



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Culture and Equalities

Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel– 8 Nov 2022

### Report on Welsh Public Libraries Standard response for Swansea Libraries for 2020-21

<b>Purpose</b>	To brief/update the Scrutiny Committee on the feedback from the Welsh Government on Swansea Council Libraries performance in relation to the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) 2020 - 2021
<b>Content</b>	This report presents an overview of the Welsh Public Libraries Framework and feedback on Swansea Library Services submission for the period 2020-21 and commentary and feedback from Welsh Government
<b>Councillors are being asked to</b>	Consider the information provided and give views
<b>Lead Councillor</b>	Elliott King
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<b>Report Author</b>	Karen Gibbins and Karen Davies
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#### 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. This report is a response to the 6th quality framework, “Connected and Ambitious Libraries 2017-2020. (Appendix B). This Framework has been temporarily extended to 2021-2022 period to give time to develop a new post Covid Framework.

The impact of Covid and the temporary closure of many libraries and the disruption to services due to the pandemic made it impractical to continue the normal reporting exercise during this period 2020-21.

Therefore a reduced amount of data was collected and reporting concentrated on qualitative information and case studies. It does not compare the response of individual services to the pandemic recognising the wide range of responses across local authorities in Wales

- 1.2 Local Authorities were asked to
  - 1.2.1 Summarise their provision against the 12 core entitlements listed in the Framework
  - 1.2.2 Recorded achievements against 6 quality indicators instead of 16
  - 1.2.3 Demonstrated the impact of library services on people through the pandemic by providing case studies
- 1.3 The annual report from the Welsh Government Minister for Finance and Local Government Rebecca Evans (Appendix A) details the response Public Libraries made to the pandemic and during this reporting period.
- 1.4 In 2020-21 Across Wales 1,492,452 books were issued, 173,235 Click and Collect collections were made, 4,528,337 people visited library websites, 2,897,491 e-resources were downloaded. Local authorities spend £37.5 million (net) on libraries which is just over 21.2p per week per person. 37% of population of Wales is a library member.
- 1.5 The report highlights the key role Libraries play in ensuring that information and culture is accessible to all. That via libraries the importance of culture in promoting positive well being and physical health can be clearly seen and is demonstrated through the case studies shared.
- 1.6 New measures introduced across Wales during this period that Swansea Libraries delivered included
  - Suspension of fines by automatically renewing loans
  - Expanding availability of online resources supported by £500k investment from welsh Government
  - Creating new digital content and reaching new audiences online
  - Redeployment of many staff to support shielding residents
  - Creating virtual tours of libraries to support re-opening measures
  - Seconded a manager to lead on a cross Wales Estyn Allan project to upskill library staff with digital skills and create more digital content online.
  - The following summarises service availability during this reporting period as was permitted in line with specific guidance from Welsh Government on the phased reopening of libraries and the Council's reoccupation of buildings and service recommencement process;

1.6.1 All Libraries were closed in April 2020 due to national restrictions (lockdown) but online services were extended and enhanced to provide alternative delivery methods where possible.

1.6.2 The community housebound service recommenced in May 2020.

1.6.3 Other front line library staff began to return to community buildings in late May and June and Central and hub libraries offered click and collect and return services at this time.

1.6.4 Other services were gradually reintroduced as permitted over the summer of 2020 and as redeployed staff returned to their substantive posts. Remaining libraries opened by September 2020 (except Bonymaen as too small to enable social distancing).

1.6.5 By putting in place appropriate safety and infection control measures such as use of PPE, extra hygiene, reorganisation of public and work spaces to enable social distancing libraries could now offer open access and browsing, computers and wifi, printing and copying, information services etc.

1.6.6 There were further periodic closures towards the end of the period with national firebreaks and a second lockdown.

## **2. Briefing**

- 2.1 Swansea Libraries met all 12 core entitlements during this period through making libraries available online and physically throughout the period and maintaining services in different ways for residents in Swansea. Details of the 6 Quality indicators met can be seen in Appendix C.

The report recognises that we have the second highest number of active borrowers (i.e. those who have used library service in the last 2 years). Numbers are reducing slightly however. Covid has seen a reduction in parents and new born babies registrations as contact with Health Workers in NHS becomes more challenging and services were disrupted during Covid.

Swansea libraries were closed from April to June and therefore a decision was made to reduce expenditure on books by 25% as physical books were not being loaned and new books not easily supplied.

In order to support children's home schooling and literacy during this period, spend on children's book resources was concentrated on popular fiction, non-fiction and expanding our book banding scheme in libraries. This enabled library staff to assemble curated book bags for children based on their reading levels in school. Staff included welsh language titles and resources into these bags, which were available for click and collect in libraries during the lockdown period. The continued commitment of resources and the success of these book bag collections are reflected in the children's loans during this period.

Staffing levels were static during this period but Swansea remains in the bottom quartile in Wales for qualified staff. Opportunities for regrading posts and funding for higher graded professional posts is challenging. This is an issue which needs regular review.

During the lockdown period, many of our residents turned to our online e-book and e-audiobook services, which was reflected in a 63% increase in usage. Through a combination of increased financial support from Welsh Government and expanded content support from suppliers, we were able to expand our national shared collection and content availability. We also committed more localised spend in order to ensure that our residents had prioritised access to high demand titles. The increased commitment is reflected in the uptake of the service and usage.

Swansea implemented a successful click and collect service, supported by a marketing campaign to increase usage of the service, as well as extending its home delivery service (handling 12,729 requests online or by telephone).

During this period the Library Service staff developed new skills and more use of social media platforms and websites to deliver 481 activities which attracted 95,776 engagements from customers such as story times, crafting videos, instructional videos and resource guides, Author Q&As, online talks and reading challenges or and online book group.

Funding from the Welsh Government enabled the purchase of mobile devices for customers to use in 10 libraries in Swansea. This also supported staff in their communication with local schools and families during this period.

Case studies included

- support for a family who had recently moved to the UK to identify and access local support during lockdown
- partnering with Flying Start to encourage reading, enjoyment of books and library membership by young families
- click and collect service to a shielding resident and confidence building to venture out again into the community
- working with a local school to provide reading materials to support home-schooling during lockdown and
- supporting an elderly customer to build their digital skills to enable them to stay in touch with family via their phone during restrictions.

### **3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary**

- 3.1 This report recognises that despite many staff being redeployed to Swansea Shielding Helpline, foodbanks and working with the LACs and more latterly TTP roles, library venues opened swiftly as permitted and in line with national restrictions and the Council's reopening approval process. And when closed, as restrictions dictated, acted to deliver alternative service online as much as possible. Sustaining a service in this way enabled residents to access physical material services, online and digital resources and to remain connected during the ongoing pandemic with availability of WIFI and broadband at venues.

The community home delivery service operated from May 2020 and the service extended its delivery to more residents isolated due to the pandemic through shielding.

This period demonstrated the role that reading has in improving wellbeing and mindfulness and how valuable libraries were to communities during the pandemic.

As noted in the report the pandemic was a catalyst for change and the service has maintained many of the services developed in this period e.g. 'click and collect' on request curated book selections, public access to mobile devices with touch screen technology, online content, investment in electronic formats for books etc.

*“Once again, whatever their circumstances, public libraries demonstrated that they are a vital component of local communities, and the commitment, resilience, and compassion shown by library staff during the pandemic is inspiring. The dedication of staff to their customers and the value that these customers place on their library service is evident*

*Swansea library service has strong community links and partnerships and has maintained a solid level of provision and use despite the pandemic” - Welsh Libraries Report 2020-2021*

#### **4. Legal implications**

4.1 None

#### **5. Finance Implications**

5.1 During the year there was reduced income from renewal of loans and no fines accrued or charged, however where this was directly impacted by Covid 19 a claim was made for Loss of Income from the WG Covid Fund.

5.2 There are ongoing temporary suspension of fines due to end in March 2023, and these are currently being supported by the Authority's Economic Recovery Fund.

#### **6. Integrated Assessment Implications**

6.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.

- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 6.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.
- 6.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 6.2 There are no implications identified after undertaking the Intergrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process.
- 6.3 If an IIA Screening Form has been completed with the agreed outcome that a full IIA report was not required:
- There were no impacts identified for the period concerned
  - Screening Form Appendix D

**Background papers:** *None.*

**Appendices:**

Appendix A Welsh Government Report

Appendix B Welsh Public Libraries Framework Connected and Ambitious

Appendix C Presentation showing 6 Quality indicators for which data was supplied.

Appendix D IIA Screening