

## LIBRARIES NI

### The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of the Authority held in Lisburn City Library and by remote video link (Zoom) on Thursday 14 December 2023 at 10:30 am

#### PRESENT

Professor Bernard Cullen (IP)  
Councillor J Gilmour (IP)

Chairperson  
Vice-Chairperson

Councillor Alistair Cathcart (VL)  
Councillor Peter Johnston (IP)  
Councillor Andrew McAuley (VL)  
Councillor Martin McRandal (IP)  
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE (IP)  
Mr John Peto (IP)  
Miss Linda Wilson (IP)

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan (IP)  
Mr Desi Miskelly (IP)  
Ms Adrienne Adair (IP)  
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry (IP)  
Mr Tony O'Neill (IP)  
Ms Finola Guinnane (VL)  
Mrs Ciara Gault (VL)

Chief Executive  
Director of Business Support  
Director of Library Services  
Human Resource Manager (Item 15)  
Department for Communities  
Boardroom Apprentice  
Service Development Manager

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

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR NON ATTENDANCE

None

#### 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 Mr T O'Neill, Acting Head, Museums and Libraries Branch, Department for Communities (DfC). He noted that Mrs C Gault, Services Development Manager was attending the meeting as a staff observer and that Mrs J McKinstry, HR Manager was in attendance for Agenda Item 15.
- 3.2 The Chairperson reported on the meeting with Ms E Morelli, Deputy Secretary and Mr J McCord, Acting Director of Culture, DfC which had taken place on 20 November 2023 in Cregagh Library. The Chief Executive, Councillor J Gilmour and Mrs W Osborne had also attended. Members noted that this had been a very important meeting and Members felt that departmental officials had listened to the points put to them regarding the challenges facing the library service. The Chief Executive suggested that after the Board Meeting he or the Chairperson would write to the Deputy Secretary thanking her for the meeting and reminding her of the points discussed adding that it may be beneficial to the Department when discussing budgets for 2024/25.

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

- 4.1 The Chief Executive referred Members to the paper which had been circulated, drawing attention in particular to the undernoted items:
- Secure Transfer of / Access to Information – DfC ALB Board Members / Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Members
  - Resignation of Co-opted Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Member
  - Departmental Correspondence – Launch of Module 5 Covid-19 Enquiry
  - Culture, Arts and Heritage Strategy Taskforce Report – Investing in Creative Delivery
  - Belfast Central Library 135 Celebration
  - Meetings held / attended
  - Launch of the British Film Industry (BFI) Replay Digital Archive
  - Book Week NI
  - Macmillan Coffee Mornings
  - Assembly Questions

### **5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2023 LNI 01.12.23**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the minutes of the Board Meeting held on 12 October 2023 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

**6. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 12 OCTOBER 2023** **LNI 02.12.23**

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

Item 10.7 / 10.10 Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 / Letter of Representation

6.2 The Chief Executive confirmed that the Letter of Representation together with the signed Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 had been submitted to the Comptroller and Auditor General for certification on 12 October 2023.

Item 11.11 /12: Management Report, Bi-Annual Assurance Statement (April to September 2023)

6.3 Members noted that the amendment had been made to Note 2 in Section 10 of the Bi-Annual Assurance Statement for the period ended 30 September 2023 and that a copy of the signed document had been submitted to DfC on 12 October 2023.

Item 12.4 /12.5: 2023/24 Budget Update and Financial Control Measures

6.4 The Chief Executive confirmed that the changes to opening hours and the impacts of funding reductions during the 2023/24 financial year had been communicated to library customers.

Item 12.6: 2023/24 Budget Update and Financial Control Measures

6.5 Members noted that the Libraries NI Senior Management Team had implemented the financial control measures and associated actions approved by Members at the October Board Meeting.

**7. MANAGEMENT REPORT** **LNI 03.12.23**

7.1 The Chief Executive and the Director of Business Support briefed the Board on the Management Report as follows:

Key Performance Indicators 2023/24 Quarter 2: July – September 2023

LNI 03.12.23 (i)

7.2 The Chief Executive reported that despite the challenging operational environment the majority of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were on target to be achieved. He discussed the areas where progress has been reported as 'Amber' i.e. the annual net resource spend, Payment of Invoices and sickness absence targets and provided background information and progress to date on each.

7.3 Members noted that the remaining KPIs were on track to be achieved.

Business Plan 2023/24: Progress Report: April to September 2023

LNI 03.12.23 (ii)

7.4 The Chief Executive drew attention to the six month update on the Business Plan 2023/24 and reported that progress had been made in respect of the majority of Business Plan targets. He drew attention to those targets which had

been reported as 'Amber' or 'Red' and provided information on the steps being taken to progress these issues.

- 7.5 Members discussed at length the on-going impact the lack of funding for bookstock was having on the organisation. Officers explained the difficulty in encouraging users back to the library service after the coronavirus pandemic and how the current funding difficulties prevented new stock from being purchased. Library users were buying new titles, circulating to friends and the on-going impact of not purchasing new book titles over a number of years would result in specifically adults not returning to use the library service. The importance of constantly refreshing library stock for children to encourage reading was also discussed.

Finance Report: October 2023

LNI 03.12.23 (iii)

- 7.6 The Director of Business Support presented the Finance Reports for Capital and Recurrent spend to October 2023 which had been reviewed by the Business Support Committee at its meeting held on 30 November 2023. He reported that the Resource Report at the end of October 2023 projected a balanced budget with zero variance as at year end. The Capital Report projected an underspend of £204,000. Discussions had taken place with DfC regarding the re-allocation of the underspend to other capital projects.

- 7.7 Members noted the report.

**8. BOARD SKILLS AUDIT REPORT**

**LNI 04.12.23**

- 8.1 The Chief Executive reminded Members that it is good practice for a Board to periodically carry out a Skills Audit to assess its skills, attributes and experience, to provide reassurance and to assist in identifying any gaps or development needs and referred to the Board Effectiveness Review 2022/23 when Board Members agreed to the development of a skills matrix.

- 8.2 He then drew attention to the report which provides an overall view of board skills, experience and attributes informed by individual self-assessment templates completed by Board Members in September 2023. He noted that no individual Board Member had been identified in the report.

- 8.3 Members noted that the report concluded that the Board has a good level of strengths, skills, experience and attributes across a wide range of areas and does not highlight any areas that would be a cause for concern. A number of more specialised areas e.g. Legal, Human Resources, Accountancy, ICT Strategy and Property Management scored lower in the assessment and may be areas where experience could be sought in future recruitment competitions. A copy of the draft report was provided to the Department to help inform future Board recruitment.

- 8.4 Members noted the report.

- 9. BOARD EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW 2023/24** **LNI 05.12.23**
- 9.1 The Chairperson drew attention to the Board Effectiveness Review 2023/24.
- 9.2 Members were reminded of the guidance contained in the Board Operating Framework relating to the regular review of Board and Committee effectiveness and of the good practice guide produced by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). Based on the NIAO guidance a checklist had been developed to assist the Board to evaluate its effectiveness.
- 9.3 The Chief Executive reported that the Effectiveness checklist would be completed in draft and brought back to Members for review at the Board Meeting to be held on 8 February 2024. He drew attention to Appendix 3 which enabled Board Members to submit additional views or comments on any other matter relating to the review of Board/Committee effectiveness. He asked that completed forms or other comments be returned to him no later than 16 January 2024.
- 9.4 Members noted that individual Committees have started or are about to start reviewing their effectiveness, including the continued relevance of the Schemes of Delegation and the process should be completed early in the New Year. A draft Action Plan based on all of the reviews would be presented to the Board at its meeting to be held on 8 February 2024.
- 10. UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION 2023/24** **LNI 06.12.23**
- 10.1 The Director of Business Support updated Members on the current financial situation since the last meeting of the Board held on 12 October 2023.
- 10.2 He reported that as Libraries NI approaches the final quarter of the financial year the funding and resourcing of the public library service continued to present significant challenges. The resource funding allocation provided by DfC in April 2023 remains unchanged, no formal in-year monitoring rounds had occurred to date, it had not been possible to bid for or secure further funding and while every opportunity had been taken to highlight to DfC the detrimental impact of insufficient library stock funding no solution to this issue was forthcoming. It was likely the funding position relating to general operating costs would remain static for the remainder of the financial year and that Officers would therefore need to continue to plan to control expenditure within the available budget by 31 March 2024.
- 10.3 In October 2023, the Board had reviewed the mid-year financial position and in response to the identified potential underspend had approved a number of actions to control expenditure.
- 10.4. The sustained application of financial controls throughout October and November 2023 have continued to contribute to the effective management of expenditure. However, the on-going pressures from external factors (e.g. continuing high inflation) had the impact of reducing the positive margin (projected underspend) predicted in October.

10.5 As of 1 December 2023, on the basis that there was no change in the baseline funding position, that the financial controls put in place continued to be applied and expenditure trends remained on course, a breakeven position was projected by the 31 March 2024 i.e. no discernible variation between expenditure and available budget). Members noted the margin for error in these projections was incredibly small at less than £40,000 or 0.14% of the total resource budget of £29,013,000.

10.6 Taking account of the on-going funding challenges, the exceptionally volatile business environment going forward and previous experience of the winter period seeing increased pressure on and demand for resources, the following approach was recommended for consideration:

- the continued application through to 31 March 2024 of the temporary financial control measures previously approved by the Board relating to the management of general operating expenditure and staffing costs
- the planned closure of the service from Saturday 23 December 2023 to Monday 1 January 2024 inclusive as previously authorised by the Board
- the further extension of the reduced opening hours regime through to 31 March 2024.

10.7 Councillor P Johnston stated that Libraries NI was one of DfC's Arms Length Bodies and although the budget for the organisation was quite small the benefits the service provided were far reaching and impacted on other core services and government priorities such as social inclusion, health and education and also had a beneficial effect on the economy.

10.8 The Board noted the following:

- the continued application through to 31 March 2024 of the temporary financial control measures relating to the management of general operating expenditure and staffing costs
- the planned closure of the service from Saturday 23 December 2023 to Monday 1 January 2024 inclusive.

10.9 On a proposal by Councillor P Johnston, seconded by Mrs W Osborne the Board approved the further temporary extension through to 31 March 2024 of the reduced opening hours regime previously put in place.

## **11. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2023** **LNI 07.12.23**

11.1 The Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, Mrs W Osborne presented the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 noting that an oral report of this meeting had been given at the Board Meeting held on 12 October 2023, and at that meeting the Board had approved the following:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report 2022/23
  - Libraries NI Draft Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23 (Submission for Certification)
  - Bi-Annual Assurance Statement, 30 September 2023
  - Corporate Risk Register September 2023
- 11.2 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Committee Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 11 October 2023 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.
- 11.3 The Chairperson confirmed that no other matters considered by the Committee had required Board approval.

**12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SERVICES COMMITTEE HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2023 LNI 08.12.23**

- 12.1 The Vice-Chairperson of the Services Committee, Councillor A McAuley, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2023.
- 12.2 On a proposal by the Vice-Chairperson of the Committee, Councillor A McAuley, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, the minutes of the meeting of the Services Committee held on 16 November 2023 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting. It was noted that no other items considered at the Committee meeting required Board approval.

**13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2023 LNI 09.12.23**

- 13.1 The Chairperson of the Business Support Committee, Miss L Wilson, presented the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2023.
- 13.2 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Miss L Wilson, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee held on 30 November 2023 were adopted as an 'as read' record of the meeting.
- 13.3 On a proposal by the Chairperson of the Board, Professor Bernard Cullen, seconded by Councillor M McRandal the Board approved the election of Miss L Wilson as Chairperson of the Committee and Mr P Johnston as Vice-Chairperson.
- 13.4 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Miss L Wilson , seconded by Mrs W Osborne the Board approved and adopted the following:
- Health and Safety Policy Review
  - Environmental Policy Review
  - Equal Opportunity Policy Review

13.5 On a proposal by the Committee Chairperson, Miss L Wilson , seconded by Mrs W Osborne the Board approved for submission to the Equality Commission the Libraries NI Statutory Equality and Good Relations Annual Report 2022/23.

**14. SCHEDULE OF BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS: JANUARY 2024 TO MARCH 2025**  
**LNI 10.12.23**

14.1 The Chief Executive drew attention to the proposed Schedule of Board and Committee Meetings for the period 1 January 2024 to 31 March 2025 and asked Members to note the dates in their diaries.

**15. UPDATE ON THE MEETING OF THE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 DECEMBER 2023 (IN COMMITTEE)**

15.1 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal Members agreed to go into Committee.

15.2 While in Committee the Chairperson updated Members on the JNC 2023/24 pay agreement for Chief Officers and Chief Executives and the subsequent pay remit submitted to the Department for Communities.

15.3 The Chairperson thanked Mrs J McKinstry for her help and support to him in all matters relating to Human Resources during his tenure as Chairperson of the Libraries NI Board.

**16. INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE: UPDATE (IN COMMITTEE)**

16.1 The Chief Executive for the benefit of new Members provided the background to the on-going industrial dispute by Branch Library Managers and an update on steps being taken to try and reach a resolution.

16.2 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor J Gilmour, Members agreed to come out of Committee.

16.3 The Chief Executive reported that while In Committee he had updated members on progress and actions being taken to resolve this issue.

**17. ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS**

17.1 There was no other notified business

17.2 Professor Cullen reminded Members that this would be his last meeting as Chairperson of the Libraries NI Board. He took the opportunity to express his appreciation and thanks to all those who had helped him to carry out the duties of the post adding that he had always received the full co-operation from successive Board Members. He also thanked the Libraries NI Senior



Management Team both past and present for their support to him and to colleagues in DfC with whom he had the best of relations. He added that this was a sad day for him as he felt so much work was still to be completed but he wished Libraries NI every success for the future.

- 17.3 The Vice-Chairperson, Mrs J Gilmour on behalf of Members and Officers thanked Professor Cullen for his commitment to Libraries NI and presented him with a gift as a token of appreciation from fellow Board Members and Officers.
- 17.4 The Chairperson thanked Members and Officers for the gift and wished all present the compliments of the season.

**18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 18.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Board would take place on Thursday 8 February 2024 at 10.30 am in Lisburn City Library or remotely via video link.

**19. MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES**

- 19.1 The meeting ended at 12.40 pm .
- 19.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended with the exception of the following:

Councillor A McAuley joined the meeting at 11:41 am

Mrs C Gault left the meeting at 12:06 pm

Signed: Julie Gilmour.  
Councillor Julie Gilmour  
Vice-Chairperson

Date: 8/2/24