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Report of the Principal Librarian

Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel – 7th
February 2018

Position statement for Swansea Council Libraries performance in relation to Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) 2016 – 17.

Purpose:	To provide the Scrutiny Panel with a report on the current position of Swansea Council Libraries performance in relation to the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) 2016 – 17.
Content:	This report presents an overview of the current legislation and explanation of the current Welsh Public Library Standards framework together with a position statement for 2016 – 17.
Councillors are being asked to:	Councillors are asked to note the report and provide comment where appropriate.
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Francis-Davies, Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Major Projects
Lead Officer & Report Author:	Tracey McNulty, Head of Cultural Services Karen Gibbins Tel: 01792 636329 E-mail: karen.gibbins@swansea.gov.uk
Legal Officer:	
Finance Officer:	

1. Background

- 1.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 makes it a statutory duty of all local authorities to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.

In order to help define the terms “comprehensive and efficient”, and to encourage and facilitate a development strategy for Welsh public libraries, the Welsh Government embarked on a series of assessment frameworks. The first Standards framework began in April 2002 and

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since then a further four frameworks have been in force, with each framework changing over time in relation to the current economic, political and professional trends within the sector and wider Welsh Government agenda.

The fifth framework entitled “Libraries making a difference” is attached in Appendix A. This is the third and final year of the fifth framework of the Standards which covers the period 2014 - 2017. The framework consists of 18 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators, 7 of which have set targets upon which the authorities' performance is evaluated.

2. Current position – Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS)

- 2.1 Swansea Council Libraries submitted its final response to the WPLS in June 2017. Museums Archives Libraries Division (MALD) have responded to the submission and a copy of the response is attached in Appendix B. The response underlines the current position of the library service within the final year of this standards framework.
- 2.2 Swansea Council Libraries met all of the 18 core entitlements in full. Out of the 7 targeted quality indicators, Swansea achieved 3 in full, 3 in part and did not meet 1. As a comparative indicator, the highest number achieved by a local authority was 7 (only one authority) and the lowest was 1.
- 2.3 The response stated that Swansea’s return showed a continued strong performance on many of the traditional indicators of use, with high levels of active borrowers and audio-visual issues and also referenced good evidence of customer engagement. The case studies evidencing this can be found in Appendix C.
- 2.4 There were some areas of concern, such as declining expenditure on Welsh language items, low levels of staff per capita and low levels of staff training.

3. Areas of good performance

- 3.1 Physical visits to libraries have remained on a similar level to 2015 -16, ranking 6 out of 22 amongst libraries in Wales. Levels of active borrowers are the 3rd highest in Wales. Audio-visual and electronic issues per capita are the second highest in Wales and the service was commended for this within the assessment report from Welsh Government.
- 3.2 Customer satisfaction levels remain high, including 99% of customers saying that customer care is ‘very good’ or ‘good’. On average, children rated the library they use as 9 out of 10, compared to 8 out of 10 in the previous survey carried out.

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- 3.3 Swansea Libraries has improved performance on last year's return in supply of requests. 78% of requests are now available within 7 days, ranking 3 out of 21 in Wales.
- 3.4 Wifi provision has now been extended to all Swansea Libraries, an improvement on last year.

4. Areas for highlighted for improvement

- 4.1 Declining levels of expenditure on Welsh language items was highlighted in the assessment report, with spend on material falling by 24% compared to last year. Some of this can be attributed to under reporting in the submission, however, this has been identified as a priority area for next year. Although demand for Welsh stock is low, all libraries have small collections, with larger collections being held at Central, Morriston and Clydach. Spend is prioritised around Welsh learners and young children.
- 4.2 ICT facilities do not meet the target set by the WPLS. This can be attributed to space constraints at smaller libraries. Swansea Libraries, however, have extended wifi provision to all libraries and use of available time on static PCs is ranked 7 out of 21 in Wales. Wifi use has increased across libraries and all libraries also have iPads for public use which are not included figures for networked public access computers.
- 4.3 Staffing levels remain below target, although it should be noted that they remain the 3rd highest in Wales. Staff with professional library qualifications also failed to meet the target and this figure is not expected to improve due to further reductions in management posts.
- 4.4 Staff training is referenced as an area of concern and this target was missed. This was due to increasing difficulty in releasing frontline staff and high staff turnover due to short term and temporary contracts. There is an element of under reporting the levels of training attended by staff and the library service has undertaken steps to rectify this for the next framework.

5. Looking forward

- 5.1 From April 2017, Welsh Government introduced the sixth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards, Connected and Ambitious Libraries. The framework consists of 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators upon which the authorities' performance is evaluated.
- 5.2 Managers in the library service have attended training sessions arranged by Welsh Government in order to ensure that the reporting is robust and accurate. Measures have been put into place to ensure data gathering more accurately reflects service performance.

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- 5.3 A greater emphasis has been placed on health and well-being within the WPLS, and the library service has ensured that service delivery reflects these changes through targeted health and well – being collections and events in libraries.
- 5.4 The new framework also challenges libraries to increase the number of events targeted at groups of people with specific needs, such as physical and health impairment, economic disadvantage (e.g. long-term unemployed), cultural difference (e.g. non-native speakers, new arrivals), educational background, or other circumstances that require special library services. Swansea Libraries are piloting new evaluation methods in order to capture the data needed to meet this quality indicator.
- 5.5 Swansea Libraries will continue to strive to improve the service's performance against the WPLS, with improved data gathering and more targeted events.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications.

Background papers: *none*

Appendices:

Appendix A: Libraries making a difference. *The fifth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-2017.*

Appendix B: Welsh Public Library Standards 2014-17. *City and County of Swansea Annual Assessment Report 2016-17.*

Appendix C: Case studies submitted as part of the WPLS annual return for 2016 – 17.