

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library on
Thursday 25 April 2024 at 10:30 am

PRESENT

Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson
Councillor Julie Gilmour	Vice-Chairperson

Councillor Alistair Cathcart
Councillor Andrew McAuley
Councillor Martin McRandal
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE
Mr John Peto
Miss Linda Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
Ms Michelle Anderson	Head of Audit
Mr Michael Lynn	Service Development Manager–Collections (Item 11)
Mr Glenn Beattie	Head of Marketing (Item 11)

Note: All Members attended this meeting 'in-person'

1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

Ms Adrienne Adair	Director of Library Services
Ms Finola Guinnane	Boardroom Apprentice

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATION OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- 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 When the meeting went into Committee at paragraph 15 Councillor A Cathcart reminded Board members of his party's affiliation as a DUP Councillor and that his input to the discussion was as a Libraries NI Board member.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

- 3.1 The Chairperson reported that Councillor P Johnston had resigned from the Libraries NI Board on 29 February 2024 to take up a position as Special Advisor to the Minister for Communities. She confirmed that she had written to Councillor Johnston to congratulate him on his new appointment and to thank him for his contribution to the Libraries NI Board.
- 3.2 The Chairperson, reported that a meeting had taken place with DfC at the beginning of April to discuss the process for filling Board vacancies. The Department had confirmed that the vacancies would be advertised in May with interviews arranged for July 2024. She added that it was hoped that the new Board Members would be in place for the Board Planning Day on 12 September 2024. The Vice-Chairperson of the Board, Councillor J Gilmour suggested that following the completion of the recruitment process the Department should consider drawing up a 'Reserve List' of candidates for future reference.
- 3.3 Members were reminded that following discussion at the February Board Meeting regarding the size of the Libraries NI Board and the on-going quoracy challenges being experienced by the Committees, they were asked to volunteer to sit on additional Committees until the recruitment process for new Board members is complete. On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved the following appointments:
- Mrs W Osborne to the Services Committee
 - Councillor J Gilmour to the Business Support Committee
- 3.4 Miss L Wilson had volunteered to sit on the Services Committee and would liaise with the Chief Executive's Office regarding her availability on the dates of the Services Committee during 2024/25.
- 3.5 Following discussion on additional measures which could be implemented to address quoracy issues on Committees, on a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board 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 this would be noted in the minute accordingly and would be reported to the Board at its next meeting.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

- 4.1 The Chief Executive referred Members to the paper which had been circulated, drawing attention to the undernoted items:
- Revised Financial Allocations 2023/24
 - Stock Funding
 - Ministerial Visits

- Resourcing the Public Library Service 2024-25
 - Annual Business Plan 2024/25 / Corporate Plan 2025 – 30
 - Standard Opening Hours
 - PRONI 100 event
 - Libraries NI in Partnership with the Ulster Orchestra
 - BBC Comes to Town
 - Changing Attitudes to Ageing
 - Free Period Products (Universal Access) in Libraries in Partnership with The Executive Office
 - Belfast Learning Festival 2024
 - Assembly Questions
 - UK Covid-19 Public Inquiry: Module 7 Update
- 4.2 In response to a suggestion from Councillor A Cathcart it was agreed that a document containing charts which provided an analysis of funding and budgeting trends for the Libraries NI Resource Budget, book stock and staffing should be made available to Board Members on the Extranet.
- 4.3 Mr J Peto thanked Officers for the reports and commended the work of the Stock Team for their efforts to ensure the financial allocations recently received were managed effectively. He suggested that Appendix 2 of Chief Executive's Business: Resourcing the Public Library Service should be included in the induction information for new Board Members.
- 4.4 Members noted the report.
- 5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2024**
LNI 01.04.24
- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 8 February 2024 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.
- 6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2024**
LNI 02.04.24
- 6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated paper noting that an update would be provided on the following issues:
- Item 4.3: Chief Executive's Business
- 6.2 Members noted that this item had been completed and that three Board Members had responded to the e-mail from the Chief Executive asking for

volunteers to sit on additional Committees. The Board had approved the nominations at paragraph 3.3 above.

Item 7.2: Financial Allocation 2024/25: Update

- 6.3 The Chief Executive reported that the funding for the public library service had been raised informally with the DfC Minister on a recent visit and the Minister had indicated that he would be willing to meet with the Libraries NI Chairperson and the Chief Executive for a more detailed briefing. To date this meeting has not taken place and it was agreed that this item would remain as a 'Matters Arising'.

Item 9.4: Board Effectiveness Review 2023/24

- 6.4 This item has been completed. The response to Question 18 on the Effectiveness Review and draft Action Plan was amended as agreed by Members at the Board Meeting held on 8 February 2024.

Item 16.1: Any other Notified Business

- 6.5 This item was also completed. All Board Members have been advised that the date of the July Board meeting has been rescheduled to 27 June 2024.

7. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES (DfC) AND LIBRARIES NI LNI 03.04.24

- 7.1 The Chief Executive briefed the Board on the Partnership Agreement which sets out the partnership arrangements between Libraries NI and the Department for Communities (DfC). In particular it explains the overall governance framework within which Libraries NI operates, including the framework through which the necessary assurances are provided to stakeholders. The roles and responsibilities of partners within the overall governance framework are also outlined.
- 7.2 Members noted that the effectiveness of the partnership and the associated Engagement Plan would be reviewed each year by DfC and Libraries NI in order to assess whether the partnership is operating as intended and to identify any emerging issues/opportunities for enhancement. The Partnership Agreement will be reviewed formally at least once every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose and up to date in terms of current governance frameworks.
- 7.3 Following discussion of the document it was agreed that it should be reviewed within 12 months of it being signed by both parties to evaluate progress against the aspirations laid out within the Partnership Agreement. The Chief Executive suggested that the review of the Partnership Agreement could, in the future, be aligned to the Board Effectiveness Review process.
- 7.4 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor M McRandal Members approved the Partnership Agreement between the Department for Communities and Libraries NI.

8. REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 APRIL 2024

- 8.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne, provided an oral report of the Committee meeting which she had chaired on 24 April 2024. She confirmed that the formal minutes of the meeting would be available at the next Board Meeting to be held on 27 June 2024 and that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had recommended a number of items as detailed in the following paragraph for the Board's approval.
- 8.2 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor A Cathcart the Board approved and adopted the following:
- Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2024
 - Annual Board Assurance Statement 2023/24
 - Corporate Risk Register (March 2024)
 - Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan 2024/25
- 8.3 The Committee Chairperson also highlighted the following items that were presented at the meeting:
- prior to the Committee meeting, the annual bi-lateral meeting had taken place with the Head of Internal Audit to discuss risk, control and governance. The Head of Internal Audit had given the Committee her assurance on these matters and confirmed that there had been no impairment to the independence of Internal Audit and that appropriate resources and support were in place to facilitate Internal Audit to carry out its responsibilities
 - the Committee had considered the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report and Opinion which provided an overall satisfactory opinion in relation to risk, control and governance within Libraries NI
 - the Committee had also considered the Chief Executive's draft Governance Statement which would be included in the Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24.
- 8.4 Members noted the report.

9. MANAGEMENT REPORT

LNI 04.04.24

- 9.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Business Support briefed the Board on the Management Report.

Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024)

LNI 04.04.24 (i)

- 9.2 The Chief Executive presented the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2024 and drew attention in particular to Section 2: Board and Committees, Section 3: Risk Management and Section 5: Financial

Planning and Monitoring. He also drew attention to those areas of the Statement which had been marked 'Working towards Compliance'.

9.3 Mrs W Osborne, Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee confirmed that the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024 had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting held on 24 April 2024 and that Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.

9.4 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, having exercised its challenge function and received the required assurances from the Accounting Officer, the Board was content to approve the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 31 March 2024.

9.5 Members noted the signed Statement would be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Annual Board Assurance Statement 2023/24 LNI 04.04.24 (ii)
9.6 The Chairperson presented the Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2024. She noted that the document had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 24 April 2024. At that meeting Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.

9.7 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Miss L Wilson, the Board was content to approve the Chairperson's Annual Board Assurance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2024.

9.8 Members noted the signed Statement would also be forwarded to the Department for their records.

Corporate Risk Register LNI 04.04.24 (iii)
9.9 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Risk Management Group at its meeting held on 26 March 2024 and subsequently by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 24 April 2024.

9.10 He discussed each risk in turn explaining the difficulties and challenges faced by the organisation and the resulting risk rating. He noted that there had been very little change in the risk register profile as at the end of March 2024 as the business environment had not substantially changed. He also noted that indications were that the 2024/25 year may present similar resourcing challenges.

9.11 On a proposal by Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as at March 2024.

- 9.12 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Capital and Recurrent Reports which detailed spending against budgetary allocations received up to the end of February 2024. It was noted that these reports had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 28 March 2024.
- 9.13 He informed Members that having had sight of the provisional March expenditure reports an underspend of £56,000 (0.17%) was being projected against Recurrent expenditure and an underspend of £69,000 (0.09%) against Capital expenditure. Both of the projected underspends were currently within the 1% tolerance limit but would be subject to review and validation in line with the drafting of the annual accounts.
- 9.14 On behalf of Members the Chairperson commended all staff for their efforts in ensuring that the organisation remained within budget.
- 9.15 Members noted the report.

10. INTERIM FINANCIAL ALLOCATION 2024/25

LNI 05.04.24

- 10.1 The Director of Business Support introduced this report and informed Members that with the re-establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive, responsibility for the setting of public sector budgets for 2024/25 returned as a function of the Executive and Departmental Ministers. The Department for Communities has made Libraries NI aware that the Executive had agreed to a short extension to the timeframe for the setting of departmental budgets and therefore a budget had not been set before 1 April 2024.
- 10.2 In the absence of a confirmed financial allocation Libraries NI had sought confirmation of the Department's approval to continue and legitimately incur expenditure in the early part of the financial year. Confirmation of authority to spend was received from DfC on 5 April 2024 along with a direction that no new projects should be commenced and no additional expenditure incurred above what was required to maintain the day-to-day functioning of the organisation until formal budget allocations are notified. Subsequently DfC issued an Interim Budget allocation on 10 April 2024.
- 10.3 The Interim Resource Allocation of £7,253,000 being based on three months (25%) of the 2023/24 opening baseline resource budget of £29.012 million and is intended to enable Libraries NI to maintain existing services and for planning assumptions to be made. In confirming the interim resource allocation the Department also stipulated a number of cautionary caveats.
- 10.4 In respect of an interim capital allocation the allocation letter did not specify a specific quantum of capital funding rather stating that further detail would follow.

- 10.5 Members discussed the implications of DfC having adopted an interim budget allocations approach which appeared to be insufficient to meet the contractual, mandatory and legal expenditure needs of the organisation. Noting the absence of a complete annual budget position creates a number of significant challenges for Libraries NI which impacts on the effectiveness of planning, budget/expenditure management and service delivery.
- 10.6 Members expressed concern that if Libraries NI had an insufficient allocation to meet its contractual commitments it would result in a 'technical breach of budget' situation. Members agreed that the Chief Executive should write formally to Mr C Boyle, Permanent Secretary, DfC highlighting the issues created for Libraries NI by the interim budget allocation.
- 10.7 Members discussed the approach proposed in the report and agreed the following actions :
- the Chief Executive to acknowledge receipt of the interim allocation and take the opportunity to highlight to DfC the gap between our contractual commitments (April through June) and the expenditure approval limit set and the need for a confirmed annual allocation ahead of the end of the first quarter and/or a revised interim allocation
 - that a cautious and austere approach be adopted over the coming months, generally curtailing expenditure and limiting the but with specific reference to minimising the stock budget to £100,000.
 - to note the work that has taken place to provide the Department with a detailed assessment of the financial requirement for delivering the public library service in 2024/25.
- 10.8 The Board as a whole agreed the approach as detailed in the Interim Financial Allocation 2024/25 as a framework within which expenditure would be monitored and controlled until such times as a formal budget proposal could be brought forward for consideration.

It was agreed to move to Agenda Item:12: Minutes of the Services Committee held on 21 March 2024

**11. MINUTES OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 MARCH 2024
LNI 06.04.24**

- 11.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Mr J Peto, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024.
- 11.2 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson Mr J Peto, seconded by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley the draft minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 21 March 2024 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.

11.3 On a proposal by the Vice-Chairperson of the Board, Councillor J Gilmour, seconded by the Committee Chairperson, Mr J Peto the Board approved and adopted the:

- Services Committee Scheme of Delegation
- Rural Needs Annual Report 2023/24
- Review of Media Handling Policy

**12. MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON
28 MARCH 2024 LNI 07.04.24**

12.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Miss L Wilson, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2024.

12.2 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the draft minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 28 March 2024 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.

12.3 On a proposal by Ms W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the:

- Vehicle Management Policy Review
- Use Of Privately Owned Vehicles for Business Purposes Policy Review

13. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

13.1 There was no other notified business.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

14.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 27 June 2024 at 11.00 am in person at Lisburn City Library

14.2 The meeting went into recess at 12:34 pm and re-commenced at 12:40 pm. Members agreed to go into Committee to discuss Agenda Item 11: Recent Media coverage regarding Book stock.

15. RECENT MEDIA COVERAGE REGARDING BOOK STOCK - IN COMMITTEE

15.1 Mr G Beattie, Head of Marketing and Mr M Lynn, Service Development Manager – Collections joined the meeting for this item.

15.2 On a proposal by Councillor A Cathcart, seconded by Ms L Wilson Members agreed to go into Committee.

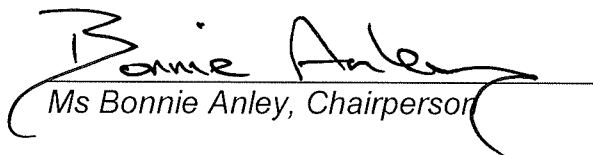
- 15.3 While in Committee the Board discussed the recent media coverage relating to LGBTQ+ themed books, reviewed the Libraries NI policy and approach and agreed its position on the matter.
- 15.4 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Board, Ms B Anley, seconded by Ms L Wilson, Members agreed to come out of Committee.

16. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

- 16.1 The meeting formally ended at 1:42 pm.
- 16.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:

Mrs W Osborne left at 12:56 pm

Signed:


Ms Bonnie Anley, Chairperson

Date:

27th June 2024