leaking roof.
- 14.13 Ms B Anley reported she had been to see Creggan Library and enquired if there had been any progress regarding the colours of external render for Killyleagh Library.
- 14.14 The Assets Manager reported that the builders were proceeding with the colours which had been agreed with planners for Killyleagh Library as if these were changed there would be delays and additional costs.
- 14.15 The Chief Executive advised that there had been engagement with the community in Killyleagh, their input had been taken on board, the colour

scheme for the library had been agreed as part of the planning process and Libraries NI were required to adhere to that. To change colours at this stage that involving re-applying to planning and incur delays and additional costs.

- 14.16 Ms B Anley reported that at the Service Committee on 16 May 2024 the Director of Library Services had advised that Libraries NI would engage with the Hans Sloan Centre regarding the colours of Killyleagh Library and requested that the Assets Manager discuss this with the Director of Library and Service and update her.
- 14.17 The Assets Manager confirmed that he would contact the Director of Library Services.
- 14.18 Members noted the Report.
- 14.19 Miss L Wilson thanked staff for the reports and all the work that lies behind them.

**15 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.13.05.24
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 12 March 2024 to 17 May 2024.
- 15.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if Libraries NI try to use electronic mail rather than sending physical letters when communicating with customers.
- 15.3 The Finance Manager advised that electronic mail is used whenever possible and there had been a number of exercises to gather email addresses. With regard to microfilm the Heritage Team felt that this was a very robust method to maintain newspaper records.
- 15.4 The Director of Business Support reported that PRONI favoured solid media e.g. microfilm and had advised that electronic media had its problems and can be subject to degradation.
- 15.5 Councillor J Gilmour commented that unlike a physical record, online records can be moved and become unavailable.
- 15.6 Members noted the Report.

16 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO APRIL 2024 BSC.14.05.24

- 16.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report advising that the sickness absence level for the 12 months up to 30 April 2024 was 12.96 days (FTE equivalent), sickness absence rates had increased by 2.05% from the March 2024 position. 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. The Head of HR and Deputy Head of Service had met with managers to discuss how they could work together to improve the rate of sickness absence, the Health and Wellbeing Team would roll out sickness absence training in September and three places had been secured on LRA Line Management training.

- 16.2 Councillor M McRandal commented that it was clear there was a lot of focus on tackling this significant problem and enquired if the recent upturn was a blip given that there had been a downturn since summer 2023. Councillor M McRandal noted that some long-term absences were classified as “under review by management.”
- 16.3 The Head of HR advised that long term absences were considered on a case-by-case basis and it was appropriate for some long term sickness absences to be monitored and reviewed by management e. g. when an employee is undergoing treatment for cancer.
- 16.4 Miss L Wilson noted the emphasis on engagement and positivity and enquired if there was a clear pathway for ill health retirements and resignations, especially around mental health.
- 16.5 The Head of Human Resources advised that Management wouldn't want staff to feel they have to resign due to their health and sickness absence was addressed on a case-by-case basis. Staff who are off with work related stress are engaged with and occupational health advice is followed.
- 16.6 Ms B Anley enquired if there was benchmarking material from similar organisations regarding the profile of sickness absence and if this could be shared with the Committee.
- 16.7 The Head of Human Resources advised that the Health and Wellbeing Officer attended a forum with other similar organisations, could access benchmarking information and this would be shared with the Committee.
- 16.8 Members noted the Report.

**17 PROMPT PAYMENT TARGET AND
 PERFORMANCE 2023/24**

BSC.15.05.24

- 17.1 The Finance Manager presented the Prompt Payment Target and Performance 2023/24 paper, updating Members on performance against the Prompt Payment of Invoices Key Performance Indicator for 2023/24. The 30-day and 10-day results had been impacted as new procurement and finance systems bedded in following go-live on 01 April 2023.
- 17.2 Members noted the Report.

18 DRAFT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

BSC.16.05.24

- 18.1 The Finance Manager presented the 2023/24 draft annual accounts advising that they would be submitted to the Audit and Risk Committee in October for consideration, to the Northern Ireland Audit Office for detailed audit and to the Board.
- 18.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if the pension figures related to people who had retired early or the scheme itself.
- 18.3 The Finance Manager advised that the pension figures were Libraries NI's total pension liability and related to the scheme itself including those who had taken early retirement.

19 USE OF THE COMMON SEAL

- 19.1 The Chairperson drew attention to 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 March 2024 to May 2024.
- 19.2 Members noted the Report.

20 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

- 20.1 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 held on Thursday 26 September 2024 at 10:30am.

20 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 20.1 The meeting ended at 12:26 pm.
- 20.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting with the following exceptions:-
- Councillor M McRandal joined the meeting at 10:33am
 - The Chief Executive left the meeting at 10:40am and returned at 10:44am.

Signed Julie Gilmore

Dated 26/09/2024