



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

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

18th December 2019

Report of the Director/Head of Transformation
Andrew Thomas

Matter for Decision

Wards Affected: All

Report Title:

Library Service Review

Purpose of the Report

To present to Members a report on the review of the Library Service in Neath Port Talbot with recommendations for decision.

Executive Summary:

Following last year's budget setting process and feedback from public consultation, it was proposed that a review of the public library service in Neath Port Talbot be carried out. The report has highlighted some potential recommendations that this Council should look to implement and the background of this report sets out a basis for the Council to move forward

Background:

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

In light of decisions made following the budget setting process in 2018/19 it was proposed that there should be a review of library services in Neath Port Talbot.

The purpose of this review is to ensure that the library service continues to deliver a sustainable service that meets the needs of the people of Neath Port Talbot, while delivering on local and national strategic priorities over the next five years.

The review has addressed the following areas:

- How We Deliver a Library Service
- Meeting Our Statutory Requirements
- How We Have Adapted to the Changing Role of Public Libraries
- Alternative Models of Delivering a Library Service
- Development and Opportunities for the Library Service
- Challenges Facing the Library Service
- Recommendations

As part of this review, public meetings have been held at seven libraries and at schools with school children. There have also been meetings with Elected Members at Baglan, Cwmafan, Glynneath, Neath, Pontardawe, Port Talbot and Sandfields Libraries.

Consultation ran from 12th August to the 31st October. Discussions have been held with Union representatives who have expressed their support for libraries and the proposals contained in the review. The key findings of the consultation are featured in within the Review of Library Services 2020-2025 at page 23.

In summary however, the views gathered by the Consultation were:

- That the library is an essential community hub that brings together a diverse audience of people.
- That libraries are embedded into the culture of the community and is vital for tackling social isolation and for health and wellbeing.
- That libraries play a vital role in developing readers, creating opportunities for learning and self-development and provide necessary access to digital resources.
- That libraries are a place that brings generations together.
- That as a minimum our existing network of branch libraries and community managed libraries should be maintained.

The Review in effect concluded the following:

1) Library Headquarters.

The Library Headquarters based at Reginald Street, Port Talbot has operated from this location since 1996. A recent review however has indicated that there is presently a maintenance backlog of at least £3m with significant structural faults recently identified. Furthermore, operational costs, when considered against the number of staff based there and the space occupied, means that remaining at the site is no longer a viable long term option.

The Review highlights potential savings as a result of downsizing to a smaller building. Based on a comparison of running costs between Library Headquarters and Ynysmaerdy School (which remains vacant since the closure in July 2018) in its last year before closure, there are potential savings of up to £25,000 to be made from utilities and business rates costs. It would be proposed however that work be undertaken to convert Ynysmaerdy School into the new location for Library Headquarters and arrangements will be considered between the Head of Property and Regeneration and Head of Transformation to facilitate this.

2) Neath Library

Neath Library faces significant challenges which show no sign of improving.

- (a) The library has a maintenance backlog of over £450,000, including mechanical and electrical elements.
- (b) The layout of the library has much higher staffing costs than any other library - £80,000 more than Port Talbot Library.
- (c) Usage at the library has been declining over the last ten years with a fall in both visitors and borrowing of 35%.

The Review has identified there could be merit in the relocation of Neath Library to the new development in the town centre.

It is suggested that relocation could deliver savings of at least £51,000 in staffing (via natural wastage) plus reducing annual operating and maintenance costs.

There is also the potential income from the sale of one of the buildings, which currently houses the children's library, adjacent to the main building. Furthermore there is potentially a grant of up to £300,000 from MALD (Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of Welsh Government) to relocate the library. This will cover all the costs of relocation including new fixtures and fittings.

Subject to Members approval therefore, a feasibility study will be undertaken to address whether it is possible to relocate Neath Library and a report will be brought back to Members in due course for consideration should this be feasible.

3) The Mobile Library

The Mobile Library remains an invaluable service to over forty communities (Appendix 4), many located in Neath Port Talbot's valley areas.

However the two vehicles that currently operate are nearing the end of their operational life.

Following visits to Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire mobile library service it became clear that there is potential to both improve the service and reduce costs by using a smaller mobile library vehicle. A smaller vehicle gives the service flexibility to access locations that the larger vehicle cannot. Replacing the two vehicles with a new one could provide an annual saving of £6000 in running costs. Furthermore the two current vehicles could potentially be sold off for a combined £10,000. Subject to Members approval therefore it would be proposed to replace the two vehicles with a new smaller vehicle.

4) The Home Delivery Service

The Home Delivery Service provides a vital function to some of the most vulnerable in society, often elderly and disabled persons. However this Review has found that there is room to make the service more efficient and more reliable.

The service currently operates a 13 year old van which, as well as having reliability issues, has annual maintenance costs of over £2000.

A theme that arose during the review was the need to move to more efficient methods of transport, one that help us reduce our carbon footprint. Consequently, and to make those improvements, this Review has concluded that we purchase, via a prudential loan, one, new small delivery van.

Officers will explore the possibility of a full electric vehicle using data from Fleet Services on vehicle usage to further reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to the Authorities De-carbonisation strategy. This measure would bring about annual savings of approximately £3000 in both running costs and by eliminating the high maintenance of the existing, 13 year old van.

5) The Branch Library Network

The Branch Library Network is the most essential part of the service. This is a view that has been expressed many times during this Review.

However, following discussions, and based on current usage patterns, there are opportunities to make slight amendments to opening hours at three libraries. These new hours, which should be implemented on a three month trial period in the first instance, are detailed in Appendix 3 and should they prove acceptable then a permanent role out of these hours will be considered.

Financial Impacts:

There are potential savings in relocating both Library HQ and Neath library which are unmeasurable at this time. The proposal to replace the Mobile library and Home delivery vehicles should be covered by existing budgets.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

A first stage impact assessment has been undertaken to assist the Council in discharging its legislative duties (under the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The first stage assessment has indicated that a more in-depth assessment is not required.

This assessment has found that there are no negative impacts for anyone who shares the protected characteristics. Where impacts have been identified for persons covered by Disability or Pregnancy/Maternity these are low impact measures and are deemed to be positive as they should improve access to these services. The

proposal has no impact on Welsh Language obligations or biodiversity and is compatible with the obligations of the Council under the Wellbeing Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

There are no implications on valley communities. The Mobile Library remains an invaluable service to over forty communities, many located in Neath Port Talbot's valley areas. The purchase of new vehicles will allow this successful service to continue operating.

Workforce Impacts:

The Review has identified workforce impacts in both staffing levels – the proposed relocation of Neath Library, and workplace location – relocating both Neath Library and Library Headquarters. These will be addressed through consultation with Unions and by the Council's own management of change policies.

Legal Impacts:

Public libraries are a statutory service, provided under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The aim of the Review was to ensure that the Council can continue to meet these obligations whilst at the same time allowing the service to develop and meet current needs.

Risk Management Impacts:

Failure to implement of these recommendations create risk to the delivery of the service because of escalating costs and the continued operation. The aim of the Review was to ensure that the Council can

continue to meet these obligations whilst at the same time allowing the service to develop and meet current needs.

Consultation:

This item has been subject to external consultation. Public meetings have been held at seven libraries and at schools with school children. There have also been meetings with Elected Members at Baglan, Cwmafan, Glynneath, Neath, Pontardawe, Port Talbot and Sandfields Libraries. Consultation ran from 12th August to the 31st October. The key findings of the consultation are included in the Review and are summarised in this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (a) Delegated authority is given to the Head of Transformation to transfer the Library Headquarters to the former Ynysmaerdy School on a date to be agreed with the Head of Transformation and Head of Property and Regeneration
- (b) The former Library HQ be declared surplus to the use of the Education Directorate and that responsibility for the same pass to the Head of Property and Regeneration
- (c) Officers undertake a feasibility study into the relocation of the Neath Library to the proposed new development in Neath Town Centre and a report be brought back to Members for approval should it prove acceptable
- (d) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Transformation to sell two mobile library vehicles and replace the same with one small vehicle.

- (e) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Transformation to purchase a new delivery van for the Home Delivery Service
- (f) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Transformation to amend the opening hours of the Branch Library Network to the hours identified in Appendix 3 for a period of three months and following the conclusion of this three month period delegated authority be given to the Head of Transformation in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member to agree the implementation of these hours on a permanent basis.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that the Library Service continues to deliver a relevant, cost effective and sustainable service for the people of Neath Port Talbot over the next five years.

Implementation of Decision:

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

Appendices:

1. Review of Neath Port Talbot Library Services
2. First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment
3. Proposed Amendments to Opening Hours
4. Communities Covered by the Mobile Library and a list of community managed libraries
5. Consultation Report
6. Branch Structure

List of Background Papers:

None

Officer Contact:

Wayne John, County Librarian

01639 899829
w.john@npt.gov.uk

Paul Doyle, Children's Literacy Officer
01639 860001
p.a.doyle@npt.gov.uk