

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION SKILLS AND WELLBEING CABINET BOARD

27th October 2022

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND TRANSFORMATION – RHIANNON CROWHURST

MATTER FOR DECISION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Purpose of Report

1. To obtain approval from Members for the Library service - Annual Return to Welsh Government, Culture Division in respect of the authorities' library services performance against the current Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) Framework 6 and to note feedback, comments and recommendations in the recently issued (September 2022) Welsh Libraries Report 2020-2021.

Executive Summary

2. The current Welsh Public Library Standards (Framework 6) usually consists of 12 Core Entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators, 10 of which have set targets. Due to the impact of COVID which resulted in the disruption and closure of many libraries during the year 2020 – 21, the Annual Return required by Welsh Government to evaluate the library services performance against the WPLS was amended as it was impractical to report against the full framework for that year.
3. Therefore, for 2020-21, the Annual return includes a summary of provision against the 12 Core Entitlements, details of achievements against 6 Quality Indicators instead of the usual 16, a narrative report on the strategic direction of the service and six case studies which demonstrate the impact of the library service on the public.

Background

4. The Annual Assessment Report from Welsh Government which is usually published in November following the submission of the Annual Return in the previous July provides a detailed response on the Authorities performance against the current standards framework.
5. For the year 2020-21, a more general Welsh Libraries Report has been produced by Welsh Government which in addition to collecting data from all 22 authorities also captures qualitative information and the experiences of library customers. The Report also includes combined individual service reports for all Library Authorities in Wales (pages 7 – 59) with Neath Port Talbot's Assessment Report included on pages 37 to 39.
6. As a direct result of COVID, all public libraries in Wales closed in March 2020. Within a week, NPT libraries moved to developing an online library service. All books on loan were extended and fines suspended, staff set up a programme of daily activities and events via social media together with promoting song and rhyme sessions on line to those residents who were isolated and unable to leave their homes.

7. While libraries were closed, staff promoted the wide range of E Resources that were available to residents and additional content was provided for E books and E Audio services. In addition newspapers and magazines were made available via PressReader and the Libby app, with usage in both on line service greatly increasing during the lockdown period.
8. As the Welsh Government COVID guidance changed, both the Mobile Library and Home Library Service resumed in June 2020, together with a call and collect service introduced at NPT's main libraries. Following consultation with staff, Health & Safety officers, Unions and senior management, a Service Recovery plan was developed to allow all libraries in the Authority to reopen safely on a phased basis for browsing and IT access by August 2020.
9. Once libraries reopened, a number of changes were necessary to ensure the safety of customers. Many of the activities and events in libraries resumed but with restricted numbers and less than half of our public access PC's were made available.
10. The Welsh Government Cultural Resilience Fund has proved invaluable in enabling the service to purchase additional equipment and support service initiatives during this recovery period.
11. Usage of on line resources continues to increase. The number of physical visits to our libraries and book issues continues to grow month by month as part of our service recovery plan in line with most authorities in Wales. The service is currently on track to meet its performance targets set for 2022-23.

Financial Impact Assessment

12. There is no financial impact based on this year's Welsh Libraries Report (Appendix 1).

Valleys Communities Impact

13. There are no specific Valleys Communities Impacts arising from this report. It should be noted that whilst we recognise the invaluable contribution of volunteers at community managed libraries in Neath Port Talbot, a number of which are in valley communities, we are not able include them in our statutory return.

Integrated Impact Assessment

14. An Integrated Impact Screening Assessment has been undertaken (Appendix 3) which concludes that an integrated impact assessment is not required for this report.

Workforce Impact

15. There are no workforce implications.

Legal Impact

16. The Annual Return to Welsh Government ensures the Council complies with its statutory duty to provide a Public Library service as required under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

Risk Management

17. There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

Consultation

18. There are no requirements for additional external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

19. Having had due regard to the first stage Integrated Impact Assessment Members are requested to approve the Annual Return to Welsh Government and note the contents of the Welsh Libraries Report 2020-21.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

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

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Welsh Libraries Report 2020-21

Appendix 2 – NPT Library Service Annual Return 2020-21

Appendix 3 – Integrated Impact Screening Assessment

List of Background Papers

Leisure and Culture Sub Committee March 2022 – Library Service update presentation

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