

MEETING	COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	19 May 2016
TITLE	“More than Books” Strategy and Delivery Model: Gwynedd Council Library Service
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CABINET MEMBER	Cllr Ioan Thomas
PURPOSE	To scrutinise the process followed in order to create the strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Following one of the Communities Scrutiny Committee's preparatory meetings, members are eager to scrutinise the process followed in order to create the Strategy and Delivery Model for the Libraries Service.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Providing a 'comprehensive and efficient Library Service for everyone who wishes to use it' is a statutory requirement under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

2.2 The Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) assess whether library services fulfil the duties noted in the Act. The Council is assessed annually by Welsh Government the Standards. The Standards also give guidance to authorities such as Gwynedd Council on what they are expected to provide in the Libraries Service in order to address the needs and expectations of local residents.

2.2 Gwynedd Council's Standards Assessment for 2012/3 noted that the **very low staffing levels**, compared to the national standard, was likely to affect the service's ability to deliver a comprehensive service in the future. As a result it was decided to review to Service.

2.3 A review of the library service was completed in 2013-2014 under the guidance of a Members' Consultative Panel. The review came to the conclusion that it would be unsustainable to continue with the library service in its current form when planning for the future. The review also concluded that the library Service in its current form would not be able to respond to the **challenges of digital developments** and to a shift in users' reading and information seeking habits.

2.4 The Member's Panel recommended that a new Library Strategy was developed which would outline how the future provision would meet the Library Standards, and meet the shift in users reading and information seeking patterns.

2.5 Since the end of 2014 the Library Service has been developing a Library Strategy for the authority, during a financially challenging period for the Council.

2.6 At its meeting in December 2014, the Cabinet approved an efficiency savings proposal to establish a "New Strategic Direction and a Delivery Model for the Libraries Service" and asked the Service to submit a detailed business case to the Cabinet before implementing them and to ensure a comprehensive equality assessment of the impact of any potential change.

2.7 The Library Service drafted a Library Strategy to address the recommendations of the review, and took into account the budgetary constraints on the Services by way of the Council's efficiency savings programme. The Service completed an initial equality impact assessment of the strategy.

3. "More than Books" Strategy – May – July 2015 Public Consultation

3.1 The "More Than Books" strategy was drafted and a Public consultation was conducted during May – July 2015 to gather the views and opinions of residents, users and partners to its contents.

3.2 The consultants provided a range of recommendations which brought together the feedback collected from the public and our partners and was presented to the Library Service in September 2015.

3.3 The consultants recommended that the Strategy's vision and priorities needed strengthening. The consultants noted that the current situation is unsustainable, but that there is general unwillingness amongst the public to see any changes to the network of libraries, even in a challenging financial context. One of the consultants' recommendations, in addition to maintaining nine main libraries, was that consideration should be given to offering an "Authority-led Community Library Service" in the eight communities where there is a library currently located and is open for fewer than 20 hours per week.

3.4 At its meeting in November 2015, the Cabinet took the decision "To defer the final decision on the Gwynedd Library Service Strategy until after Her Gwynedd". The cabinet was of the opinion that the outcomes of the Gwynedd Challenge and the priorities of Gwynedd's residents should be considered before moving forward with the development of the Library Service's "More than Books" Strategy and a provision model to deliver this strategy.

4. Gwynedd Challenge – September 2015 to March 2016.

4.1 Between September and December 2015, the Council commenced the process of identifying possible cuts to services by undertaking the 'Gwynedd Challenge' public

consultation throughout the authority. Following the Cabinet's decision (16 February 2016), on 3 March 2016 the Full Council resolved to support **a cut of 25% (£65,000) to the budget to purchase books from April 2016 onwards.**

4.2 The Full Council resolved that the Library Service should not face any cuts above and beyond the efficiency savings target for its budget. As the Council's financial strategy notes, the service is expected to have an efficiency scheme to secure savings of £101,370 by reviewing the libraries provision in the county. Those who responded to the Gwynedd Challenge consultation confirmed that they were willing to see a change to the libraries provision but they did not wish to see the authority going any further. It was noted that the Service should consider, when developing a strategy and its delivery model, how difficult it is for rural areas to find volunteers and also consider the impact on the different age groups as identified in the equality assessment.

4.3 The responses to Gwynedd Challenge also showed the public's support to protecting the mobile service.

5. Reviewing the “More than Books” Strategy

5.1 Following the decisions of Gwynedd Challenge and to respond to the consultations and the equality impact assessment the Service has amended and adapted the strategy.

5.2 The strategy outlines a **vision** for the Library Service which is to ‘Improve the quality of life for Gwynedd’s residents by delivering a comprehensive and effective library service’

5.3 The Strategy **aims** to

- Promote reading and access to printed and digital material for educational, leisure, health and well-being purposes
- Provide and refer residents to information and reading resources of the highest quality
- Promote the use of the service’s resources and libraries as multifunctional community centres

5.4 The Strategy also prioritises **four key service areas**, which are:-

- Promoting reading
- Access to information
- promoting Health and well-being
- developing digital skills

5.5 In order to achieve this strategy within the available budget the strategy recommends categorizing the type of provision / library that should be provided across the county.

5.6 This Strategy recommends provision / library categories that build upon best practice identified by the Welsh Government in other parts of the country and which have been adapted to the rural context of Gwynedd.

5.7 The categories recommended by the “more Than Books” strategy has taken consideration of the following :

- Population and demographic patterns
- Pattern of use by the libraries' existing members
- Distance from a library (especially the need for the authority to ensure that 70% of homes are aware within 3 miles, or within 15 minutes on Public Transport, to a Library building, or within a quarter of a mile to a mobile library stop)
- Performance trends e.g. number of visits and borrowing per hour.
- Equality considerations e.g. 0-14 and 65+ age groups / Language
- Deprivation and access to public Transport

5.8 The Strategy therefore recommends that the library provision in the county, based on these categories should include :-

- A. **Area Libraries**
- B. **Authority led Community Managed Library**
- C. **Mobile Services**
- D. **Community Link / Access Point**

5.9 By using current performance statistics of the existing libraries (See appendix 1) and placing them against the definitions of categories, the Strategy proposes that the Library provision should include nine Area Libraries; four Authority led Community Libraries and Mobile Services as the most comprehensive and efficient way to deliver a Library Service within the available budget.

5.10 See appendix 2 for a description of each category.

5.11 The suggested definitions for each category mean, if adopted, then **changes will occur across the existing network** of libraries. It will mean rationalizing and reducing opening hours among the area libraries, rationalizing hours and change in Building management arrangements with community libraries, and modifying the locations and duration of the Community Mobile Service.

5.12 Using this categorisation also identifies locations in which the Library Service cannot continue to maintain the provision as it currently is. We propose that the existing provision of providing a library service from a building comes to an end in four communities, but due to the likely social impact of this, a 'Community Link / Access Point' category is proposed in order to mitigate the impact on the community

and in order to maintain access to the service for the residents of that community via alternative methods.

5.13 See appendix 3 for a copy of the “More Than Books” Strategy, which will be reviewed following the next steps (outlined below).

6. Next Steps.

6.1 The Service is now planning to discuss its Strategy, as it now is, with the relevant communities. These discussions will focus on the eight communities for which we are recommending changing the status quo. This step of the process will be a way of updating the communities and gathering their initial feedback to our recommendations and provide an opportunity for communities to present suggestions for us to scope.

6.2 These discussions have been planned to include the local member, relevant community / town council, and then entering into discussions with partners as and when necessary.

6.3 Following these initial discussions, the Cabinet Member will recommend the “More than Books” Strategy to the Cabinet for a final decision in September 2016.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Scrutiny Committee Members are asked to consider the process followed to develop the strategy and the reasoning behind what is being proposed within the strategy.