

# GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET



## Report to the Cabinet

**Meeting Date:** 28th March 2017  
**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Ioan Thomas  
**Contact Officer:** Catrin Thomas, Senior Manager Community Learning  
**Contact Number:** 01286 679 913 (32913)  
**Item Title:** Library Self-service Machines

### 1 DECISION SOUGHT

Approve the application for £ 74,412 from the Transformational Fund for the purchase of 9 self-service machines to be installed in the 9 main libraries.

### 2 REASON WHY DECISION IS NEEDED

The level of financial commitment requires Cabinet approval.

### 3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The Cabinet has adopted the "More than Books" Strategy for 2016-2020 for the Library Service. Implementing the strategy will change the authority's library provision by moving from 17 libraries to maintaining 9 main libraries and supporting 4 community libraries.

3.2 These changes will lead to increased use of the main libraries, whilst maintaining the same level of staffing.

3.3 This application for funds to install self-service machines is an opportunity to maximize the changes in the library provision by improving the service to residents and make better use of staff time.

### 4 REASON AND JUSTIFICATION BEHIND THE DECISION

4.1 The Welsh Public Library Standards states that all library authorities should aim for a staffing level of 3.6 (Full Time Equivalent) staff per 10,000 resident population to ensure sufficient staffing resource to undertake the duties expected by residents. The staffing level in Gwynedd in March 2016 was 2.86 (FTE) which is 20% lower than the national standard. Ongoing revenue investment to meet the national standard would be an annual cost of £ 75,442. In the current financial climate seeking additional revenue resources would not be prudent use of scarce resources.

4.2 Therefore, this application for £ 74,412 is a one-off capital investment to develop the service and to make the most efficient use of the staffing levels.

The capital funds would buy nine self-service machines with RFID technology (Radio-frequency identification) to scan books / items for faster lending / returning and offers electronic payment options.

4.3 The Self-service machines would lead to a more efficient book administration system (i.e. the borrowing and returning of books).

- Frontline staff will deal with over one million items a year whilst performing borrowing/returning tasks (1,098,252 in 2015/16). With approximately 20 (FTE) frontline staff that means that every member of staff deals with over a thousand items on average in every week.
- A high percentage of these transactions could be undertaken by the user via self-service.
- Following a simple exercise in Porthmadog, Caernarfon and Penygroes Libraries, users to the library commented that what is important to them when borrowing and returning items was to avoid queuing and waiting.
- The self-service machines would reduce the waiting time for users to return books, and allow user to borrow books with ease.

4.4 The Self-service machines would lead to better and more efficient use of staff resources. Releasing frontline staff from transactional tasks would give them more time to support users with what is important to them such as: -

- Dealing with more complex queries (staff currently deal with over 60,000 inquiries annually);
- Supporting residents to access information;
- Supporting residents with using computers and tablets (over 100,000 sessions per year);
- Organise health and well-being activities, literacy activities, and digital literacy (over 27,000 residents attended library activities during 2015-16).

4.5 Case studies collected by the service as part of the Library Standards Annual Report indicates the value and impact of such activities – the report assessment praised the evidence submitted in these case studies but also noted that the level of activity in Gwynedd is much lower than average for Wales.

4.6 The Library Service regularly gathers users' comments and views and a recurring theme in the responses received is the need for more activities in all libraries, particularly on matters such as digital literacy and health and well-being.

## **5 NEXT STEPS & TIMETABLE**

5.1 Purchase and install the self-service machines in the 9 main libraries from September 2017 onwards.

## **6 ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO MAKING THE DECISION**

### **Views of the Statutory Officers**

#### **Chief Executive**

"The investment that is being recommended is sensible because it offers the opportunity to maximize the change that comes by improving the service to residents and make better use of staff service time."

#### **Chief Finance Officer**

"A number of deserving needs / uses will be competing for scarce resources from the Transformation Fund, and it is a matter for the Cabinet to prioritise the relevant applications."

In the full Council on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2017, when 'bids' for additional resources to meet unavoidable pressures on services were approved, I noted that the Council's main priorities, developmental matters to make a difference, were to be funded through the 'Strategic Plan' procedure. It is a matter for the Cabinet members, with the guidance of the Chief Executive, to prioritise the Transformation Fund to this end.

Following the Cabinet's decision on 22 November 2016 to approve the transfer of £635k to the Transformation Fund, I confirm that there is sufficient provision to realise the projects presented to the 28 March 2017 Cabinet meeting, and that further funds are in reserve for some further projects that may mature / come to the fore and reach the Cabinet for a decision in future."

I confirm that the one-off sum of £ 74,412 in paragraph 4.2 is a fair estimate of the capital cost of purchasing and installing the RFID machines."

#### **Monitoring Officer**

"No observations with regards to propriety".