

REPORT TO THE CABINET
(13 September 2016)

Cabinet Member: Councillor Ioan Thomas

Subject: The Libraries Service's "More than Books" Strategy

Contact officer: Sioned E. Williams, Head of Economy and Community Department

Decision sought

To adopt the "More than Books" Strategy for Gwynedd Council's Library Service.

Local member's views

County Matter

1. Introduction.

1.1 This report presents a future strategy for Gwynedd Council's Library Service. The "More than Books" Strategy notes what Gwynedd Council's Library Service wishes to provide for the authority's residents for the 2017 - 2020 period.

2. Background

2.1 Providing a 'comprehensive and efficient Library Service for all persons desiring to make use thereof' is a statutory requirement under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964.

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

2.3 Gwynedd Council's Standards Assessment 2012/3 noted that the very low staffing levels, compared to the National Standard, were likely to impact the service's ability to deliver a comprehensive service in the future. Consequently, the Service was reviewed.

2.4 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.

2.5 The Consultative Panel recommended that a Library Strategy needed to be developed which would include a delivery model that would meet the needs of the Library Standards, and respond to the shift in users reading and information seeking habits.

2.6 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.

2.7 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 that the Service submit a detailed business case to the Cabinet before implementation and ensure a comprehensive equality assessment of the impact of any potential change.

2.8 The Libraries Service went ahead to draw up a Libraries Strategy and an equality impact assessment to address the review's recommendations, and the financial restrictions imposed through the Council's efficiency savings regime.

2.9 An independent company was commissioned to undertake a public consultation to gather the opinions and ideas of residents, users and partners on the contents of that strategy, namely "More than Books", during May - July 2015.

2.10 A range of recommendations were presented in the consultation report which brought together the feedback collected from the public and our partners and these were submitted to the Library Service in September 2015.

2.11 The report noted that the vision needed to be adapted and that some of the priorities needed to be strengthened. It was confirmed that continuing with the current situation was unsustainable, but that there was general unwillingness amongst the public to see any changes to the network of libraries, even in a challenging financial context. One of the consultees' recommendations was that, in addition to maintaining nine main libraries, consideration should be given to offering an "authority-led community library service" in the eight libraries which are open for less than 20 hours per week.

2.12 The report of the public consultation and the equality impact assessment was submitted to Gwynedd Council's Cabinet on 3 November 2015. The Cabinet decided to postpone the "*final decision on the Gwynedd Library*

Service Strategy until after Gwynedd Challenge". The Cabinet was of the opinion that the results of **Gwynedd Challenge** and the priorities of the residents of Gwynedd needed to be considered before moving forward with the development of the Library Service's "More than Books" Strategy.

2.13 The report in question can be viewed through the following link <https://democratiaeth.cyngor.gwynedd.gov.uk/ielistdocuments.aspx?cid=133&mid=1547&ver=4&>

2.14 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) the Full Council (3 March 2016) resolved to support **a cut of 25% (£65,000) to the budget for purchasing books from April 2016 onwards.**

2.15 The Full Council resolved that the Library Service should not face any cuts 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 authority. Those who responded to the Gwynedd Challenge consultation confirmed that they were willing to see a change to the network of library buildings but they did not wish to see the authority going any further. It was noted that the Service should consider, when developing a delivery model, how difficult it is for rural areas to find volunteers and also to consider the impact on the different age groups as identified in the equality assessment.

2.16 The responses to Gwynedd Challenge also showed the public's support to protecting the mobile service, especially for the elderly and children.

2.17 With **less budget** available to maintain the service and to purchase books (through the Gwynedd Challenge cuts and efficiency savings regime) it is neither possible to maintain the current network of libraries, nor is it possible to offer a community library arrangement for each of the eight communities as recommended by consultees in September 2015.

2.18 Following decisions regarding the budget of the Library Service, as well as feedback gathered through the public consultation process on "More than Books" and Gwynedd Challenge, and the outcomes of the equality impact assessment, the Library Service has amended and adapted the strategy.

3. "More than Books" Strategy

3.1 The "More than Books" Strategy has been included in appendix 1.

- 3.2 The Strategy identifies a **vision** for the Libraries Service namely to "Improve the quality of life for Gwynedd's residents by delivering a comprehensive and efficient library service";
- 3.3 The **aims** of "More than Books" are
- To promote reading and access to print and digital material for educational use, leisure and health and well-being
 - To provide and refer residents to information and reading resources of the highest quality
 - To support and promote the use of the service's resources and its buildings as multifunctional informal and formal community hubs that are beyond books
- 3.4 By means of the Strategy, the Library Service will focus on five **priority areas** namely,
- the reading offer
 - the information offer,
 - the health and well-being offer,
 - the learning offer,
 - and the digital offer
- 3.5 In order to achieve this Strategy within the available budget, the strategy recommends categorising the type of provision / library that is required across the authority.
- 3.6 This Strategy recommends provision categories which use good practice identified by Welsh Government in other parts of the country and that have been adapted for Gwynedd's rural context.
- 3.7 The provision categories for the "More than Books" Strategy take the following into consideration:
- Population and demographic patterns
 - Pattern of use by the libraries' existing members
 - Distance from a library (especially the need for Gwynedd Council to ensure that at least 70% of households are within 3 miles or 15 minutes' travelling time on public transport to a fixed library building, or within a quarter of a mile to a mobile library stop).
 - Performance trends e.g. total number of visits and loans per hour.
 - Equality considerations e.g. 0-14 and 65+ age groups / Language
 - Deprivation and access to public transport
- 3.8 The Strategy therefore recommends moving towards a provision that is based on:-
- **Area Libraries**
 - **Authority led Community Managed Library**
 - **Mobile Services**

- **Community Link**

- 3.9 Using population statistics, performance statistics, the cost of using existing libraries, and equality needs in accordance with the assessment's conclusions; the Strategy proposes (in accordance with the definitions of the categories) to maintain:- Nine Area Libraries in Bangor, Caernarfon, Porthmadog, Pwllheli, Dolgellau, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Tywyn, Barmouth and Bala; Four Community Libraries in Bethesda, Penygroes, Nefyn and Cricieth; and Mobile Services - as the most comprehensive and efficient way to deliver a Gwynedd Library Service within the available budget.
- 3.10 Using this categorisation also identifies locations in which the Library Service cannot continue to maintain the provision in its current form. Therefore, the Strategy proposes that the existing provision of maintaining a library service from a building comes to an end in four communities, namely Llanberis, Deiniolen, Harlech and Penrhyndeudraeth. However, due to the likely social impact of this, a 'Community Link' category is proposed in order to mitigate social impacts on the community and in order to maintain access to the service for the residents of that community via alternative methods.
- 3.11 Implementing the Strategy in accordance with the definitions of the categories will mean that **changes will take place across the existing network** of libraries. It will involve rationalising and reducing opening hours within the area libraries, rationalising hours and changing building control arrangements with the community libraries, and adapting the locations and duration of the Community Mobile Services.
- 3.12 The Strategy was submitted to the **Communities Scrutiny Committee** on 5 May 2016 asking members to consider the steps that had been taken to develop the strategy and to scrutinise the rationale for what is recommended in the "More than Books" Strategy. The Committee discussed and scrutinised the strategy's content, direction and rationale. It was resolved to accept the model in brief, but the committee noted the following key concerns;
- Concern about placing additional pressures on Community Councils in light of the new models and that a discussion needed to be held about this capacity with the local community
 - The need to combine empty libraries with the Council's other assets
- 3.13 The report in question can be viewed through the following link
<https://democratiaeth.cyngor.gwynedd.gov.uk/ielistdocuments.aspx?cid=144&mid=1705&ver=4&>
- 3.14 In accordance with the Scrutiny Committee's observations, the Library Service has engaged with the relevant community councils, and other third

sector partners, to discuss the new model with them (namely the Community Libraries and Community Links).

4. Impact of the “More than Books” Strategy.

4.1 Equality Impact

- 4.1.1 In accordance with the duty under the Equality Act 2010, an equality impact assessment of the strategy was undertaken (see [appendix 2](#)). After the public consultation, following the decisions of Gwynedd Challenge and as a result of local discussions, the impact assessment was updated.
- 4.1.2 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken for each individual location/community where substantial changes are proposed, and the conclusion of those assessments have been used to develop the Strategy. Copies of the location specific assessment can be obtained by request from the Library Service.
- 4.1.3 The Strategy’s Equality Impact Assessment has drawn together the potential impact of the strategy on a county wide basis, but also on specific protected groups within those communities that face substantial changes.
- 4.1.4 The impact assessment mainly highlights a negative impact for specific age groups such as older people and parents with young children (under 5 years old) as a result of cutting the network of fixed library locations.
- 4.1.5 The strategy has been adapted to address these negative impacts by proposing to adapt the mobile service and establishing alternative access arrangements.
- 4.1.6 Following full consideration, it is concluded that the Strategy addresses the potential impacts that have been identified.

4.2 Impact on the Citizen

- 4.2.1 The Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) assess whether local authorities fulfil the statutory duties. The Standards also assesses whether the service provided meets the needs and expectations of the library's customers and local resident.
- 4.2.2 We anticipate that there will be a substantial reduction in the **performance** of the Service against the National Standards in 2016-17 mainly due to the cutback that was made to the book purchasing budget. We do not anticipate that adopting this strategy will have a further detrimental impact on the Service's performance.

4.2.3 Welsh Government will publish a new Assessment Framework for the National Standards in autumn this year for the 2017/18 -2019/20 period and, therefore, it is not possible at present to anticipate what the strategy's impact against that framework will be.

4.3 Spatial Impact

4.3.1 The strategy has more impact on some communities in the authority, specifically in the eight communities where a change to the current arrangement is recommended.

4.3.2 We have discussed the strategy with community councils and other partners in these eight communities. It should be noted that the objection and general unwillingness to see any changes to the network of libraries remains.

4.3.3 However, a positive response has been received from the four communities where a Community Library is recommended. If the Strategy is adopted by the Council, Community Councils and other Partners have stated their willingness to collaborate with the Library Service to establish such an arrangement.

4.3.4 The response in the four communities where it is recommended that maintaining a library service from a building comes to an end and replaced with a Community Link has been varied, but generally the responses object the changes.

4.3.5 All responses are included in appendix 3.

4.4 Based on the responses from different communities, we are not of the opinion that any information or evidence has come to hand that suggests that the strategy should be adapted; information that has been received does not highlight further considerations either in terms of the equality impact assessment. However, it should be recognised that a number of communities have highlighted that losing or changing the library provision will lead to far-reaching social, cultural and community side-effects; and that the objection stated conveyed this in many communities.

5. Recommendations.

5.1 To adopt the "More than Books 2016-2020" Strategy for Gwynedd Council's Library Service.

6. Relevant Considerations.

6.1 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 6.1.1 There is a duty for every public body to carry out sustainable development, which is, to ensure the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In carrying out this duty, the Council must take into account the importance of long-term impact and ability, inclusion, integration, collaboration and the preventative use of resources whilst considering what is being proposed.
- 6.1.2 Whilst developing and considering the “More than Books Strategy 2016-2020” these matters have been taken into account in accordance with the sustainable development principle. These considerations are reflected in the Strategy’s vision and aims; and the act itself is referenced within the Strategy on page 9. As the Strategy is implemented, we will continue to consider the act’s requirements.

6.2 Financial Context.

- 6.2.1 As previously noted at the beginning of the report, the review showed that the current budget is insufficient to maintain the library service in its current form, and that continuing to maintain the service as it is, is unsustainable for the future.
- 6.2.2 The Council's financial strategy for 2015/16 - 2017/18 expects a contribution from the Libraries Service towards efficiency savings.
- 6.2.3 Realising the Strategy would lead to £101,370 of efficiency savings. (see Appendix 4).
- 6.2.4 It is anticipated that the savings would be realised during 2017-18 in accordance with the work programme noted in section 8 below.

6.3 Main Risks

- 6.3.1 Realising this Strategy successfully depends on the collaboration of community councils, partners and service users.
- 6.3.2 Realising the changes to service locations (particularly in the eight communities where the greatest change is recommended) depends on continued discussions with community councils and other partners; and this negotiation can highlight obstacles, concerns, lack of capacity, lack of resources, the need for investment or any other matter that cannot yet be foreseen.
- 6.3.3 Realising this Strategy successfully also depends on the collaboration of other services within the Council. The work programme to put the

strategy into place brings about implications for the resources of other services.

6.3.4 Continuing from the above, some of these implications can be subject to further decisions by the Council, especially bearing in mind the use and future of individual sites, and the commitments of other Council services.

7. Next steps and timetable

7.1 The timetable below is noted in order to implement the Strategy:-

October - December 2016	January – March 2017	April – June 2017	July – September 2017
Implement the changes in the area libraries by January 2017.			
	Implement the change and establish the Community libraries by 30 March 2017 in Penygroes and Criccieth		Implement the change and establish the Community libraries by September 2017 in Bethesda and Nefyn.
Implement the change of bringing the existing provision to an end in four communities by the end of March 2017.			
		Implement the change of establishing the Community Links in four communities from April 2017 onwards.	
Implement the change to the Mobile Service from 1 April 2017 - September 2017 to correspond with above changes.			

Views of the statutory officers

The Chief Executive:

“The Council’s decisions on efficiencies within this service area, means that change is inevitable. The report recognises the risks associated with the changes proposed and the Cabinet must be fully aware of those and the mitigating actions when making their decision.”

The Monitoring Officer:

“The report notes that an inclusive and long Process has been undertaken to develop the strategy. The Strategy addresses the statutory requirements placed upon the Council, and identifies how it will respond. The Council has undertaken vast processes in respect to consultation, and has assessed the strategy in respect to equalities, and have used these considerations to form its recommendations. It will be necessary to continually assess against the statutory requirements (including any matters relating to equalities and the Well-being of Future Generations Act) as the strategy is implemented.”

Chief Financial Officer:

“I confirm that the figures included in appendix 4 are a fair estimate of the impact of the proposed changes to the library service, and these should realise a net saving of £101,370 in accordance to the Council’s decisions on 3rd of March 2016. Realising the savings and the strategy however is subject to ongoing discussions with community councils and other council services.”

Appendices

Appendix 1 - “More than Books” Strategy: 2016-2020”

Appendix 2 - “More than Books” Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 – “More than Books” Spatial Impact – local responses

Appendix 4 – Efficiency Savings Estimates.