



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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Background briefing: Northern Ireland Library Authority (Libraries NI)

Overview

The Northern Ireland Library Authority (or Libraries NI) is the public library service for Northern Ireland. Its functions were established by the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, replacing the previous structure whereby libraries were managed through five Education and Library Boards. Libraries NI is overseen by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, and currently operates 99 branch libraries in Northern Ireland, two specialist libraries, and 28 mobile libraries. Libraries NI is part-way through a three stage consultation process as part of a review: *Meeting the Demands of a Modern Public Library Service*. Stage one resulted in the closure of ten libraries in the Greater Belfast area, a decision on ten libraries outside Belfast is expected in September 2011, and a third stage on mobile library provision is yet to commence. Libraries policy is driven by the 2006 document, *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*, which states in Public Library Service 2 that '85% of households should have access to a library service within two miles'¹.

¹ DCAL. 2006. *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries: Principles and priorities for the development of public libraries in Northern Ireland*: p22.

1 Libraries NI

Libraries NI is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body, established under the Libraries Act (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. Libraries NI began operating in 2009-10. Previously, the library service was undertaken by Education and Library Boards whose sponsor department was the Department of Education. Libraries NI aims to 'provide and promote a range of high quality library and information services for everyone in Northern Ireland'².

Libraries NI is the largest of DCAL's nine arms-length bodies in terms of budget. Figures for income and expenditure for recent years, provided by DCAL, are as follows³:

Income

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
DCAL budget	34,532,000	33,883,000	38,038,000	31,400,000
National Lottery	Not known	Not known	200,000	-
Other sources	Not known	Not known	1,507,000	-

Expenditure

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
Grant spend	0	0	0	-
Capital spend	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Not known</i>	3,849,000	-
Fixed asset/ collections additions	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Not known</i>	-
Overhead/admin costs	<i>Not known</i>	<i>Not known</i>	33,082,000	-
	-	-	36,931,000	-
Admin as proportion of overall expenditure	-	-	89.58%	-

In its initial proposal for budget reductions, presented to the CAL Committee in January 2011, DCAL outlined a reduction to the Libraries NI allocation of £2.99m over the next four years. Libraries NI stated of this proposal that when capital and current budgets are combined and inflationary pressures taken into account, the proposed reduction represented cumulative efficiencies of £13.82m. Libraries NI stated in their submission to the CAL Committee in January 2011 that on the basis of this proposed budget

² Libraries NI website. <http://www.librariesni.org.uk> Accessed 13.9.10.

³ Information provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, 10.9.10, and included in NI Assembly Research Paper NIAR 384-10 *DCAL's Arms-Length Bodies: Accountability, Governance and Resources*, 13.9.10.

reduction, plans were submitted to DCAL which outlined savings measures in four broad areas of expenditure, as follows:

Savings Plans	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	Total
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Closure of libraries	0.086	0.179	0.252	0.265	0.782
Reduced opening hours	0.362 (net of potential redundancies)	0.732	0.763	0.796	1.929
Recruitment freeze	0.390	1.028	1.750	2.532	5.700
Reduction in stock budget	0.427	0.979	2.595	1.407	5.408
Total savings	0.541	2.918	5.360	5.000	13.819

Table 1: Savings plans proposed by Libraries NI in response to the draft budget, January 2011⁴.

However, in the final budget allocation, DCAL stated that Libraries NI has been allocated an additional £2m of additional resource, an uplift of £880,000 to their allocation in 2013/14 via internal reallocation, an additional £2m of capital across the four years, a further £500,000 to 'cover existing commitments' in 2011/12, and £4.25m of Invest to Save funding for the ELFNI replacement⁵. Their final DCAL allocation for the four year budget period, as compared with 2010/11, is as follows:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Current expenditure	30.52	31.56	30.11	31.02	30.57
Capital expenditure	13.00	2.30	4.17	2.59	2.70

Table 2: Final budget allocations for Libraries NI

2 Consultation process and library closures

From 2010, Libraries NI has conducted a review of the public library service, entitled 'Meeting the demands of a modern public library service'. This review is designed to meet a key target set by DCAL⁶.

Libraries NI has outlined a number of existing drivers and difficulties which have prompted the need for a strategic review of Northern Ireland's public libraries⁷:

⁴ Libraries NI. 7.1.11. Submission to Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee on the implications of Draft Budget 2010: presented to the CAL Committee 13.1.11.

⁵ DCAL. 25.5.11. *Final budget allocations and consultation responses*: written submission to the CAL Committee for meeting on 2.6.11.

⁶ Libraries NI. 17.2.11. *Meeting the demands for a modern public library service within Northern Ireland*: written submission to the CAL Committee meeting on 17.2.11.

⁷ Libraries NI. 2010. *Meeting the Demands for a Modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland – Stage 2*.

Drivers:

- The opportunity, for the first time since 1973, to conduct a review of library provision across the entire public library service;
- A unique opportunity to review this service as a regional service and not constrained by former Education and Library Board boundaries;
- The need to deliver on business efficiencies identified in the rationale for creating Libraries NI;
- The need for more suitable buildings in locations that serve the population and reflect demographic shifts in populations;
- The need to recognise that some libraries are simply located too close together which may have been appropriate historically and is now no longer necessary;
- The need to derive much more effective use of staff in a customer support capacity;
- The need to make best use of staff resources and proactively drive down relief staffing costs;
- The need to modernise and upgrade buildings;
- The provision of opening times to reflect modern lifestyles;
- Concentration on provision of stock where it is needed;
- Improved security and reduced costs;
- Increasing diversity in the workforce;
- A working environment more fully compliant with Health & Safety legislation;
- The need for re-structured, more streamlined services incorporating flexible working patterns and closer integration of departments; and
- The need for libraries to be more than 'just books'.

Difficulties:

- Trying to sustain a very large number of branch libraries some of which have a very low level of usage;
- Offering the full range of library services in smaller, more limited buildings;
- Utilisation of scarce staffing resources over a large number of library locations;
- A surplus of old stock and lack of proper storage;
- Many buildings with inadequate facilities and in a poor state, requiring significant refurbishment to bring them to a state of compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements;
- The high cost of maintaining buildings which are significantly under-utilised;
- Out-dated custom and practice and inflexible working arrangements; and
- Complete absence of any formal strategic review and long-term failure or inability to plan in line with resources available.

The review involves three specific phases of consultation. The first has been completed, the second is part-way through, and the third is yet to commence.

- i. Phase one of the consultation examined library provision in the Greater Belfast area. Following the completion of this stage in June 2010, ten of the 14 libraries consulted on were 'determined as unviable' and were closed.
- ii. Phase two involved consultation on ten libraries outside the Greater Belfast area: Carnlough, Draperstown, Fintona, Gilford, Kells and Connor, Killyleagh, Moneymore, Moy, and Richhill. A decision on the outcome of this consultation is expected in September 2011⁸.

Libraries NI has estimated that the closure of ten libraries in Greater Belfast and a further ten following phase two of the review, would provide cumulative savings of £0.782million over the four year period⁹.

- iii. Phase three will involve a consultation on the mobile library services across Northern Ireland, including current routes within the Greater Belfast area, and making consideration of whether additional provision may be required.

3 Similar bodies in other jurisdictions

Library provision in other jurisdictions across the UK and Ireland is generally dealt with by local authorities, with some form of over-sight body providing advice and information at national level. The situation in Northern Ireland, with Libraries NI responsible for centralised library provision, is unique.

England

In England, public libraries are funded and run through local authorities. The scale of coverage in each case can vary markedly, with some operating at a large scale (such as Cornwall Council, with 35 libraries), and some much smaller (such as Peterborough City Council, with eight).

Support and good practice for libraries is co-ordinated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. MLA will be abolished, with functions transferring to Arts Council England, in 2012.

Scotland

Public libraries in Scotland are also funded and run by local authorities. The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) is an independent advisory body to the Scottish Government on library and information matters, offering 'leadership, focus and support

⁸ Libraries NI news release. 3.5.11. *Libraries NI board decision expected in September.*

⁹ Libraries NI. 7.1.11. *Submission to the Culture, Arts and leisure Committee on the implications of Draft Budget 2010: p4*

to the Scottish library and information sector, coordinating and promoting national service developments'¹⁰.

Wales

In common with England and Scotland, public library services in Wales are co-ordinated by local authorities. CyMAL: Museums, Libraries and Archives Wales provides financial support and advice to local libraries.

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, local libraries are also co-ordinated at local authority level, with 32 separate library services. Provision is over-seen by the Department for Environment, Community and Local Government, and An Chomhairle Leabharlanna (the Library Council) provides advice to the department and the library authorities on public library development and library co-operation.

¹⁰ Information and Libraries Scotland website. 'Scottish Library and Information Council': <http://www.slainte.org.uk/slic/slicindex.htm> accessed 10.6.11.