

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

23 JULY 2019

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING

PROPOSED CHANGES TO LIBRARY SERVICES IN BRIDGEND

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Cabinet proposals for the relocation of the Library service from the Tŷ'r Ardd premises and also the need to plan for the longer term in regard to mobile Library services.
- 1.2 The report also seeks approval from Cabinet to develop new approaches to sustain the provision of Library services including co-location opportunities as identified within the medium term financial strategy.

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 in 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 Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism,

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 On 1st October 2015, BCBC transferred the operational management of a large 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; however, Awen, under the terms of the management agreement, provides the Council with the information required on performance to satisfy itself that the service is meeting the desired outcomes.
- 3.4 Since 2015 the partnership with Awen has delivered financial savings to the Council whilst maintaining or enhancing related services and attracting external investment for capital improvements and revenue programmes. The management fee as part of the contract with Awen is negotiated in 3 year cycles with the current cycle running from 2019 – 2022.
- 3.5 The current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) identifies further savings from Library and cultural facilities and related services, including reviewing the number of facilities (libraries, community centres) and also reductions in services or opening hours. Whilst some of the £150,000 savings identified between 2019 – 2021 have been found, there remains a shortfall of £70,000 that needs to be identified.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 Service Related Proposals

- 4.1.1 There are a number of imminent decisions that are required to be made to sustain an efficient and effective approach to Library services operation.
- 4.1.2 In 2018, the Cabinet report on the capital programme identified the planned closure of the Tŷ'r Ardd building at Sunnyside to release a capital receipt with the Registrars services being relocated to the Civic Offices site. The Council's agreement with Awen, established in 2015, identified the potential need to make alternative provision for services operated at Tŷ'r Ardd.
- 4.1.3 Previously, in 2011, the Council relocated the Local and Family History Library resources, formerly located at the Coed Parc site, to Tŷ'r Ardd and these facilities and services will be displaced following the disposal of the site, requiring a decision on their future to be made.
- 4.1.4 Awen identify that Tŷ'r Ardd attracts approximately 6,000 visits per annum and based on Library users who joined at Tŷ'r Ardd, circa 70% are local residents. There were 3,500 bookings for ICT sessions at the site in 2018. Although a dedicated Local and Family History Library is not a requirement for the statutory Library service, the above data indicates the public value of the service.
- 4.1.5 Initially, there would need to be an interim relocation of the service to a facility that is capable of accommodating the quantity of books, newspapers,

periodicals, maps, microfiches and other materials inclusive of access to ICT equipment and at no additional cost to Awen.

4.1.6 Through discussion with Awen and a review of existing Library spaces that Awen occupies, the only suitable and cost effective location would be at the “Y Llynfi Library” at Maesteg Sports Centre. The facilities at “Y Llynfi” would have sufficient space to support an interim service offer and an ICT suite is also in existence. It would also be the most cost effective interim solution as it would not incur additional facility costs and would allow Awen to further contribute to targeted financial efficiencies. Following the redevelopment of Maesteg Town Hall, the local and family history service is planned to be co-located within the new facilities created to support longer term sustainability of library and cultural services. The Maesteg Town Hall project has been supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

4.2 **Mobile Library Services**

4.2.1 The mobile Library service is also valued by many local people but there are challenges and opportunities to be considered to support the longer term sustainability of mobile Library services.

4.2.2 Awen currently operate two approaches to mobile Library service provision including the large mobile Library vehicle and the ‘Booklink’ service for the housebound.

4.2.3 The Booklink service utilises a smaller vehicle supporting 282 customers with visits every 5 weeks.

4.2.4 The large mobile Library operates 10 routes and supports 361 individuals every 3 weeks (currently 7 of the 140 stops service nurseries, pre-school groups and Flying Start with approximately 73 participants).

4.2.5 The mobile Library service is important to overall performance of the Library service with circa 40,000 book issues per annum in total.

4.2.6 The current larger mobile Library vehicle is 11 years old and experiencing periodic failures with a replacement vehicle of similar specification anticipated to cost in the region of £120,000.

4.2.7 Awen have identified that there is a crossover of users between Library services and opportunities for a more flexible and innovative approach (11% of mobile Library users also use Library buildings whilst over two thirds of mobile Library users are over 60, suggesting potential eligibility for the Booklink service).

4.2.8 The proposal from Awen is that they can increase the number and range of beneficiaries of mobile Library services with a more flexible approach and smaller vehicles as opposed to the Council investing in the larger less flexible vehicle. This would be at Awen’s cost as opposed to the BCBC capital programme.

- 4.2.9 The proposal would see a standardised 5 week timetable established as per the current Booklink scheme with existing mobile Library users transferred to the new service.
- 4.2.10 This approach would minimise duplication of services and maintain support for vulnerable groups but also expand the reach of the service by working with Health Visitors and young families, schools, care homes, day centres, childcare settings and hospitals. This model could support the aspiration for every child in Wales being entitled to a free 'Bookstart' pack before they are 12 months old (and again at 27 months) in Wales, developing lifelong readers from an early age.
- 4.2.11 The Cabinet report of January 2018 had identified the need for a review of options for the mobile Library service to be progressed and the proposal demonstrates improved flexibility, cost effectiveness and sustainability.

4.3 Delivering Further Efficiencies

- 4.3.1 As part of the MTFs, the Council has identified the need to further reduce the management fee payable to Awen by £150,000 between 2019 and 2021 based on reviewing the number of libraries and also reductions in services or opening hours.
- 4.3.2 The approach of co-location of Library services alongside other wellbeing facilities is aligned to the corporate business plan objective of developing a next generation of wellbeing hubs. The Healthy Living and Cultural Trust partnerships established with GLL/Halo and Awen are supporting large numbers of vulnerable people as part of the prevention approach as an alternative to managed care and the infrastructure of hub facilities has long term importance to a strategic prevention approach.
- 4.3.3 There are existing examples of where a co-located approach to services has been cost effective including the Library facilities at Bridgend Life Centre, Maesteg Sport Centre, Garw Valley Centre and Ogmere Valley Life Centre, where partnership working with Halo Leisure has been established. The 2017/18 Welsh Public Library Standards report ranks Bridgend as the best performing Local Authority in terms of Library opening hours and is ranked seventh in terms of active borrowers per capita. However, the strategic reduction of investment into Library resources is also identified as a future risk.
- 4.3.4 There is current work in progress regarding the co-location of Library facilities within the redevelopment of Maesteg Town Hall that will improve cost effectiveness for the Council and similarly a feasibility study of opportunities in Porthcawl for co-location but these projects will not deliver new facilities or savings in the short term.
- 4.3.5 It will be for BCBC and Awen to identify any further opportunities for co-location of services but also to provide Cabinet with further information on the scale of costs and savings that might apply to the reduction in the number of libraries or hours of availability of services run on the Council's behalf by Awen. Again, the potential need to compensate Awen for any

detriment that materialises or to repay grant investment applied to specific facilities may impact on levels of savings that can be delivered.

4.3.6 It should be noted that the management fee negotiations with Awen is based on 3 year cycles and the Council would benefit from identifying its affordability level for services in subsequent years as opposed to annual incremental efficiencies.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

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

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 An equality impact screening has been conducted in relation to the need to plan for alternative provision to the Tŷ'r Ardd site based on the intention to dispose of the asset .There is no requirement for an Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the disposal of Council property.

6.2 The equality impact assessment screening has been conducted on the interim provision of Local and Family History services at Y Llynfi, Maesteg and subsequent relocation of these services to the new Maesteg Town Hall site when development works have been completed. A full equalities impact assessment will be conducted in regard to the longer term provision of library services at Maesteg Town Hall. The EIA screening recognises that the proposal is to retain and sustain a local and family history service within the County Borough and that risks are mitigated by retaining this service in a suitable and sustainable location. The interim relocation period for the local and family history service would allow a full EIA to be conducted within 3 years. .

6.3 An equality impact assessment screening has also been conducted on the proposed change in approach to mobile Library services and found to standardise the level of support with the potential to expand the reach to other equalities groups. The screening identifies no detriment to people accessing the Book Link service which would generally support older adults and people with disabilities or poor mobility issues. Although the frequency of visits by the traditional mobile library service would reduce slightly this would not necessarily equate to a reduction in service (i.e. the resources issued to customers). The screening also identifies the potential to support a broader range of groups and organisations including those with a protected characteristic. A full equalities impact assessment would be conducted following 12 months of operation.

6.4 Whilst no equality impact assessment has been conducted on the potential reduction in the number of Library facilities or opening hours, it is anticipated that full consultation may be required based on the statutory duty relating to Library services should such issues materialise.

7. Wellbeing 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 Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County

Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental wellbeing 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 Wellbeing 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 Commissioners' 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.
- 7.5 The Council has established a long term, 20 year, partnership agreement with AWEN that targets population outcomes that are consistent with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The model of co-locating libraries and cultural services is consistent with the five ways of working identified within the Act, particularly integration and collaboration. The proposal relating to the disposal of Tŷ'r Ardd represents a long term and sustainable future for the local and family history service as an integrated part of the broader library service.
- 7.6 The proposed remodelling of mobile library services recognises the broader needs of all people with a protected characteristic that could more consistently be supported by mobile library services. The Council's Strategic Equalities Plan identifies the importance of providing fair and equal access to all members of the community to leisure and cultural services. This proposal contributes to the aspirations for a More Equal Wales and a Wales of Vibrant Culture and Welsh Language.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 The partnership with Awen has delivered the targeted £625,000 of efficiencies within the first three years of the contract equating to 17% of the original budget.
- 8.2 In addition, by integrating the management of Wood B / B Leaf facilities into the contract, a further £120,000 of efficiencies became deliverable by the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate.
- 8.3 Between 2015 and 2019, the Council has benefitted from a fixed management fee for services delivered by Awen with no inflationary uplift provided (which would have equated to £164,000) further contributing to the reduction of costs to Council for operating library services.

8.4 Beyond the above, the proposals in this report identify the additional £150,000 of management fee reductions that will be applied to Awen between 2019 – 2021 and also longer term financial challenges faced by the Council.

8.5 There may be specific costs for BCBC relating to the relocation of services currently operated at Tŷ'r Ardd inclusive of storage charges that will need to be identified. These costs will need to be supported by Council which might include a contingency funding application.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Cabinet is requested to:

- Approve BCBC and Awen taking forward the interim relocation of the Local and Family History service to Y Llynfi, Maesteg based on the need to vacate the Tŷ'r Ardd building following its disposal.
- Approve the medium term relocation of the Local and Family History service to Maesteg Town Hall as a more appropriate and sustainable venue following completion of the significant capital investment works
- Approve BCBC and Awen to progress the proposed approach to mobile Library services based on the improved flexibility and support that could be achieved and recognising that the proposal sustains mobile library services. The proposed mobile service also removes any potential capital investment required from the Council. The service would be subject to review within a 12 month period.
- Approve BCBC and Awen to review the indicative costs and potential efficiencies of co-locating additional Library or other services related to the Awen partnership but also to identify the potential implications of a reduction of facilities and opening hours. Any proposals will be subject to a further report.

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Background documents - None

