

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

EDUCATION SKILLS AND WELLBEING CABINET BOARD

28th September 2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE TOURISM HERITAGE AND CULTURE

MATTER FOR INFORMATION

WARDS AFFECTED: All

WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update to 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 (July 2023) Welsh Libraries Report 2021-2022.

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 2021-22, the Annual return included 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 case studies which demonstrate the impact of the library service on the public. The Welsh government report is overwhelmingly positive for Neath Port Talbot with all the objectives fully met, a considerable increase in active borrowers and some excellent new initiatives highlighted.

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. There was a slight delay in this year, with the report coming through from Welsh Government in August 2023.
5. As was the case for the 2020-21 Report, for 2021-22, 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 via case studies.
6. Throughout 2021-22 the Library Service was still feeling the effect of the pandemic. Libraries were unable to offer their full range of services and events/activities, and the Service was restricted in what it could deliver across all communities in Neath Port Talbot. Where it could, the Service delivered online sessions and events in place of in-person events.

7. Our Home Delivery Service and Mobile Library continued throughout 2021-22 to deliver reading materials to our most vulnerable residents, providing social interaction and support to those who became isolated.
8. The suspension of book fines was made permanent in 2021-22. In doing so the Service has removed, what is to some, a barrier to access.
9. While libraries were restricted in what they could deliver, 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.
10. Towards the end of 2021-22 the Service was beginning to resume a number of its regular activities. In-person visits to schools returned as did a full Song and Rhyme programme for babies and toddlers.
11. Issue and Visitor figures were steadily increasing and staff were engaging and supporting members of the public with enquiries, including one to one assistance.
12. We upgraded our options for printing and included WiFi printing as part of our service. This came about as part of the demand from our users.

Financial Impact Assessment

13. There is no financial impact as a result of the 2021-22 Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Assessment Report (Appendix 1).

Valleys Communities Impact

14. 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

15. A First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken (Appendix 2) which concludes that a full Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

Workforce Impact

16. There are no workforce implications as a result of the Welsh Public Library Standards Report.

Legal Impact

17. 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

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

Consultation

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

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that Members note the contents of Annual Assessment Report 2021-22 and Neath Port Talbot Library Service's Annual Return 2021-22.

Reasons for Proposed Decision

21. No decision required.

Implementation of Decision

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

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Assessment Report and Foreword 2021-22

Appendix 2 – First Stage Integrated Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – Neath Port Talbot Library Service Annual Return 2021-22

List of Background Papers

None

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