Appendix 1 – Progress Against the 2019/21 Action Plan

The pandemic had a major impact on library provision in 2020/21 but despite there were some significant achievements as identified in the table below:

Action Plan 2019/21 – Evaluation

Theme	What we wanted to achieve.	What we achieved
Keeping the service relevant in a rapidly changing environment	Improved and up-to-date digital and computer equipment available at all libraries in RCT.	Public access PCs were renewed at all branches in 2021. Large interactive screens suitable for training or holding meetings online have been placed in community meeting rooms at Pontypridd, Ferndale, Porth, Rhydyfelin and Mountain Ash Libraries Self-service machines have been installed in all libraries. Where possible these have been situated to allow use out of normal library hours. MFD photocopiers and scanners have been installed in all libraries All staff have been given access to Teams for virtual meetings and staff training sessions. In a service such as ours with locations spread over the County Borough this will reduce travel and increase contact between managers and staff. Senior managers issued with laptops to aid remote working and to give opportunities for remote access with both staff and public. (This has been used for meetings, training sessions, remote interviews etc).
	More access to a wider range of electronic resources.	The provision of electronic resources is one area that has benefitted from the Covid-19 pandemic due to an inevitable surge in the use of digital technologies due to social distancing and lockdowns. In effect the Library Service became a virtual service almost overnight and had to quickly adjust to new ways of working and delivering services. These changes highlighted the fact that there is an appetite for digital services with a significant increase in users and items borrowed being seen. The increased appetite for digital services and in particular e-books and e-audiobooks led to significant investment in these areas. With funding coming from Welsh Government and a realignment of our book budget to increase the amounts being spent on e-resources As well as investing in our existing e-book and e-audiobook platform Borrowbox we have also taken out a subscription to another e-resource platform (Ulverscroft) to increase availability and choice for our customers. People now have the option of becoming digital members of the library by joining online. Digital

membership provides access to all our digital content and digital members wishing to borrow physical items can upgrade to full membership by providing ID at one of our libraries. Digital content includes access to a large collection of e-books and e-audiobooks containing a wide selection of titles including Welsh language titles. The number of people borrowing e-books and e-audiobooks has increased greatly during the Covid-19 pandemic as can be seen by the following table.

Total loans		
April & May 2019	April & May 2020	Variance
69,528	145,736	110%

Active users		
May-19	May-20	Variance
8,144	16,088	98%

During the Covid-19 pandemic a temporary 'Order and Collect' service was introduced where library members could order books online or by telephone for collection from a library of their choice. This service has proven to be popular with library members appreciating the book selections made by staff and so the service is to be retained.

| Improved use of social media platforms for promoting the service to current customers and new customers.

Work with the Council's marketing team to promote the Library Services online resources. | Prior to the Covid pandemic our use of social media via our Library Facebook page had showed a slow but steady increase as we continued to expand our promotion of library materials and events as well as providing service updates and information. However, during the pandemic we had to rapidly adapt to dealing with an online audience and increasingly made use of social media to share information related to Covid-19, communicate changes to the library service and to promote available library resources. This increased usage can be seen in the following table |

Month	Facebook followers	People viewing content
April 2020	580	6300
April 2021	969	11,600

Further improvements in this area could be made if other social media platforms such as Instagram were made available to the service.

		The Schools and Children's service have utilised Facebook to provide (with publisher consent) on-line storytelling and craft sessions, these have temporarily replaced physical sessions in libraries. Going forward a blended approach using both physical sessions and online sessions is planned. All relevant stories and posts are shared with the council's marketing team for inclusion on the council's Twitter feed, website, and news feeds.
	Digitisation of collections and development of an appropriate platform to enable 24/7 accessibility to online resources	The digitisation of local history materials has continued throughout this period and both our 'Photographic Archive' and 'Our Past' websites have had additional material added to them. The rate at which digitisation has occurred has been affected by the Covid pandemic with our digitisation officer not being able to carry out this work from home. Funding to develop an appropriate platform has been acquired via a successful bid to the National Heritage Lottery Fund with this being part of the larger 'Altered Images' heritage project. One of the project purposes for Altered Images is to merge the library service's existing heritage websites to create one all-encompassing website that showcases, records, preserves and promotes the culture, history, and heritage of Rhondda Cynon Taf. Thereby making the collections more accessible and attracting more and a wider range of people online.
	More digital programmes and activities for children and young people at RCT libraries.	Staff from the Schools and Children's service were able to access a digital training package thanks to a grant from the Welsh Government's Cultural Recovery Fund. This 'Estyn Allen' project involved technical training in the use of basic equipment and software apps as well as providing funding for authorities to invest in the basic hardware and software needed to produce good quality activities and content. The skills, equipment and software gained from participating in this project has allowed staff to produce on-line storytelling and craft sessions and tie in videos for events such as how to bake a chocolate cake (Roald Dahl Day) and how to make Welsh Cakes (St David's day). In addition to this our Teenage Librarian established an on-line reading group. All these activities have proven to be popular and although they were introduced as a means of engaging with children and young adults during Covid restrictions we will look to take a blended approach going forward with a mix of physical and digital activities.

Embedding new models of service delivery	A successful and well-used mobile library service that offers a range of services and is accessed by customers of all ages.	Of the all the services we offer the mobile library service has been hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic due to the restricted space available on a mobile library and the need for social distancing to be observed. Mobile services were suspended as of March 2020 and are yet to be re-instated making it impossible to make any progress in developing this service. Instead, we have worked to expand our At Home service by restructuring the current service and incorporating the Mobile staff and vehicles into the service to expand the number of visits available. This has allowed us to incorporate many of the mobile library members into this service as well as opening the service to vulnerable people affected by the pandemic.
	A @homelibraryservice that supports customers to access books in a variety of formats that meet their needs.	Prior to the disruption caused by Covid the service continued to develop with staff piloting a tablet loan service whereby tablets with pre-loaded digital e-books/e-audiobooks were delivered to @home library members. Unfortunately, this was cut short due to the Covid pandemic but will resume as soon as conditions allow. During the pandemic after an initial period where the service was temporarily withdrawn, we were able to reintroduce the service due to the appropriate use of PPE and the introduction of Covid safe delivery guidelines. The service has continued to operate since its reintroduction and expanded during lockdown, offering a service to people who were shielding or identified as vulnerable as part of the local response to the pandemic. Use was also made of Mobile Library staff and vehicles to expand the service further to include deliveries to mobile library members whose service had been withdrawn due to covid restrictions.
	Well-used libraries at the heart of their communities co-located with other services and partners in community hubs at: • Ferndale • Mountain Ash • Porth • Pontypridd (Taf Vale)	The co-location of libraries with other services in line with the Council's development of community hubs that provide a range of services has been successfully completed during the timeframe of this strategic plan with community hubs that contain libraries being established at the following sites. • Mountain Ash (Canolfan Pennar) and Ferndale - Ferndale Hwb) – 2019 • Porth (Porth Plaza) and Pontypridd (Llys Cadwyn) – 2020 • Treorchy (Cultural hub in partnership with the Park and Dare Theatre) – 2021 Investment from the Council and successful bids to MALD for Transformation Capital Grants have

		allowed us to create modern and well-equipped libraries at each site that are well suited to serve their local communities.
		Although the Covid pandemic has disrupted the process of building a customer base for these locations' initial data from Ferndale and Mountain Ash libraries that opened prior to the pandemic show a significant increase in use and in the number and range of activities and events being offered from these sites.
		The One4all service which provides a face-to-face information service for the council was transferred into the Library Service in April 2020. The timing of the move and the disruption caused by Covid-19 has not allowed any real analysis of how this service can best fit into the library service to take place and this is something that we hope to achieve during the period of the next Library Strategy.
Improving the library experience for customers	All library buildings to be attractive and suitable for the needs of the communities that they service.	Prior to the period covered by this strategy a number of successful bids to MALD for Transformation Capital Grants had resulted in the overall condition of our libraries being raised to a good level. The good work previously carried out has been built upon during the period of this strategy with the development of the Hub model for service delivery leading to significant investment in libraries situated within community hubs. This includes the installation of Adult Changing Places at Canolfan Pennar, Llys Cadwyn and Porth that ensures improved access to people with disabilities.
		All libraries have benefitted from investment to IT facilities which has allowed all our public access pcs to be renewed, self-service kiosks to be introduced and remote printing facilities made available. We also use our annual budget to maintain libraries to ensure that they are attractive, welcoming, and fit for purpose and make improvements where possible. Example of this would be the significant improvement made to facilities at Tonypandy library and the creation of a small community meeting room at Hirwaun which allows private One-to-One meetings to take place
	More access to learning opportunities for all ages.	The ability to develop access to learning opportunities has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Face to face groups and classes have been suspended for long periods and when reintroduced only available for limited numbers. However, the foundations for developing greater access to learning opportunities have been created during this period with more community rooms, IT

		suites and better connections with learning providers being developed thanks to the community hub model of service delivery. In libraries at Ferndale and Mountain Ash where these improvements were introduced prior to the Covid-19 pandemic access to learning opportunities increased with 11 additional opportunities per month being created at Ferndale Library and an additional 15 per month at Mountain Ash. During the pandemic the library service has looked to develop learning opportunities online by creating online story and craft sessions, increasing the range and number of educational stock available via our digital e-book/e-audiobook platform, and promoting other library online resources such as Libby (e-magazine platform with over 3,000 titles), Ancestry and Transparent Language Online. It is hoped that once services return to normal, we can take advantage of the foundations laid down during Covid, both physical and digital, to provide more access to learning opportunities.
	Well -developed Reader Development Programmes for all ages	The library service has a number of reader development programmes in place including Bookstart for children under three years of age, the Summer Reading Challenge and various Book Clubs, for example English Language, Welsh Language, Teen, Visually Impaired, Sci-Fi and Manga. In addition to this we organise and hold regular in-house story time sessions at libraries throughout RCT. Again, many of these were disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic but we were able to deliver story time sessions and book clubs online and the Summer Reading Challenge was hosted fully online in 2020 and a hybrid version was held in 2021. Our Schools Library Service provides registered schools with project collections on a wide range of subjects and reader collections which allow classes to read the same book.
	Programmes of cultural activities developed with other partners.	The Library Service works with a wide range of people, groups, organisations, and other council departments to develop cultural activities. These include one off exhibitions, annual events, and larger grant funded projects. Examples of these include: Three Welsh Language sessions were held at Aberdare and Pontypridd libraries as part of Owain Glyndwr day on the 16th September 2019. Paintings by the Ystradyfodwg Arts Society are regularly displayed at Treorchy Library. The Library Service produces an annual anthology of poetry and prose by local writers and launch/ performance events are held each year to showcase

		the work included in the anthology. (2021 no events held due to Covid 19). Other annual events include activities to promote national initiatives such as 'World Book Day' and 'Libraries Week'. The Library Service was successful with a bid for funding from Carnegie UK as part of their Engaging Libraries project. Our project was entitled 'The Fake News Immunity project' and we engaged with members of the public on the creation of a Fake News booklet, a short film based on community conversations about Fake News and we also worked with a local school to produce a local History booklet that explored local Fake News stories from the past to discover whether they were true or fake As a NLHF Priority Area RCT received a solicited invitation to apply to the NLHF for grant funding towards a project of our selection that would look to rebuild capacity within Rhondda Cynon Taf and the community in relation to heritage. The project that was developed as a result of this approach - 'Altered Images' - was approved in August 2021. It has been allocated £250,000 and will last for 3 years. and will look at the theme of Altered Images – How views of the past change over time and how understanding the past can challenge our assumptions about where we come from and how our communities developed. The Library Service will be leading on the delivery of this project working closely with the Heritage and Arts Service and local communities.
	Well-qualified and skilled staff able to offer advice and support on a wide range of issues	We work hard to identify opportunities to provide staff with training including in-house training and free training offered by suppliers or external organisations. Funding for two staff to undertake a professional qualification via distance learning has been provided and two staff are currently enrolled at Aberystwyth University. We support any staff member who wishes to improve their Welsh language skills by paying course fees or allowing time away from work. Library staff also undertake training which is relevant to developments in their work or to specific projects recent examples of this include Census Support training and use of the Order & Collect' module. Recent events and in particular the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of good digital skills and two staff were enrolled in the Estyn Allen project which involved technical training in the use of basic equipment and software apps.
	Good use made of volunteers to add capacity to the service	Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the library service offered a number of volunteer opportunities primarily in the form of work placements, including

| | | long term placements for people with learning disabilities, and a small number of identified roles being offered out to volunteers such as assisting in the digitisation of materials from the local history collection. Young adults from our e-teens library regularly assist with library activities such as story time sessions and special events. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and to ensure the safety of staff and volunteers, a temporary suspension of library volunteers has been enforced. During Covid however as part of the development of Community Resilience Hubs established to provide residents with support, library staff contributed to the coordination of Community Resilience Volunteers who delivered food and medication to vulnerable people on the Shielded Patients List. |