

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

18th March 2021

REPORT OF HEAD OF TRANSFORMATION
ANDREW THOMAS

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report 2019-20

1. 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 2019-20.

2. Executive Summary

The current framework 6 of the Welsh Public Library Standards, “Connected and Ambitious Libraries” consists of 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators, 10 of which have set targets. Due to the impact of COVID-19, some authorities have been unable to provide data for all of the quality indicators, therefore for the reporting year 2019/20, three quality indicators, one of which had a set target, have been removed.

Neath Port Talbot currently 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 9 quality indicators for this year which have set targets, Neath Port Talbot achieves 6 in full, 1 in part and fails to achieve 2, which is consistent with performance over the course of the current framework.

The service continues to achieve the standard on Welsh language resources (QI10) prioritising expenditure in this area to reflect the role of libraries in supporting the Welsh Government's aim of creating one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Since 2018, performance against the current Welsh Public Library Standards has also become one of the National Performance Indicators (NPI's), with authorities required to report on the percentage of Quality Indicators with targets achieved.

The Quality Indicators which the library service fails to achieve, in common with many local authorities are resource based and can be directly attributed to successive budget reductions which has adversely impacted on stock purchases (QI 9), staffing levels (QI 13) and total opening hours of branch libraries (QI 16).

3. 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. The Minister uses the Standards framework 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.

The current Sixth framework of the Standards – Connected and Ambitious Libraries which usually cover a three year period (initially 2017 – 20), has now been extended for a further year until 2021.

The framework consists of 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators, reduced this year to 13, nine of which have set targets upon which the library services performance is evaluated.

Following the transfer of some 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 managed by the Library

Service 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.

The Assessment Report (appendix 2) provides a detailed response from Welsh Government on the authorities' performance against the current standards. The library service continues to receive high levels of customer satisfaction, together with a slight increase in membership and loans of E Resources. The areas of decreased usage, namely visitors and loans can be attributed to the early impact of COVID-19, which resulted in library closures from mid-March 2019.

4. Financial Impact

Since 2014, the library service has seen budget reductions of nearly £700,000 or more than 30% of the total budget.

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 £100,000.

Staffing – An additional 16 full time members of staff would be required at an estimated cost of £300,000.

With the development of framework 7 of the Standards, it is envisaged that more realistic targets will be set.

5. Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring / information purposes.

6. Valleys Communities Impacts

There are no implications

7. Workforce Impacts

There are no workforce implications.

8. 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.

9. Risk Management Impacts

Due to reductions in the library service budget, performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards has been restricted and those standards that the authority continually fails to achieve are resource based, namely expenditure on book stock and staffing levels.

Performance against the current Standards framework 6 has remained constant, but is unlikely to improve beyond the present level achieved without additional investment in the service. Further reductions in the library service budget will have a negative impact on the current 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.

10. Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

11. Recommendation

It is recommended that Members approve the Annual Report to Welsh Government and note the contents of the Annual Assessment Report 2019-20.

12. Reasons for Proposed Decision

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

13. Implementation of Decision

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

14. Appendices

Appendix 1: Neath Port Talbot – Annual Return 31st March 2020.

Appendix 2: Annual Assessment Report 2019-20.

List of Background Papers

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

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