



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19TH MARCH 2019

LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY 2019-21

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR RHYS LEWIS

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Cabinet Members with an opportunity to review the Strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library Service and its associated Action Plan.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Consider the content of the report;
- 2.2 Approve the library services strategy action plan.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Core entitlement 12 of the Welsh Public Library Standards requires every Local Authority in Wales to produce a strategy and action plan that outlines the future development of its public library service. Once approved these documents must be placed on the Council's website so that they can be easily accessible to the public.
- 3.2 Developing a Strategy and Action Plan is also important as it ensures that the library service is aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan and to other local and national strategies so that it supports the wider Council and Welsh Government agenda.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The first published Library Service Strategy and Action Plan for Rhondda Cynon Taf covered the period 2015 – 18 and indicated the direction of

travel and priorities at a challenging time for Local Authorities and their library services. This strategy identified the following as key priorities:

- Embedding libraries at the heart of communities;
- Enabling residents to maximise their potential by ensuring they have access to a broad range of opportunities;
- Managing the service through a period of change and renewal and continuing to investigate innovative models of delivery;
- Working more effectively with reduced resources.

4.2 The Action Plan indicated how the service would address each of these priorities and included a range of performance indicators for measuring success. **Appendix 1** includes the Library Service Action Plan 2015-18 and indicates the progress made against each priority.

4.3 When the 2015-18 strategy was being written, it was impossible to foresee the significant on-going changes that would affect the service and the opportunities, as well as challenges that these would present the service, the staff and our customers.

4.4 The library landscape in 2019 looks far more favourable than it did in 2015 and although some changes to the service have not been universally welcomed, progress has been made in many aspects of the service and significant capital investment has been made into library buildings while co-location with other services has benefitted customers as well as the staff.

Of particular note are:

- The opening of a new library at Rhydyfelin;
- The transfer of Porth library to Porth Plaza providing customers with access to additional and improved facilities and services;
- The co-location of One4All at Aberdare library to ensure customers have access to a wider range of information and advice;
- The complete internal and external refurbishment of Tonypany library with the creation of an IT/Education room, community room and makerspace;
- The purchase of 2 new mobile library vehicles with Wi-Fi and tablets.

In late spring 2019 work will be completed on Ferndale and Mountain Ash community hubs and the libraries in those towns will transfer to these new premises which will include enhanced facilities and services.

The development of the Council's flagship library at the Taff Vale hub has attracted investment of over £6 million, including a grant of £300,000 from Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh

Government, and is due to be completed during the 2019/20 financial year.

Therefore the library service looks ahead to the next two years with optimism.

- 4.5 Overall, the key priorities identified in the 2015-18 strategy have been met while Customer Satisfaction Surveys indicate a very high level of satisfaction with customer care across all aspects of the service (with between 96% and 99% of respondents indicating that they felt the service they received was 'good' or 'very good'). Most importantly the impact of the service on individuals and groups in their communities indicate the importance libraries continue to play in people's lives – these are evidenced through case studies.

5. THE LIBRARY SERVICE STRATEGY 2019/21 – SUPPORTING PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES TO ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

- 5.1 The Draft Strategy and Action Plan 2019/22 can be seen at **Appendix 2 and 3**. The Draft Strategy includes information on current levels of usage, an outline of the provision that is currently available and key priorities for the future. The Action Plan identifies how the priorities will be met in order to achieve the outcomes and impacts desired.

- 5.2 The key priorities for the next three years are proposed as:

- Keeping the service relevant in a rapidly changing environment;
- Embedding new models of service delivery;
- Improving the library experience for customers.

- 5.3 In order to achieve these priorities the service will:

- Enhance the programme of digitisation of resources and make these available online so that customers can access collections at any time;
- Harness new IT developments to improve the customer experience at static, mobile and through the @homelibraryservice;
- Ensure that all staff have the skills required to provide a service that remains relevant at a time when innovations in technology and changing patterns of usage are having an impact on how customers want to engage with the service;
- Invest in infra-structure improvements including co-location with other services in community hubs;
- Embed new models of delivery and monitor customer feedback to ensure they achieve their objectives;
- Ensure that residents have access to a broad range of learning opportunities;

- Work with partners to provide a wider range of information, advice and support on well-being and health;
- Work with partners and volunteers in the heritage, arts and cultural sectors to develop a range of cultural activities.

5.4 The service will work towards ensuring the following outcomes and impacts:

- People will be able to increase their knowledge/skills having used the library;
- People will be able to take part in reading and other cultural events organised by the library of their choice;
- People will feel part of a community using the library service;
- People will be able to take advantage of the opportunities of the digital world through using the library;
- Personal health and well-being will be enhanced by using the library;
- People can participate more fully in local affairs via the facilities in the library

6. NEXT STEPS

6.1 If Cabinet is happy to approve the Library Service Draft Strategy and Action Plan 2019/21, it will be sent to Creative Design and Print and appropriate photographs included and the information included in infographic format so that it is attractive and easy to read. It will also be translated prior to being published on the Council website.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Due regard has been paid in the development of this strategy to the needs of protected groups and the needs of individuals so that there is equal access to the service and equality of opportunity for residents regardless of their status, gender, disability, background, ethnicity, religious belief or sexual orientation.

7.2 There is no requirement to undertake a full Equality Impact Assessment in respect of this strategy and action plan.

7.3 The content of this strategy and action plan will not have a negative impact on the Welsh language or result in the Welsh language being treated less fairly than the English language.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 The Strategy document has not been subject to a public consultation. However, the content of the strategy and associated action plan has been influenced both by feedback from customers through the Customer

Satisfaction Surveys undertaken in 2016/17, feedback from the service's 'Keep in Touch' days, and responses from customers and others who have taken part in the recent consultation events at Mountain Ash, Ferndale, Porth where changes to the library provision have been proposed as part of the Council's wider developments of community hubs and town centres. Feedback on the Transformation of the mobile library changes has added to the understanding of customer needs while informal feedback through emails and telephone calls is always forthcoming.

- 8.2 The views of young people have been captured through the Library Service's Children and Young People's Customer Satisfaction Survey and the much wider View Point Survey undertaken by the Youth Engagement and Participation Service at the end of 2018 which included a series of questions to gauge the opinions of young people about libraries and what would attract them to visit and use the facilities.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Library Service is aware that there is a limited budget and that the service is required to adhere to its current funding levels. It will work with internal Council services and other partners to apply for external grant funding where appropriate to support any investment in buildings and facilities identified in the Action Plan.

10. LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires Local Authorities to ensure the provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service without specifying what that entails. However, in Wales the Welsh Public Library Standards has clear quality indicators that library services have to abide by. This Strategy and Action Plan is designed to ensure that Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service meets its statutory obligations.

11. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 11.1 The work of the Library Service links to the corporate each of the corporate priorities:
- Building a strong economy;
 - Priority of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone;
 - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work.
- 11.2 This Strategy and Action Plan will ensure that the Library Service is sustainable over the **longer-term** and remains relevant in the face of changing patterns of customer usage and raised expectations of modern library services. In order to provide the maximum benefit possible to customers, and maximise its own resources the service will **collaborate**

with other Council services and partner organisations to facilitate a wide range of activities and events. Co-location in community hubs will add significant value to the service provided to customers and contribute to the creation of a more **integrative** model of provision – specifically one that is focussed on providing early intervention in order to prevent problems and issues experienced by children, young people and families from deteriorating.

- 11.3 The provision of an @homelibraryservice with its expanded eligibility criteria, is designed to **prevent** the most vulnerable customers from being adversely affected by the changes in mobile library provision. The strategy indicates the retention of a Children and Young People’s service as this is seen as essential to ensure access to books and associated activities that will prevent young people from being at a disadvantage in their education.
- 11.4 Customers of all ages will be **involved** in reviewing the services provided at libraries and mobile libraries through Customer Satisfaction Surveys due to take place later in 2019.
- 11.5 This Strategy and Action Plan contributes to the following well-being goals:
 - **A prosperous Wales** – Ensuring a sustainable library service will ensure access to a world of lifelong learning through relevant book stock, online and other materials as well as facilitating access to a wide range of learning opportunities in communities. Support provided for the development of digital skills with free access to Wi-Fi will support contribute to a more skilled and employable population;
 - **A more resilient Wales** – the Strategy indicates the investment to be made in the workforce so that their levels of resilience are increased at a time when the service continues to undergo significant changes;
 - **A healthier Wales** – By providing information through books, online resources and access to advice and support sessions through partner organisations and services, customers will be able to make more informed choices for the benefit of their health. They can also be helped through the Book Prescription Scheme that directly supports people with health concerns;
 - **A more equal Wales** – the commitment to maintain all elements of the library service including mobile and home library provision will ensure that all residents will be able to access the service, regardless of their situation. The piloting of some digital technology will potentially transform the lives of vulnerable people by enabling them to access online learning as well as e-books and other materials;

- **A Wales of cohesive communities** – libraries provide a community centre for residents to gather in, free of charge. There will be continued investment in library buildings under this strategy so that they will contribute to the regeneration of town centres and provide a welcoming space. Libraries will also continue to facilitate the development of reader and learning groups and host the meetings of community organisations. In this way they will provide the glue that holds communities together as they promote tolerance and understanding;
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** – the Strategy and Action Plan makes specific reference to the family history and local studies collections and plans for the further digitisation of collections. This will make an important contribution to the promotion of the heritage of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Much of the historical material is in the Welsh language;
- **A globally responsible Wales** – Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library Service works with other library services across Wales to procure book stock and e-books/online stock to ensure that resources are used most efficiently. This is an element of the work that will continue through 2019-22.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 This report has provided Cabinet Members with a draft copy of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service Strategy and Action Plan 2019/22 for consideration.
- 12.2 If the current draft is approved, it will require uploading onto the Council's website before the end of March 2019 so that the service adheres to the Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee – Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity Committee

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICE

Background Papers

None.

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