

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO CABINET

21<sup>st</sup> MAY 2019

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

#### WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS 2017-18

#### 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Cabinet the Council's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) sixth framework for the period 2017-18.

#### 2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priority/priorities:-

1. **Supporting a successful economy** – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.
2. **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

- 2.2 The Council has a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for the benefit of all residents of the County Borough.

#### 3. Background

- 3.1 The provision of public library services in the United Kingdom was made a statutory service for local government as a result of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The legislation requires local authorities to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for persons desiring to make use thereof”.

- 3.2 The responsibility for overseeing the terms of the 1964 act and how it is applied within Wales currently rests with the minister for culture, tourism and sport who has a duty under section 1 of the act *“to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library services provided by local authorities, and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred upon them as library authorities by or under the 1964 act”*.

- 3.3 In order to assist in discharging this responsibility, in 2002 the Welsh Government established a framework of standards for the management of local authority library services, by local authorities, the WLGA and other relevant bodies. As part of this framework, new targets relating to library provision and performance are reviewed and set every three years. One of the overall objectives of the standards is that libraries offer all the services and facilities listed as core entitlements within the framework with quality also being measured via a range of performance indicators and impact measures.
- 3.4 Since 2017 local authorities have commenced recording their performance against the sixth quality framework for Welsh libraries entitled *“Connected and Ambitious Libraries” and for the period 2017-2020*. Welsh Government in *their publication “How good is your public library service?”* states *“Libraries will not necessarily be able to achieve the top levels of performance in all areas, but are expected to achieve as many of the targets as possible and to seek improvements in those areas where performances are weaker. Authorities should also compare their performances with others in Wales and share best practice in order to bring about improvements”*.
- 3.5 On an annual basis, Bridgend Council, as the public library authority, is required to submit an annual Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) return for consideration by assessors. A report is issued in turn by the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of the Welsh government, who have responsibility for administering the framework. The report produced represents the considered view of the assessors on the Council’s performance for the given year.
- 3.6 On the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015, BCBC transferred the operational management of a range of cultural services, including the library service, to the Awen Cultural Trust. The statutory duty to provide the library service and report on its performance remains with the Council, but Awen, under the terms of the management agreement, provides the Council with the information required on performance in relation to the standards to satisfy itself that the service is meeting the desired outcomes. It should be noted that two libraries are operated by Halo Leisure at Ogmores Vale and Garw Valley with two others co-located in Halo run facilities at Bridgend Life Centre and Maesteg Sports Centre

#### **4. Current situation / proposal**

- 4.1 Attached as **Appendix 1** is the 2017-18 report from MALD in response to the library self-assessment return against the sixth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards (2017-20).
- 4.2 The overall assessment underlines the quality of the library service being delivered to the citizens of Bridgend County Borough by Awen as part of the partnership agreement with BCBC.
- 4.3 The 2017-18 report highlights that the service has continued to perform well noting the effectiveness of service points and the contribution of the service to wellbeing, an increase in formal and informal training, growth in attendance at events and also increases in membership and active borrowers.

- 4.4 Where concerns have been raised, they have been in relation to reductions relating to investments into book stock and materials although it should be noted that the preferences of library users are noticeably changing at Bridgend libraries such as increasing use of digital resources. Awen highlight that the book fund has remained fairly static since 2015 and has not been inflated during this period which has been consistent with the approach to the management fee provided by Council. MALD recognise that budgets have been carefully planned and targeted to deliver on agreed strategic outcomes.
- 4.5 The MALD report explains that the library service in Bridgend now meets 11 of the 12 core citizen entitlements in full and one in part. During 2017-18 the public accountability measures for libraries in Wales have changed from estimated library visits to levels of achievement in relation to 10 quality indicators with quantifiable targets.
- 4.6 The evaluation by MALD identifies that Bridgend has achieved 7 quality indicators in full, 1 in part and failed to achieve 2 of the indicators. A comparison as to how Bridgend has compared to other local authorities has been provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 4.7 The quality indicators not met relate to acquisitions per capita or materials spend per capita (Q19) and also the amount of material budget or spend on Welsh language resources per capita (Q110). Further details can be seen in **Appendix 1 Section 2.2**.
- 4.8 Although the report has identified that careful planning of resources by Awen is apparent, resource availability could have a greater negative impact on future years. Positively, Bridgend libraries attract a disproportionately high number of attendees to programmed activities and events and have evidenced impact on population wellbeing via a series of case studies. The partnership with Awen has delivered significant financial efficiencies since commencing in 2015. Although this will have been a contributor to the reduction in the book fund the overall picture remains positive with the report concluding that the *“service has continued to perform well.... particularly in terms of its engagement with the local community and the wide variety of activities and events it offers.”*
- 4.9 The assessment that the service meets a wide range of both core entitlements and quality indicators show that the library service plays an important role in promoting citizens digital skills and inclusion, that the locations of libraries are close to where their customers live and, in response to the medium term financial strategy of the Council has continued to maintain opening hours and service availability. The library service has demonstrated its strategic commitment to supporting children’s literacy and by programming events and activities to engage with this important population group. The focus given to offering an engaging and varied range of events and activities for children and young people is reflected in the fact that attendances at such events organised by libraries in Bridgend remain high.
- 4.10 Although the Welsh Government utilises data to formulate its assessment the case studies that Awen have provided are of equal importance and include the summer reading challenge to maintain children’s literacy during school holidays, supporting employability, dementia supportive activities in leisure facilities and “live and loud” cultural events in library settings funded by Arts Council Wales.

- 4.11 It has previously been reported to Cabinet that to meet the outcomes required by the Council whilst reducing the Council management fee, the Awen Cultural Trust may need to deliver the library service in a way that might not meet the short term requirements of the standards. This approach, approved by Cabinet in 2016 continues to provide a strategic focus for the development of the library service and to encourage an innovative response.

## **5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules**

- 5.1 There are no effects upon policy framework and procedure rules.

## **6. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 6.1 An EIA was conducted when the operation of the library services and other cultural services were transferred to Awen.

## **7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications**

- 7.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the wellbeing goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

- 7.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people.

- 7.3 The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has identified the importance of ensuring continued free access to libraries and museums to support local communities to access the variety of cultural opportunities and activities on offer to them in these spaces. Awen have recently announced the removal of library fines to support the building of better relationships with service users.

- 7.4 In the "Art of the Possible" (2019) the Commissioner's office identifies that libraries are now acting as community hubs, hosting choirs, family activities, computer classes and social events. They identify the opportunities that exist to implement simple changes such as encouraging staff to make use of their free library card and providing accessible information on what libraries offer.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are additional savings of £150,000 applicable to the management fee payable to Awen between 2019 and 2021 which may impact on availability of services and accessibility to the public of library and related services.

## **9. Recommendations**

9.1 Cabinet is requested to:

- Consider and note the content of the report and appendices recognising a positive year of progress against the Welsh Public Library Standards;

**Susan Cooper**  
**Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing**  
**March 2019**

**Contact Officer: Andrew Thomas**  
**Telephone:** (01656) 642692  
**E-mail:** Andrew.r.thomas@bridgend.gov.uk

**Background documents**  
None.