

RHONDDA CYNON TAF LIBRARY SERVICE DRAFT STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2022-25

STATUTORY DUTIES OF LIBRARIES IN THE UK

Local authorities have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 'to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons'.

The Act does not specify how local authorities should ensure they deliver a modern and efficient library service that meets the needs of their communities except that they should:

- have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service
- lend books and other printed material free of charge to those who live, work or study in the area

In Wales the duty 'to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided through local authorities' has been devolved to the relevant Welsh Minister and since 2002 this duty has been fulfilled through the Welsh Public Library Standards.

These standards consist of 12 core entitlements and 15 Quality Indicators.

An annual assessment is undertaken of the performance of each Library Service in Wales against the WPLS. Due to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of public libraries during the National Lockdown, no assessment was undertaken in 2020/21. However, in 2019/20 Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library Service met all 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taf achieved 5 in full, 1 in part and failed to achieve 3. The full WPLS Assessment Report can be found on the Welsh Government website.

THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT 2015

The long-term aim of the Welsh Government is to build a Wales that is prosperous and secure, healthy and active, ambitious and learning, and united and connected.

The Well-being Goals from the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) Act 2015 are:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language
- A globally responsible Wales

Libraries contribute to each of the 7 Well-being Goals by:

- providing access to a world of lifelong learning through books and online information, free access to the internet and the delivery and facilitation of learning opportunities for people of all ages
- encouraging personal development and offering a range of services and activities that promote social and economic resilience
- working with partners to support wellbeing and reduce social isolation including providing information to support individuals to make informed choices and supporting the Book Prescription Scheme

- providing safe and inclusive facilities, and offering support to those who are socially disadvantaged to access provision within their communities that will improve their prospects
- providing places where people can meet and connect with each other and with the services they need locally, including through the development of local hubs
- encouraging and promoting cultural activities for all ages, preserving local collections that safeguard local heritage and ensuring access to materials, and activities in the Welsh language
- making efficient use of resources, recycling materials, and working with MALD and other library services in Wales to develop the All-Wales Library Management system and implement good practice that reduces impact on the environment.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S CORPORATE PLAN

The Library Service contributes to the priorities identified in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020 – 2024 'Making a Difference':

- People: are independent, healthy and successful
- Places: where people are proud to live, work and play
- Prosperity: creating the opportunity for people and businesses: to be innovative; be entrepreneurial; and fulfil their potential and prosper

LIBRARIES CONNECTED – UNIVERSAL LIBRARY OFFERS

The Library Service is guided in everything it does by themes identified by the Welsh Government in its Sixth Quality Framework – 'Connected and Ambitious Libraries' that outlines the following Universal Offers:

HEALTH & WELLBEING: Healthier, Happier, Connected - To support the health and wellbeing of local people and communities through services that inform, engage and connect.

INFORMATION & DIGITAL: Inform, Inspire, Innovate - To ensure local communities have access to quality information and digital services, to learn new skills and to feel safe online.

READING: Engage, Imagine, Discover - To build a literate and confident society by developing, delivering and promoting creative reading activities in libraries.

CULTURE & CREATIVITY: Explore, Create, Participate - To enable local communities to access and participate in a variety of quality and diverse arts and cultural experiences through local libraries.

VISION

Our vision for Rhondda Cynon Taf Libraries is to support all individuals and communities to achieve their full potential.

LIBRARY SERVICES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Despite pressures on local authority finances across Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has maintained a mixed model of delivery that includes:

- 3 Area Libraries.
- 10 Branch Libraries
- Mobile provision including the @homelibraryservice for residents who are unable to use static libraries
- A Schools Library Service that offers a loan and advisory service to all primary schools.
- A Children and Youth Librarian that develops programmes and activities that promotes reading and information literacy among young people.
- E-books, e-audiobooks and e-magazines available online at all times to all residents.
- Local studies collections at Aberdare, Pontypridd and Treorchy libraries.
- Online access to local studies materials and photographic collections.
- Delivery of the Council's face-to-face 'One4all' information service
- Access to community meeting spaces and digital technology

The development of community hubs from 2019 has added another dimension to the Library Service and enhanced the offer to residents. The following libraries are currently co-located with other Council services and/or partner organisations:

- Porth
- Mountain Ash (Canolfan Pennar)
- Ferndale (Yr Hwb)
- Church Village (Garth Olwg Lifelong Learning Centre)
- Llantrisant (co-located with the Leisure Centre)
- Pontypridd (Llys Cadwyn)
- Treorchy (Arts Service/Park and Dare theatre)

In addition, in April 2020 the Council's One4All information and advice service was merged with the Library Service. This service operates from the following library/hub buildings:

- Treorchy
- Aberdare
- Llys Cadwyn
- Canolfan Pennar (Mountain Ash)
- Pontyclun

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Covid-19 had a major impact on library provision in 2020-21. The major negative impact was the requirement for services to close during the National Lockdown and during the Local Lockdown in Rhondda Cynon Taf. On-going restrictions as Wales passed through different Alert Levels continued

to have a negative effect on the footfall in libraries, although conversely, there was a significant increase in the number of people downloading e-books and e-audiobooks.

Library services adapted quickly to the challenges and provision, such as story-telling and craft sessions for children, transferred online while the development of an 'Order and Collect Service' for books has been extremely popular and enabled libraries to provide services from the end of June 2020 onwards in line with public health regulations.

Mobile library provision was suspended during this period to protect staff and customers as the vehicles were unable to meet social distancing requirements, and there was a need for staff in other areas of the service and elsewhere in the Council to provide resident support. However, additional resources were provided to the @homelibraryservice for residents unable to leave their homes to access books – this has been crucial for the wellbeing of the most vulnerable residents.

It was during this period of lockdown that Community Hubs and the support co-ordinated from library bases locally had the greatest impact on resident health and wellbeing.

It is difficult at this time to assess the longer-term impact of the pandemic, but it is recognised that there will be some customers who still lack confidence in visiting their local libraries and hubs and this may continue for a longer period than anticipated.

KEY PRIORITIES

The financial pressures experienced by local authorities in recent years and those imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic have resulted in the library service reviewing every aspect of its offer to ensure that it:

- remains relevant in an increasingly technological age
- provides access to the range of opportunities and support required by residents
- embraces change and adopts an innovative approach to problem-solving to ensure the service is fit for purpose for the longer term

The focus going forward will be on:

- keeping the service relevant in a rapidly changing environment
- improving the library experience for all customers
- taking the opportunities and lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic to inform and shape future provision

Engagement with communities to understand their needs and work with partners to ensure that customers have the range of provision they require ensuring that development take account of the voices of seldom heard members of the community will be a cross-cutting theme, as will the focus on ensuring that libraries/hubs remain at the heart of local communities.

To achieve these priorities, the service will:

- further 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
- 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
- embed new models of delivery and monitor customer feedback to ensure they achieve their objectives
- build on online delivery of services to children identified during Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen, expand, and increase the reach of these services to families across RCT
- 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
- recognise and promote reading & library use as an essential element in peoples improved mental health and wellbeing
- blend traditional and digital services by developing a Digital strategy for libraries
- reflect all communities in the promotion of and engagement with our culture, heritage and local history collections
- Support the further development of community hubs working in partnership with Neighbourhood Network partners.
- Provide opportunities for agencies and partners to work together to address poverty & facilitate employability initiatives

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

- People will be able to re-engage with reading and visiting the library as a pleasurable leisure activity
- 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

LIBRARY STATISTICS

Physical visits			
2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – January 2022
727,922	712,686 (up to 20/03/20)	11,952	284,145

Virtual visits			
2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – December 31st 2021
114,966	147,601	177,525	112,915

Physical Items borrowed			
2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – January 2022
434,404	535,281	98,737	185,227

Digital Items borrowed			
2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – January 2022
30,309	48,330	88,289	N/A

Active members			
2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 – 2021	2021 – January 2022
13,948	18,632	22,981	12,797



what our customers say

'You have valuable resources that, in this time of increasing family research being made, deserve all the recognition they can get.'

'I honestly can't thank the library service enough for the support I've had in my role, and I can't praise enough the work that goes on to support community and voluntary groups.'

'I have like many others had a difficult lonely life during the present restrictions. The click and collect system in our library was a godsend and much appreciated.'

'A big thanks to the library staff for delivering a fabulous service during these strange times'

The staff couldn't do enough for me, they were both helping me chose some appropriate books to take home. The kids loved them. I then returned to see what else we could try, and the staff suggested audio books, what a hit!!!! the kids loved these too.

'I appreciate the services provided greatly and my 6-year-old son has progressed very well with his reading since I joined the library'