

Meeting of:	SUBJECT OVERVIEW SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2
Date of Meeting:	13 MARCH 2025
Report Title:	LIBRARY AND CULTURAL SERVICES
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	SOPHIE MOORE GROUP MANAGER PREVENTION & WELLBEING
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.
Executive Summary:	<p>The report updates scrutiny on the progress made, following Cabinet recommendations related to the Awen Culture contract. The report also includes the details for a public engagement for the development of a strategy for community hubs, library, and cultural services. This is the duty of the statutory duties under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Equality Act 2010 to provide a comprehensive library service and consult with the community on changes.</p> <p>In May 2024, Cabinet approved a number of recommendations including to progress the required public engagement in relation to the development of the strategy for community hubs, library and cultural services in the County Borough which will be the subject of a future Cabinet report. A total saving of £360,000 was agreed for 2024-25, with £65,000 already achieved, with £65,000 already achieved.</p> <p>BCBC recognises the importance of cultural and library services to people and communities and their importance in preventing escalating needs to statutory services. It is also important that the services are value for money and are as integrated as possible. The Council has successfully delivered previous savings through the partnership with Awen and aims to develop a long-term plan for community hubs, library, and cultural services. The 2024-25 budget reduction requirement is £360,000, with public support for reducing library-related expenditure expressed in the 2025-2026 budget consultation.</p>

	Public Engagement will take place in Spring 2025 following Cabinet’s recommendations for the need for public engagement and consultation on the future of community hubs, library, and cultural services.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update the Committee on progress made, following Cabinet recommendations in relation to the Awen Culture contract. The public engagement documentation and time frame in relation to the development of the strategy for community hubs, library and cultural services is attached as **Appendix A** for Scrutiny consideration.

2. Background

- 2.1 In May 2024 Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out below:

To approve the issue of the immediate legal notices required to enact contract changes with Awen to remove the subsidy to Bridgend Youth Theatre and reduce the book fund by £50,000 in 2024-25 and to progress the required public engagement in relation to the development of the strategy for community hubs, library and cultural services in the County Borough which will be the subject of a future Cabinet report.

- 2.2 As part of the agreed Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in 2024-2025 a saving of £360,000 was agreed. Towards the total savings Cabinet have already agreed a saving of £65,000 linked to the removal of the subsidy to Bridgend Youth Theatre and to reduce the book fund by £50,000 to date. In 2024-25 savings have been mitigated by maximisation of grant income. The Council now needs to ensure the full savings are achieved. Therefore the remaining amount of £295,000 is still to be determined.
- 2.3 In accordance with the Partnership Agreement between the Council and Awen, it is for the Council to inform Awen where it wishes to seek changes or reductions in its service requirements. A change notice is issued to request further information on any implications that can be identified. This process also sets out to identify any costs that cannot be mitigated that may fall to the Council should such change be implemented.
- 2.4 The Partnership Agreement is specific regarding responsibilities for library services and recognises that the Council retains a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service with a core library offer that is free at the point of use and open to all. The Partnership Agreement identifies that the Council also retains statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 to fully consult with the local community in relation to any potential changes to access to library services, with particular regards to location, opening hours and access for people with disabilities.
- 2.5 In relation to the above, the Council acknowledges that it is fully responsible for determining what is a “comprehensive and efficient” library service and for undertaking any consultation requirement arising from any proposed changes in library service.

- 2.6 Based on the scale of reduction in financial support being proposed there will be implications for future library services and facilities and as such there is a need for the Council to progress public engagement to co-produce the development of a strategy and then progress formal consultation on the future of community hubs, library and cultural services in Bridgend.

3. Current situation/ proposal

- 3.1 The value of cultural and library services to local communities is recognised and understood but the financial position that the Council is facing means that financial efficiencies are sought across all areas of service within the Council. The Council was proactive in developing a partnership approach to delivering cultural services and this has already successfully delivered previous savings whilst ensuring that some, though not all, of the risk in operating those services sits outside of the Council.
- 3.2 There is an agreed 2024-2025 MTFS budget reduction relating to the cultural services being delivered on the Council's behalf but also a recognition that there is a need to develop the next longer-term plan for community hubs, library and cultural services. The last review was in 2010, and the related engagement processes will inform and shape Bridgend's long term community hubs, library and cultural strategy and subsequent consultation.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. Initial screening shows that a full equality impact assessment will be needed for the proposals set out in this report following the public engagement and consultation process.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The provision of cultural services including the library and broader wellbeing services contributes to the wellbeing of local people and communities in the following ways:-

Involvement -	The engagement of residents and utilising their contributions to help shape services as well as developing the cultural third sector and related participation is a positive feature of the local partnership. This has been recognised in the Welsh public library standards (in full) reports.
Long Term -	Bridgend has been progressing its long-term approach to providing library and cultural services since the establishment of the partnership agreement in 2015. In line with Welsh Government plans there is an opportunity to develop a longer-term cultural strategy for Bridgend.
Prevention -	The broad range of cultural venues are connecting people to their communities, supporting information advice and assistance

and developing social prescribing opportunities in partnership with communities and stakeholders.

Integration - Through the partnership agreement and service development planning there are connections to health, social care, education and broader third sector and community development.

Collaboration - The partnership supports joint planning and development to achieve population level outcomes. Awen have proven successful in relations with external bodies such as Arts Council, Health Board, Heritage Fund and more.

- 5.2 In regard to the Council's Wellbeing Objectives the cultural range of services and venues contribute to the following objectives: -
A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable.
A County Borough with thriving valleys communities.
A County Borough where we help people meet their potential.
A County Borough where people feel heard, valued and part of their community.
A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There is no impact or link to Bridgend County Borough Council's climate change aspirations as a result of this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 The Partnership Agreement between the Council and Awen ensures that appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of service users and staff.
- 7.2 The services that Awen provide ensure that our most vulnerable residents and those requiring connection to information and assistance can be supported by acting as Council Information Points.
- 7.3 Awen, as the Council's delivery partner of library services, are actively engaged in the corporate parenting strategy and steering group.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 When the partnership with Awen was established in 2015 it delivered early efficiencies of £625,000. The savings have been managed to date with little service reduction. The current MTFS requirement for 2024-25 is £360,000 and the Council needs to determine the specific areas of reductions in its requirements to meet this.
- 8.2 In the budget consultation exercise undertaken January 2025, the public were in principle supportive of the need to reduce the level of expenditure on library related services.
- 8.3 Due to the public engagement & consultation timeframe, the full £360,000 budget reduction proposal is unlikely to be delivered in full in 2024-25. The Social Services

and Wellbeing Directorate will have to identify one-off efficiencies within 2024-25 to mitigate any shortfall in the first instance.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is recommended to note and scrutinise the public consultation that will be commencing shortly to co-produce a library, community hub and cultural strategy which will be subject to subsequent public consultation.

Background documents

None