

AGENDA ITEM 6

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

15th DECEMBER 2015

PORTH LIBRARY

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, CORPORATE & FRONTLINE SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE DEPUTY LEADER

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1. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the proposal to relocate the services delivered in Porth Library to Porth Plaza, where it is intended to create a sustainable community hub delivering a range of complementary services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves the relocation of Porth Library services to Porth Plaza.
- 2.2 Instruct Officers to proactively seek a community asset transfer of the existing Porth Library building and review opportunities to work with local, voluntary and third sector providers to deliver a range of community health and wellbeing initiatives.
- 2.3 Agrees to fund the reconfiguration and relocation of existing fittings and fixtures of the current library service into Porth Plaza (£20,000) from existing one off available resources.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Moving the Library Services currently delivered in Porth Library to Porth Plaza will ensure that:
 - 3.2 It has the flexible space required to deliver a modern library service;
 - 3.3 There will be enhanced opportunities for partnership working and

development of joint activities across service areas;

- 3.4 Residents in Porth and surrounding areas will be able to access a wider range of services more easily within a fit for purpose modern building which may also mitigate the need to travel to other areas.
- 3.5 The proposal will create a sustainable publically accessible building for key services whose collective aim is to reduce the impact of poverty, reduce isolation, improve local social and learning networks and maximise use of Council Buildings and resources via the provision of a library, refreshment and meal provision, training and support via Communities First/TGB/A4E and provision of on- site childcare facility.
- 3.6 The cost of maintaining the current Porth Library building could be mitigated by proactively promoting the building as a potential RCT Together Community Asset Transfer to the voluntary sector and the potential receipt of annual rent whilst also ensuring the building can be fully utilised for the benefit of the wider community as a community well being hub.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The current library building at Porth was opened in 1953. It consists of two floors with access to books and two express public access PCs on the ground floor, and a children's area and further IT provision in an open plan area on the first floor. It is a detached building fronting Pontypridd Road in Porth and is adjacent to the Porth Plaza facility.
- 4.2 The building is Grade II listed and has an area of 311.8 sq m.
- 4.3 Recent investment upgraded the first floor area and created a small community meeting room with funding that was provided by CyMAL (now renamed as the Museums, Archives, and Libraries Division of Welsh Government). This funding was originally invested in Tylorstown but on its closure in 2014, the grant was then transferred for use at Porth.
- 4.4 The library is well-supported by the local community who campaigned to keep it open in 2014 during a programme of rationalisation within the Library Service. Visitor numbers for 2014/15 were 42,215 while issues of books were 25,384. The library has 12 public access PCs which were used for 41% of the time. In addition, just over 1,500 people attended events at the library.
- 4.5 Despite improvements to the building it does not easily lend itself to the range of activities or the partnership working that is essential in a modern library.

It is anticipated that if it is co-located with other services, footfall will increase while the activities on offer could be expanded to meet a diverse range of community needs. The importance of the design of library space has been identified by the Welsh Government in its recent report - *Scoping a New Future for Welsh Public Libraries (2015)*. The report states that public library buildings in Wales will continue to play a central role at the heart of their communities as creative, cultural and educational hubs. Consequently it concludes that the *'interior design of the library will increasingly need to be flexible with spaces where libraries can deliver a wide programme of activities including working in partnership with other agencies.'*

- 4.6 Co-location with other services has been identified as an important way in which visitor numbers to libraries can be increased, new members registered and additional activities and services offered for the benefit of the local community. This approach has been adopted by Rhondda Cynon Taf Library Service and co-location is a key theme in the Library Service's Strategy and Strategic Action Plan 2015-18. Seven libraries currently have other council or voluntary sector services delivered partly or wholly on the same site.

5. BUILDING MAINTENANCE ISSUES

- 5.1 The building was constructed circa 1912 and is of a masonry construction with a slate roof. Over the years the building has been subject to day to day maintenance, but as with many buildings of this age and construction type there is a need for significant refurbishment to be undertaken.
- 5.2 A survey of the Centre was undertaken by Corporate Estates in 2014, which identified a backlog of maintenance
- 5.3 In order to address the above refurbishment issues, significant investment is required, estimated to be in excess of £64,000, of which, £2,300 is classed urgent, £61,300 classed desirable and just £970 classed as long term . This work is not currently included in any planned maintenance programme.

6. MARKETABILITY

- 6.1 The property's marketability is fairly limited. Whilst it has an elegant facade, the Grade II listing is an onerous obligation on any perspective purchaser and likely to discourage market interest.
- 6.2 The lack of parking, and the presumption against residential use due to the risk of flooding, severely limits the alternative uses for the property. It is situated in a mixed area of commercial development, and as such would likely be suitable for appropriate commercial uses, but this is certainly not a strong area of occupier demand in Porth at present. There may be some interest for

community uses, but it is difficult to envisage that this would release any value.

7. PROPOSAL

- 7.1 The transfer of the existing Porth Library Services into the Porth Plaza will enable library services to be delivered in a building which will be fit for purpose and maximise usage of Porth Plaza as a modern, state of the art community facility.
- 7.2 In view of the building maintenance and other issues outlined above it is proposed that Officers review opportunities to work with local, voluntary and third sector providers and promote the current Porth Library Building as a potential community asset transfer with the possibility of a voluntary sector group being able to lever in independent funding to undertake some of the repairs required to maintain the building for the foreseeable future.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening form has been prepared for the purpose of this report. A full report is not required as there is no perceived negative impact in respect of protected characteristics as a result of this proposal. This exercise has shown that a full EqIA is not required. The screening form can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business officer.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Given the proposed enhancement to the Library Service with the relocation to the building next door, appropriate engagement activity will be undertaken with service users to ensure that changes are communicated and new arrangements are implemented as effectively as possible.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 The opportunity to work with local community third sector providers will mitigate the need for capital investment and would provide a more cost effective and value for money alternative that would also support community resilience.
- 10.2 Investment of approximately £20,000 is needed to progress the reconfiguration and relocation of existing fittings and fixtures of the current

library service into Porth Plaza. This capital expenditure can be covered from existing one off available resources.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 Under Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires local authorities to deliver a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. In Wales responsibility for ensuring that local authorities discharge their functions in relation to the Act rests with the relevant Welsh Minister (currently the Minister for Culture and Sport). 'Libraries Inspire' is the strategic development framework for Welsh Libraries 2012-2016. This document emphasises the need for developing sustainable models of service delivery, creating inspirational spaces, supporting lifelong learning and attracting a wider audience.

12. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

- 12.1 This proposal would contribute to the achievement of co-location of services as identified in the Library Service Strategic Action Plan 2015-2018

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The report therefore recommends that officers progress the opportunity to relocate the current Porth Library Service into Porth Plaza as a mechanism for maximising use of a modern fit for purpose facility, with full accessibility for a diverse range of users in order to deliver a range of services as part of a community hub for reducing isolation, increasing social and learning networks and tackling poverty.
- 13.2 This report therefore recommends instructing officers to review opportunities to work with local, voluntary and third sector providers to proactively promote the use of the existing Porth Library building as a building eligible for Community Asset Transfer.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

Public Service Delivery, Communities and Prosperity

Contact Officer(s)

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