

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 24 November 2022 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) Alderman Thomas Burns	Chairperson
(IP) Miss Linda Wilson	Vice Chairperson
(VL) Professor Bernard Cullen	Chairperson of the Board
(VL) Councillor Billy Webb MBE JP	
(VL) Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
(VL) Councillor Cheryl Brownlee	

(VL) Ms Stefani Millar	Boardroom Apprentice
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IN ATTENDANCE

(IP) Mr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
(IP) Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
(IP) Mrs Jacqui McKinstry	Head of Human Resources
(VL) Mr Tim Neeson	Assets Manager
(VL) Ms Rita McNamee	Finance Manager
(VL) Mr Desi Curry	Head of ICU/ICT

OBSERVERS

(VL) Ms Carole Devine	District Manager
(VL) Ms Michelle Fitzpatrick	District Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

There were no apologies

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 reminded Members that as part of the Leadership Development Plan it had been agreed that some staff should attend and observe Board and Committee meetings as part of their personal development and welcomed Carole Devine, District Manager.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.11.22

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support reported that following national negotiations agreement on the 2022/23 pay settlement had been reached between the Trade Unions and the National Joint Council for local government services. This was a single year agreement for a flat rate increase of £1925 on all pay points effective from 01 April 2022 and one additional day's annual leave entitlement effective from 01 April 2023. Libraries NI were required to obtain specific Departmental approval prior to implementation, a business case and supporting pay remit had been submitted to DfC.

- 4.2 The Director of Business Support advised that an additional local claim had been submitted by NIPSA on behalf of the Joint Trade Union Side aimed at improving the living standards of members. In summary the claim was seeking:

- all grades to move up two spinal column points
- a reduction in the working week to 35 hours with no salary decrease
- Covid 19 Recognition payment of £1,000 nett (£500 per year for 2020 & 2021)
- two days' additional leave
- improvements to mileage rates
- a commitment to maintain pay above the Real Living Wage going forward.

Similar claims had been submitted to other bodies which operated under the umbrella of DfC sponsorship, Management had written to the Department seeking guidance and would continue to engage with Trade Union representatives on the matter.

- 4.3 The Director of Business Support reported that the budget position continued to be exceptionally challenging, the organisation continued to operate on the indicative budget allocation provided by DfC in April, which had subsequently been reduced by £170,000. There had been no in-year monitoring rounds and there were substantial financial pressures due to increased utility bills, staff pay settlements and rising inflation. There had been no substantive progress to resolve the financial pressures and a potential overspend of £470,000 was projected. Libraries NI continued to highlight to DfC the challenging financial situation and the role of libraries during the cost-of-living crisis. The matter would be subject to further discussion at the December Board meeting.

- 4.4 The Chairperson enquired regarding the impact on the stock budget and ebooks.
- 4.5 The Director of Business Support advised that resources with which to procure library stock were all but exhausted with the historically low stock budget fully committed mid-year, normally by this time in the year stock would have benefitted from in year monitoring rounds. EBooks were another stock format bought in the same way as hardcopy books, the service under which a book could be requested had been temporarily suspended due to lack of budget.
- 4.6 The Chief Executive advised that Libraries NI was very mindful of the impact of the small allocation on the stock budget and have highlighted to DfC the impact both this year and next year.
- 4.7 Mrs W Osborne enquired if the projected overspend might increase; commented that the Board would be considering options to deal with this and the timing of implementing measures.
- 4.8 The Director of Business Support advised that there were many variables that could impact the projected overspend, this would be closely monitored to avoid any increase and further control measures could be put in place if necessary. Decisions regarding managing the overspend needed to be balanced against the need to maintain a reasonable level of service.
- 4.9 The Director of Business Support reported that the Minister for Communities had approved the updated Strategic Outline Case for the Belfast Central Library Redevelopment Project. The previously approved Outline Business Case could now be reviewed and updated, and work would begin to develop a resourcing plan and framework to support this next stage of the development process.

**5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE BSC.02.11.22
HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor B Webb, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee on 29 September 2022, which had been submitted to the Board on 13 October 2022, were approved.

**6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON BSC.03.11.22
29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the concerns raised by the Committee at the September meeting and subsequently by Libraries NI Board regarding the financial position had been communicated in writing to DfC. The Permanent Secretary had acknowledged the budgetary pressures and advised that spend should be curtailed where possible while seeking to maintain services.

**7 COMMITTEE/ BOARD EFFECTIVENESS
REVIEW 2022**

BSC.04.11.22

- 7.1 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 26 January 2023.
- 7.2 Councillor B Webb queried the requirement to undertake this review annually, each year a lot of work was done to produce a similar result and enquired if the Review could be undertaken on a bi-annual basis.
- 7.3 The Director of Business Support advised that while an annual review was not mandatory, it was considered best practice and Board approval would be required to change this.
- 7.4 Professor B Cullen advised that he shared Councillor Webb's frustration, the Organisation's governance structures were widely acknowledged to be effective however he was required at his annual DfC appraisal to confirm, on behalf of Libraries NI Board, that this Review had been completed.
- 7.5 Miss L Wilson requested clarification regarding the Committee's roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to e3.
- 7.6 The Chief Executive advised that the Business Support Committee had the correct policies and procedures in place to support ongoing business. The Board had established a subcommittee, the Information Services Committee, which dealt specifically with the implementation and e3 contract.
- 7.7 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 2023 meeting.
- 7.8 Members agreed to initiate the process immediately.

**8 STATEMENT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY (REVIEW)**

BSC.05.11.22

- 8.1 The Director of Business Support advised that the Corporate Social Responsibility Statement provided a framework within which Libraries NI sought to undertake business in way which considered the interests of society and the impact of activities on customers, suppliers, employees, communities and the environment. The fundamental ethos of the Organisation had not changed, in reviewing the Statement the opportunity had been taken to expand on and clarify commitment to ethical procurement.

- 8.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if policies were up to date and commented that 4.1 should make it clear that although an extensive list it was not an exhaustive one.
- 8.3 Mrs W Osborne asked how the organisation ensured that procurement was carried out ethically.
- 8.4 The Finance Manager reported that a lot of procurement was done through CPD/NICS frameworks, who had confirmed in their terms and conditions their commitment to ethical procurement, this then flowed through the supply chain.
- 8.5 Ms S Millar asked if queries had ever been raised about the Statement and commented that perhaps the wording should be “we aim to” rather than “we will” as Libraries NI could not control all areas.
- 8.6 The Director of Business Support advised that he was not aware of an enquiries or issues being raised in relation to the Statement.
- 8.7 Councillor B Webb noted that staff were referenced and enquired if this included Board Members.
- 8.8 The Director of Business Support confirmed that there was no reference to Board Members and proposed that the Statement be further reviewed and clarified to take on Members’ comments and be brought back to the January 2023 meeting for approval.
- 8.9 The Chairperson agreed that the Statement be reviewed to incorporate Members’ suggestions and be reviewed at the January 2023 meeting.

**9 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN 2022-23 – BSC.06.11.22
PROGRESS REPORT**

- 9.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Progress Report, which showed progress to date in delivering on a range of targets as set out in the Business Support Service Plan 2022-23. Actions and targets had been assigned red, amber or green status reflecting progress to date and the anticipated position at March 2023. It was noted that while most targets were on course to be achieved Staff Development and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy were amber, due to the impact of staff absence in areas of HR Staff Development Team.
- 9.2 Mrs W Osborne commented that with HR under pressure the risk was enhanced, wellbeing becomes increasingly important and enquired what steps had been taken to address the staffing issues within HR.
- 9.3 The Director of Business Support advised staff development and training was part of discretionary spend and therefore being impacted by budget constraints Other HR staff were picking up on the core work of training and development.

- 9.4 The Head of HR reported that the training and development staff had been impacted by retirement and long-term sickness, additional resource had been brought in to cover and within the team other staff were dedicating resource to this key area. The Health and Wellbeing Officer had recently resigned, the post had been advertised and had a good response. Work was underway on a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 9.5 Members noted the Progress Report.
- 10 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER 2022- 23- UPDATE REPORT BSC.07.11.22**
- 10.1 The Director of Business Support presented the revised Business Support Risk Register which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and take account of mitigation actions taken to date and new or emerging risks which had been identified since May 2022.
- 10.2 Members noted the Update Report.
- 11 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT NOVEMBER 2022 BSC.08.11.22**
- 11.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Information Systems e3 Programme Update Report, advising members on progress made. The e3 contract had commenced on 01 October 2022 and eight Implementation and Support Officers had been recruited to assist with implementation.
- 11.2 Members noted the Report.
- 12 FINANCE REPORTS**
- 12.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2022 BSC.09.11.22**
- 12.2 The Finance Manager presented the Resource Expenditure Report to October 2022 detailing expenditure incurred to date and projecting a £474,000 overspend.
- 12.3 Members noted the Report with concern.
- 12.4 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2022 BSC.10.11.22**
- 12.5 The Finance Manager presented the Capital Expenditure Report to October 2022.
- 12.6 Members noted the Report.

**13 PROCURMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 BSC.11.11.22
 AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000**

13.1 The Finance Manager presented the Procurement Report updating the Committee of procurement activity over £1,000 and Single Tender Actions for the period from 10 September 2022 to 11 November 2022.

13.2 Members noted the Report.

14 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO OCTOBER 2022 BSC.12.11.22

14.1 The Head of HR presented the Sickness Absence Report for the 12 month period to the end of October 2022 advising that the composite sickness absence level in October was 11.74 FTE days, the target for 2022/23 being 9.5 FTE days or less. An increase in the autumn and winter months was typical and a change in the recording of Covid relating absence had also contributed.

14.2 Miss L Wilson noted that 34% of staff had zero absence and asked if absence was benchmarked against other organisations and if steps were being taken to reduce short term absences.

14.3 The Head of HR advised that benchmarking against other public sector organisation had been done and rates were not out of sync. The increase in short term absence was typical for winter and autumn months, also the Covid isolation period had been reduced and staff isolating for more than five days would now be included in these figures.

14.4 Professor B Cullen commented that Covid had highlighted transmissibility and changed the culture of staff coming to work with coughs and sneezes. The long-term absences were more concerning, reducing staffing, placing other team members under more pressure and stress and causing attrition over time. The current financial situation added to this, with the lack of funding and expectation that services must be maintained. Professor Cullen enquired if the financial pressures had impacted the engagement of agency staff.

14.5 The Head of HR confirmed that agency staff continued to be engaged, predominantly to support frontline services.

14.6 The Director of Business Support commented that there was an inherent stress on the Organisation as a result of many years of underfunding, the current financial climate added an additional level of stress.

14.7 Members noted the Report.

**15 REPORT ON STAFF WELLBEING MEASURES AND BSC.13.11.22
 INITIATIVES**

- 15.1 The Head of HR presented the Report providing information on current health and wellbeing measures and initiatives that were provided to employees to support a workplace culture that is mutually beneficial to the Organisation and its staff. Work was progressing to develop an overarching Health and Wellbeing Strategy with seven domains of:
- health
 - good work
 - value and principles
 - collective/social
 - personal growth
 - good lifestyle choices
 - financial wellbeing.
- 15.2 The Chairperson welcomed the Report and development of a Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 15.3 Mrs W Osborne advised that she would be very supportive of a forward-thinking strategy; it would be important to engage with all levels of staff and to get feedback on current provision and what they would want included in the new strategy. A baseline would need to be established, possibly using data collected from a staff survey.
- 15.4 The Head of HR advised that it had been several years since a workplace survey had been done, surveys tended to focus on the negative, the new strategy would focus on engagement. This would start afresh with the baseline being the current provision; all levels of staff would be engaged with to design the strategy.
- 16 UPDATE REPORT – NEWTOWNARDS LIBRARY BSC.14.11.22
REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**
- 16.1 The Assets Manager presented the Report updating the Committee on progress in development of a partnership scheme with Ards and North Down Borough Council to redevelop library and council facilities in Newtownards.
- 16.2 Miss L Wilson commented that this looked like a very good project, enquired if sharing parts of the proposed premises limited library opening hours.
- 16.3 The Assets Managers advised that it was planned that the library premises could be accessed when the Council area of the premises were closed, thus library opening was not impacted.
- 16.4 The Director of Business Support advised that there continued to be difficulties in securing funding for projects such as the Newtownards Library Redevelopment. There were a number of projects which had been approved by DfC but funding hadn't been made available. There was a lack of longer-term capital development strategy from DfC, which could impact the overall estates plan.

16.5 The Chief Executive advised that there was no capital funding budget against which the pipeline of projects could be managed, funding was only granted as project arose. Currently projects were being stalled, there was a need to engage with DfC regarding long term infra-structure requirements for Libraries NI.

16.6 The Chairperson commented that stalling projects created community frustration.

16.7 Members noted the Report.

17 UPDATE REPORT – PROPOSED BANBRIDGE LIBRARY REDEVELOPMENT – ACQUISITION OF LAND AT SCARVA ROAD, BANBRIDGE BSC.15.11.22

17.1 The Assets Manager presented the Report updating the Committee on progress in acquiring land at Scarva Road, Banbridge to facilitate the proposed development of a new library facility to replace the current library building.

17.2 Members noted the Report.

18 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.16.11.22

18.1 The Assets Manager presented the Report on the Use of the Common Seal, detailing the three occasions on which the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority had been applied in the period between September 2022 and November 2022.

18.2 Members noted the Report.

19 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

19.1 There was no other notified business.

20 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

20.1 Members noted that the next scheduled meeting of the Business Support Committee would be held on Thursday 26 January 2023 at 10:30am.

22 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

22.1 The meeting ended at 12:44pm.

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

- Ms M Fitzpatrick (observer) joined at 10:34am
- Councillor B Webb joined at 10.37am
- Ms M Fitzpatrick and Councillor B Webb left at 12:13pm

- Councillor C Brownlee left at 12:26pm
- Professor B Cullen left at 12:42pm

Signed 

Dated 26 : 1 : 2023