

# **Review of Neath Port Talbot Library Services**

## **A Sustainable Library Service 2020-2025**

### **Introduction**

The Council's budget proposals that were put to public consultation in the autumn of 2018 included the possible transfer or closure of four libraries – Baglan, Cwmafan, Glynneath and Skewen. Following the consultation exercise this proposal was withdrawn. However it was proposed that there would be a full review of library services in Neath Port Talbot to be presented to Council at the end of 2019.

The timing of this review is apt coming as it does at the midway point of the Library Service's five-year strategic plan published in 2016. Issues identified, and recommendations put forward in the strategy, will also be evaluated in this review. Furthermore a new set of recommendations will be put forward for consideration by Elected Members. The overarching purpose of the review has to be to ensure that the Service continues to deliver a relevant, cost effective and sustainable service for the people of Neath Port Talbot over the next five years.

The review will address the following areas:

1. How We Deliver a Library Service
2. Meeting Our Statutory Requirements
3. How We Have Adapted to the Changing Role of Public Libraries
4. Alternative Models of Delivering a Library Service
5. Development and Opportunities for the Library Service
6. Challenges Facing the Library Service
7. Recommendations for Consideration

This review has sought the views of the public, library staff, elected Members, community groups, senior officers within Neath Port Talbot and fellow library professionals. These views have been both supportive and critical and have provided us with many insights which have been helpful

in producing this review. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all participants for their valuable contribution. A consultation report can be found in Appendix 1.

## **Background**

Financial pressures placed upon councils over the last decade have meant that all areas of local authority expenditure has been scrutinised. As a result, across the UK, library services have seen considerable reductions in spending with between £20m and £30m cut annually from UK library budgets. However, over the last year there have been strong local campaigns that have sought to stem the tide of library closures. In both Powys and Essex residents have challenged library plans and made it clear to the respective Councils that it is the responsibility and duty of the local authority to provide a library service.

I am in the village due to being rehomed (out of my area) from the Woman's Aid refuge & I have severe PTSD so I am here with no friends or family & even in that respect the library is a very big part of my life. If I didn't have a chat with the staff working at the library I would have totally no conversation and that helps my illness in a very big way.

*Library User*

In Wales there seems to be no appetite amongst local authorities to close libraries. Where proposals have been put forward there has been strong public opposition leading to long, costly judicial review, as happened in Vale of Glamorgan.

In fact, some authorities have refurbished and/or relocated town centre libraries (Wrexham, Haverfordwest, Pyle) as part of their town centre regeneration programme.

The situation in Neath Port Talbot has been no different to the rest of the UK with successive budget reduction proposals over the last three years. Following the 2013 Library Review Report, which paved the way for the setting up of Community Managed Libraries, over £700K has been saved from the Service's budget. This equates to more than a 30% reduction. It was in response to these changes that the Library Strategy 2016-2021

was produced. It opened with a vision statement that remains applicable and bears repetition in this review:

*Neath Port Talbot will provide a strong, sustainable network of public libraries, both statutory and community managed together with a digital, 24/7 online library service that embraces new media, adapting to the ever changing needs of library users. The service will support communities across Neath Port Talbot, benefiting residents and visitors in a wide range of ways and ensuring that libraries contribute to a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and prosper.*



The national launch of Every Child a Library Member at Glynneath Library

*This vision has as its core themes:*

- *Access to digital, online services*
- *Supporting the local economy through learning and training*
- *Health, independence and well being*
- *Social, community and cultural well being*
- *Literacy intervention*
- *Reading for pleasure*
- *Education for all and lifelong learning*
- *Responding to the study needs of school pupils*
- *Empowering users by offering access to the widest range of quality and accurate information and allowing opportunities for creating and sharing of information*
- *Supporting local Council services*

*Delivering this vision will create a vibrant library service that places libraries as a partner working with other agencies and the voluntary sector in meeting Neath Port Talbot Council's key priorities. The Strategy also*

*takes into account current changes in library provision as a result of financial pressures. There is a need to ensure that statutory obligations are maintained and that Welsh Government policies and targets as set out in the Welsh Public Library Standards are followed. New legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) has also been taken into account within this strategy. This is a vision that will make a difference to all who use the library service.*

(Library Strategy 2016-2021)

This review will achieve two things: Firstly it will ensure that the Service continues to deliver its vision and is able to demonstrate achievements in meeting its core themes and key local and national objectives. Secondly, it will create the foundations from which the Library Service can continue to develop and improve, offering better services to residents and visitors to Neath Port Talbot, which are sustainable, delivering quality services for today's library user and for our future generations.

We recommend that that an update of this Review will be carried out and published by the end of 2022.

## **1. How We Deliver a Library Service**

The Library Service provides a network of 8 branch libraries and 1 mobile library covering 90% of households in Neath Port Talbot. (Welsh Public Library Standards stipulate that at least 75% of households should be within 2.5 miles of a static service point, or within ¼ mile of a mobile library stop.) In addition, the Service provides support to 7 Community Managed Libraries. It should be noted that when these Community Libraries were established in Neath Port Talbot in 2014 it was prior to any guidance from Welsh Government. This was not produced until 2015, following the publication of the *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014*, which stated that for Community Libraries to be considered as part of a statutory service there should be a minimum of 50% local authority staffed hours. Therefore, the 7 Community Managed Libraries in Neath Port Talbot are not included as part of our statutory library provision.

After a very traumatic and sad time in my life, I decided to join the reading group held in Skewen library as a way of uplifting my spirits. I was made to feel very welcome, and soon felt part of a friendly and supportive group of like-minded people. I have now been part of this group for nine years. We enjoy discussing the books, and these discussions lead on to wider topics of conversation. We listen to any problems people have, and offer advice or just support. I have also found about other groups and classes which I have then joined and made even more friends, thus getting out and socialising even more.

*Library User*

Below is a table which shows the number of libraries for each authority across Wales and the number of libraries per 10,000 population. Neath Port Talbot is below the Welsh average of 0.74 and in the bottom quartile.

	<b>Libraries</b>	<b>No. of Libraries per 10,000 Population</b>
Powys	18	1.36
Gwynedd	13	1.05
Ynys Mon	7	1.00
Caerphilly	18	1.00
Pembrokeshire	12	0.97
Blaenau Gwent	6	0.86
Conwy	10	0.86
Merthyr	5	0.84
Bridgend	12	0.84
Denbighshire	8	0.83
Ceredigion	6	0.81
Carmarthenshire	15	0.81
Wrexham	10	0.74
Vale of Glamorgan	9	0.70
Swansea	17	0.70
Monmouthshire	6	0.64
Newport	9	0.60
<b>Neath Port Talbot</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.56</b>
RCT	13	0.55
Cardiff	19	0.53
Flintshire	7	0.45
Torfaen	3	0.33
<b>WALES</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>0.74</b>

The 2016-21 Library Strategy implemented a tiered system for all Neath Port Talbot libraries. The tiers were based on the services that users could expect at each library, taking into account facilities on offer, opening hours, location and professional staff. The 4 tiers are as follows:

Tier 1 – Neath, Pontardawe and Port Talbot

Tier 2 – Glynneath, Sandfields and Skewen

Tier 3 – Baglan and Cwmafan

Tier 4 – Community Managed Libraries – Briton Ferry, Cymmer Afan, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Resolven, Seven Sisters and Taibach. (Since the tiers were introduced both Cwmllynfell and Ystalyfera have ceased operating.)

The mobile library is not included in the tiers given its unique method of service delivery.

The branch library network remains a vital local service meeting the needs of a strongly diversified audience. Libraries are safe, trusted venues that provide access to a range of Local Authority services which enables the Council to support local people, organisations and communities. They provide a universal offer to all ages and abilities.

- We support parents and their young families, delivering the Bookstart scheme, in partnership with health visitors, providing early years book packs to babies, supporting Welsh Government's First 1000 days programme.
- We continue to support children through their school years with targeted literacy intervention and help to foster a love of reading.
- We give support to students and further education through our study resources, digital and online services.



Bookstart Song and Rhyme session in Victoria Gardens, Neath

- We support the local economy by assisting with routes into employment and career development through training, partnerships with education providers and job clubs.
- We enrich community life through a wide range of activities and cultural events.
- We support the mental and physical health and well-being of our citizens by providing social interaction, access to information, and specific health focussed activities e.g. dementia and autism friendly events.
- We support users in building skills and confidence through our range of activities and services.
- We deliver specialist services to the housebound and the elderly.

From its central headquarters in Velindre, Port Talbot, the Library Service also provides specialised work in the areas of:

- Home Delivery Service to the vulnerable and housebound
- Services to Sheltered Housing and Nursing Homes
- Bookstart and Supporting Families and Under 5s
- Children's Literacy and Support for Schools
- Toy Library
- Digital Services
- Administrative Support for Branch Libraries

At Library Headquarters there are 6 full-time members of staff, 2 part-time and 2 staff in externally funded posts. A branch library staff structure can be found in Appendix 2.

In 2018-2019 the overall operating budget for the Service was £1,712,292\*. The percentage breakdown of the costs was as follows:

- Staffing Costs 63% \*\*
- Materials/Resources 13%
- Other Operational Costs 24%

\* Total expenditure per 1000 population, at £12,051, is fractionally lower than the Welsh average of £12,145.

\*\* The average percentage cost for staffing across Wales is 62%.

*(Based on national WPLS data for 2018-19)*

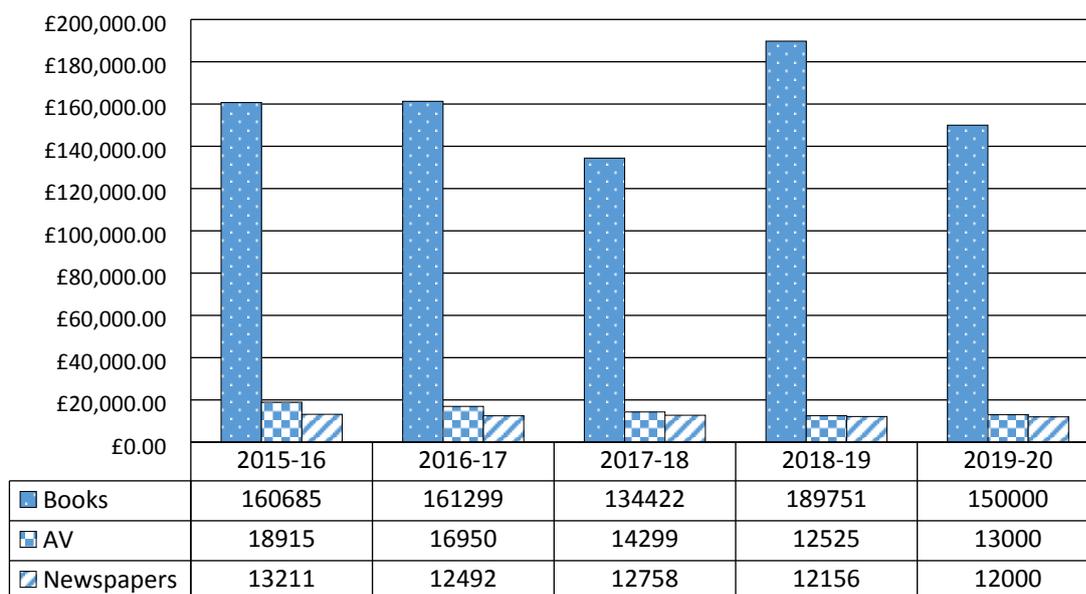
The next table gives an indication of the overall operating costs of each library in Neath Port Talbot.

<u>Library</u>	<u>Staffing</u> <u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Premises &amp; Support</u> <u>Services Expenditure</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Net</u> <u>Operating</u> <u>Costs</u>	<u>Cost</u> <u>per</u> <u>Visit*</u>
Baglan	£28394	£25407	£2227	£51574	£1.60
Cwmafan	£29121	£34310	£16396	£47035	£0.53
Glynneath	£44893	£18103	£1727	£61269	£0.88
Neath	£244397	£45661	£20424	£269634	£2.12
Pontardawe	£109304	£20000	£9190	£120114	£1.98
Port Talbot	£161402	£102582	£18679	£245305	£1.81
Sandfields	£62790	£24450	£4557	£82683	£1.09
Skewen	£48483	£11521	£1748	£58256	£1.81

\* Neath, Port Talbot and Pontardawe Libraries (Tier 1) have a professional member of staff providing support to other libraries hence the higher cost per visit. Moreover, in the case of Port Talbot the library is situated in the Aberafan Shopping Centre and therefore bound by a commercial rent. (The cost per visit for Wales in 2018-19 ranged from £1.18 to £2.52.)

The graph below details the breakdown of bookfund expenditure for each year since 2015. Figures for 2019-2020 are estimates at this stage. Bookfund expenditure makes up most of the materials/resources budget. In 2018-19 bookfund expenditure equated to £1547 per 1000 population. The Welsh Library Standard relating to expenditure on books and other items states that the Library Service should be spending £2180 per 1000 population. In actual figures this represents a shortfall, in 2018-19, of £91,000. We anticipate this shortfall increasing to £130,000 in the current financial year given the estimates for this year.

## Bookfund Expenditure 2015 - 2020



## Income Generation

Opportunities for income generation in libraries is limited. Those libraries which have rooms or space to hire, such as Cwmafan, are able to generate significantly more than smaller libraries such as Baglan or Skewen.

(Discussions with Community Managed Libraries indicates that while some are able to obtain external grants to support activities and resources, generating income to cover day to day running costs is an ongoing issue and challenge.)

Nevertheless, across all 8 branch libraries, £74,948 of income was created in 2018-19. A percentage breakdown of this is shown in the table below.

Photocopying charges	40%
Room hire	20%
Non-casual lettings	18%
Fines	8%
Charges for Audio-Visual items	8%
Sales of books and other items	5%
Miscellaneous	1%

The Service does receive a number of ad-hoc grants for projects from Welsh Government e.g. Every Child a Library Member and Adult Learners Week. In addition we receive a contribution from Flying Start for the Bookstart Co-ordinator post.

A consideration for the coming years should be whether or not Neath Port Talbot follows the example set in Bridgend, and other library services across the UK, and abolish fines for overdue items. These can be a barrier to access for the most vulnerable, deterring some from joining the library and borrowing books.

## How Well Do We Perform?

The Library Service has a number of performance measures it uses to assess how well it is delivering a service.

The principal measure is our annual Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) evaluation provided by Welsh Government. This highlights how well we perform when measured against its quality indicators and core entitlements. The 2018-2019 WPLS evaluation has stated that the Service achieved 100% of the Core Entitlements and 75% of the measurable quality indicators (Corporate Performance Measure - CP073a). This has increased from 65% in 2017-18 as a result of the Service dedicating a greater portion of the materials budget to purchasing Welsh language material. The Library Standards will be discussed in greater detail in the next section – Meeting Our Statutory Requirements.

Below is a table which indicates the number of people currently using the Library Service in Neath Port Talbot. For comparative purposes, performance in 2015 is shown alongside performance in 2019.

	<b>2015</b>	<b>2019</b>
Number of Visits to Libraries	627583	629583
Number of Visits to Library Service Website**	171026	130739
Number of Attendees at Library Events	46885	87993

Number of Attendees at Library Events in the Community	6801	9996
Number of Library Members	82249	88486
Number of Active Members*	24192	26937
Number of Issues of Books and Other Items	450318	414552

\* Active members defined as a borrower who has loaned an item within the last 12 months

\*\* In common with many authorities in Wales website visits have decreased annually. This has been due to members of the public preferring to engage with us via social media.

Over this period performance has generally ebbed and flowed but overall remained consistent. It is clear from the user surveys undertaken since 2015 that all of our libraries and our staff are highly regarded by our users. A survey carried out in February 2019 reported the following results.

- Percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills **90%**

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- Percentage of adults who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the library **87%**

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- Percentage of adults who experience the library as an enjoyable safe and inclusive place **97%**

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- Percentage of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives **95%**

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- Percentage of adults who think that the choice of books is 'very good' or 'good' **96%**

- Percentage of adults who think that the standard of customer care is 'very good' or 'good' **99%**
- 
- Percentage of adults who think that the IT facilities provided are 'very good' or 'good' **91%**
- 
- Percentage of adults who think that the library is 'very good' or 'good' overall **98%**

In addition, services that are operated out of Library Headquarters show that:

- We serve 35 nursing and residential homes across Neath Port Talbot.
- We serve 46 playgroups with regular book stock.
- We serve 92 playgroups and childminders with toys and play equipment from the Toy Library.
- We cater for 472 registered housebound users (Home Delivery). These users are amongst the most vulnerable in the community, often elderly and/or disabled.
- We provide for 41 reading groups for adults and children in both English and Welsh in Neath Port Talbot.
- We have provided literacy intervention / activities at 43 schools over the last five years.



Storytelling at Ysgol Bae Baglan

I started visiting Pontardawe Library as a baby. My mother and father would bring me to music rhythm and rhyme. A lovely woman would read us stories and sing songs and get us to join in. Later, every time we came we would get to take away books. My mum and dad would read me these books all week before going back to the next session to change them over. It wasn't long before I must have had hundreds of books read to me.

I became too old for rhythm and rhyme but that didn't stop me going to the library. Now I could choose my own books. I am now ten years old and I still love coming to the Library, they have great staff that do what they can to get me books that I want. And I love it that they know my name.

I know that I am very lucky to have all these books to read. There would be no way I could have bought them. That would too much money!

I have been told that my reading is very advanced for my age. My teachers often ask me to read out loud in class and I also read to the younger children in school. I enjoy helping them learn to read.

I think that going to the library to read and talk about books has helped me a lot. I love it.

*Library User*

## **Achieving Savings Targets**

Responding to budget pressures, the Service has been effective in reducing its costs and limiting any detrimental impact upon front line services and our users.

Savings have been achieved in:

- The new all-Wales library management system
- Improving the book supply process through the use of EDI (Electronic Data Interface) technology
- A reduction in central staffing costs
- Vacancies management
- Sharing resources with the Education, Library, Resource Service (ELRS)

## **2. Meeting Our Statutory Requirements**

Public libraries are a statutory service as defined in the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*. The Act makes it a duty for local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.

Since the early 2000s Welsh Government have implemented a number of assessment frameworks (Welsh Public Library Standards) which has sought to ensure that local authorities continue to meet their statutory duty and assess how well they deliver a library service.

The Library Standards have changed considerably since the first Framework in 2002. They have adapted to the ever changing landscape of public services, financial constraints and the changing role of libraries.

The current Framework (6) has a set of 12 Core Entitlements – these are to “enable the public to know what they can expect from their public library service” *Welsh Public Library Standards Framework 6 2017-2020* – and a further 16 Quality Indicators, of which 10 have measurable targets. As stated above, Neath Port Talbot met all 12 Core Entitlements in 2018-19. Of the 10 measurable indicators the Library Service achieved 75%. The areas where Neath Port Talbot fails to meet its targets were all resourced based, namely:

- Number of staff
- Number of Opening Hours
- Expenditure on books and other items

In order to achieve 100% of the measurable standards then it is estimated that we would require a minimum of £375k increase in our budget. We recognise that in the current financial climate that this is not a realistic option.

However, Welsh Government has recognised the efforts of the Service. “Neath Port Talbot library service has consolidated and improved its performance in a number of areas in 2018-19, with dedicated staff and careful planning contributing to a well-managed service.” (Annual Assessment Report 2018-19) Furthermore, referring to this Review, the Report stated “The importance of appropriate resourcing levels will be a key consideration in ensuring that the service can be shaped to meet this aim, allowing it to build on the strengths evident in this year’s assessment report.”

The Library Service also recognises other statutory duties and the need to meet local objectives and priorities. The 2016 Library Strategy took into account the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) and our own responsibilities in meeting Neath Port Talbot Council's priorities. Additionally, the Service is supportive of, and acknowledges its role in contributing to Welsh Government's aim of creating one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and is active in supporting early years, particularly with the First 1000 Days agenda. The Service's work in supporting local and national priorities is updated annually and presented as part of our Welsh Public Library Standards report to Welsh Government each year.

### **3. How We Have Adapted to the Changing Role of Public Libraries**

Throughout the whole of this process it has been made clear at public focus groups and at meetings with Elected Members that the library is an essential resource that has a vital role to play in any community. It could be said that at no point in their history have libraries provided a more valued, relevant service to as wide a range of users as they do today. The library has a special place in any town or village, providing a vast range of resources and activities to support citizens throughout their life. With its



many diverse functions the library can bring the community together as has been demonstrated with good effect at Cwmaman where local Elected Members have worked with the library to regenerate a number of high profile community events in the village.

Christmas at Cwmaman Library

A number of national and local case studies have shown the value of libraries to health and well-being – particularly mental health, the economy, digital literacy, learning, culture and reading. The recent report, “Public Libraries: The Case for Support” which was produced in partnership between CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals) and The Big Issue, stated that there is evidence of “a correlation between public

libraries and safer communities (and libraries have) a positive impact on social isolation and loneliness in communities.” Libraries are able to achieve this because they are continuously innovating, modernising and adapting their services to fit the needs of users and communities.

Neath Port Talbot has been at the forefront of many of the changes that have taken place across Wales over the last ten years.

Considerable improvements have been made in the implementation of self-service issuing (RFID) at two of our main libraries and in the book supply process through a combination of new technology (EDI), a consortium approach to purchasing and direct delivery to individual branches by our suppliers. This had led to greater efficiencies at Library Headquarters and improved the speed of book supply to each branch library.

The Library Service has also been proactive in taking the lead on the development of an all Wales service for e-resources – these include books, magazines and audio. Neath Port Talbot was the lead authority for the Welsh Book purchasing consortium which achieved considerable savings for all 22 local authorities in Wales.

Even greater savings were achieved with the procurement of a computerized library management system. Until 2018 Neath Port Talbot shared a system with Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. In August 2018 the Service transferred to an all-Wales Library Management System which has facilitated greater co-operation and resulted in savings in excess of £10k per annum.

Additionally the Service plays an active role in regional library partnerships which promote inter lending between public (Books4U) and academic libraries (Regional Passport Scheme), providing users with a wider range of resources. They also enable greater skills sharing between staff with opportunities for personal and professional development. This is vital to ensure that Neath Port Talbot continues to play an active role in modernisation throughout the region.



Author event at Sandfields Library

Neath Port Talbot was the first local authority in Wales to adopt a model of Community Managed Libraries and to work with local volunteer groups to deliver a local library service.

The planned relocation of Skewen Library to Carnegie Hall will provide a vast improvement in the library offer to the people of Skewen with a newly refurbished library giving more space, a dedicated ICT suite, new toilet and wash facilities, events space and an all-round better user experience. The library will be co-located at Carnegie Hall, which is owned and operated by Coedffranc Town Council, and highlights a positive collaboration with the Council in creating an improved community hub, bringing together a number of local services.

Central to any discussion about how we continue to deliver a library service is the user. We have been proactive in involving the community in aspects of the service. In addition to the Community Managed Libraries there are also *Friends Of...* groups which are supporting the activities and the operation of 2 libraries – Glynneath and Pontardawe.

Both Friends groups have been successful in obtaining extra funds for their libraries which has been used to support our events programme and to provide much needed, improved facilities. A great strength of these groups is that they are all committed to working collectively for the benefit of the library, and the community, and have developed strong working relations with the staff, supporting their work where it's most needed. The Library Service is grateful for the help and support of these Friends groups.

I was a new member of the Cwmafan community last year and a first time Mum too! The library was my saviour ...it was the main community hub that offered me a way to meet other Mums, introduce my daughter to song, rhyme and books. All which I believe have contributed to my daughters amazing development thus far. I also attend yoga classes there and it's the go to space for community information - we attended this year's secular Remembrance Day service which was so important and the perfect space for it. This year the library will be the centre of Christmas activities also. The library offers a serene sanctuary, a friendly, welcoming service and an essential information point.

*Library User*

However it should be noted that what fits one community may not be suitable for another. What works in a town centre library cannot always be duplicated in a local, village library and vice versa. As our libraries can be

specific to the community they serve creating one, identifiable library brand is problematic as that brand may not apply universally. It is also important to consider existing provision within the community. Where there already exists strong community organisations e.g. community centres, the library needs to ensure that it works in co-operation and not against them.

The Library Service in Neath Port Talbot has taken the lead in how it engages with schools, working in partnership with teachers to deliver targeted literacy work at both primary and secondary schools. This has been highly commended by Welsh Government.

The Service has recognised that there is a need to be visible and proactive, not only as a static branch library, but also in communities, delivering activities and events across the whole of the county borough. Over the next five years the Service has to ensure that it continues to remain at the forefront of development and provide a modern, sustainable library service that meets the needs and ambitions of its users.



Local history talk at Neath Library

We know that the needs of users will change. What people expect from the library is constantly evolving, either through changes in society e.g. unemployment, migration, or changes that the public experience during their lifetime – e.g. ageing, health, caring, family. It is the role of the library to ensure that it fulfils all these needs at any given time.

In 2020, libraries in Wales will be playing a key role, in partnership with the Welsh Government and with the BBC, in supporting the allocation of new bus passes and with providing assistance for people over 75 who will require a TV licence. Accessing these services digitally from home is not an option for many. Research published by the Office for National Statistics in August 2019 has shown that while more people are accessing the internet, both at home and via mobile devices, there is a significant percentage (24%) of over 65s who are not using the internet. Furthermore the research also suggests that one of the reasons why some people are not using the internet is their own lack of skills. The library has a vital role to play in ensuring that these people do not get left out in an increasingly digital age.

The 2016 Strategy identified the following three priority areas:

- Children and Young People
- Active Citizens
- Older People

It also stated a commitment to addressing some of society's biggest issues:

- Physical and mental health
- Digital inclusion
- Isolation amongst the elderly
- Literacy and numeracy
- Unemployment
- Child poverty

#### **4. Alternative Models of Delivering a Library Service**

Across Wales local authorities have been meeting the challenge of providing quality public services at a time when finances have been restricted.

With regard to public libraries a number of different management models have been put in place over last few years. The most notable of these is the establishment of a Trust to deliver public services.

Blaenau Gwent (Aneurin Leisure Trust), Bridgend (Awen Culture Trust), Flintshire (Aura Leisure and Libraries) and Merthyr Tydfil (Merthyr Tydfil

Leisure Trust) now operate their library service via trust status. At first sight there are clear benefits to adopting this model of delivery, as trusts are exempt from business rates (NNDR). If this model were to be adopted in Neath Port Talbot this would save £70k from the Library Service budget. The second benefit is that the trust is able to pursue other funding sources not currently available to local authorities.

However, Trust status doesn't come without its disadvantages. The set up costs could very well outweigh any long term benefits from NNDR savings. Furthermore, if Welsh Government move to make libraries exempt from business rates, as has been proposed by a number of Ministers over the years, then there are no savings to be made.

Even with the Trust model local authorities are still held accountable by Welsh Government for delivering its statutory duty.

Evidence from Blaenau Gwent suggests that there is considerable risk to the Local Authority's reputation if the Trust fails to perform as desired. Concerns regarding the low level of investment have prompted the Council to review how it run its library services in Blaenau Gwent. It must also be said that other local authorities have considered adopting the Trust model but have decided to remain within full Council control.

Trust status is no guarantee of improvement and, and we would argue, offers no significant benefits to both the Council and to library users at this time.

It should be noted that with leisure trusts in particular, due to the low level of income from public libraries, investment tends to go to those areas of trusts i.e. leisure centres, theatres, that generate high levels of income. The exception to the rule is Awen Culture Trust which has community centres, libraries, a country park and a theatre within its remit.

Another recent development has been the establishment of Community Hubs. Cardiff now has a combination of branch libraries and hubs and in Monmouthshire the principal libraries now function as Council Hubs.

The hub comprises library space and other council services in one building. In Monmouthshire you will find a one-stop shop and community learning resource within the library. The rationale behind the move to hubs is creating a more efficient use of library space and to share resources while reducing building costs.

The hub concept isn't exactly new. Libraries have been the hub of the community and offering a range of facilities, sometimes in partnership, for a number of years.

In Neath Port Talbot, for example, we have Pontardawe Library which has supported the functions of the previous one-stop shop; Cwmafan Library which shares the building with Afan Valley Communities for Work; Glynneath Library has been used for one-off events and activities with Glynneath Training Centre; Baglan Library is used in partnership with Action with Children and once the new Skewen Library is established at Carnegie Hall it will act as an integrated hub in the village.

Where the opportunity exists we will always look to work in partnership and to share resources where we can but only where we believe it benefits our residents and supports our aims and objectives.

Where to start! I've lived in Baglan for thirty-eight years, my son joined when he was three years old, what a joy it was to visit on a cold wet day, choose books, chat with Elaine, who always knew which books would be received joyfully by a small boy. The library has grown over the years and introduced many facilities which the community appreciate, and use. Visiting yesterday was a joy; I only went to return a book. The library was full of excited chatter, children from the local school were making their weekly visit to choose their books.

*Library User*

## **5. Challenges Facing the Library Service**

### **Staffing and Planning for the Future**

Staff are the Library Service's greatest resource. It is clear from our surveys and public focus group meetings, plus feedback via case studies, that visitors to libraries value our staff very highly. It is through the hard work of our staff that the numbers of visitors attending events at libraries and at outreach activities has increased by 82% since 2015. However, the Library Service, in common with a number of Local Authority departments, now has an ageing workforce, and as result faces staffing challenges over the next five years.

At present, over 50% of our staff will be over the age of 60 by 2025. Moreover, 25% of our staff will be at, or past retirement age, by that date. It is therefore fair to assume that we will face a significant staff turnover in

the coming years. We have identified that over the next few years two of our libraries will have a complete change of staff.

In order to ensure that our staff have the professional skills, knowledge and training and are capable of maintaining a high quality library service beyond this Review, we need, therefore, to put a plan in place.

The Council's Workforce Strategy has impacted upon external recruitment, but in spite of this the Library Service has been successful in nurturing its own professional staff, building a specialist team in certain areas, namely, heritage, children's literacy, community services and our area librarians. Furthermore the Service has been successful in managing vacancies, always ensuring that frontline services are prioritised and, where appropriate, staff are able to utilise their skills to take on greater roles within their pay grades.

However, we recognise that there are areas where we need to improve on. Succession planning for both the senior manager and library ICT specialists are two that require immediate attention. This will have to be achieved against the backdrop of a shortage of experienced, professionally qualified staff in Wales.

In addition it must be noted that the Library Service fails to meet the minimum Welsh Government standard on the number of staff (FTE) per 1000 population, fails to meet standard on professionally qualified staff and is one of the lowest staffed (per head of population) library services in Wales.

## **Maintaining a Network of Branch Libraries**

It was evident from the public consultation on the Council's 2018 budget proposals that there is strong support for branch libraries. One of the most powerful messages to have come from that exercise, and it is a message that has been heard during this review process, is that the library is seen by many as an essential to the wellbeing of any community. The public have told us that:

- The library is embedded into the culture of the community
- It is the community hub that brings us all together
- The library helps children with their reading and learning and provides facilities that supports their work at school
- The library often delivers over and above what you would expect of a library

- It is important as a place that brings generations together
- The library is vital for improving health and well-being and reducing social isolation
- The library is a safe haven
- The library helps those who feel vulnerable and alone

Much of what the public have told us supports the argument put forward by *Public Libraries: The Case for Support* that “Public libraries are part of the local ecosystem of health and social care provision. They alleviate pressure on local health and social care budgets and provide a much-needed frontline for community-based support for people’s health and wellbeing.”

However, as we saw with the budget proposals in 2018, the library is constantly being challenged and must not consider itself immune from budget cuts and scrutiny. This Review has provided a welcome opportunity to meet with a range of users, Elected Members and community groups to discuss library provision within their community. These meetings have examined:

- Suitability and sustainability of the existing building
- Long term maintenance costs
- Options for alternative locations
- Opening hours
- Library usage patterns

One point that has been repeated on a number of occasions and is supported by national studies, is that libraries are a very efficient, cost-effective resource for the local economy. Libraries offer a considerable return on investment, demonstrating how libraries add value to the community and the local economy.

Condition surveys have been carried out at 6 libraries. The combined condition costs for the 6 libraries is £1.28m. (The full assessments can be found in the background papers to this report). A brief summary together with the overall site comments are presented below.

It must be noted that the costs identified in the condition surveys are largely concerned with the structural fabric of the building i.e. walls, roof, heating, electrics, windows. There has been little investment from the local authority over the last decade and if this continues then the costs will

increase over the course of the next five years. Any improvement work that has happened has been as a result of Welsh Government funding via their Transformation Capital Grants Programme. Over the last decade the Library Service has successfully obtained over £1.5m from this fund and, once the planned relocation of Skewen Library goes ahead, will have refurbished all 8 of its branch libraries. This programme has allowed the Service to improve the interior of each library, transforming how the library looks and enhancing the services on offer.

## **Baglan**

Baglan Library is open 25 hours per week.

Condition Cost for the overall site = £188,000.

Grade C-

*The building is over 50-years old and still displays many of the original features. Mechanical and electrical services have been renewed in recent years, however, additional investment is required short and medium term, to extend the lifespan of the building.*

## **Cwmafan**

Cwmafan Library is open 25 hours per week.

Condition cost for the overall site = £370,250

Grade C

*Internally, the library has been refurbished to a high standard. Remaining internal areas are mainly the original fabric and updating / refurbishment required. Costs for internal areas are not for library area.*

*Lighting and electrical distribution are mainly the original installation and have reached the end of their recommended lifespan. Roof covering has been patch repaired in recent years, however, the covering should be considered time expired.*

## **Glynneath**

Glynneath Library is open 30 hours per week.

Condition cost for the overall site = £86,000

Grade B

*Overall, the library is in fair to good condition. Dated internal areas require refurbishing / updating. Roof covering nearing the end of its lifespan.*

## **Neath**

Neath Library is open 48.5 hours per week.

Condition cost for the overall site = £463,000

Grade C-

*Overall, the building has received little investment over recent years. Further remedial works required to building fabric, due to damp issues. Mechanical and electrical elements are nearing the end of their lifespan.*

## **Pontardawe**

Pontardawe Library is open 40 hours per week.

Condition cost for overall site = £53,000

Grade B

*The building has received moderate investment over recent years. Internal areas have been refurbished to a high standard. The flat roof is deemed to have reached the end of its practical lifespan.*

## **Port Talbot**

Port Talbot Library is open 50 hours per week.

The library is situated on the first floor of the Aberafan Shopping Centre. The lease for the library will expire by 2025.

No condition survey has been undertaken.

## **Sandfields**

Sandfields Library is open 35 hours per week.

Condition cost for the overall site = £123.750

Grace B

*The building received an internal refurbishment circa 15-years ago. External glazed curtain wall and roof coverings have reached the end of their lifespan. Heating distribution is mainly the original installation and due to its age, will require renewals over the next 5-years.*

## **Skewen**

Skewen Library is open 30 hours per week.

It is proposed that the library be relocated from its present site on New Road, Skewen to Carnegie Hall, which is managed by Coedffranc Town Council. As a result no condition survey has been carried out for the library.

## **Library Usage Trends**

Our branch libraries are being used by more people than at any time over the last 10 years. Overall visitor figures are 4% higher than what they were in 2010 and remain in the top quartile for library visitors in Wales. Only 2 libraries (Glynneath -3%; Neath -35%) have fewer visitors than they did in 2010.

Much of this increase is due to libraries expanding the range of activities and events, meeting changing user needs and being proactive in creating opportunities for people to participate in their library.

Meanwhile the issue of books and other items has fallen by 12% overall since 2010. This includes a 35% decrease at Neath. Three libraries – Cwmafan, Pontardawe and Sandfields are loaning more books than they were ten years ago.

## **Opening Hours**

Since the 2014 Review, the Library Service has seen a sharp reduction in its overall opening hours.

In 2014 157 hours per week were lost (7850 per year) as a result of the transfer of 9 libraries to community management. There was a further reduction in 2015 when the mobile library service was reduced from two vehicles working on a 2-weekly rota to one vehicle working on a 3-weekly rota. This has led to a 50% reduction in available hours.

As a consequence, Neath Port Talbot no longer achieves the minimum standard (120 hours per 1000 population) for available opening hours as set out in WPLS Framework 6. In order to achieve this we would need an extra 1350 annual hours, or at least 27 hours per week. It should be noted that Community Managed Libraries are not included in this calculation as they do not fulfil the criteria governing statutory library provision in Wales.

The Library Service now has one of the lowest levels of opening hours per head of population across Wales. Increasing opening hours at the present time is not a viable option given budget pressures, so the Service is limited as to what can be achieved so we must concentrate on maintaining the existing number of hours.

Following the various consultation meetings it will be recommended that minor amendments are made to the opening hours at a number of libraries based on identified changes in usage and consultation.

*(See Recommendation 7, pg40-41)*

### **Library Headquarters**

We have also examined the long term viability of Library Headquarters / ELRS as a base for the Service.

The Library Service shares the building with the Education Library Resource Service (ELRS) and has done so since 1996. A number of other departments have also occupied the building in that



time, most recently NPT Physical Activity and Sports Service (PASS).

The building is on the site of the old Glanafan Lower School in Velindre, Port Talbot. It is a two storey building that is now over 100 years old. In the last year major structural faults have surfaced. A perimeter fence was erected around the building to safeguard against the risk of falling guttering and roof tiles.

A condition survey undertaken in 2010 indicated a backlog of maintenance costs of over £2m to update the building to a suitable standard. Since then there has been very little investment in the building. It is reasonable to assume that these costs will have risen to over £3m.

Suitable alternative accommodation has been identified at Ynysmaerdy School, Briton Ferry, a single storey building in relatively good condition. The school occupies approximately half the floor area of Library Headquarters. When comparing running costs of the school in its final year and Library Headquarters in the same year, (2017-18) it suggests a potential saving in both utilities costs and NNDR (business rates). The combined saving could provide operational savings of over £25,000.

## **6. Development and Opportunities for the Library Service**

### **Neath Library**

Neath Library is situated at Victoria Gardens, in two adjacent buildings, both over 100 years old and, as identified in the 2016 Library Strategy, is no longer capable of fully meeting the needs of many of our users, and when coupled with its significant building and maintenance costs, means that remaining at Victoria Gardens cannot be considered a long term option.



A recent building condition survey (May 2019) concluded that “Mechanical and electrical elements are nearing the end of their lifespan.” The survey also noted that the heating system had exceeded its lifespan and that there was evidence of water ingress, damaging both the roof and the internal walls.

The library building also creates a number of operational issues. The original library building was opened in 1904. Neath Borough Council purchased the house next door in the 1960s which became the children’s library.

Being housed in two adjacent buildings, over two floors, means that it is extremely costly to staff. When compared with Port Talbot Library, which now has the highest number of visitors of all libraries, Neath’s staff costs are over £80,000 more, despite being open fewer hours than Port Talbot. Neath also has high heating costs and presents accessibility issues for library users. The library doesn’t have the floor space and set out as it is, with a number of small rooms, it can no longer deliver what it needs to deliver.

A major concern is that we are unable to open the Children’s Library for the full 48.5 hours per week. During term time the Children’s Library is only open for 23 hours per week. This has a negative effect on delivering early years programmes and supporting national schemes such as the Frist 1000 Days. This in turn has a knock on effect on library usage. Over the last 5 years the library has lost 20% of its annual visitors, down from

158,000 to 127,000. Contributing to this fall has been the changes that have taken place in Neath town centre over the last ten years, namely, the shift of the commercial centre and car parking.

We acknowledge that, for a number of our members, there is a great deal of affection for Neath Library. It has stood for over 100 years and is an iconic building in the town. It therefore comes as no surprise that the building is well loved. It has been suggested that the library should remain at Victoria Gardens and receive full renovation. However this would not address many of the issues i.e. access, staffing costs, and the likely renovation costs would prove to be too prohibitive.

The planned redevelopment of Neath Town Centre offers an opportunity to create a new flagship library for Neath. Relocating Neath Library to the planned retail development, adjacent to the multi storey car park, has the potential to transform library services and contribute to the regeneration of the town centre. Furthermore we would envision the new library being located next to the planned leisure centre, creating a new leisure, learning and culture destination in Neath.

There has been much research into the value of libraries in enhancing the local economy through creating a 'halo' effect for local business. A report published in 2014 (Archives, Libraries and Museums Alliance UK) found that the value per library to the local economy was between £18.43 to £35.32 per visit. While the library doesn't generate income it does bring in a significant footfall that spends money in the local community.

Drawing inspiration from the new Haverfordwest Library, which has seen footfall increase by over 300% this year, and has also provided a significant boost to local retailers in the town, a new Neath Library has the potential to attract well over 200,000 annual visitors, doubling what the library currently achieves.

The vision at Haverfordwest was to create a flagship library, in partnership with the National Library of Wales, incorporating a library, gallery, visitor information centre and a coffee shop. It placed the new library at the heart of the town's retail centre. It is a model that has been implemented successfully and is being replicated in other areas of the UK.



Haverfordwest Library

In Plymouth, for example, the central library was relocated to the heart of the city, in the centre of the high street. The library was one feature of the wider tourism plan for the city which sought to turn Plymouth into a destination for tourists. As a result, visitor numbers to the city have increased beyond what was estimated as has visitor spending in Plymouth.

Neath now has the opportunity to create a new, vibrant, culture, leisure and retail area for the town.

A new library will be able to deliver a much wider range of activities and events that it is able to do at present; it will be a place where people are happy to spend quality leisure time; it will be a place which children can enjoy at any time; it will be a place which is open and accessible to everyone, on one open-plan floor.

When combined with the planned leisure centre, it will create a large potential footfall for Neath that could allow the Council to entice retailers to the town.

There is also the potential, as has been found with Haverfordwest, to connect with tourism to promote the many wonderful attractions in Neath and the surrounding valleys. It can become a gateway to Neath and beyond.

Funding from Welsh Government (c.£300,000) is available to cover the costs of relocation and providing fixtures and fittings for a new library.

A new site has the potential to deliver savings and create opportunities for income generation. Downsizing from the existing two buildings to one open-plan site will save on operating costs. In a modern, better designed library, on one floor, staffing costs can be reduced, via natural wastage, by a minimum of £51,000 – this should cover the anticipated commercial rent.

In addition, relocating the library will free up the main library building and the adjacent house for possible sale or rental.

Relocating Neath Library as part of the town centre redevelopment gives us an opportunity to transform library services for the people of Neath and the surrounding area. It can be achieved with lower running costs than at present and can contribute to the regeneration of Neath, bringing more visitors and more money into the town.

### **Delivery of a Mobile Library Service**

During the last 10 years the demand for a mobile library service has decreased across Wales. Some local authorities, e.g. Swansea have cut the service altogether while others have downsized, either by moving from a 2-weekly to 3-weekly service, as is the case with Neath Port Talbot, or have reduced the size and type of vehicle e.g. Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire. A number of local authorities have invested in new, smaller mobile libraries. Last year Carmarthenshire replaced their fleet of mobile libraries with three new vehicles.

Ten years ago Neath Port Talbot had a fleet of 3 mobile libraries and 4 drivers. The service also covered South Powys on a recharge basis.

Following the previous Library Review in 2014 the service has gradually been reduced to a 3-weekly schedule with 2 alternating vehicles and 1 driver. As a result user numbers have understandably fallen by over 20% in the last two years.



The mobile library in Neath Port Talbot continues to provide a valuable service to over 40 communities, including school visits and those areas that no longer have a branch library. The mobile library plays a vital role for the Library Service in ensuring that all residents of Neath Port Talbot have access to library resources regardless of where they live. For many of our rural communities, or those areas where public transport links aren't dependable, the mobile library is essential. For this reason we believe that we are not at the stage where the mobile library service could be terminated.

There are currently 2 large mobile library vehicles (30'), both of which are classed as HGV, have high operational and maintenance costs, are out of lease and, at 10 years old, are nearing the end of their operational life.

There are options for replacing both vehicles with one, more efficient, smaller vehicle (20'), creating greater flexibility in service delivery, e.g. increased number of locations that it can visit and supporting the Home



a. Carmarthenshire Mobile Library  
Pembrokeshire Mobile Library



b.

Delivery Service. There will also be reduced annual maintenance and leasing costs over the lifetime of the vehicle.

It is expected that replacement costs would range from between £60k (a) to £90k (b), depending on the type of vehicle, examples of which are illustrated below. This would be purchased via prudential loan over 9 years and would be met within the existing leasing budget.

There will also be a resale value on the current two vehicles of an estimated £10k.

## Home Delivery Service

The Home Delivery Service is a vital service to the 472 currently registered housebound borrowers currently in Neath Port Talbot. It provides an essential book delivery service to those members of the public who are housebound and would otherwise be unable to access a library service. Our users tend to be elderly, often with physical and sight disabilities and are regarded as being amongst the most vulnerable in society.

The service provides a six-weekly visit with books and audio books selected by a member of staff at Library Headquarters. To many of our borrowers this service is viewed as a lifeline and is one of their few regular contacts they have with society.

In order to maintain this service we need to replace the existing small delivery van (pictured).

The current delivery van (CP06 HCJ) is 13 years old out of lease and has increasing annual maintenance costs of over £2100.

We would plan to use this new vehicle to improve our supply of new books to Community Managed Libraries and nursing homes.



### ***Potential Savings of Current 2 Vehicles***

2 x Current Libraries Annual Running costs = £10,162.32

1 x Current Light Van Annual Running costs = £2,148.00

**Total      £12,310.32**

1 x New Smaller Library Annual Running cost = £4,741.68

1 x Fully Electric Light Van Annual Running cost = £843.60

**Total      £5,585.28**

**Potential annual saving on running costs = £6,725.04**

These figures are not inclusive of fuel or purchase costs and also exclude any addition maintenance such as damage etc.

### **Co-location and community hubs**

As mentioned above the Service will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of co-location and the sharing of resources. As and when the opportunity arises we will evaluate options for relocation of library premises to reduce costs and improve services.

## **Library relocation**

Any decision to relocate a library is made with a view to improving the service for that community. A number of proposals have been put forward in recent years (e.g. relocating Sandfields Library into the new Afan Lido complex) but these have not come to fruition due to strong opposition from the local community.

In the case of Skewen Library, we believe that the relocation to Carnegie Hall will greatly enhance the library offer for our users. Welsh Government has provided a grant of £106,000 to facilitate relocation and to cover costs associated with the move. We will continue to explore funding opportunities with Welsh Government to refurbish or relocate branch libraries.

## **Micro-libraries (book deposit collections)**

Micro-libraries, or small book deposit collections, have the potential to provide books in places where static or mobile libraries cannot serve. At present this Review has not identified any practical or suitable locations in Neath Port Talbot for such collections. We do however, remain open to the potential and will continue to look at the feasibility of piloting micro-libraries.

## **Partnership**

Over the last decade a number of libraries have established Friends Of... groups as a means of supporting and developing activities in their local library. Whilst we recognise that there may not be the capacity in some communities to organise or establish a Friends Of... group, we do acknowledge the valuable contribution that can be made in obtaining grants and extra funding which are not available to the local authority.

The Friends groups at Pontardawe and Glynneath have been proactive in supporting the professional library service in their community. Both groups have worked with the library staff to develop an events programme and to explore options for income generation. We will continue to support the

establishment of Friends of... groups where they provide extra benefits to the library and our users.

## **7. Recommendations**

The following are recommended for decision by Members.

### **1. Relocation of Library HQ / ELRS to Ynysmaerdy School**

Library Headquarters is currently located in a Category D building in Velindre, Port Talbot. There is an estimated backlog of £3million maintenance costs. The building is in a poor state of repair with major structural faults having been recently identified. Furthermore, for the number of staff that are based there, the building has become grossly inefficient. Annual running costs combined with ongoing maintenance costs mean that remaining at Velindre is no longer a viable option.

We therefore recommend relocating Library HQ, together with the ELRS, to Ynysmaerdy School in Briton Ferry.

There will be savings as a result of downsizing from a two storey building to a single storey with half the floor area of the current Library Headquarters. Based on a comparison of running costs between Library Headquarters and Ynysmaerdy School in its last year before closure, there are potentially savings of up to £25,000 to be made from utilities and business rates costs.

In addition, Ynysmaerdy also offers a more secure and better site for the Museum Service's store.

### **2. Neath library**

Over the last ten years usage at Neath Library has fallen by over 30%. At the same time the library has become very expensive to maintain. The condition survey highlighted £463,000 of outstanding maintenance, with concerns over the heating system and other mechanical and electrical issues. Furthermore, Neath Library has significantly higher staff costs than any other library. Based on 2018-19 figures the library cost over £80,000 more to staff than Port Talbot Library, which is open for longer than Neath. Broken down hourly, Neath Library costs £34.83 per hour more to staff than Port Talbot.

Neath Library is no longer sustainable with the situation likely deteriorating over the next five years.

We therefore recommended relocating Neath Library to the new retail development site in Neath where it can contribute to a leisure, culture and education destination, adjacent to the proposed new leisure centre.

A new Neath Library has the potential to deliver over 200,000 in footfall, transforming library services for the people of Neath and the surrounding area and contributing to the regeneration of the town. The library can be an anchor institution for Neath which will create a better platform for community engagement, support the local economy, provide quality learning opportunities and support the health and well-being of the town and its residents for years to come.

Financially, the case for Neath is clear.

- Staff costs will be reduced by at least £51,000 (via natural wastage) which should cover a commercial rent at the new site. The library will provide a long term guaranteed footfall and income for the town centre redevelopment.
- There is a potential income for the sale of one of the buildings, which currently houses the children's library, adjacent to the main building.
- Running costs, including maintenance, will be greatly reduced.
- A grant of up to £300,000 can be applied for from MALD (Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of Welsh Government) to relocate the library from Victoria Gardens. This grant will cover all the costs of relocation including new fixtures and fittings.

### **3. Mobile library service**

The mobile library provides an essential service to over forty communities, many located in valley communities where access to library services are limited. To ensure that this service remains sustainable we recommend that the existing two large mobile library vehicles, both nearing the end of their operation life, be replaced by one smaller vehicle. This new vehicle at 20ft and under 7 tonnes will make this service become more flexible, allowing access to locations that the larger vehicle cannot access.

Replacing the two vehicles with a new one should provide an annual saving of £6000 in running costs. Furthermore the two current vehicles could be sold off for a combined amount of £10,000. (pg.32-34)

#### **4. Home delivery service**

The Home Delivery Service provides a vital function to the most vulnerable in society, often elderly and disabled persons. As well as offering a regular supply of books in a variety of formats, including large print and audio, the Home Delivery Service also provides an invaluable face-to-face service that for some is one of the few regular contacts they have with society.

In order to operate this service as efficiently as we can we recommend purchasing, via a prudential loan, 1, new small delivery van to deliver the service and support Community Managed Libraries in Neath Port Talbot. We 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. (pgs 34-35)

#### **5. Port Talbot Library**

The current lease on Port Talbot Library, which is located on the first floor of Aberafan Shopping Centre, expires in the next 5 years. We recommend therefore that consideration should be given to either finding alternative premises for the library in Port Talbot Town Centre, or renegotiating the lease at the existing site before 2025.

#### **6. Skewen library**

Skewen Library is the smallest and most limited in what can currently be delivered of all our libraries. Following discussions with Coedffranc Town Council a successful grant application (£106,000) was submitted to Welsh Government, which will facilitate the relocation of Skewen Library to Carnegie Hall, which is operated by the Town Council. This move will result in savings on the existing building, and facilitate the long term sustainability of the library service, with improved facilities for the public.

#### **7. Branch Library Network**

The branch library network is the most essential part of the service. This is a view that has been expressed countless times during this process. We have listened to library users, our staff and Elected Members and as a result recommend that all eight libraries are maintained at the present level with the existing total number of opening hours. However, following discussions and based on current usage patterns, we recommend that the following amendments to opening hours be considered for approval and piloted for trial period of three months:

### Glynneath

<b>Current Hours</b>			<b>Proposed Hours</b>		
Monday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 6.30	Monday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30
Tuesday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30	Tuesday	9:30 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30
Wednesday	Closed	Closed	Wednesday	Closed	Closed
Thursday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30	Thursday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30
Friday	10.00 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30	Friday	9.30 - 1.00	2.00 - 5.30
Saturday	10.00 - 1.00	Closed	Saturday	10.00 - 1.00	Close

### Neath

<b>Current Hours</b>		<b>Proposed Hours</b>	
Monday	9:00 – 6:00	Monday	9:00 – 6:00
Tuesday	9:00 – 6:00	Tuesday	9:00 – 6:00
Wednesday	9:00 – 6:00	Wednesday	9:00 – 6:00
Thursday	9:00 – 5:00	Thursday	9:00 – 6:00
Friday	9:00 – 7:00	Friday	9:00 – 6:00
Saturday	9:30 – 1:00	Saturday	9:30 – 1:00

### Pontardawe

<b>Current Hours</b>		<b>Proposed Hours</b>	
Monday	9.30 – 6.00	Monday	9.30 – 6.00
Tuesday	9.30 – 5.00	Tuesday	9.30 – 5.00
Wednesday	9.30 – 6.00	Wednesday	9.30 – 6.00
Thursday	9.30 – 5.00	Thursday	9.30 – 6.00
Friday	9.30 – 7.00	Friday	9.30 – 6.00
Saturday	9.30 - 1.00	Saturday	9.30 - 1.00

## **8. Community Managed Libraries**

Community managed libraries continue to provide an important service in their communities and are a link to Neath Port Talbot Library Service.

It is recommended, that as a minimum, we continue to provide the same level of support, namely, professional support, staff training, access to the Library Management System and regular book stock exchange.

We propose to further develop regional support for community libraries, via the Tier 1 libraries, to ensure that a professional librarian is always available to provide support.

## **9. Staffing**

This Review has highlighted that at least half of our staff will be over the age of 60 by 2025. An assumption that the Library Service will see significant staff turnover, and lose a number of qualified and experienced staff over the two to three years is fair.

Planning ahead, we recommend putting in place a staffing plan that will address succession management and the continued delivery of a library service. This plan will also address staff training issues to ensure that our staff continue to grow and develop and are able to best utilise all their skills. There will be opportunities for shadowing, mentoring and additional training which will be included in personal development plans.

## **Appendices**

1. Library Consultation Report
2. Branch Library Staff Structure

### **Background Papers**

1. Condition Surveys
2. Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Assessment 2018-2019

### **Bibliography**

1. Library Strategy 2016-2021
2. Welsh Public Library Standards Framework 6
3. Welsh Public Library Standards Assessment 2018
4. Welsh Public Library Standards Assessment 2019
5. Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014
6. Shaping NPT: Neath Port Talbot Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2022
7. Libraries Inspire: The Strategic Development Framework for Welsh Libraries 2012-2016
8. Public Libraries: The Case for Support 2019

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