



## **CABINET – 16<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2024**

**SUBJECT: TO SEEK APPROVAL TO CONSULT ON A DRAFT STRATEGIC VISION FOR LIBRARY SERVICES**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR- EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES**



### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet a draft Strategic Vision for the future of Library Services following the review work undertaken within the Mobilising Team Caerphilly programme
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet's approval to go out to consultation on this draft Strategic Vision, before any firm recommendations can be determined by Cabinet early in 2025.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 There is currently significant pressure on public finances across the UK. Central Government, Local Government, Health and other sectors are all facing challenges where the costs of delivering services have accelerated far beyond the level of funding available to the sector.
- 2.2 The impact of these challenges upon Caerphilly County Borough Council have seen the Council facing the need to make £65m of savings during the period 2024/25 through to 2026/27 essentially just to stand still. Having identified a range of permanent savings as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process totalling circa £20m, the remaining balance of £45m must be found over the next two years.
- 2.3 In July 2023, the Council launched its Transformation Portfolio known as Mobilising Team Caerphilly. The Portfolio consists of two component programmes: Service Transformation and Place Shaping. The Service Transformation Programme is primarily charged with delivering the necessary change across the Council to meet the £45m savings requirement.

- 2.4 Service Transformation includes several workstreams with a key focus on, Customer Journey, Collaboration and Partnerships, People and Ways of Working and Unavoidable Change. There are currently 15 projects 'in flight' which are focused on making a contribution towards the financial target and transforming service.
- 2.5 Each Project is being developed using Agile Programme Management methods while, the Portfolio as a whole, is supported by a Portfolio Management Office (PMO). The PMO is responsible for developing and ensuring adherence to agreed governance arrangements and decision making, as well as driving and tracking benefits realisation.
- 2.6 Portfolio governance arrangements are built upon the Welsh Government endorsed HM Treasury Green Book business case guidance and five case model (cases for Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management). On this basis, each of the 15 projects will be underpinned by business cases that covers these aspects.
- 2.7 This report focuses on the outcome of the MTC Portfolio Review of the Council's Library Services. The Review has been operational since March 2024 looking at options for the future of the Library Services, as well as the outcomes of the pilot community hub model at Rhymney Library.
- 2.8 A 'Draft Library Services Strategic Vision for 2024-2028' which has been developed through the Review is appended to this report. The report introduces the draft strategic vision to Cabinet, along with an Integrated Impact Assessment as well as a Library Service Strategic Assessment.
- 2.9 Cabinet are asked to note the contents of the vision and, should they be minded, agree to launch a six-week public consultation on the Draft Library Services Strategic Vision 2024-2028.

### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **3.1 Cabinet:**

- 1) Note the contents of the draft Strategic Vision in Appendix 1
- 2) Agree to proceed with a six-week period of public consultation starting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October on the draft Strategic Vision attached at Appendix 1

### **4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 The future provision of Library Services should be guided by a strategic view of how the service should be delivered in the county borough. Library services are front facing in communities and, therefore, it is important to gather

community views at this stage of the review. The draft strategic vision proposes a new model based on the success at the Rhymney Library Hub in five further town centre libraries.

- 4.2 The Council is facing an unprecedented financial challenge with £45million of savings to be found over the next 2 years. This review seeks to help achieve some of those savings, while at the same time delivering a more sustainable and resilient library service for the future and offering the hub model at five further locations.
- 4.3 The options for alternative delivery at other locations are part of the draft strategy on which we would aim to seek views. Potentially some of the remaining twelve community libraries will not be part of the future provision and so views are needed on how these should be treated as the strategic vision is delivered.

## **5. THE REPORT**

- 5.1 The Library Service in the county borough currently operates 18 static service points, a Digital Service and a LibraryLink service that delivers books to housebound and vulnerable people. The draft strategic vision, and the Library Service Strategic Assessment at Appendix 2 of this report give more information on the size and scope of the service in its current form.
- 5.2 In order to draw out some of the key information that has supported the draft strategic vision development it would be worth recognising that the Council operates a similar number of libraries to the cities of Cardiff and Swansea, and rural Powys. In comparison to other valleys authorities with similar geography and demographics Caerphilly has maintained more library venues than other councils. Also, in comparison with other councils Caerphilly spends comparatively more on its library services than others that are council run, however not all budgets are structured the same and the data on page 9 of the Library Services Strategic Assessment should be read with this in mind.
- 5.3 Between 2010 and 2015, due to budget cuts, staffing reductions were made such that 11 of the libraries became single-staffed with reductions in opening times and lunchtime closing across the entire estate. Opening hours vary with the size of the library with larger town libraries open 41 hours per week including selected evening and Saturday opening. Smaller community libraries are open as little as 15 hours per week. The results of previous user consultations show frustration with the limited opening hours and lunchtime closing.
- 5.4 The 2022/2023 headline outcome of the Welsh Government annual report on attainment of the Welsh Public Library Standards by the Council noted that:

*“Although it is anticipated that the move to a Community Hub model will help to ease staffing difficulties, the staffing situation in Caerphilly is a concern. The large number of single-staffed service*

*points limit the service's ability to offer a wide range of services in areas such as IT support. In such circumstances, the service should be proud of its ability to continue to provide reader development programmes and keep all libraries open in cases of sickness and emergency leave”.*

This statement reflects the commitment and dedication of the staff working in the service who maintain a large degree of flexibility and resourcefulness in order to keep the whole estate open as advertised. It also reflects the comparative difficulty of running library events and programmes at some of the smaller libraries. Libraries are the front-face of the Council in communities and the role of librarians has moved significantly away from just book issue to supporting learning and well-being. Librarians provide digital support, improve literacy and numeracy, help support individual well-being through groups and activities across all ages, support dementia and mental health, help alleviate isolation and loneliness, and provide help with education and employment prospects among many other roles.

- 5.5 The 'Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028' at Appendix 1 aims, among other things, to address many of the challenges set out in 5.1-5.4, and includes the following vision statement:

***We will deliver a welcoming and sustainable Library Service by integrating into a Hub model, to provide all residents with the opportunity to access library resources and other support, in town centre locations across the borough.***

Supported by the following objectives:

**Objective 1 - Improve and develop the library services availability and offer**

**Objective 2 – Help residents to access information, advice and support in a Hub location**

**Objective 3 – Put community needs at the heart of town centre Hubs, support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting**

**Objective 4 – Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resources and improve the overall offer**

- 5.6 The Rhymney Library Hub opened in January this year with grant support from Welsh Government match funded by the Council. The Rhymney Library Hub embodies many of the proposed facets of the new library service. Its first six-months of operation show some notable successes that have met the aims of the pilot project with increased town centre footfall, more library stock issue, lunchtime opening and on-site access to other council services such as Caerphilly Cares, Employment Support, Housing etc. Partner services from Gwent Police and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board are operating from the library through bookable meeting rooms that are also used by the community and third sector.

5.7 The aim of the pilot hub approach in Rhymney was to:

- Unify the customer offer, offering person centred, holistic support based on 'What matters' to them rather than what services we have to offer.
- Provide a face-to-face offer to all, including our residents who are most vulnerable and deemed at risk.
- Be the front-face of the council in communities and provide multiple services in a single location.
- Support ongoing customer engagement through the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and respond to this information periodically to inform and shape the Community Hub agenda bespoke to each community library/venue.
- Support agile working for CCBC officers, partner organisations, community groups, residents, and visitors.
- Reduce the public sector carbon footprint, as well as the carbon footprint in our communities.
- Provide digitally enabled and modern, shared spaces for use by the community and partners, which also offers assisted digital services.
- Support town centre and village locations to drive footfall and improve the commercial opportunities in town centres and village high streets.
- Provide private office space for meetings, video conferencing and training requirements.
- Generate income where applicable.

There have been many views shared by users of the hub that demonstrate the impact of this as an approach. Once such illustrative comment is:

*"Would just like to say what a great and wonderful help they have been to me. It is lovely to see regular faces- nothing is too much trouble for them. You go home thinking what a lovely sense of relief and start feeling that you can start living. The hub is lovely, all new and very private. Just to say again, the staff are worth their weight in gold".*

5.8 The draft strategic vision proposes improving the resilience and future of the library service by focussing on the town centres libraries as community hubs following the success of the pilot model in Rhymney. The proposal is to extend the hub model to Bargoed, Blackwood, Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly and Risca libraries building on the successes at Rhymney.

The move to a town centre hub model will also support the development of the Council's forthcoming Contact Management Strategy, another Mobilising Team Caerphilly project, by formalising the face-to-face support for digital access to council services. Digital enablement and 'assisted digital access' also align perfectly with the strategic vision for the future of libraries and recognises that a move to a digital platform to access more council services will need to be delivered to allow support for people who are less digitally able to access services in this way.

The draft strategic vision offers other potential enhancements for libraries:

- An end to lunchtime closing
- No single staffing
- Greater capacity to develop services at fewer locations
- An opportunity to access more Council services in one location
- An opportunity to provide digital assistance to access Council services
- Supporting anchor buildings in town centres
- Cementing contribution to town centre footfall and regeneration

5.9 Recognising that the Council has a comparatively large library estate and that the resources that support it, like staffing, are stretched, along with the significant savings challenge facing the Council means that we will have to consider the future of the twelve other libraries that make up the current estate. The Library Service Strategic Assessment benchmarking data shows that many library authorities have had to rationalise the numbers of buildings they provide. This is a picture replicated across the UK with retractions in static service points being achieved in a number of ways, including closure and disposal, move to trusts, transfer of buildings to the community and voluntary sector through community asset transfer, moving library stock into third sector buildings or other alternative delivery models. The consultation will ask for views on how the retraction of libraries from communities could impact on users and also ask for views on options to achieve a rationalisation.

5.10 During the 6-week period the Council will need to hear views on this and will also be open to approaches from community and voluntary organisations on working together to find a solution, including the possible transfer of buildings to the sector if a suitable business case can be made. At the same time, it will seek views on the move to a hub model at the libraries in Bargoed, Blackwood, Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly and Risca to mirror the success of the Rhymney Hub.

5.11 To mitigate the effects of potential closures a new Community Outreach Service is proposed, with the LibraryLink service being maintained, and a greater promotion and awareness raising of the Digital Service.

5.12 The Council reports annually to Welsh Government on the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS). We have begun the assessment on how the draft strategic vision might affect the Council's attainment of these standards. It is important to note that these standards are a benchmark of 'best service' used to measure and compare services and are not statutory compliance standards.

The **negative impacts on the WPLS with targets** are considered to be:

- **Staffing levels** - any potential staffing reduction will adversely affect compliance. The Council is under the full time equivalent (FTE) per pop<sup>n</sup> level requirement, less staff may mean less ability to work with partner

agencies- also reportable. The standard is 3.6 FTE per 10000 pop<sup>n</sup> The Council does not meet this standard currently and with 6 venues it will potentially drop from our current 2.66 to 1.95.

- **Stock acquisitions** - per pop<sup>n</sup> will be less. The Council does not meet this standard currently.
- **Opening hours** - per 1000 pop<sup>n</sup> at the 6 venues will not meet the 120 hours required- dropping to 97 hours.
- **Staff qualifications** - per 10000 pop<sup>n</sup> this should be 0.65 FTE. The Council does not currently meet this standard and has 0.45 qualified staff per 10000 pop<sup>n</sup>. The number will likely reduce as staff numbers may be potentially reduced, however, we are unable to quantify at this stage.

There will be **no difference to the following WPLS with targets:**

- **Travel distances** – the proposed model maintains this coverage across the county borough.
- **Staff training** – 2% of staff hours should be spent in training. It is possible that with less staffing coverage required at outlying venues that this figure may increase.
- **Welsh language resource acquisition** – 4% of the budget should be used for this. The stock budget will be lower, but the proportion should be maintained.

The following **numerical WPLS do not have targets but may decrease** with less library footprint:

- **Total number of visits**
- **Active borrowers**
- **Total membership**
- **Informal support offered**
- **Attendance at library events**

Standards that are **described qualitatively will be maintained** as these are not service size or population dependent e.g. free access, knowledgeable staff, high quality resources, range of formats, learning through life, community participation, reading for pleasure, meeting particular needs, attractive spaces, online resources, access to Welsh language resources, Wi-Fi access, provision of digital equipment, shared catalogue, customer consultation, digital skills improvement etc.

- 5.13 The Welsh Public Library Standards stipulate travelling distances and times to libraries based on population density.

20 or more persons per hectare	95% of households should be within 2 miles road distance of a static service point
≥1 but ≤ 20 persons per hectare	75% of households should be within 2.5 miles road distance, or 10 mins public transport travelling time, of a static service point
≤ 1 person per hectare	70% of households should be within 3 miles road distance or, 15 mins public transport travelling time of a static service point

It is recognised that the public transport time is impossible to calculate as routes are not consistent, mappable or able to be measured consistently. However, the Library Service Strategic Assessment gives an overview of public transport options and travelling distances.

The proposed estate that would be maintained by the Council will meet both population and transport requirements. The maps at pages 5, 6 and 7 of the Assessment show the 10-minute drive times and 2-mile road distances.

#### 5.14 **Conclusion**

The Library Service review has reached a stage where the proposals that have been developed need to be consulted on more widely to shape the future direction of the draft strategy and a move to a hub model delivered in fewer locations.

### 6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 It is assumed that the proposed Hub Model, should it prove acceptable, will create a more sustainable Library Model for Caerphilly.

### 7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The proposal is to conduct a community consultation on the development of five community hubs at the library locations in Bargoed, Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly, Blackwood and Risca, following the pilot model in Rhymney.
- 7.2. Further, to understand, from the results of that consultation and available data, how to manage the future of the remaining library locations. The options for these may include closure, community asset transfer or some other alternative delivery model. The proposal includes the possible expansion of the Library Link Service and a new Community Outreach Service.



- 7.3 A draft Integrated Impact Assessment supports the decision to consult. It will be refined as the strategic vision develops and in the light of consultation responses and further data gathering.

[Link to IIA – English](#)

[Link to IIA – Cymraeg](#)

## **8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 This is an early-stage report that is being consulted on with a view to developing a final strategy for the future of the library service. The intention is that the final strategy will be adopted early in 2025, and that any possible savings will be determined at that point through the development of a business case and an associated timeline for delivery.

## **9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications directly associated with this report. Staff working in the library service have been informed of the draft strategic vision prior to it being made available to the public and their views as valued members of staff and consultees are welcomed over this 6-week public consultation timeline.
- 9.2 Any future staffing model that becomes necessary as the review develops will be under the guidance of People Services in accordance with relevant human resources policies, and in consultation with staff and Trade Unions as appropriate.

## **10. CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 The consultees listed below have been consulted on this report and its appendices. All responses have been encompassed within the body of the report. This report seeks approval to consult more widely on the draft strategy for the future of the library service. The results of this consultation will inform future stages of the review.
- 10.2 A Joint Scrutiny to take the views of elected members, and afford them the opportunity to comment as consultees, will take place on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, within the six-week consultation period.
- 10.3 Future consultation will be needed to understand the implications for any community libraries that may close as part of the review. Should that be a proposal in future stages individual Integrated Impact Assessments will be developed that build on the data and engagement for those communities and libraries with the intention to consult further in January 2025.

## 11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964  
Local Government Act 2000  
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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Consultees:

- Cllr Sean Morgan- Leader of the Council
- Cllr Jamie Pritchard- Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change
- Cllr Carol Andrews- Cabinet Member for Education and Communities
- Dave Street- Interim Chief Executive
- R. Edmunds – Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services
- Gareth Jenkins- Interim Corporate Director for Social Services
- Mark S Williams- Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
- Jo Williams- Assistant Director Adult Services
- Stephen Harris- Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
- Sue Richards- Head of Education Strategy and Planning- Programme Director for Place-shaping
- Liz Lucas- Head of Customer and Digital Services- Programme Director for Service Transformation
- Lynne Donovan- Head of People Services
- Ben Winstanley- Head of Land and Property Services
- Leanne Sykes- Deputy Head of Financial Services and Deputy S151 Officer
- Karen Pugh- Library Services Manager
- Tina McMahon- Caerphilly Cares Manager
- Lisa Downey- Service Manager Human Resources
- Sarena Ford- Communication Manager
- Karen Williams- Customer Services Hub Manager
- Hayley Lancaster- Public Engagement Manager
- Anwen Cullinane- Senior Policy Officer- Equalities and Welsh Language
- Vicki Doyle- Policy Officer (Data and Statistics)

### Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028 English
- Appendix 1 Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028 Welsh
- Appendix 2 Library Service Strategic Assessment