

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CULTURE CABINET BOARD

28th February 2019

REPORT OF HEAD OF TRANSFORMATION
ANDREW THOMAS

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2017-18

Purpose of the Report

To approve the Annual Report to the Welsh Government in respect of the authorities library services performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) framework 6 and to note the feedback, comments and recommendations in the Annual Assessment Report 2017-18.

Executive Summary

This is the first year of the new framework 6 of the Welsh Public Library Standards, “Connected and Ambitious Libraries” which consists of 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators, 10 of which have set targets.

Neath Port Talbot now meet all 12 of the core entitlements in full. These core entitlements have been revised and enable the public to know what should be expected from their local public library service.

In respect of the 10 quality indicators which have set targets, Neath Port Talbot achieves 6 in full, 1 in part and fails to achieve 3, which allowing for comparison with the last year of framework 5, identifies a similar level of performance for those quality indicators where direct comparisons are possible.

In 2018, performance against the current Welsh Public Library Standards has also become one of the National performance Indicators for local authorities in Wales (NPI's).

The Quality Indicators which the library service fail are resource based and can be directly attributed to successive budget reductions since 2014, which has adversely impacted on stock purchases (QI 9 / QI 10), staffing levels (QI 13) and total opening hours of branch libraries (QI 16).

Background

Public libraries are a statutory service, provided under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

In Wales, all local authorities are required to report annually to the Welsh Government via the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD), on their individual performance against the current framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards, which the Minister uses as an interpretation of local authorities complying with their statutory duty in providing a “comprehensive and efficient” library service as required under the 1964 Act.

This is first year of the Sixth framework of the Standards – Connected and Ambitious Libraries which covers the period 2017 – 20. The framework consists of 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators, 10 of which have set targets upon which the library services performance is evaluated.

Following the transfer of 9 libraries to community management in April 2014, the Welsh Government commissioned a Report on Community Managed Libraries and the Statutory Provision of Public Library Services in Wales (May 2015), which only recognises those community libraries where paid staff are available for a minimum of 50% of the opening hours. This excludes most of the community libraries in Neath Port Talbot and directly impacts on the total number of aggregated opening hours which can be attributed towards Quality Indicator 16.

Financial Impact

Since 2014, the library service has seen budget reductions of nearly £600,000 or 30% of the total budget.

The current Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for the library service is £2,329,190 against the current original revenue budget of £1,612,753.

In order to fully comply with the Welsh Public Library Standards, Neath Port Talbot would need to increase expenditure in the following areas:

Book stock – an additional £139,000.

Staffing – An additional 14 full time members of staff would be required at an estimated cost of £240,000.

Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

Workforce Impacts

There are no workforce implications

Legal Impacts

The Annual Report ensures that the Council complies with its statutory duty to provide a public library service required under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Risk Management

Due to reductions in the library service budget, performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards has deteriorated since 2013 and those standards that the authority fail to achieve are mostly resource based, namely expenditure on book stock and staffing levels.

Performance against the current Standards is unlikely to improve without investment in the service and further reductions in the library service budget will have a negative impact on performance.

The possible closure or transfer to the community of any further libraries is also likely to have an adverse impact on the authorities' performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards, which

since 2018 have become one of the National performance indicators (NPI's) for local authorities in Wales.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve the Annual Report to Welsh Government and note the contents of the Annual Assessment Report 2017-18.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

To enable the Council to comply with its statutory duty of providing a library service in Neath Port Talbot.

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

Appendix 1: Neath Port Talbot – Annual Return 31st March 2018.

Appendix 2: Annual Assessment Report 2017 – 18.

List of Background Papers

Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards 2017 -20

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