

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 22ND JANUARY, 2018

REFERENCE FROM LEARNING AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
11TH DECEMBER, 2017

“536 WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS PERFORMANCE 2016-2017 (DLS) –

The Library Services Manager, in presenting the report, advised that the purpose of the report was to endorse the Annual Return for 2016-2017, to provide an update on the feedback received on the Library and Information Service performance received from Welsh Government and to inform Members about the Sixth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020.

The report highlighted that the Welsh Public Library Standards were introduced by Welsh Government in 2001 to provide a common performance assessment framework for public library services in Wales. The Standards were reviewed and updated by Welsh Government on a three year cycle. The Annual Return submitted for 2016-17 was the third report of the Fifth Framework, which operated from April 2014 to March 2017. Committee was advised that in setting targets and areas of reporting, the Fifth Framework had taken into account the financial difficulties affecting Councils, yet also still set some aspirational targets.

The Library Standards Return for 2016-17 was attached at Appendix 1 to the report, with Case Studies at Appendix 2. The return was completed using a template provided by Welsh Government and it required sufficient information to enable the assessors to evaluate performance and identify factors that may impact on performance. The first part of the report is related to Core Entitlements, and the second part related to Quality Indicators (WPLSQI 1-16).

Feedback in the form of an Annual Assessment from Welsh Government was to be found at Appendix 3 to the report. The executive summary of the Assessment commended the Vale of Glamorgan for continued investment in stock but also mentioned disappointment that the Authority missed staffing and opening hour targets. The assessment went on to summarise that the "Authority appears to be an average performer, with many indicators in all areas close to the median for Wales and some pockets of good performance".

In terms of positive performance, the Committee was advised that the Vale:

- was one of five services in Wales that had achieved the target for book stock;
- ranked 5th in Wales in terms of active borrowers;
- was 12th in the rankings for events at libraries; and

- up in terms of volunteers and now ranked 2nd in Wales.

For the performance indicators which were not met, only one Quality Indicator (QI) had not been met, with two others being partially met as follows:

- QI 3, for individual development, was only partially met. This QI related to activities provided for library users in relation to literacy and digital skills, reader development and information literacy. During 2016-17 there was significant change in libraries with the implementation of the community libraries initiative, and one consequence was that individual development work could not be timetabled or undertaken to the same level as before. While the target was missed in 2016-17 it was anticipated that this QI would be achieved again during the period of the new framework;
- QI 13, staffing, and professional staffing per capita, was only partially met in common with all but one authority in Wales, staffing numbers being 10.5 FTE below the target per population. Given necessary staffing changes over recent years, which followed opening hour changes and the establishment of five community libraries, it was expected that the total staffing establishment would not meet the indicator for staff per capita and also professional staff per capita. It was not foreseen that this QI would be achieved during the life of the next framework. It was felt that the current library workforce was appropriate for the structure of the service. Whilst staff numbers did not meet the target, the indicator did not take account of over 100 volunteers who now did valuable work in their communities to provide libraries services with substantial Council support for infrastructure, equipment, books and staff support;
- QI 16, opening hours per capita, was not met. This QI included the opening hours for both Council run and Community Supported libraries. Together they opened for 107 hours, which were fewer than the target of 120 hours per annum per 1,000 resident population. A further 35 opening hours per week would be required to meet the target. Currently, there was little demand from customers for extended hours at Council libraries, however a number of community libraries had expressed a desire to increase their hours in future, subject to the availability of volunteers. In an effort to make libraries accessible to users outside current opening hours, the library service had invested in a system which would enable unstaffed use of Barry library up to 9pm weekdays, in the first instance. The Sixth Framework asks Authorities to report on the number of unstaffed hours they provided from 2017 onwards, however, these will not be included in the calculation for the QI.

In addition, the Library Services Manager advised that there had been a fall in visitor numbers, which was not uncommon across Wales, and that periods of rising and falling visitor figures happen from year to year. . Partly as a result of a drop in visitors the net cost per visit of running the Service had decreased by only £0.18 despite significant budget savings over the previous year.

A copy of the Framework was attached at Appendix 5 to the report.

A Committee Member commented on the introduction of booths at Penarth Library, used to drop off books without the assistance of a member of staff. The Member stated that if people were standing in large queues then this would be an ineffective service. In reply, the Library Services Manager stated that the Library Management System had been implemented during July but there had been an issue with the supply of new equipment. There had also been difficulties with the network. The new system was operating in Cowbridge, Barry and Llantwit Major but there were issues at Penarth. The Library Services Manager stated that Penarth Library was on a different network exchange and so a meeting with the Head of I.C.T had taken place. He added that the Council was working on a solution and that this was a priority for the Library Service.

In relation to a reduction in the number of visitors to libraries during 2016/17 when compared to 2015/16, a Committee Member asked if this reduction was larger within the community run libraries. The Library Services Manager confirmed that the reduction in visitors was larger for the five community libraries. He also advised that during the period of transfer, there had been an element of uncertainty among the public in regard to opening times and whether the libraries were operating and this may have accounted for some of the fall in use along with some adjustment of opening hours.

A Committee Member referring to the rural parts of the Vale asked whether more could be done to promote the libraries on line. The Library Services Manager advised that a Digital Library Officer had been appointed and one of their tasks would be to promote the service, so there would now be more promotional activity in this area. The Library Services Manager also referred to Book Groups, of which there were 32 in the Vale and he also made mention of the House Bound Service that was available to individuals who were not able to leave their homes. In addition he commented that the Service was being active in trying to attract people into the libraries.

In answer to a question about unplanned emergency closures during the year the Library Services Manager advised that emergency closures were very rare. These had happened during a period of short staffing, between the time when some staff had left the Service and before community libraries were transferred and being operated by volunteers.

A Committee Member asked for more detail around risk assessments in relation to the Open+ scheme planned for Barry. The Library Service Manager advised that the Service had produced risk assessments. One of the risks might involve a person gaining access to the library by following a library user that had activated the automatic doors; another might involve someone being taken ill in the library when unstaffed. For both occasions library users could pick up the phone and dial emergency services. He also outlined that Open+ would be restricted to adult users and they would all receive an induction programme before being given access.

A Committee Member gave praise to the library staff, particularly in Barry, and to their work to organise extra events in order to increase footfall. The Member also

praised the use of twitter feeds, which was a very useful tool. The Member then asked about the future prospects for the Library Service. In reply, the Library Services Manager stated that there was a positive future for the Library Service and he outlined that compared to other local authorities, the Vale was in a much better position. Some Local Authorities had decided to reduce their book stock; the Vale however had a priority to maintain its stock as without it people would not be encouraged to visit. The Library Services Manager also stated that staff and their creativeness and commitment was invaluable, with the Service now under less pressure due to better opening times. He outlined that more could be done online which would remove the need to purchase expensive reference books. He also referred to the Wales consortium to purchase books and the possibility of working regionally in other ways especially in relation to the Library Management System. There was also a positive way forward for working in a joined up way with Community Libraries. They now had almost the same access to library systems as the Council's libraries and in future there will be opportunities for joint training.

At this point, the Cabinet Member with permission to speak, stated that the range of services available at libraries had been increased, for example by allowing residents to be able to purchase Vale goods such as recycling bags, and he hoped that this would also include Blue Badge and Bus Pass services. These would help to increase footfall. In terms of opening hours, the Cabinet Member stated that the Bibliotech library system had been used successfully in Scandinavian countries for many years, although this came with some risk, it was a proven system. He added that this could be the way forward as it would allow people to visit libraries at times which best suited them.

The Chairman, in referring to a potential 24 hour service, queried whether the unstaffed service operating at Barry until 9pm could continue later than that. In reply, the Library Services Manager stated that it could, and once the trial period had proved its worth the Service might be extended beyond 9pm and on weekends.

The Chairman praised the use of new online facilities such as E-Books and E-Magazines and commented on the positive use of social media in order to promote services. The Committee agreed to receive a presentation on how the library services are promoted, particularly in regard to the use of social media. Also, it was agreed for a Committee site visit to take place that could possibly coincide with an open day. The Library Services Manager referred to the importance of promoting services and this was a constant process, as for example, many people may not be aware that the library service was free.

The Chairman, referring to support for literacy and digital skills, queried whether there had been any positive knock on effects following the move of Vale Learning Centres into libraries. The Library Services Manager confirmed that there were, and made reference to the use of personal computers and I.T. equipment. As Vale Learning Centre users were joined up to the library service when they enrolled, it was hoped use of the centre would increase their use and knowledge of libraries and would help them feel comfortable there.

There be no further comments or queries, it was

RECOMMENDED –

- (1) T H A T Cabinet be recommended to endorse the Annual Return for 2016-2017 submitted to Welsh Government in June 2017.
- (2) T H A T the performance of the Library and Information Service in relation to the Welsh Library Standards Framework be noted.
- (3) T H A T the Committee receives a presentation with regard to promotion of the Library Service via Social Media.
- (4) T H A T a Committee site visit to Barry Library be arranged that possibly coincides with an open day.
- (5) T H A T the Committee's thanks and appreciation be passed on to staff.

Reasons for recommendations

- (1) To comply with the requirements of the Welsh Government for formal approval of the Annual Return for 2016-2017 and to seek Cabinet endorsement.
- (2) To keep Members informed of progress.
- (3) In order for the Committee to consider how the library services are promoted.
- (4) So Members of the Committee can see the range of services provided at Barry Library and meet and talk to some of the staff and library users.
- (5) In order for the staff to be congratulated for their hard work.”

[Attached as Appendix – Report to Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee:
11th December, 2017](#)