

## **LIBRARIES NI**

### **The Northern Ireland Library Authority**

Minutes of a meeting of the Services Committee held remotely via Zoom  
on Thursday, 20 January 2022 at 10:30am

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor Cathal Mallaghan	Chairperson
Professor Bernard Cullen	
Councillor Glenn Finlay	
Councillor Julie Gilmour	
Ms Deirdre Kenny	
Councillor Donal Lyons	
Mr John Peto	Vice-Chairperson
Dr Margaret Ward	

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Ms Trisha Ward	Director of Library Services
Ms Margaret Bell	Head of Service
Ms Adrienne Adair	Head of Service
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications
Mr Sean Beattie	Deputy Head of Service
Ms Julie Reid	Deputy Head of Service
Mr Michael Lynn	Service Development Manager
Ms Maura Craig	Area Manager
Mr Conor McKenna	Area Manager
Mr Michael Fry	District Manager
Ms Allison Milligan	District Manager
Ms Angela Hodkinson	Boardroom Apprentice
Ms Mary McGrady	Minutes

In the absence of the Committee Chairperson who was delayed, the Vice-Chairperson Mr J Peto chaired the meeting and welcomed Members and staff.

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE**

1.1 An apology was received from Mr H Reid.

## **2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

- 2.1 The Chairperson reminded Members of their obligation to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict 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.01.01.22**

- 4.1 The Director of Library Services referred to the report that had been circulated and provided an update on developments as a result of COVID restrictions due to the increase in transmission of the Omicron variant. She reported that the messaging about mask wearing had been reinforced in libraries and social distancing signage and measures had been reinstated. Mobile library services have been withdrawn and replaced with BookBox and all programming has moved to online only for January. The Committee noted that measures would be kept under review.
- 4.2 Ms T Ward referred to the annual review of fees and charges and reported that this year, the Senior Management Team had agreed the recommendation that fees and charges remain appropriate and continue to allow services to be affordable and accessible. Therefore, with the exception of charges for room hire, which will be considered by Services Committee later on the agenda, no other changes have been recommended. Services Committee members noted the fees and charges that were appended to the report.
- 4.3 The Director of Library Services reminded the Committee that, as reported at the Board, a number of libraries were required to close at short notice recently on an ad hoc basis because of staff shortages. She reported that in order to minimise ad hoc closures, where these staffing issues were seen as longer term, a decision had been made to reduce opening hours on a temporary basis. Services Committee noted that Lurgan, Grove and Kilkeel libraries were currently closed on late nights.
- 4.4 Ms T Ward then highlighted the following:
- Fivemiletown Library had closed for refurbishment on 23 December 2021 with reopening planned for February 2023
  - Warrenpoint Library would close on 31 January 2022 for a few weeks to facilitate work on the toilets
  - Downpatrick Library would close on 7 February 2022 for a few months to facilitate work on heating and lighting systems

- Limavady Library would close at the end of February 2022 until June 2022 to facilitate work on the heating and lighting systems
- Portstewart Library had reopened in new rented premises at Station Road, Portstewart, on 11 January 2022
- The Armagh Heritage Service, which had relocated to Armagh Regional Administrative Centre, would re-open in February 2022. A presentation on general plans for development within the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area would be brought to the March meeting of the Committee.

4.5 Ms T Ward went on to provide an update on the implementation of the organisational structure. She informed the Committee that before Christmas, recruitment had been completed at Senior Administrative Officer grade and that consultation would now commence on the implementation of posts at Administrative Officer grade. She referred Members to an overview of the management structure that was appended to the report and added that when the process had been completed staff would be invited to attend a Committee meeting. It was noted that a further presentation on the organisation structure would be presented at the February Board Meeting.

4.6 The Director of Library Services informed the Committee that Libraries NI had negotiated a licensing agreement to provide access to British Standards for all Libraries NI customers, regardless of their location. She reported that British Standards were an important resource and one that was previously available through the library service in Northern Ireland although only accessible in Belfast Central Library. Access to the service had been discontinued some years ago for a number of reasons, including budgetary pressures and lack of demand for a service which was only available in one library. In response to a question from Councillor G Finlay, the Director of Library Services confirmed that officers would work with a number of organisations to promote this new service which would be available from next week and that the Marketing Team would also be promoting this initiative as widely as possible.

4.7 Ms T Ward reported that on 21 December 2021, Libraries NI had reached the millionth eBook and eMagazine check out on the Overdrive/Libby app. This reflected the huge growth in eBooks since they were introduced in 2014 when there was an average 7,000 checkouts a month. She stated that whilst Libraries NI had not maintained the spike that was seen in the first lockdown in Spring 2020, when there were monthly checkouts of just over 200,000, the average, since libraries re-opened in May 2021, has been 88,000 (including the checkouts from the new BorrowBox app).

4.8 The Director of Library Services then referred to some forthcoming events and initiatives and gave an overview of 'Give it a Go', a combination of Festival of Learning and New Year New You which runs throughout January 2022 and Children's Mental Health Week which takes place on 7 – 13 February 2022. She also referred to a number of Residencies which were planned as part of the

Service Plan target to exploit collections and to encourage more participation. The Director of Library Services also drew attention to the IFLA World Library and Information Congress to be held on 26 – 29 July 2022.

- 4.9 Ms T Ward gave an overview of the following meetings she and/or the Heads of Service had attended:
- Carnegie Engaging Libraries Steering Group, 18 November 2021
  - Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), 24 November 2021
  - Libraries Connected, 1 December 2021
  - Department for Communities (DfC), 8 December 2021 and 10 January 2022.
- 4.10 The Director of Library Services reported that copies of a children's book 'Our Wee Place', commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office, and created to "sensitively reflect" on the experience of growing up in Northern Ireland had been given to Libraries NI. The author, Sophie Kirtley, and illustrator, Ellan Rankin, are both from Northern Ireland.
- 4.11 Ms T Ward informed the Committee that two members of staff had received British Empire Medals in the New Year Honours list. Mr E Johnston, Branch Library Manager in Omagh Library had received his honour for services to libraries and Ms F Hunter, Cleaner in Irvinestown Library, had received an honour for services to the Irvinestown community. She also reported that Mr R Armstrong, funder of the Libraries NI Storyteller in Residence, had been awarded an MBE.
- 4.12 The Services Committee discussed various elements of the Director's Business and thanked the Director of Library Services for the report.

## **5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2021 SC.02.01.22**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Mrs D Kenny, seconded by Dr M Ward, the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **6. MATTERS ARISING**

- 6.1 There were no matters arising.

## **7. REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES COMMITTEE 2021/22 SC.03.01.22**

- 7.1 The Vice-Chairperson introduced the Committee Effectiveness and Compliance Review papers that had been circulated including the draft Scheme of Delegation for Services Committee. The Director of Library Services spoke to the draft Scheme of Delegation for Services Committee and confirmed there were no proposed changes.

- 7.2 On a proposal by Councillor G Finlay, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Committee agreed to recommend approval of the Scheme of Delegation to the Board.
- 7.3 The Committee considered the checklist for the Committee Effectiveness Review in detail. The completed checklist appears at Appendix One.
- 7.4 A discussion followed and the responses provided on the 2020/21 review were agreed with the following additions:
- question 2 – to take on board the Department’s recent strategy document ‘Building Inclusive Communities 2020 – 2025’ and other forthcoming strategy documents in relation to social inclusion and anti-poverty
  - question 8 – the Director of Library Services to continue to seek speakers from other library organisations to present at Committee meetings.

**8. SCHEME OF CHARGES FOR ROOM HIRE SC.04.01.22**

- 8.1 Mrs D Kenny and Councillor D Lyons withdrew for this item.
- 8.2 The Head of Service, Mrs M Bell, presented the Scheme of Charges for Room Hire which sets out the proposed charges for the booking of rooms in libraries. She referenced the range of users of the rooms, including local community groups and public sector organisations. She noted that whilst there was limited take up of room bookings, there had been a recent request from Ms C Hanna MP to hire a room in Finaghy Library to hold constituency surgeries. She advised that the Senior Management Team had granted approval for this request.
- 8.3 She explained the rationale for the changes and the factors affecting charges. It was noted that Committee and Board approval of the proposed changes is subject to ratification and further approval by the Department for Communities (DfC) prior to implementation.
- 8.4 The Head of Service outlined the principles that influence charges for room hire and the issues that have arisen since the scheme was originally agreed in 2009 when Libraries NI was established. She also explained the rationale for each of the recommendations to address the identified issues. Members noted that although no additional income would be received from the implementation of the new charging structure, savings would be made in terms of staff time in administering the new charging structure.
- 8.5 Following discussion of the issues identified in providing access to equipment such as flipcharts or kitchen facilities it was agreed that where required flipcharts and pens would be provided and flasks containing hot water for tea/coffee would also be provided.

8.6 On a proposal by Dr M Ward, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Scheme of Charges for Room Hire to the Board.

8.7 Mrs D Kenny and Councillor D Lyons re-joined the meeting.

**9. REVIEW OF FILMING POLICY SC.05.01.22**

9.1 Mr G Beattie, Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications, introduced the Filming Policy which was presented to the Committee in line with the policy review cycle.

9.2 Members noted that the policy remained largely unchanged except for a minor amendment which provided clarification around charging for filming in a library location.

9.3 On a proposal by Councillor G Finlay, seconded by Mrs D Kenny, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Filming Policy to the Board.

**10. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION POLICY SC.06.01.22**

10.1 Mr M Lynn, Service Development Manager, introduced the Community Information Policy which had been presented to the Committee in line with the policy review cycle. He informed Members that the purpose of the policy was to ensure a consistent approach to community information had been adopted by Libraries NI, and that the organisation conforms to legislative requirements while meeting the needs of its customers.

10.2 Mr M Lynn highlighted minor amendments which had been made to the Policy to reflect changes to the organisational structure and some additional clarification on displaying and disseminating information.

10.3 On a proposal by Dr M Ward, seconded by Councillor G Finlay, the Services Committee agreed to recommend the approval of the Community Information Policy to the Board.

**11. MEMBERSHIP DRIVE SC.07.01.22**

11.1 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications, Mr G Beattie, presented the Membership Drive report which outlined the actions both taken and planned to promote library membership and to increase awareness of library services. He highlighted the significant decline in active library members as a result of the pandemic.

- 11.2 Mr G Beattie provided an overview of the activity carried out by the marketing team and reflected on the two main initiatives that had already taken place i.e. Summer Reading Challenge (SRC) and Book Week NI. He reported that promotional emails had been sent to primary schools and that the SRC had been promoted in the local press and via social media. He also highlighted the success of BookWeek NI which in partnership with the BBC provided opportunities for promotion of events on a range of media (TV, radio and online). It was noted that the combined social media reach and engagement figures for the partnership were not yet finalised but for Libraries NI the total reach/impression count was 496,930 which is up 83% from the last comparable year in 2019.
- 11.3 The Head of Strategic Marketing and Communications then reported on the advertising campaign, noting that the procurement which had started in May had completed in mid-November 2021. He advised that work had commenced with the successful agency and media plans were progressing for regional adshels, radio and social media advertising. Mr G Beattie also described current and forthcoming events such as the 'Give it a Go' initiative running throughout January, a 'Big Bedtime Read' video which is being developed and 'Family Days' which would take place in the spring in 12 different locations. He added that it was hoped to organise a literacy month during February/March to promote reading and library stock.
- 11.4 Mr G Beattie drew attention to the importance of stakeholder engagement and confirmed that training had been delivered to key local managers on how to make the best use of engagement opportunities.
- 11.5 In conclusion, Mr G Beattie noted that although the number of active and new members had increased, encouraging members of the public to return to library events was proving challenging given the ongoing COVID restrictions. He added that it was hoped that going forward as the restrictions eased and normal programming returned to libraries, footfall would increase.
- 11.6 The Services Committee thanked Mr Beattie for an encouraging report and acknowledged the challenging environment in which Libraries NI is currently operating due to COVID-19.

## **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, 24 March 2022 at 10:30am.

**14. MEMBERS' ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

14.1 The meeting ended at 11:52am.

14.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:

- Ms A Adair joined the meeting at 11:15am
- Councillor C Mallaghan joined the meeting at 11:44am.

Signed: Councillor Cathal Mallaghan

Date: 24 March 2022



## Board and Committee Effectiveness Review 2021/22

		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 would like reports and presentations on this to continue to Services Committee.  The Committee noted there will be a need for further work to better understand the views of the public, service users, staff and other stakeholders in the context of a post COVID-19 world and the development of a new public library strategy by DfC.
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?	√			

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
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"> <li>• keeping us abreast of relevant developments both in Libraries NI and the broader library world?</li> <li>• setting key targets?</li> <li>• monitoring performance?</li> <li>• financial reporting and monitoring?</li> <li>• determining value for money?</li> <li>• gaining assurance?</li> </ul>	√			Members valued the opportunity to receive a presentation from a speaker from another library organisation. The Director of Library Services to continue to engage speakers from other organisations.
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?	√			
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?	√			

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
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?	√			
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?	√			
21.	Are there clear channels of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• between the Committees and the Board?</li> <li>• between the Board and stakeholders?</li> <li>• between the Board/Committees and officers?</li> </ul>	√			

		Yes	No	Partly	Comments/Action Points
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 when it is appropriate to meet physically again.
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?	√			