

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of the Board Planning Meeting held in Lisburn City Library and by remote video link (Zoom) on Thursday 12 September 2024 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

(IP) Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
(VL) Councillor Julie Gilmour	Vice Chairperson
(IP) Mr Adrian Driscoll	
(IP) Councillor Rosie Kinnear	
(IP) Councillor Roisin Lynch	
(VL) Councillor Andrew McAuley	
(IP) Ms Ursula O'Hare	
(IP) Ms Wendy Osborne OBE	
(IP) Mr John Peto	
(IP) Councillor Gareth Sharvin	
(IP) Miss Linda Wilson	

IN ATTENDANCE

(IP) Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
(IP) Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
(IP) Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
(IP) Ms Kim Keys	Deputy Head of Service
(IP) Ms Julie Reid	Deputy Head of Service
(IP) Ms Sue Williamson MBE	President, CILIP UK
(IP) Mr Iain Greenway	Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities

Note: IP denotes 'in-person' attendance, VL denotes 'virtual' attendance

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Councillor Alistair Cathcart	
Councillor Martin McRandal	
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service

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. No interests were declared.

Welcome and Introductions

- 3.1 The Chairperson welcomed Board Members and staff to the meeting. She particularly welcomed Ms S Williamson, President of The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and Mr I Greenway, Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities (DfC).
- 3.2 She reminded Members that the focus of the planning day was to allow the Board an opportunity to hear of strategic perspectives in the library world from Ms S Williamson, MBE and an update from Mr I Greenway on the development of an updated new Public Library Policy for Northern Ireland. Both of these items would provide an important context for the discussion on the draft Corporate Plan 2025 – 30.

Presentations

- 3.3 Ms S Williamson, President of The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) gave a presentation entitled 'We Live in Interesting Times'. She provided Members with an overview of her career to date and her route into leadership and strategic roles in the library and information profession. Ms Williamson outlined how public libraries in the United Kingdom (UK) are governed and funded. Ms Williamson also referred to various reports on library services and in particular 'An Independent Review of Public Libraries' (2024) by Baroness Sanderson which states *'It is a fact, largely unrecognised, that libraries help meet a range of government objectives spanning several different departments. In time it would be hoped that an important loop can be closed, whereby libraries are able to attract sustainable funding from those departments which benefit from their work'*.
- 3.4 Ms Williamson drew attention to the importance of libraries and the services they provide in communities and how they feed into the new Labour Governments' five declared missions of working towards clean energy, to achieve the highest G7 growth in the economy, to safeguard the future of the NHS, to provide opportunity for all and to deliver safer streets. She then drew attention to CILIP's horizon scanning report and toolkit 'Future Libraries' (2024) which aims to 'challenge and engage librarians and library leaders to re-imagine libraries in a world of climate change, population shift and digital advancement'. Members were informed of CILIP's 'Welcome to Libraries' Induction pack for new staff and volunteers joining the library service and she reported on the professional development opportunities available through CILIP. She reiterated the importance of developing staff and highlighted that 'leaders of the future are amongst current staff'.
- 3.5 Ms Williamson discussed the unique structure of Libraries NI compared to how libraries are organised and funded in the UK. She stressed the importance of cross sectoral partnership working and the need to continue to progress the work on a public library strategy for Northern Ireland. She added that the British Library was keen to discuss networking opportunities with Libraries NI in relation to the Business and IP Centre Network.

- 3.6 The Chairperson thanked Ms Williamson for her interesting and informative presentation.
- 3.7 Mr I Greenway, Director, Culture Division, Department for Communities (DfC) then updated Members on the development of a refreshed new Public Library Policy for Northern Ireland. He provided the background to the development of a 'Policy Branch' in DfC which is taking forward the new policy development work. He reported that on 3 July 2024 the DfC Minister, Mr G Lyons made an announcement to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 'Heritage, Culture and Creativity, a Strategic Approach to Protect, Support and celebrate our Culture, Heritage and the Arts'. He added that that this strategic approach would include the review of policies on public libraries and museums both of which are currently out of date. He explained that the new programme will deliver separate policies for heritage, arts, museums and public libraries but given that some themes are common across all four Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs), DfC officials would prepare a single action plan for all four documents. He added that it was anticipated that the public consultation on the new public library strategy would commence next year.
- 3.8 Mr Greenway reminded Members that the Northern Ireland Executive had published the agreed draft Programme for Government 2024 – 2027; 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' on 9 September 2024. This document outlined nine priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland. Mr Greenway then referred to the economic outlook and likely funding position for the next few years noting that it was anticipated that no substantial increases in funding would be available from Westminster. He added that it was understood that next year's funding would be allocated on a one year basis but that it was hoped that a longer term funding profile e.g. two to three years could then be established.
- 3.9 Members discussed the historic underfunding of the library service over recent years and the Director of Business Support reminded Members that the current budget allocation did not include sufficient funding to meet the bookstock requirement.
- 3.10 The Chairperson thanked Mr Greenway for the update on the progress of the new Public Library Policy.

Discussion

- 3.11 Mrs W Osborne thanked Ms Williamson and Mr Greenway for their excellent presentations. She stated that both presentations had clearly identified Libraries NI as owning a 'core' function which should be provided for the betterment of the people of Northern Ireland. She said that she would prefer if the approach to the new Public Library Policy had been taken separately as she felt that libraries had important differentials which the other three ALBs may not provide. She said that although many community buildings and spaces existed for the people of Northern Ireland, Libraries NI were the only providers of a trusted and neutral space. She added that some strategic issues still need to be resolved in order that a creative and cohesive library policy can be developed.

- 3.12 Councillor G Sharvin stated that the presentations had provided Members with lots to think about. He said that the challenges which existed are not unique to Libraries NI. He noted that at present Libraries NI receive an annual budget which makes it more difficult when planning. Councillor Sharvin asked if discussions regarding funding for next year were being discussed by the Department. Mr Greenway confirmed that a budget exercise for next year was currently taking place. He said that it was likely that next year would be a single year budget with a longer term funding allocation (2 years) to follow. Mr Greenway stated that there may be a 3 or 4% cut next year per department which equates to the loss of a significant amount of spending power.
- 3.13 Ms L Wilson stated her concern that if the four policies were taken together the distinct role that libraries play would be hidden. She re-iterated Mrs Osborne's statement in relation to the distinct role of libraries and how important libraries are in the community. She asked that the important and distinct role of libraries is noted. Mr Greenway responded that he would take all of the above points made by Members on Board.
- 3.14 The Chief Executive thanked Ms Williamson for her insight into the role of libraries and the developments which are taking place relating to libraries in other areas of the United Kingdom. He added that Mr Greenway's presentation provided an insight into the Department's role in producing a new Public Library Policy for Northern Ireland which he found encouraging and informative. He added that the development of a new Public Library Policy and Libraries NI Corporate Plan 2025 - 30 was an opportune time to look at the current library estate and budget allocation and move to a more strategic approach to the development and provision of the service.
- 3.15 The Chief Executive then drew attention to the draft Libraries NI Corporate Plan 2025 – 30 and took the opportunity to thank the members of the Corporate Plan Working Group (Mr S Beattie, Ms C Beatty, Ms K Keys, Mr T Neeson, Ms H Poston and Mr G Beattie) who had worked diligently over the past year to prepare the draft which is presented for discussion. He confirmed that the draft Plan had been shared with Mr Greenway and colleagues in DfC.
- 3.16 Members discussed the draft Corporate Plan in detail and a number of comments / suggestions were noted. The Chief Executive agreed to take comments on board and would take them forward with the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Plan Working Group who would be tasked with discussing how best they could be incorporated into the next iteration of the document which would be available for Board Members at a future Board Meeting. A summary of key points highlighted during the discussion is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.17 In response to a question regarding the new Public Library Policy, the Chief Executive confirmed that he would be in discussions with the Department regarding their timetable for completion and going out to public consultation on the document and that a copy of the new policy, when complete would be available for Members.

Concluding Remarks

- 3.18 The Chairperson thanked everyone for their contributions and suggested that Board Members feed back to the Chief Executive any further suggestions they may have regarding the draft Corporate Plan with a view to having a further discussion of the document at the October Board Meeting.

4. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 4.1 The Chairperson referred to previous discussions regarding venues for forthcoming Board Meetings. She reminded Members that it had been intended to hold the Board Planning Day meeting in Omagh Library but for logistical reasons the venue had been changed to Lisburn City Library. She added that she was still keen to hold a Board Meeting at a venue other than Lisburn City Library and confirmed the arrangements for forthcoming meetings as follows:

17 October 2024, 10.30 am, Lisburn City Library

12 December 2024, 10.30 am, Lisburn City Library

13 February 2025, 10.30 am Antrim or Omagh library

5. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 5.1 The meeting ended at 2:12 pm.
- 5.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:

Mr I Greenway left at 1:40 pm

Signed:


Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

17 October 2024

Libraries NI Board Planning Day

Summary of Comments on Draft Corporate Plan

General points:

- Generally good content but too generic in places
- Needs to be shorter and pithier
- It would be good if we could better reflect the passion for the library service through the document
- Board members would like to see working in partnership amplified / having a higher profile in the document
- The concept of libraries as a gateway i.e. a gateway to health, to education, to information et cetera, came through as a theme or concept
- It would be helpful to draw into our corporate plan some of the themes and concepts captured through the Baroness Sanderson Report
- More of our 'user' voice throughout (voices of passion)
- More alignment to new PfG and the axis of People Places and Partnerships
- More visual and info graphics

Vision mission and values

Generally content with the 'Vision', one suggestion to consider adding the word positive so that the Vision would now read:

'a relevant, accessible and inclusive library service making a positive difference to the lives of people and communities'

Followed by discussion around how do we measure making a positive difference?

The Mission Statement

- It was felt that the Mission Statement required further work
- Narrowing of Mission Statement
- There was a sense that it needed to better reflect the core value and added value of the library service and this is something to reflect on

- Include some higher level statements on what a library service is - perhaps something along the acronym ERIC – education, recreation, information and culture.

Some of the questions posed where along the lines of:

- What is our purpose?
- What is our unique selling point (USP)?
- Need to clarify the unique offering of LNI in the value chain
- 'Less is more'
- Distinguish what our outputs are/what our outcomes are and what the impacts of those outcomes are
- Focus on, reflect on and identify those differences that only libraries make to people and communities
- Libraries provide unrivalled public access to IT and information – the library service is very much a gateway – could this concept be amplified.

Highlights, Achievements and Reflections section

- Signposting to other documents (e.g. Annual Report and Accounts) and don't replicate in the Corporate Plan.
- Bring the infographic on page 11 forward to a more prominent position in the document.
- Maintaining a forward like looking aspect is more important than a retrospective.
- The benefit of Libraries NI as a single library authority i.e. the structural advantages could be highlighted in the document.
- Consider using the period product initiative as a case study.

Our Strategic Context

- There should be more context around what we do as a library service – the environment, artificial intelligence, bigger strategic picture
- There was a sense of a real opportunity to align ourselves to the new DfC Library Policy and find a way forward that will allow for an investment programme that leads to tangible improvements that are doable
- Delaying the final signing/publication of the Libraries NI plan to sequence with the new DfC policy would make sense.

Strategic goals, priorities and outcomes section

- There is a need to sharpen the outcome statements with more specific reference to libraries and what libraries do
- Consider a separate strategic goal developed around 'early years'.

Delivering our Corporate Plan – foundations for success section

No specific comments.

Making a difference – measuring performance section

- Set out what we will measure to demonstrate how we make a difference
- Consider the audiences we are aiming at.
- More measurable targets linking them to existing data (where possible).