

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 30 November 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)
(IP) Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
(VL) Councillor Peter Johnston	
(VL) Professor Bernard Cullen	
(VL) Councillor Martin McRandal	

IN ATTENDANCE

(IP) Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
(IP) Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
(VL) Mr Desi Curry	Head of ICU/ICT
(VL) Mrs Rita McNamee	Finance Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Ms Finola Guinnane
Mr Tim Neeson
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry

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 welcomed Councillor Martin McRandal as a new temporary member of the Business Support Committee and thanked him for volunteering to support committee membership.

3.2 The Chairperson advised that the issue of committee membership in general would be dealt with under Director's Business.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.11.23

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the issue of committee membership was impacting the Business Support Committee and thanked Councillor McRandal for volunteering as a temporary member of the Committee. While DfC were in the process of beginning the competition to appoint new Board Members, it was recognised that it may be some time before the process concluded. In the meantime, the roles of Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson needed to be formalised and established. Based on the rotation policy the next Chairperson should be a non-elected member and the Vice Chairperson should be an elected member. The Committee had the option of continuing with Miss L Wilson as Vice Chairperson acting as Chairperson until March 2024 or alternatively the Committee could proceed with a proposal to elect Miss L Wilson as Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson from the elected Members, Councillor P Johnston being the only eligible elected Member.
- 4.2 Miss L Wilson enquired who, in the absence of a vice-chairperson, would chair a Committee meeting if she wasn't available and advised that she would be happy to proceed as the Board wished.
- 4.3 The Director of Business Support advised that if Miss L Wilson wasn't available the Chairperson of the Board could be called upon to stand in.
- 4.4 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, Miss L Wilson was nominated for the position of Chairperson and Councillor P Johnston was nominated for the position of Vice Chairperson.
- 4.5 Miss L Wilson accepted the post of Chairperson.
- 4.6 Councillor P Johnston accepted the post of Vice Chairperson.
- 4.7 The Director of Business Support reported that the 2023/24 NJC Pay Settlement had been agreed nationally; all employees below salary scale point 43 would receive an increase of £1925. This resulted in staff on the bottom of the payscale receiving a 22% increase over the last two year. Libraries NI required departmental approval to apply this increase, the requisite business case had been submitted to DfC and approval was awaited.
- 4.8 The Director of Business Support advised that the Assets Department had carried out a review and confirmed that there were no buildings in the library estate with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC).

- 5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 MAY 2023 BSC.02.11.23**
- 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 25 May 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 06 July 2023.
- 6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MAY 2023 BSC.03.11.23**
- 6.1 The Director of Business Support reported that one of the matters arising was Committee Membership which had been addressed under Director's Business.
- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that in response to the Committee's request a range of sickness absence statistics for April 2022 and April 2023 had been prepared and were appended to the Matters Arising paper.
- 7 MATTERS TO NOTE FROM POSTPONED SEPTEMBER 2023 MEETING BSC.04.11.23**
- 7.1 Miss L Wilson advised that as there were insufficient members available to form a quorum the September Business Support Committee meeting had been postponed. Items requiring the Committee's consideration and approval had been brought forward to the November 2023 meeting. The majority of the September 2023 papers were superseded by the most recent papers. The September 2023 papers were still available on the Extranet for information.
- 8 COMMITTEE/BOARD EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2023 BSC.05.11.23**
- 8.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the Committee was required to review its effectiveness annually, including the continued relevance of the Scheme of Delegation. It was proposed that the process should commence immediately with a view to completing it at the next Committee meeting on 25 January 2024
- 8.2 The Chairperson advised that the review should reflect the Committee's reduced membership but that despite this it remained effective.
- 8.3 Mrs W Osborne commented that the impact of the financial constraints on Libraries NI Board should also be highlighted.
- 8.4 The Chairperson advised that in the interim Members should direct any comments, responses or questions directly to the Director of Business Support who would collate responses for further discussion at the Committee's January 2024 meeting

8.5 Members agreed to initiate the process immediately.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY (REVIEW) BSC.06.11.23

9.1 The Director of Business Support advised that in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period the contents and intent of the Libraries NI Health and Safety Policy has been reviewed, there are no substantive revisions proposed other than to update relevant dates and titles/terminology.

9.2 Councillor P Johnston enquired regarding the frequency of accidents at work in Libraries N.

9.3 The Director of Business Support advised that Item 13 Health and Safety Report for 2022-23 would provide this information.

9.4 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor P Johnston, the Health and Safety Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

10 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY (REVIEW) BSC.07.11.23

10.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Environmental Policy, advised that in keeping with best practice and the scheduled review period the contents and intent of the Policy has been reviewed, there are no substantive revisions proposed other than to update relevant dates and titles/terminology.

10.2 The Chairperson commented that the policy appeared quite general and enquired where specific actions and practical steps would be detailed.

10.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the policy provided a high-level framework which sets the direction/ethos of the Organisation. The specific actions and practical steps to implementation were set out in a range of related strategy and policy documents such as the Assets Management Strategic Plans and Procedures and Procurement Policy.

10.4 Professor B Cullen commented that there would be benefit in having a single report detailing the actions taken in support of this policy and of Libraries NI's response to the environmental crisis. This could then be used to inform any relevant public facing reports which would enhance the organisations reputation and public relations.

10.5 Councillor P Johnston welcomed the Policy as an overarching guide but cautioned that implementing the policy carried a risk of becoming resource intensive.

- 10.6 The Chief Executive advised that the Policy should be viewed as a statement of intent/commitment in this area, setting out guiding principles. Actions were reported in a number of ways and should be collated. This was a long-term piece of work and would require funding to plan ahead.
- 10.7 The Director of Business Support advised that he would progress work on a log of actions derived from implementing the Environmental Policy.
- 10.8 On a proposal by Councillor P Johnston, seconded by Mrs W Osborne the Environmental Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

11 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY POLICY (REVIEW) BSC.08.11.23

- 11.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the existing Equal Opportunities Policy had been in place since the establishment of Libraries NI, an internal audit review had recommended that it would be prudent to more clearly set out the policy position separately from the supporting procedures. A review had been carried out in consultation with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and relevant Trade Unions. A number of changes had been made to the structure of the policy, although the content and intent were largely unchanged.
- 11.2 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne the Equal Opportunity Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

12 LIBRARIES NI STATUTORY EQUALITY AND GOOD RELATIONS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 BSC.09.11.23

- 12.1 The Director of Business Support presented Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Report 2022/23 which demonstrated the progress made in 2022/23 in implementing the Libraries NI Equality Scheme commitments and Disability Action Plan. The report highlighted equality and good relations outcomes, impacts and good practice and progress on Equality Scheme commitments. The Equality Commission had been given a draft of the Report and been advised that it was subject to Business Support Committee and Board approval.
- 12.2 The Chairperson thanked the Director of Business Support for all the work in preparing the Report and requested that the impact of receiving a stock budget late be incorporated, as this impacts the less well off.
- 12.3 Mrs W Osborne enquired if the Equality Commission provide feedback on this report.

- 12.4 The Director of Business Support advised that he would incorporate the Chairperson's comments and confirmed that the Equality Commission normally provided constructive feedback in February/March of the year following submission.
- 12.5 The Chairperson enquired if the Committee were informed of this feedback or could the feedback be presented with the next year's Report.
- 12.6 The Director of Business Support advised that the feedback tended to be minor, while it had not previously been reported to the Committee, he would be happy to do this.
- 12.7 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Libraries NI Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Report 2022/23 was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**13 HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT FOR 2022/23 BSC.10.11.23
(INCLUDING PUBLIC AND EMPLOYERS
LIABILITY EXPERIENCE)**

- 13.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Health and Safety Report for 2022/23 providing the Committee with information on Health and Safety actions taken to date and a summary of the number, nature, severity, and impact of accidents occurring, and claims experienced between April 2022 and March 2023.
- 13.2 Councillor P Johnston enquired if the total potential claim value of £250,000 was typical and did settlements require Board approval.
- 13.3 The Director of Business Support advised that £250,000 was typical of the reserve held by Libraries NI. The Management Statement Financial Memorandum and Scheme of Delegation permitted the Chief Executive to settle claims up to £10,000 on his own authority and claims over £10,000 and up to £100,000 acting on legal advice, without a requirement to seek Board approval
- 13.4 The Chairperson enquired if decisions regarding settlement were driven by legal advice.
- 13.5 The Director of Business Support confirmed that such decisions were always based on legal advice.
- 13.6 Councillor M McRandal enquired if there were problem locations in respect of claims from members of the public and if financial constraints impacting the budget for maintenance resulted in increased risk.

13.7 The Director of Business Support reported that all accidents were investigated, all person injury claims were subject to a more intensive investigation. Geographically accidents were evenly distributed. While insufficient funding was a concern, the issue was not increased risk but the cumulative effect of under investment.

13.8 The Chief Executive advised that if there was learning as a result of investigations action would be implemented e.g. new paving was laid in response to reported slips and trips. The Risk Assessment process was relied on when considering these matters.

13.9 Members noted the Report.

**14 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN 2023-24 BSC.11.11.23
PROGRESS REPORT**

14.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Business Support Service Plan 2023/24 – Progress Report which detailed the progress to date in delivering on a range of targets as set out in Business Support Service Plan 2023/24. Individual actions and targets had been assigned a Red/Amber/Green status reflecting progress and taking account of the anticipated position in March 2024

14.2 Members noted the Report.

**15 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER 2023-24 BSC.12.11.23
– UPDATE REPORT**

15.1 The Director of Business Support presented the revised Business Support Risk Register 2023/24 which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and took account of mitigating actions taken and new or emerging risks which had been identified in the period from May 2023.

15.2 Professor B Cullen commented that the principal factor for the level of red was due to a lack of genuine partnership with our sponsoring department and questioned how to constructively and diplomatically communicate this. Libraries NI have discussed earned autonomy, have demonstrated time and again how we have earned autonomy, but this had not been progressed.

15.3 The Director of Business Support suggested that he and the Chief Executive could raise this through the Partnership meeting forum.

15.4 Mrs W Osborne advised that the Audit and Risk Committee had discussed this, there was no partnership agreement in place and the Management Statement was now out of date. There was a need to demonstrate the risk of not having earned autonomy clearly defined otherwise it was unlikely to be included in the Partnership Agreement.

15.5 The Chief Executive noted that it was important to keep the Risk Register up to date highlighting risks and recording governance role. He assured the Committee that Libraries NI would continue to raise these issues and engage with DfC to reinforce this message.

15.6 Members noted the Report.

**16 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME BSC.13.11.23
UPDATE REPORT NOVEMBER 2023**

16.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Information E3 Programme Update Report advising Members of progress made. All planned implementation work moving to the Public Sector Shared Network (PSSN) had been completed and a PSSN project evaluation report would be completed in December 2023. The overall e3 implementation plan remained on track and was now in the later stages of implementation.

16.2 Members noted the Report.

17 FINANCE REPORTS

**17.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITUE REPORT TO BSC.14.11.23
OCTOBER 2023**

17.1 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report to October 2023, detailing expenditure incurred to date. Assuming the financial controls remained in place and expenditure trends remained on course a breakeven position was projected by 31 March 2024.

17.2 Councillor M McRandal noted that other costs had doubled and enquired regarding this.

17.3 The Finance Manager advised that other costs included compensation arising from employment related matters and costs relating to grant aided programmes, which should be recovered.

17.4 The Chairperson enquired if Libraries NI had received any communication regarding revenue raising measures following the Secretary of State's recent comments.

17.5 The Chief Executive advised that Libraries NI were not generally viewed as a revenue generating organisation and had not been asked about revenue raising measure.

17.6 Members noted the Report.

- 17.7 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2023 BSC.15.11.23**
- 17.8 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report advising of expenditure to 31 October 2023.
- 17.9 Members noted the Report.
- 18 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.16.11.23 AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000**
- 18.1 Members noted the Report which indicated that there had been no procurement in the reporting period.
- 19 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2023 BSC.17.11.23**
- 19.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Sickness Absence Report advising that the sickness absence level for the 12 months up to 31 October 2023 was 14.00 days (FTE equivalent). The target set for 2023/24 was to maintain sickness absence (composite average FTE days lost) at or below 11.5 days by 31 March 2024. Long term absences continued to have a disproportionate impact and were the focus of current actions by the HR team and managers in conjunction with our Occupational Health provider.
- 19.2 Councillor M McRandal commented that it was worrying that long term sickness seemed to be increasing and enquired how this was being managed.
- 19.3 The Director of Business Support cautioned that the reporting format of a rolling 12 month period could be misleading, currently there were 28 staff on long term sickness absence. For staff with genuine long term medical conditions the mechanism was that they would be assessed by OH provider and a course of actions suitable to the individual would be identified, this may include adjustments, a phased return to work and occasionally retirement on medical grounds. Contact was maintained by managers to ensure staff continue to feel they belong to the Organisation; this process, procedure and the relationship between managers and staff members encouraged staff to return to work.
- 19.4 The Chief Executive noted that in April 2022 there were 32 staff long term sick, in April 2023 there were 32 staff long term sick, currently there were 28 staff long term sick. There were a range of approaches and strategies being applied and hopefully these would impact the figures.
- 19.5 Mrs W Osborne commented that sickness absence continued to be an issue, the trend was not shifting in spite of the work by staff and was unlikely to change before March 2024.
- 19.6 Members noted the Report.

20	REPORTS ON THE OUTCOME OF PROCUREMENT EXERCISES	
	i.Fivemiletown Library(Replacement Facility) Appointment of Main Contractor	BSC.18.11.23
	ii.Creggan Library (Replacement of Roof Structure) Appointment of Contractor	BSC.19.11.23
	iii.Various Locations (Health&Safety Remedial Works) Appointment of Professional Services Team(s)	BSC.20.11.23
	iv.Killyleagh Library Energy Invest to Save Project	BSC.21.11.23
	v.Ballymoney Library Energy Invest to Save Project	BSC.22.11.23
	vi.Bessbrook Library Energy Invest to Save Project	BSC.23.11.23

20.1 The Director of Business Support presented the suite of Reports advising on the outcomes of the procurement exercises.

20.2 Members noted the Reports.

21 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.24.11.23

21.1 The Chairperson drew the Committee’s attention to the Report on the Use of Common Seal, detailing the seven occasions on which the Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority had been applied between May 2023 and November 2023.

21.2 Members noted the Report.

22 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

22.1 There was no other notified business.

23 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

23.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be hold on Thursday 25 January 2024 at 10:30am.

24 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

24.1 The meeting ended at 12:30pm

24.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the following exceptions: -

- Professor B Cullen left at 11:55am

Signed

Inoffensiv

Dated

25 Jan 2024