

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2017-2018

PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

COMMUNITIES AND PROSPERITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22nd March 2018

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH , PROTECTION & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Agenda Item No. 6

RHONDDA CYNON TAF'S WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS ASSESSMENT 2016-17

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide information to the Public Service, Communities and Prosperity Scrutiny Committee of the feedback received from Welsh Government in respect of the Library Service's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) for the period 2016-17.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the content of the letter and the Annual Assessment Report received from Welsh Government;
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 This is the third Assessment Report to be received under the Fifth Quality Framework which was introduced by the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport in April 2014.

3.2 The aims of the Fifth Quality Framework are to:

- Enable the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport to fulfil the statutory requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 in respect of superintending the duty of local authorities to deliver a '*comprehensive and efficient*' library service;
- Provide a robust assessment of the performance of library services;
- Have clear links to the Welsh Government's agenda to ensure credibility across local government in Wales;
- Be relevant and useful to all local authority library services in Wales;
- Be transparent, easily understood and accepted by stakeholders;
- Incorporate outcome measures to show the benefits of using libraries;
- Act as a driver for improvements to library services and local communities; and
- The Fifth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards includes 18 core entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators (7 of which have outcome targets) designed to monitor how well library services provide for the people of Wales. Minimise the burden of data collection on library authorities.

3.3 The Fifth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards includes 18 core entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators (7 of which have outcome targets) designed to monitor how well library services provide for the people of Wales.

3.4 The Fifth Framework consists of 4 themes that have a number of core entitlements and quality indicators related to wider government agendas. The desired outcome of the Framework is that each library service offers all the services and facilities included in the core entitlements. The 4 themes are as follows:

- Customers and communities;
- Access for all;
- Learning for life; and
- Leadership and development.

3.5 The core entitlements stipulate that libraries in Wales will:

- ensure friendly, knowledgeable and qualified staff at hand to help (WPLSCE1);
- Stage a range of activities to support learning, enjoyment and enable users to obtain the maximum benefit from the available resources (WPLSCE2);
- Provide access to a range of services and resources to support lifelong learning, personal well-being and development, and community participation (WPLSCE3);
- Be open to all members of their communities (WPLSCE4);
- Be free to join (WPLSCE5);
- Provide a safe, attractive and accessible space with suitable opening hours (WPLSCE6);
- Provide appropriate services, facilities and information resources for individuals and groups with special needs. Special needs can be caused by physical and health impairment, economic disadvantage (e.g. long term unemployment). Cultural difference (e.g. language, new arrivals), educational background, or other circumstances that require special library services. (WPLSCE7);

- Lend books for free (WPLSCE8);
- Deliver free access to information (WPLSCE9);
- Provide free use of the internet and computers including wi-fi (WPLSCE10);
- Deliver free use of online information resources 24 hours a day (WPLSCE11);
- Provide access to high quality resources in a range of formats, including those in the Welsh language, reflecting changing forms of publication (WPLSCE12);
- Share their catalogues to enable a single search of all Welsh library resources (WPLSCE13);
- Promote libraries to attract more people to benefit from their services (WPLSCE14);
- Regularly consult users to gather their views on the service and information about their changing needs (WPLSCE15);
- Work in partnership to open up access to the resources of all Welsh libraries (WPLSCE16);
- Provide access to the library service's strategy, policies, objectives and vision, in print and online, in a range of languages appropriate for the community (WPLSCE17);
- Provide a clear, timely and transparent complaints process if things go wrong (WPLSCE 18)

3.6 A copy of the quality indicators can be seen in the attached Welsh Public Library Standards Assessment at Appendix 1.

3.7 Local authorities submit an Annual Return to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of Welsh Government. An independent panel then assesses the return and the Library Service's performance against the core entitlements and quality indicators of the Framework. In addition the following are provided by the Library Service:

- Case studies which highlight the impact of the service on individuals and groups;
- A narrative that demonstrates how the library service is contributing towards wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals;
- A short statement about the future direction and plans for the library service.

These can be seen at Appendix 2.

4. RESULTS OF THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT 2016-17

4.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf's Library Service was assessed as follows:

- All 18 core entitlements were met in full;
- Of the 7 quality indicators that have outcome targets, the service met 3 in full, 3 in part and failed to meet 1;
- Reduction in staff hours and opening hours were identified as negatively affecting performance against the Quality Indicators;
- Overall the service was assessed as an average performer when compared with Library Services across Wales.

4.2 Previous assessments under the Fifth Quality Framework were as follows:

- In 2014-15 the service was assessed as having met all the 18 core entitlements and 3 quality indicators in full, 2 in part and failed to meet 2;
- In 2015-16 the service was assessed as having met all of the core entitlements and 3 quality indicators in full and 4 in part.

The decision to reduce the opening hours of branch libraries by 3.5 hours each week, implemented in 2016, has meant that the Library Service no longer meets the quality indicator on opening hours. (It should be noted that many libraries are used outside of the official opening hours by tutors and community groups. However, this use cannot be counted as part of the return to Welsh Government as there is no librarian on site during these periods.)

- 4.3 Overall, the Welsh Government's narrative assessment of the performance of the Library Service was more positive than the previous two assessments with recognition being given to the fact that the service performs higher than the median for Wales in several areas, including the percentage of people who feel the library has made a difference to their lives (94%). Also the proportion of customers who rated the quality of customer care as 'good' or 'very good' was very high (99%) while 100% of people who participated in formal training sessions at libraries stated that it helped them achieve their goals.
- 4.4 Performance in relation to the quality indicators on book stock has been mixed with the target for children's acquisitions being met, and the 4% target on Welsh-medium stock being met. However, adult acquisitions have not reached the target. Reductions in the Book Fund in 2016 explain this result.
- 4.5 Significant development is noted in the use of volunteers. The positive impact of this development can be seen both in respect of the delivery of the Summer Reading Challenge – specifically the engagement of young volunteers to support the programme; and in the digitisation of historical records.
- 4.6 There are reasons for the failure to achieve some of the quality indicators. For example, Wi-Fi has to be accessible at every library venue for the service to meet the quality indicator on IT provision. At the time of the assessment Rhydyfelin library was in a temporary location which did not have access to Wi-Fi. Rhydyfelin has now relocated into a new building so that this indicator will be achieved in readiness for the 2017/18 assessment. Also, in respect of ICT the decision was taken not to invest in further public access computers or other digital equipment as only 29% of the time available was being used. It would be irresponsible at a time of financial challenges for the Council to invest in equipment that was not required by customers just to meet a quality indicator.
- 4.7 Efforts have been made this year to improve the speed at which requests are supplied but this continues to be a problem area. However, it is pleasing to note that the assessment panel understands that this is due to the very high level of demand for popular new books and not due to a lack of efficiency on the part of the service.
- 4.8 Staffing levels and opening hours are dictated by the budget allocated to the service, consequently it is not envisaged that the service will achieve these quality indicators in the medium term. The percentage of qualified staff within the service is a concern in relation to workforce development and succession planning and a training budget has been identified to support the professional development of staff. The service has benefitted from having 2 apprentices but there are currently no apprenticeship qualifications available to develop skills that

are specific to librarianship so that the apprentices have to follow the framework for administrative assistants. This is an issue that has been identified to MALD as they have a responsibility for promoting training opportunities for the sector.

- 4.9 A comparison of the performance of all Welsh Library Services against the core entitlements and quality indicators with outcome targets can be seen at Appendix 3.

5. **CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Although the Library Service's performance reduced slightly in respect of the number of quality indicators achieved in 2016/17 when compared to 2015/16, the latest assessment is more positive in respect of potential future developments and its recognition of improvements achieved in key areas such as community engagement and outreach provision.
- 5.2 The relocation of Rhydyfelin library to its new venue that includes Wi-Fi means that in 2017/18 the service should gain an additional quality indicator. There are some other potential areas where further improvements can be made. However some indicators, such as staffing levels, opening hours and book acquisitions remain beyond the reach of the service in Rhondda Cynon Taf as they would require additional funding that is not currently available.
- 5.3 It is notable that despite failing to meet the staffing target set by MALD that customer feedback indicates satisfaction rates of 99% ('very good' and 'good') for customer care which is an indication of the continued dedication of library staff to providing the best possible service for their customers.

Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Annual Assessment Report 2016-17

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government.

1) Executive summary

Rhondda Cynon Taf is meeting all of the 18 core entitlements in full.

Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taf achieved 3 in full, 3 in part and did not achieve 1.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is currently an average performer, with the impact of repeated recent budget cuts, reductions in staff hours and particularly opening hours negatively affecting performance overall. There are some signs of recovery and areas of improvement, however, including improved outreach and engagement, and the provision of mobile library services to mitigate the effects of previous branch closures. The proposed investment in new buildings is welcomed.

- Two case studies provide clear evidence of the impact of core services as well as activities for groups. 94% of adults think that the library has made a difference to their lives, above the median for Wales.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf conducted user surveys of both adults and children during 2016. Overall, 96% of adults rated the library overall as very good or good, which although high, is just below the median for Wales; however, the proportion of adults rating both the choice of books and customer care as very good or good was very high, being 99% for customer care. 100% of attendees at formal training sessions indicated that it had helped them achieve their goals.
- Ten branch libraries have reduced opening hours by 3.5 hours compared to last year, and this has had a negative impact on performance, with all library use per capita levels below the median for Wales overall in 2016-17. Virtual visits were also reduced, owing to the unavailability of the online photograph collection for significant periods of time.
- Rhondda Cynon Taf's book budget was reduced further in 2016-17 and the authority does not meet the acquisitions targets. However, the proportion of materials expenditure accounted for by children's items, and items in the Welsh language both achieve the targets.
- The proportion of requests satisfied within 7 or 15 days are among the lowest in Wales, however, it is noted that this is largely due to the volume of requests received for popular new titles before they are available which cannot be excluded from the calculation.

- Staff levels continue to decline, and the per capita targets of both overall and professional staff have not been met. The reduction in FTE staff is largely due to a reduction in staff working hours. The proportion of staff hours accounted for by staff training has achieved its target. The use of volunteers has increased significantly compared to 2015-16.
- Total revenue expenditure per capita was one of the lowest in Wales in 2016-17. Net cost per visit was £2.29, close to the median for Wales.

Considering the four areas in the framework (*Customers and communities; Access for all; Learning for life; and Leadership and development*) in comparison to the rest of Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf performs poorly on indicators in the areas of *Access for all*, *Learning for life*, and *Leadership and development*. However, there are areas of strength including customer care and engagement.

Further cuts in expenditure, staff time and opening hours have had a negative impact on the library service. There are encouraging signs however, with the authority emphasising the council's commitment to improving the infrastructure of library buildings with work on a new state of the art library in Pontypridd commencing in 2017. Future development is likely to be based on the community hub model.

2) Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against the core entitlements, the quality indicators which have targets, the quality indicators showing performance against others, and impact measures. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is made in Section 3.

a) Core entitlements

Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to meet all 18 core entitlements in full.

b) Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QI) within the framework. Of the 7 which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taf is achieving 3 in full, 3 in part and is not achieving 1.

| Quality Indicator | Met? | |
|-----------------------------------|------|---------------|
| QI 3 Individual development: | | Met in full |
| a) ICT support | ✓ | |
| b) Skills training | ✓ | |
| c) Information literacy | ✓ | |
| d) E-government support | ✓ | |
| e) Reader development | ✓ | |
| QI 5 Location of service points | ✓ | Met in full |
| QI 8 Up-to-date reading material: | | Partially met |
| a) Acquisitions per capita | ✗ | |
| or Materials spend per capita | ✗ | |
| b) Replenishment rate | ✓ | |

| Quality Indicator | Met? | |
|--|--------|---------------|
| QI 9 Appropriate reading material: | | Met in full |
| a) % of material budget on children | ✓ | |
| b) % of material budget spent on Welsh or Spend on Welsh per capita | ✓ ✗ | |
| QI 10 Online access: | | Partially met |
| a) All service points | ✓ | |
| Computers per capita | ✗ | |
| b) Wi-Fi provision | ✗ | |
| QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications: | | Partially met |
| a) Staff per capita | ✗ | |
| b) Professional staff per capita | ✗ | |
| c) Head of service qualification/training | ✓ | |
| d) CPD percentage | ✓ | |
| QI 16 Opening hours per capita | ✗ | Not met |

This represents a change over last year's performance, with QI 16 no longer being met. However, Rhondda Cynon Taf now achieves the target for the percentage of the materials budget spent on items in the Welsh Language so that QI 9 is now fully met, which is an improvement over last year.

c) Impact measures

The framework contains three indicators which seek to gather evidence of the impact that using the library service has on people's lives. Through these and other indicators it is possible to see how the library service is contributing towards educational, social, economic and health and wellbeing local and national agendas. These indicators do not have targets. Not all authorities collected data for the impact indicators, and ranks are included out of the numbers of respondents stated, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

An impact survey for adults was carried out in May 2016 and a children's survey was carried out in September 2016.

| Performance indicator | | Rank | Lowest | Median | Highest |
|---|------|-------|--------|--------|---------|
| QI 1 Making a difference | | | | | |
| b) % of children who think that the library helps them learn and find things out: | 93% | 10/19 | 68% | 93% | 100% |
| e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives: | 94% | 4/19 | 36% | 86% | 97% |
| % of children who think that the library has made a difference to their lives: | 73% | 10/17 | 58% | 82% | 98% |
| QI 4 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals: | 100% | 1/19 | 80% | 97% | 100% |

Rhondda Cynon Taf provided 2 excellent impact case studies which showed the real difference the library service makes:

- The Knitting Nanas group which combats social isolation and supports local charities.

- An attendee at Digital Friday sessions, accompanied by Hafal to help access the provision, whose confidence, social skills and independence have all improved.

d) Quality performance indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets, but allow performance to be compared between authorities. The following table summarises Rhondda Cynon Taff's position for 2016-17. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where relevant data elements were not available to some authorities. Figures reported in respect of the first two years of the framework for QI 4 to QI 16 are repeated for convenience of comparison. Note that indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population.

| Performance indicator | Rank Lowest Median Highest | | | | | 2015/16 | Rank | 2014/15 | Rank |
|---|----------------------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| QI 1 Making a difference | | | | | | | | | |
| a) new skills | 84% | 6 /19 | 23% | 71% | 93% | | | | |
| c) health and well-being | 59% | 9 /20 | 26% | 56% | 94% | | | | |
| d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive | 99% | 2 /19 | 93% | 98% | 100% | | | | |
| QI 2 Customer satisfaction | | | | | | | | | |
| a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books | 94% | 3 /20 | 74% | 90% | 98% | | | | |
| b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care | 99% | 4 /20 | 90% | 99% | 100% | | | | |
| c) 'very good' or 'good' overall; | 96% | 12/20 | 92% | 97% | 100% | | | | |
| d) child rating out of ten | see text in 3a | 8.6 | 9.1 | 10.0 | | | | | |
| QI 4 User training | | | | | | | | | |
| a) attendances per capita | 35 | 11 | 3 | 34 | 248 | 35 | 9 | 39 | 6 |
| c) informal training per capita | 98 | 16/20 | 1 | 156 | 712 | 124 | 13 / 19 | 124 | 12 / 21 |
| QI 6 Library use | | | | | | | | | |
| a) visits per capita | 3,385 | 17 | 2,453 | 4,033 | 6,751 | 3,441 | 16 | 3,790 | 15 |
| b) virtual visits per capita | 534 | 17/21 | 341 | 922 | 2,299 | 737 | 17 | 937 | 11 |
| c) active borrowers per capita | 77 | 22 | 77 | 153 | 235 | 84 | 21 | 97 | 20 |
| QI 7 Attendances at events per capita | 237 | 8 | 62 | 214 | 496 | 225 | 11 | 21 | 22 |
| QI 11 Use of ICT - % of available time used by the public | | | | | | | | | |
| a) equipment | 29% | 13/21 | 16% | 32% | 69% | 30% | 13 | 36% | 11 |
| QI 12 Supply of requests | | | | | | | | | |
| a) % available within 7 days | 52% | 20/21 | 48% | 70% | 82% | 57% | 22 | 62% | 22 |
| b) % available within 15 days | 65% | 21/21 | 65% | 85% | 96% | 71% | 22 | 74% | 22 |
| QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications | | | | | | | | | |
| (v) a) total volunteers | 48 | 7 | 0 | 24 | 209 | 12 | 14 | 0 | 17 |
| b) total volunteer hours | 1,333 | 10 | 0 | 798 | 5,156 | 130 | 19 | 0 | 17 |
| QI 14 Operational expenditure | | | | | | | | | |
| a) total expenditure per capita | £9,249 | 19/21 | £6,745 | £11,979 | £16,968 | £9,870 | 18 / 21 | £10,921 | 21 |
| b) % on staff | 75% | 2 /21 | 46% | 58% | 75% | 69% | 6 / 21 | 68% | 4 |
| % on information resources | 15% | 7 / 21 | 4% | 13% | 25% | 16% | 8 / 21 | 14% | 8 |

| Performance indicator | | Rank | Lowest | Median | Highest | 2015/16 | Rank | 2014/15 | Rank |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| % on equipment and buildings | 0% | 21/21 | 0% | 4% | 20% | 1% | 20 / 21 | 12% | 5 |
| % on other operational costs | 10% | 20/21 | 9% | 22% | 37% | 15% | 15 / 21 | 6% | 21 |
| c) capital expenditure per capita | £1,178 | 6 / 21 | £0 | £341 | £16,692 | £417 | 10 / 21 | £35 | 15 |
| QI 15 Net cost per visit | £2.29 | 11/20 | £1.50 | £2.33 | £3.30 | £2.30 | 14 / 21 | £2.23 | 10/11 |
| QI 16 Opening hours (see note) | | | | | | | | | |
| (ii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points | 0.00% | 1 | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.48% | 0.06% | 17 | 0% | 1 |
| b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed | 1.79% | 11/19 | 0.00% | 0.13% | 8.33% | 0.48% | 9 / 19 | 0.4% | 10 / 19 |

Note: Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.

Data on Wi-Fi usage has only been provided by three authorities for 2016-17 and so is not included in the table above.

3) Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators are divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance against the quality indicators within these four areas, and compares results with those from the first two years of the framework.

a) Customers and communities

Rhondda Cynon Taf conducted a user survey of adults in May 2016 and one of children in September 2016. The proportion of adults indicating that the choice of books and customer care was very good or good were both rated highly, however, the proportion of adults rating the library as very good or good overall is below the median for Wales, at 96%. The children's survey did not directly address the question of rating the library out of 10; however 93% of respondents stated that they considered the library to be good. All service points provide the full range of support for individual development, apart from one service point which is currently in a temporary location pending a new building which does not have Wi-Fi access. Attendance at formal training sessions per capita is just above the median for Wales, and 100% of attendees were helped to achieve their goals.

b) Access for all

Rhondda Cynon Taf meets the standard for easy access to services. There have been falls in all areas of library use over the last year and this is largely attributed to a further reduction in opening hours with 10 libraries each experiencing a reduction of 3.5 hours. The decline in virtual visits is largely attributed to the online photograph collection being unavailable for a significant period due to technical issues. The per capita levels of library usage are all below the median for Wales in 2016-17, with the number of library members and active borrowers per capita now the lowest in Wales. Attendance at events and activities organised by the library has increased compared to last year, and the per capita level is above the median for Wales as a whole.

c) Learning for life

Rhondda Cynon Taf's book budget has reduced further in 2016-17 and the acquisitions target has not been met. Both acquisitions and materials expenditure per capita are below

the median for Wales. It is noted that due to the current financial climate it is unlikely that any improvement will be seen in the authority's performance against this standard in the near future. The figure for lending stock at the start of the year was not provided and so the replenishment rate cannot be calculated. Despite a decrease in materials expenditure on children's items, the proportion of total materials expenditure accounted for by children's items does meet the target. An increase in expenditure on materials in the Welsh language has led to the proportion of materials expenditure accounted for by items in the Welsh Language also achieving the target.

The target for ICT equipment is not met, and the authority cites lack of available space, and low take-up of its current provision as reasons for not being able to justify more expenditure on this. Future ICT plans are focussed on providing better facilities for their use rather than more equipment. Only one service point, which was housed in a temporary location, did not offer access to Wi-Fi. This will be provided when the new building opens during the summer of 2017. The proportion of requests satisfied within both 7 and 15 days are among the lowest in Wales. The service has investigated its performance on this measure and it is noted that part of this is due to the large volume of requests for popular titles which are placed before the title is in stock, as staff pro-actively place reservations on forthcoming books for customers. The number of requests can exceed the number of copies purchased by a factor of 5, resulting in considerable delays for those at the end of the list, and processes are being revised, including using the 'purchase alert based on holds' report in the new all-Wales LMS.

d) Leadership and development

Overall staff FTE levels have reduced compared to last year and it is noted that this is largely due to a general reduction in staff working hours rather than a reduction in the number of staff. The number of FTE professional staff has also reduced slightly, and the per capita staffing levels are both below target. The authority notes that an authority-wide re-deployment policy affects recruitment of qualified library staff, but that funding has been approved to support staff to achieve qualifications via distance learning. Despite a 17% increase in the number of staff hours spent training, the proportion of staff time taken up by training remains below the median for Wales. The introduction of a formal volunteering policy and the creation of an apprentice post within the service whose role is to identify volunteering opportunities has led to a significant increase in the number of volunteers, with a total of 48 providing an average of 28 hours each to the service.

Total revenue expenditure has decreased again over the last year which is largely as a result of a 38% decrease in total other operational expenditure and it is noted that in 2018 work will begin on a new state of the art library in Pontypridd, which emphasises the council's commitment to improving the infrastructure of library buildings. Total revenue expenditure per capita was one of the lowest in Wales in 2016-17. Average net cost per visit was £2.29, slightly below the median for Wales, and compares to £2.30 in 2015-16. Ten branch libraries experienced reductions in opening hours in June 2016 so that the target for opening hours is no longer achieved. There were no unplanned closures of static service points.

4) Strategic context

Rhondda Cynon Taf provided a clear narrative concerning the contribution the library

service makes to supporting literacy strategies, digital inclusion, tackling poverty, health and well-being and promoting the history, culture and language of Wales. It also supports the Welsh Government aim of increasing volunteering opportunities.

5) Future direction

Rhondda Cynon Taf describes the key challenge for the future as providing a library service which meets people's needs in a climate of constrained budgets. Five priorities are listed – embedding change, improving ICT, developing engagement, investigating collaboration and colocation, and investigating the use of volunteers. Future plans for library buildings will be based on the community hub model.

6) Conclusion

Rhondda Cynon Taf is currently an average performer, with the impact of repeated recent budget cuts, reductions in staff hours and particularly opening hours negatively affecting performance overall. There are some signs of recovery and areas of improvement, however, including improved outreach and engagement, and the provision of mobile library services to mitigate the effects of previous branch closures. The proposed investment in new buildings is welcomed.

Appendix 2 – case study and additional narrative questions

Good impact case studies are expected to include evidence that the library service has made a positive difference to an individual (or group of individuals). This would normally go beyond a description of services provided and their use, to show the outcome, and may include testimony from the customers concerned.

Authority: Rhondda Cynon Taf

1. The impact which the library has had on an individual, or on a group of individuals, during the year. Describe the use made of the service, and the difference that use made to the individual or group concerned. Up to four case studies may be provided (indicative length: 500 words each).

a) **Case Study: Knitting Nanas**

Background:

A group was set up in Pontypridd library every Thursday morning for those who enjoyed or wished to learn and improve their knitting and crocheting skills. The aim being to use any items made to raise funds for local charities. The group also knits specialist items for the premature baby unit and 'Twiddle-muffs' for dementia patients at the local hospital, resources that are greatly appreciated by the ward staff. Ward Manager Elaine Warren said;

'The Twiddle-muffs that have been donated to us have been invaluable; they are an excellent resource that really helps our patients.'

Personal Perspective:

Pam Smith was already a library user when she saw a poster in her local library advertising a new group that was hoping to start called the 'Knitting Nanas' whose aim was to knit items of clothing for premature babies. As a keen knitter Pam thought this was an excellent idea and joined straight away. The social aspect of the group has been of vital importance helping to combat loneliness and isolation.

'Over the years I have made many new friends. I have had great support through good times and not so good.'

'Many of the group live on their own; joining the group has helped them. Also some have joined the library and take out books.'

A vital part of the group's success has been its location in the library, a friendly, non-threatening environment which has been able to provide support and resources for the group.

'The library has been a great support, not only helping me to find books for some

of my projects but also ordering books for me. I would like to thank the library for all their help and support given to us.'

The Way Forward:

The group now also organises charity events at the library and also a special day each year where local school children come to the library and are taught how to knit and crochet, passing on these skills to a new generation and encouraging them to interact with other generations.

'A great morning is had by all; the children go home happy with something they have made. We go home ready for a rest!'

Since the introduction and success of the group at Pontypridd library other libraries such as Hirwaun and Rhydyfelin have started their own 'Knit and Natter' craft groups.

b)

Case Study - Digital Fridays at Hirwaun Library

Digital Fridays has been running at Hirwaun Library since October 2016. The Library is in a great location in the heart of the village. There has been good, steady attendance every Friday and a group of regular attendees has naturally developed. Participants are supported by Communities First Engagement Workers, Librarians & Volunteers to increase their digital skills. There are strong working partnerships in place to support people of all ages and abilities which is demonstrated within this case study.

Information relating to individuals included in this case study has been extracted as permission was granted on the basis that this case study does not appear on any websites social media etc. Permission has been given to show to funders, inspectors and internal departments.

c)

d)

2. Please provide a narrative that demonstrates how the library service is contributing towards wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals (indicative length: 500 - 1,000 words).

Rhondda Cynon Taf library service has worked hard in recent years to create libraries that respond to community needs and play a key role in the communities

they serve. Our service provision is very broad as it is driven by the information and cultural requirements of the communities we serve. We provide community space that is free and accessible to everyone, access to a wide range of facilities including free internet and computer usage, easy access to information and advice, books and learning activities and very importantly we facilitate social interaction.

Establishing an early foundation for reading skills has been identified by the Welsh Government as being a crucial factor in providing children with the best start in life. As well as providing access to literature that is targeted at children, young people, adults and users with poor literacy levels we run story time sessions, reading groups, host author visits and other literary based events. We also support reading promotions and strategies such as Bookstart, the Summer Reading Challenge and World Book Day.

The Welsh Government aims to help 95% of people gain at least the basic digital skills needed for the 21st century by 2012. We support this aim by the providing free internet access, ICT training sessions and informal advice and guidance by staff members, enabling residents without home computers the facility to access the internet. The introduction of Digital Friday sessions in 5 of our libraries has contributed greatly to the digital inclusion strategy within RCT.

The Welsh Government's strategies to tackle poverty and promote growth and sustainable jobs rely on individuals obtaining more skills, a higher general level of education and making informed decisions with regard their personal development. Our libraries facilitate this by not only offering the resources required for learning to take place but by providing informal and formal classes on a wide range of subjects. The availability of community meeting rooms and spaces with access to IT facilities makes us the ideal location for partnership work.

We continue to play a key role in promoting the history, culture and language of Wales by providing materials for loan, collecting, preserving and making available local history materials, both in a physical and digital format, as well as hosting exhibitions and talks on events of national and local significance to Wales. We continue to support local authors by providing advice, resources and publicity for their books. Use of the Welsh language is promoted through Welsh classes, Welsh language reading groups and Welsh conversational groups who all make use of our facilities.

The Welsh Government is committed to increasing the number of volunteering opportunities in Wales. We continue to support this aim and in recent years we have greatly increased the number of volunteering opportunities we provide. Opportunities include Work Placements, Welsh Baccalaureate placements and identified Library Volunteer placements, e.g. local history and digitisation volunteers.

Our libraries continue to operate as a multi-purpose service open to all aspects of the community. They are places that people visit to choose books, use a computer and attend group meetings or classes and as such they are institutions that promote inclusion and prevent social isolation. Specialised services such as the Schools Library Service and Housebound Service encourage literacy and serve some of the most isolated people in our communities.

Recently there has been a significant emphasis on wellbeing at a strategic level as evidenced by recent legislative changes. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 highlights the need to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. Our library service is instrumental in supporting these needs and contributing to Welsh Government strategies and policies both at a national and local level. Continued investment in library services is required if we are to sustain our contribution to national and local priorities.

3. Please provide a short statement about the future direction and plans for the library service (indicative length 200 words).

Our challenge is to provide a library service that meets the needs of the people who live, work and study in our area, whilst dealing with significant service changes and constrained budgets. In order to achieve this we have identified the following service priorities:

- Embed changes to the Library Service while striving to limit the impact of budget reductions on achievement of the Welsh Public Library Standards
- Provide improved access for residents to ICT facilities and digital resources
- Develop new ways of engaging with residents to provide services targeted to their needs
- Investigate opportunities for co-location and collaboration with other services and other local authorities
- Investigate the use of volunteers to provide additional support to paid staff.

Greater emphasis is now being placed upon co-location and collaboration with other services and in 2016/17 Aberdare One4all centre was relocated to Aberdare Library and Porth One4all centre was relocated into a shared building with Porth Library. Our libraries at Aberdare and Treorchy also now offer hot desking facilities for other

council departments. Future plans for library buildings will increasingly be based upon this community hub model and more shared sites are planned for the coming years with significant capital investment to ensure they are fit for purpose for a 21st century service. Increased provision of digitised services including the digitisation of local history collections and the introduction of self service kiosks are also high priorities.

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