

## LIBRARIES NI

### The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library and remotely via video link (Zoom) on Thursday 12 October 2023 at 10:30 am

#### PRESENT

Professor Bernard Cullen (IP)	Chairperson
Councillor Julie Gilmour (IP)	Vice-Chairperson
Councillor Alistair Cathcart (VL)	
Councillor Peter Johnston (VL)	
Councillor Andrew McAuley (IP)	
Councillor Martin McRandal (IP)	
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE (IP)	
Mr John Peto (VL)	

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Jim O'Hagan (IP)	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)	Director of Business Support
Ms Adrienne Adair (IP)	Director of Library Services
Ms Finola Guinnane(IP)	Boardroom Apprentice

No observer from the Department for Communities (DfC) attended the Board Meeting.

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

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

1.1 Miss Linda Wilson

#### 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. No interests were declared.

#### 3. CHAIRPERSON'S BUSINESS

3.1 The Chairperson welcomed Members and staff to the meeting and in particular welcomed Ms F Guinnane, Boardroom Apprentice, to her first Libraries NI Board Meeting.

3.2 The Chairperson reported that he had received a letter from DfC dated 4 August 2023 giving formal approval of the Libraries NI Business Plan 2023/24.

3.3 He informed Members that Ms C Brownlee had stepped down from her position on the Libraries NI Board following her co-option as MLA for East Antrim. On behalf of Members and Officers the Chairperson congratulated Ms Brownlee and wished her well in her new role.

3.4 The Chairperson then updated Members on the current vacancies on the Libraries NI Board. He reported that at present the Libraries NI Board consisted of a total of nine Members including the Chairperson. He added that the meeting of the Business Support Committee due to be held on 28 September 2023 had been cancelled as the meeting was inquorate. He added that he had been assured by the Department that the competition to recruit new Board Members would progress. Members noted that Councillor M McRandal had agreed to become a member of the Business Support Committee in order to ensure that the Committee remained quorate. On a proposal by the Chairperson, Professor B Cullen, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, Members approved the appointment of Councillor M McRandal to the Business Support Committee. The Chairperson also reported that he had received confirmation from the Department that his term of appointment had been extended to 31 December 2023 and that the competition to recruit a new Chairperson had commenced.

#### **4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

4.1 The Chief Executive referred Members to the papers which had been circulated, drawing attention to the undernoted items:

- Annual Business Plan 2023-24
- Accounting Officer Responsibilities Regarding Budget Spending
- Funding of the Public Library Service
- Boardroom Apprentice 2023
- Book Week NI: 16 – 22 October 2023
- Launch of Library of Sanctuary, 19 September 2023
- Belfast Central Library 135 - 13 October 2023
- Presentation to DfC / ALB Senior Leaders Forum
- Assembly Questions

4.2 The Chief Executive informed Members that Book Week would take place this year from 16 – 22 October 2023. He explained that this would be the eighth annual Book Week which is a joint initiative between Libraries NI and BBC Northern Ireland. Book Week Ambassadors would support and raise the profile of the initiative and are drawn from across public life. He reported that Dr J Brady, Head of the Civil Service had launched the 'Go-On' initiative on 11 October 2023 and it was hoped to engage further with Dr Brady on the role of libraries in the public sector. He also reported on a visit by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mr C Heaton-Harris to Lisburn City Library on 18 October 2023 on 'Love your Library' Day. 'Love your Library Day' is part of the Book Week celebrations and he encouraged as many Members as possible to take part in the various events.

- 4.3 The Chief Executive also reported that the Libraries NI Official Statistics 2022/23 had now been published on the website and a report would be brought to the November meeting of the Services Committee.
- 4.4 Councillor M McRandal asked in regard to the launch of Ormeau Road Library as a designated Library of Sanctuary, if Libraries NI should have other libraries also designated. The Chief Executive responded that the process to achieve the status had been onerous, that we would need to consider funding implications of rolling it out to other libraries but that all libraries are promoted as welcoming, trusted and safe places for everyone.

**5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 6 JULY 2023**  
**LNI 01.10.23**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 6 July 2023 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

**6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 6 JULY 2023**  
**LNI 02.10.23**

- 6.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the circulated paper noting the following.

Item 10.4: Revised Draft Annual Business Plan 2023/24

- 6.2 Members noted that this item had been completed and that following a submission of the updated Annual Business Plan 2023/24 to the Department on 31 July 2023, as reported by the Chairperson formal approval had been received on 4 August 2023.

Item 13.6: Confirmation of Resource Funding Allocation and Proposed Budget and Spending Plan 2023/24

- 6.3 Members noted that following the approval and adoption of the Budget and Spending Plan 2023/24 the application of expenditure controls had been implemented. An update on progress would be provided at Agenda Item:12, 2023/24 Budget Update and Financial Control Measures.

**7. MINUTES OF THE BOARD PLANNING MEETING HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2023**  
**LNI 03.10.23**

- 7.1 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the Board Planning Meeting held on 14 September 2023 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

**8. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE BOARD PLANNING MEETING HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2023**  
**LNI 04.10.23**

- 8.1 The Chief Executive reported that there had been only one matter arising at

*Item 4.10: Board Planning Day Event – Programme* and confirmed that the presentation slides had been made available on the Extranet for the information of Board Members.

## **9. REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2023**

9.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne, reminded Members that a meeting of the Committee had taken place on 11 October 2023, the formal minutes of which would be available at the next Board Meeting to be held on 14 December 2023. She informed Members that Ms A Quail had been appointed as a co-opted Member to the Committee and had been welcomed to her first meeting of the Committee. She then reported that prior to the Committee meeting, the annual bi-lateral meeting had been held with representatives from the NIAO and ASM to discuss the conduct of the audit and confirmed that Members had been assured that the NIAO and ASM had received all the co-operation and access necessary to carry out their audit.

9.2 Mrs W Osborne reported that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had recommended approval of the following items to the Board:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report 2022/23
- Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23
- Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April to September 2023)
- Corporate Risk Register September 2023.

9.3 Members noted the report.

## **10. LIBRARIES NI ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2022/23**

**LNI 05.10.23**

10.1 The Chief Executive presented four documents for the consideration of the Board and reported on each in turn.

10.2 Draft Report to Those Charged with Governance 2022/23 LNI 05.10.23 (i)  
The Chief Executive reported that the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) had completed the audit of the 2022/23 Annual Accounts and had indicated that the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) would certify the 2022/23 financial statements with an 'unqualified' audit opinion. It was noted that the report contained seven findings one of which was a 'Priority One' relating to the management of cash drawdowns. Management had accepted the recommendations contained in the report and appropriate actions to address had been initiated.

10.3 Members noted the Provisional Report to Those Charged with Governance 2022/23. The Chairperson of the Board, Professor B Cullen on behalf of Members, highlighted the excellent achievement in attaining an unqualified audit opinion and commended all staff involved.

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report 2022/23 LNI 05.10.23 (ii)  
10.4 The Chief Executive reported that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee is required to report annually to the Board on the External Audit Statement in respect of the Accounts, the state of the organisation's finances and on the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management and other governance and control issues within the organisation.

10.5 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne, confirmed that Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee were content to provide this assurance based on the work carried out by the Committee during the year. Members also noted the Head of Internal Audit's assurance contained in the report.

10.6 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board adopted the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee's Annual Report 2022/23.

Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 LNI 05.10.23 (iii)  
10.7 The Chief Executive drew Members' attention to the Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 and confirmed that no significant changes had been made to the document since it was last reviewed by Members. He reported that at the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 11 October 2023, Ms S Heanen, NIAO had advised that there was a small typographical error in the Certificate from the Comptroller and Auditor General and that an amended Certificate would be issued.

10.8 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 for submission to the Comptroller and Auditor General for certification.

10.9 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, Members agreed to delegate authority to the Chairperson and Chief Executive as Accounting Officer, in the event that any revisions were subsequently required by the NIAO.

Letter of Representation LNI 05.10.23 (iv)  
10.10 The Chief Executive referred to the Letter of Representation and reminded Members that as Accounting Officer he was required to submit a Letter of Representation when the signed Annual Report and Accounts were being sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General for certification.

10.11 Members noted the Letter of Representation.

## **11. MANAGEMENT REPORT** **LNI 06.10.23**

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

Finance Report: August 2023 LNI 06.10.23 (i)  
11.2 The Director of Business Support presented the Finance Reports for Capital

and Recurrent Spend to August 2023. He reminded Members that these reports would normally be reviewed by the Business Support Committee at the September Committee meeting, but this had not happened as the Committee meeting was cancelled due to insufficient Committee Members. As a result, the reports were now being brought to the Board for review.

Corporate Risk Register

LNI 06.10.23 (ii)

- 11.3 The Director of Business Support drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register which had been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at its meeting held on 11 October 2023, noting that in general there had been no change to risk levels across the organisation as there had been little change to the general business environment. He informed Members that there were now no 'Green' risks as the Residual Risk for Corporate Governance had changed to 'Amber'. He reported on each risk in turn explaining the difficulties and challenges faced by the organisation and the resulting risk rating.
- 11.4 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne confirmed that the Corporate Risk Register had been reviewed at the Committee meeting held on 11 October 2023 and that Members were content to recommend the Corporate Risk Register to the Board for approval. She reported that Committee Members had made it quite clear that Libraries NI was working in a very challenging situation and there was a real risk that continuing to operate in this way would cause lasting damage to the organisation. She stated that there seems to be an expectation by the Department that Libraries NI will work within budget and continue to deliver services as normal – the strategic risk is that this will become impossible. She added that it is not only Libraries NI who owns the risk but also DfC and added that there were stresses and strains throughout the organisation.
- 11.5 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved and adopted the Corporate Risk Register as at September 2023.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 2023/24: Quarter One: April to June 2023

LNI 06.10.23 (iii)

- 11.6 The Chief Executive drew attention to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) Report for Quarter One: April to June 2023, noting that as the year progressed some targets may not be met. He drew attention to those targets which were coded 'Amber' providing an update on progress to date and explained that the target for Customer Satisfaction and the Summer Reading Challenge were currently coded 'Grey' and further information would be available later in the year. The Chief Executive reported that the targets relating to budget expenditure and sickness absence remain challenging.
- 11.7 Members discussed the high levels of sickness absence and the actions being taken by the Health and Wellbeing team to address the issue. In response to a question from Ms F Guinnane regarding the use of staff networks and Mental Health Champions, the Director of Business Support agreed to liaise with Ms Guinnane on this issue.

- 11.8 Members noted the KPI 2022/23 Quarter One Report.
- 11.9 Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April to September 2023) LNI 06.10.23 (iv)  
The Chief Executive drew attention to the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 30 September 2023. He confirmed that it had been scrutinised by Members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee at the meeting of the Committee held on 11 October 2023, and Members had been content to recommend the document to the Board for approval.
- 11.10 Issues highlighted in the document included the current vacancies on the Libraries NI Board leading to difficulties in ensuring Committees are quorate, the recurring financial pressures impacting all aspects of service delivery, including the inadequacy of the resource allocation; absence of a strategic capital programme; and the impact of the cost of living crisis. He noted that there was increasing tension between managing resources and providing a comprehensive public library service which would require a greater level of engagement between the Board and Chief Executive and the Chief Executive and DfC. He added that it was important that Officers and Board Members proactively engaged with DfC in respect of the financial allocations for next year.
- 11.11 The Chief Executive then went through each section highlighting areas indicated as 'working towards compliance' and explained, where applicable, actions being taken to remedy the situation. He also drew attention to Section 10: Internal and External Audit and explained that an amendment would be made to Note 2 to reflect that there had been one Priority One recommendation arising from the audit of the Libraries NI Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23.
- 11.12 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Board approved the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 30 September 2023 subject to the amendment at paragraph 11.11 above.

**12. 2023/24 BUDGET UPDATE AND FINANCIAL CONTROL MEASURES**  
**LNI 07.10.23 (Tabled)**

- 12.1 The Director of Business Support presented the tabled report which provided Members with up to date information on the current financial situation. For the benefit of the new Board Members he explained the impact of the reduced financial allocation on the library service and the measures taken to date to live within budget. He reported that as at 1 October 2023 and on the basis that the financial control measures already put in place remain and that expenditure trends are stable for the remainder of the year a potential underspend of £312,000 was projected. In light of the revised projections it was proposed to release £100,000 for the purchase of bookstock.
- 12.2 The Director of Business Support noted that this shift in the financial position is positive in terms of budget management but that it has only been possible through the considerable efforts of managers and staff to minimise expenditure, however it has impacted negatively on the scale and scope of

the services provided. He added that while there is now some 'headroom' and the trajectory for remaining within the overall financial allocation envelope is broadly on target, the period to the 31 March 2024 remains extremely challenging and the margins for error are narrow. The winter period normally sees increased pressure on and demands for resources and there are a number of variables yet to play out. Therefore, if Libraries NI are to maintain momentum and remain within the financial allocation by year end the current temporary financial control measures would need to remain in place.

- 12.3 He then referred to the reduced opening hours which were currently in place and recommended that these should continue until 31 December 2023 when returning to normal operating hours would be considered if the financial position permitted. He also referred to library closures over the Christmas/New Year period when historically the demand for library services was lower explaining that officers were considering approaches to service delivery during this period.
- 12.4 Mrs W Osborne remarked that while the financial position gave the appearance of being positive in terms of budget management the stark reality of operating within the constraints of the reduced financial allocation was one of detriment being caused to the library service and for the people of Northern Ireland. Councillor A Cathcart added that it was essential that communications to the public allowed them to understand the challenges being faced and impacts on book stock and opening hours.
- 12.5 The Chief Executive responded agreeing that communication with library users and the wider public in the coming months would clearly set out the impact of the budget position on the scale and scope of services which could be provided.
- 12.6 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Ms W Osborne the Board having reviewed the mid-year financial position and projections approved the following actions:
- an internal budget adjustment and reallocation of £100,000 to the library stock budget
  - the continued application through to 31 March 2024 of the temporary financial control measures
  - the further temporary extension through to 31 December 2023 of the reduced opening hours regime previously put in place, including where possible standardised closing at 5:00 pm but taking account of local circumstances and the ability to accommodate the contractual working hours/patterns of staff and subject to on-going review of the financial position and assessment of the scope to return to regular opening hours from January 2024
  - that Senior Management Team are authorised to explore, develop and implement such holiday closure arrangements as they consider appropriate to accommodate library user and staff needs over the Christmas/New Year period while taking account of the prevailing financial position.
- 12.7 Board Members thanked the Director of Business Support for the report.



**13. MINUTES OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2023**  
**LNI 08.10.23**

- 13.1 The Chairperson of the Services Committee, Mr J Peto, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2023.
- 13.2 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 21 September 2023 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.
- 13.3 On a proposal by Mr J Peto, seconded by Councillor A McAuley, the Board approved and adopted the Fees and Charges 2024/25.

**14. MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2023 - CANCELLED**

- 14.1 The Chief Executive reported that the meeting of the Business Support Committee which was due to be held on 28 September 2023, had been cancelled due to the meeting being inquorate. The next meeting of the Committee is due to be held on 30 November 2023.

**15. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS**

- 15.1 There was no other notified business.


**16. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 16.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 14 December 2023 at 10.30 am either in Lisburn City Library or remotely via video link.

**17. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

- 17.1 The meeting ended at 12:22 pm.
- 17.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended.

Signed:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Professor Bernard Cullen, Chairperson

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
14 December 2023