

LIBRARIES NI

The Northern Ireland Library Authority

Minutes of a Meeting of the Business Support Committee held on

Thursday 28 March 2024 at 10:30am

In person at Lisburn City Library

PRESENT

Miss Linda Wilson	Chairperson
Mrs Wendy Osborne OBE	
Councillor Martin McRandal	
Ms Bonnie Anley	Chairperson of Libraries NI Board

IN ATTENDANCE

Dr Jim O'Hagan	Chief Executive
Mr Desi Miskelly	Director of Business Support
Mr Desi Curry	Head of ICU/ICT
Mrs Jacqui McKinstry	Head of Human Resources
Mr Tim Neeson	Assets Manager

1 APOLOGIES FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

The Chairperson welcomed Bonnie Annley, Chairperson of the Board of Libraries NI, to the Business Support Committee.

Apologies were received from Mrs Rita McNamee, Finance Manager, and Ms Finola Guinnane, Board Apprentice

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 advised that Councillor Peter Johnston having taken up a position as Special Advisor to the Minister for Communities had resigned from his position on the Board of Libraries NI and consequently as a member of the Business Support Committee.

4 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

BSC.01.03.24

- 4.1 The Director of Business Support advised that Councillor Johnston's resignation left the Committee Vice-chairperson's position vacant, based on the rotation policy this position should be held by an elected member. The Director of Business Support reported that he understood Councillor Julie Gilmore had volunteered to sit on the Business Support Committee and that this appointment would be ratified at the April Board meeting. Consequently, he proposed that the matter of election of a Vice- chairperson be considered at the May meeting when there should be two elected members as possible candidates for the position.
- 4.2 The Director of Business Support reported that as there had been no financial allocation confirmed to date, the new financial year would start with an uncertain position and it was assumed the department would provide an indicative allocation and authority to spend. This was exceptionally challenging, making planning and longer-term delivery very difficult. While there was no formal budget bidding mechanism, the Director of Business Support and the Chief Executive had provided DfC with an estimate of the minimum funding required to maintain services for the year.
- 4.3 Mrs W Osborne enquired if the financial constraints which had been put in place last year would remain in place until the situation was clarified.
- 4.4 Councillor M McRandal enquired at what point implementing harsher financial constraints would need to be considered.
- 4.5 The Director of Business Support advised that the current financial controls had been approved to 31 March 2024, therefore from 01 April 2024 libraries would return to normal opening hours. It was important that DfC understood that while the difficult financial situation in 2023/24 had been managed this did not mean it could be repeated in 2024/25. The financial situation would be monitored, significant projected overspends would be flagged up along with the actions required to avoid an overspend and their effectiveness, however initially commitment to expenditure would be constrained.
- 4.6 The Chief Executive advised that DfC had been informed of the implications for libraries of another difficult financial year and that the controls applied in 2023/24 would not be sufficient to manage a second year. Extending the temporary changes to library opening hours and staff hours would require public consultation.
- 4.7 Ms B Anley enquired if there would be merit in trying to ring fence some capital budget and were there projects ready if funding became available.
- 4.8 The Director of Business Support advised that current indications were that the capital budget will be for contractual commitments only. DfC were aware of a program of capital projects Libraries NI wanted to bring forward, there were a number of projects ready should funding become available. Money

which became available quite far into the year to be spent in year could fund small projects but not larger projects.

- 4.9 The Chief Executive commented that housing and the Casement Park project require a lot of DfC's attention. Assets had drawn up a program of projects but it was very difficult to get a commitment to 2/3year projects.
- 4.10 Miss L Wilson commented that Libraries NI had diligently managed to keep going in a difficult financial situation in 2023/44 and there was a risk that DfC would expect that they could continue to do this.
- 4.11 The Chief Executive advised that an impact analysis had been provided to DfC highlighting the consequences of insufficient funding.

**5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE BSC.02.03.24
HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2024**

- 5.1 On a proposal by Councillor M McRandal, seconded by Mrs W Osborne, the minutes of the meeting of the Business Support Committee on 25 January 2024, 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 08 February 2024.

**6 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE BSC.03.03.24
MEETING HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2024**

- 6.1 The Director of Business Support confirmed that a summary detailing the outworkings of the Committee's Effectiveness Review had been provided to the Board and subsequently incorporated into the final report of Board/ Committee Effectiveness Review 2023/24.
- 6.2 The Director of Business Support advised that additional information had been provided expanding on the subject matter of complaints received during the 2023/24 reporting period.
- 6.3 Councillor M McRandal thanked the Director of Business Support for the additional information and asked if the analysis diagram could be larger so that data labels were clearer.
- 6.4 Ms B Anley enquired if examples of complaints were available.
- 6.5 The Director of Business Support advised that more information regarding complaints was available in the report which had been brought to the January 2024 meeting. The Director of Business Support advised that he would review the analysis diagram to provide clearer information.

7 VEHICLE MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW BSC.04.03.24

- 7.1 The Assets Manager presented the Vehicle Management Policy which had been reviewed along with the associated equality screening and rural needs impact assessments in keeping with best practice and scheduled review periods. The policy was considered to remain fit for purpose, there were no substantive revisions proposed other than to update dates, titles and terminology.
- 7.2 Mrs W Osborne noted that Internal Audit had recently reviewed vehicle management and enquired if their recommendations had been considered when reviewing the Vehicle Management Policy.
- 7.3 The Assets Manager confirmed that Internal Audit's recommendations had been considered when reviewing the Policy.
- 7.4 The Director of Business Support advised that an update would be provided following Internal Audit's recommendations regarding vehicle management.
- 7.5 On a proposal by Mrs W Osborne, seconded by Councillor M McRandal, the Vehicle Management Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

**8 USE OF PRIVATELY OWNED VEHICLES FOR BSC.05.03.24
BUSINESS PURPOSES POLICY REVIEW**

- 8.1 The Assets Manager presented the Use of Privately Owned Vehicles for Business Purposes Policy which had been reviewed along with the associated equality screening and rural needs impact assessments in keeping with best practice and scheduled review periods. The policy was considered to remain fit for purpose, there were no substantive revisions proposed other than to update dates, titles and terminology.
- 8.2 Miss L Wilson advised that there was a typo which needed corrected at 5.1 and enquired if the internal audit recommendations had been considered as part of the review.
- 8.3 The Director of Business Support advised that the internal audit recommendations were not applicable to this Policy.
- 8.4 On a proposal by Miss L Wilson, seconded by Councillor M Randal, the Use of Privately Owned Vehicles for Business Purposes Policy was approved and recommended to the Board for adoption.

9 ASSETS MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW

BSC.06.03.24

- 9.1 The Assets Manager presented the Assets Management Policy which had been reviewed along with the associated equality screening and rural needs impact assessments in keeping with best practice and scheduled review periods. The policy was considered to remain fit for purpose, there were no substantive revisions proposed other than to update dates, titles and terminology.
- 9.2 Ms B Anley enquired regarding the consequences of falling outside this policy, if health and safety and insurance concerns were covered by the policy.
- 9.3 Miss L Wilson commented that there was an onus on Libraries NI to highlight concerns and seek funding from DfC and suggested that this be included in the principles of the policy at 3.1.
- 9.4 The Chief Executive suggested that the policy should state that representations are made to DfC to seek funding to maintain the estate, when funding is not received remedial and mitigating actions are taken, which could include closing a library.
- 9.5 The Assets Manager reported that resources were expended in complying with the policy, however the unreliable nature of the current funding regime significantly constrained activity.
- 9.6 Mrs W Osborne advised that the external auditors had recently commented on the challenges facing the wider public sector in achieving value for money from property maintenance activities.
- 9.7 The Chief Executive advised that health and safety risks would be covered by the risk assessment process and Health and Safety Policy.
- 9.8 The Director of Business Support advised that the Assets Management Policy would be further reviewed in line with Members' comments and be brought back for consideration to the Committee's May 2024 meeting.

10 2023/24 BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

BSC.07.03.24

- 10.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Progress Report which detailed progress in delivering on a range of targets set in the Business Support Service Plan 2023/24.
- 10.2 Mrs W Osborne noted the continuing challenges around HR, including around the HR IT system upgrade and advised that the system needs to work and there needed to be the resources to take this forward.

- 10.3 The Head of HR reported that the Team were working very hard with Fujitsu and Civica to ensure that the systems were fit for purpose.
- 10.4 The Chief Executive reported that there had been specific challenges in HR area of e3 which had generated a huge additional workload for the HR team. A lot of work was being done to resolve the Branch Library Manager industrial dispute, including progressing a business case.
- 10.5 Mrs W Osborne enquired if the shortcomings with the HR system gave rise to any contractual issues.
- 10.6 The Director of Business Support advised that the HR system was a generic offering that required significant tailoring to the Libraries NI processes and policies, the supplier was in the process of implementing and incorporating these into the next software release. The licencing for the existing recruitment system had been extended until the new system could be fully tested. The provider would be held to account to ensure that the requirements were met.
- 10.7 Councillor M McRandal expressed concern regarding the number of amber statuses, advised that background information regarding HR was useful and enquired how appraisals were being completed.
- 10.8 The Head of HR reported that the Learning and Development Manager had been absent and subsequently the post had become vacant. A new structure for Learning and Development was being considered, following this a strategy would be put in place and a plan for training of staff, in particular the new District Managers.
The target relating to staff appraisal related to Business Support staff only, across the Organisation appraisals were not being completed as staff were involved in lawful action short of strike. This had a detrimental effect on staff, not just staff engaged in industrial action and would be a priority when the dispute was resolved.
- 10.9 Ms B Anley enquired if the industrial action was likely to be resolved in the current financial year.
- 10.10 The Chief Executive reported that there had been a lot of hard work done to resolve this dispute, a business case had been prepared and there had been engagement through the LRA to step up the pressure to get an agreement. The actual signing of an agreement was unlikely to happen in the current financial year.
- 10.11 Mrs W Osborne enquired regarding the percentage of appraisals completed across the whole Organisation.

- 10.12 The Head of HR advised that she would forward this information to Mrs Osborne.
- 10.13 Ms B Anley noted that the new partnership agreement had a red status although some work had been done on this. Ms B Anley enquired if more detail could be provided next year regarding Outcome 3; Number 9, and Numbers 4, 5 and 6 had a green status but weren't measured, should measurable targets be considered.
- 10.14 The Chief Executive advised that there had been some engagement regarding the partnership agreement and hoped that a gentle reminder would help to complete this.
- 10.15 The Director of Business Support advised that the global nature of support provided by the directorate to frontline library services often made it difficult measure specific outcomes.
- 10.16 Miss L Wilson enquired if the Belfast Central Library redevelopment project was included in the current ISNI.
- 10.17 The Director of Business Support advised that he was aware there was work under way to develop a new investment strategy for Northern Ireland, but he had not as yet seen a draft.
- 10.18 The Chief Executive advised that Belfast Central Library remained a strategically important project for Libraries NI, an outline business case had been approved in 2022, a review of this would take 12-18 months before moving to selecting a design team and procurement.
- 10.19 Miss L Wilson acknowledged all the work of business support staff in achieving the green targets.
- 10.20 Members noted the Report.

11 2023/24 BUSINESS SUPPORT RISK REGISTER BSC.08.03.24 UPDATE REPORT

- 11.1 The Director of Business Support presented Business Support Risk Register 2023/24 which had been updated to reflect the current business environment and to take account of mitigating actions implemented to date and new or emerging risks which had been identified in the period since November 2023. Revisions had been added where relevant to reflect the current Corporate Risk Register.
- 11.2 Ms B Anley enquired when the Register had been updated.

- 11.3 The Director of Business Support advised that it had been updated at the beginning of March.
- 11.4 The Chief Executive reported that DfC had assigned staff to consider a Public Library Strategy.
- 11.5 Miss L Wilson commented that it would be important to get buy in from DfC.
- 11.6 Ms B Anley noted that Business Continuity Risk had moved from amber to green.
- 11.7 The Director of Business Support advised that he was content that the recently revised Business Continuity Framework was sufficiently robust.
- 11.8 Ms B Anley enquired if the Board had seen the revised Business Continuity Framework.
- 11.9 The Chief Executive confirmed that he would follow this up.
- 11.10 Members noted the Report.

**12 INFORMATION SYSTEMS E3 PROGRAMME BSC.09.03.24
UPDATE REPORT MARCH 2024**

- 12.1 The Head of ICU/ICT presented the Information Systems E3 Programme Update Report advising Members of progress made. The implementation of PSSN was complete, the library management system was live with some elements still to be implemented. Work was progressing on the budget forecasting systems and all managers had been trained, further enhancements to the HR solution had been secured and the legacy recruitment and selection system had been extended. Overall the e3 implementation plan remained on track and the associated payment milestones had been achieved to date.
- 12.2 Ms B Anley enquired why Board Members had been locked out of the system for two days.
- 12.3 The Head of ICU/ICT advised that communication of the implementation of the two-factor authentication was not properly aligned with the technical switching on of the services by the service provider. This caused a delay of two days in ensuring the service was operational. An apology was made by the Chief Executive for the confusion caused.
- 12.4 Members noted the Report.

13 FINANCE REPORTS

13.1 RESOURCE EXPENDITURE REPORT TO FEBRUARY 2024 **BSC.10.03.24**

13.2 The Director of Business Support presented the Resource Expenditure Report to 28 February 2024, detailing expenditure incurred and income to date. Projections indicated a potential underspend of 0.5% of budget at 31 March 2024.

13.3 Miss L Wilson thanked staff who had worked very hard with late funding to ensure the underspend was low.

13.4 Members noted the Report.

13.6 CAPITAL EXPENDITURE REPORT TO FEBRUARY 2024 **BSC.11.03.24**

13.7 The Director of Business Support presented the Capital Expenditure Report advising of expenditure to 28 February 2024.

13.8 Ms B Anley advised that the High Street in Killyleagh had been repainted since planning the work to Killyleagh Library and it would be good to engage with residents regarding paint colours, subject to planning considerations.

13.9 The Chief Executive advised that the Assets Team had worked very hard to engage with Killyleagh residents, the paint and render colours were subject to planning considerations.

13.10 Members noted the Report.

14 PROCUREMENT REPORT – TENDERS OVER £1,000 AND SINGLE TENDER ACTIONS OVER £1,000 **BSC.12.03.24**

14.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Procurement Report updating the Committee on procurement activity for the period from 13 January 2024 to 11 March 2024.

14.2 Miss L Wilson enquired if the value of continuing to invest in microfilm rather than accessing online services had been considered.

14.3 The Chief Executive suggested that colleagues in Services should consider this.

14.4 Members noted the Report.

15 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT TO FEBRUARY 2024 BSC.13.03.24

- 15.1 The Head of Human Resources presented the Sickness Absence Report advising that the sickness absence level for the 12 months up to 29 February 2024 was 12.59 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.
- 15.2 Mrs W Osborne noted a trend regarding work related stress which needed to be addressed, industrial action was another key issue, there was a danger of creating a culture which would be hard to change. Intervention was required and HR needed the resources to address this.
- 15.3 The Head of HR commented that it was disappointing that the culture of the Organisation had been impacted, it would take time to address this and require collaborative work across the Organisations to ensure staff feel valued.
- 15.4 Councillor M McRandal commented that it was good that this was a standing item on the agenda as the sickness absence rate impacted the effectiveness of the Organisation.
- 15.5 Ms B Anley suggested that a regular staff survey may be a timely support.
- 15.6 The Head of HR advised that Management hoped to proceed with a staff engagement survey and build upon this with a Health and Wellbeing Strategy.
- 15.7 Members noted the Report.

16 REPORT ON THE USE OF THE COMMON SEAL BSC.14.03.24

- 16.1 The Chairperson drew attention to the Report on the Use of the Common Seal, detailing the two occasions on which the Common Seal of the Northern Ireland Library Authority had been applied in the period January 2024 to March 2024.
- 16.4 Members noted the Report.

**17 ANNUAL BUSINESS SUPPORT COMMITTEE BSC.15.03.24
WORK PLAN 2024/25**

- 17.1 The Director of Business Support presented the Annual Business Support Committee Work Plan detailing meeting dates and proposed business item to be considered in 2024/25, the Plan was subject to revision or addition in response to developing business needs.

17.2 Members noted the Plan.

18 ANY OTHER NOTIFIED BUSINESS

18.1 There was no other notified business.

19 DATE OF THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

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

20 MEMBERS ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE TIMES

20.1 The meeting ended at 12:55pm.

20.2 All Members arrived for the commencement of the meeting and remained until it ended.

Signed 

Dated 30th May 2024