

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19th March 2025

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE TOURISM HERITAGE AND
CULTURE**

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

Library Strategy 2025-2030

Purpose of the Report

To seek approval from Members to implement the Library Service strategy which outlines current best practice and options for future development of Libraries in Neath Port Talbot.

Executive Summary

The Library service is a statutory service governed by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Libraries play an active role in day to day life for a large number of local residents and it is a highly valued and highly regarded service.

This Strategy presents a new vision for delivering a comprehensive library service in Neath Port Talbot. It aims to establish a strong, sustainable network of public libraries, both statutory and community-managed, alongside a digital, 24/7 online library service to meet the changing needs of library users. The Strategy highlights current best practices and compliance with existing legislation, including the Welsh Public Library Standards and the Well-being of Future Generations Act

(2015), thereby ensuring all statutory obligations are fulfilled. Implementing this vision will cultivate a dynamic library service, positioning libraries as collaborative partners with other agencies and the voluntary sectors to achieve Neath Port Talbot Council's key priorities and meet the targets established by the Welsh Public Library Standards.

Background

Neath Port Talbot Library Service manages eight Branch Libraries, a Mobile Library, a Home Delivery service, a Toy Library and an early years Bookstart Co-ordinator to deliver our statutory obligations. Additionally, the Service provides support to seven community managed, volunteer-led libraries.

The service is used by approximately 19,000 residents who read and request books with approximately 200,000 books on library shelves. Additionally, visits to libraries are increasing to provide warm spaces, places for social interaction and creative learning, with more than 431,000 visit through local authority led libraries during the 2023-2024.

With around 50 current staff, the service is far more than a book lending service, it plays an active role in supporting residents on a daily basis providing free internet, wifi and public access PC's in all local authority led libraries. From early years introduction to songs and rhymes to hosting foot clinics, from engaging with the Youth Council to providing author talks and creative writing events. The scope of a public library has been transformational over the past decade and will continue to show its importance in years to come.

Neath Port Talbot is required to produce a library strategy so that it complies with core entitlements as set out in the Welsh Public Library Standards. These Standards provide the framework for all local authorities in Wales to deliver their statutory responsibility in respect of library services to 'provide a comprehensive and efficient library service' as specified in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Public libraries connect people, information and culture. The library strategy will link closely with the Neath Port Talbot's Culture Strategy 2023 and help to develop and improve our collective cultural life, recognising the power of culture and the positive impact on our health and wellbeing.

Financial Impacts

The service currently costs £1,841,753 to run annually. With increasing pressure on local authority budgets officers will continue to seek opportunities to reduce the pressure on the revenue budget but without adversely affecting the standards of service. As future decisions are taken and the detail of each part of the action plan is worked up, careful consideration will be given to meeting this difficult balance.

Valleys Communities Impact

The valley communities are served by local authority-led libraries, community-managed libraries, and a mobile library. The mobile library addresses gaps in geographical coverage in Neath Port Talbot. This service operates on a three-weekly basis and is used by many residents who cannot attend a fixed library location due to poor transport links or limited mobility.

Integrated Impact Assessment

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Authority in discharging its legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010, Welsh Language Regulations 2015 and the Wellbeing of future Generations Act 2015.

After completing the first stage assessment, it has been determined that this function does not require a more in depth IIA assessment.

Workforce Impacts

There are no current workforce impacts associated with this report at present. This Strategy outlines potential opportunities for the future direction of the Library Service.

Legal Impacts

Neath port Talbot have a statutory obligation to provide a Library Service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Risk Management

If the strategy is not adopted, there will be a risk of not achieving the Welsh Public Library Standards set out by Welsh Government.

Consultation

In October 2024 a survey was published by the Library Service giving residents of Neath Port Talbot the opportunity to provide feedback. In total 667 responses were received of which the top 5 main benefits from using our libraries were listed as :-

- Free lending of books
- Safe and welcoming space
- Support from library staff
- A place to find information
- A place to meet people

The results of the survey are reflected within the Library Strategy, Appendix 1. Consultation was additionally sought from Councillor Cen Phillips, the Cabinet Member for Nature, Tourism, and Wellbeing.

Scrutiny Feedback

To be added after scrutiny.

Recommendations

That with due regard to the Integrated Impact Assessment screening form that Members approve the library Strategy to enable the authority to comply with the core entitlements of the Welsh Public Library Standards.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To ensure that Neath Port Talbot complies with Welsh Public Library Standards and delivers an efficient valued service that caters for the changing needs of our communities.

Implementation of Decision

The decision is proposed for implementation after the 3 day call in period.

Appendix 1

Library Strategy 2025-2030

Appendix 2

Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Form

List of Background Papers

Welsh Public Library Standards Extended Framework 6

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