The Vale of Glamorgan Council

Cabinet Meeting: 22 January, 2018

Report of the Cabinet Member for Learning and Culture

Update on the Position of Community Libraries

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform Members about the current position of Community Libraries one year after they were established.

Recommendation

1. To recommend that Members note the progress to date and on-going support provided to community libraries.

Reason for the Recommendation

1. To keep members informed of progress.

Background

2. A draft Library Strategy was considered by Cabinet in April 2014 following a major review of the library service and a period of public consultation in the preceding year. The strategy contained 15 recommendations ranging from changes to opening hours, reduction of cleaning costs, a change to security arrangements, the extension of WiFi services, the promotion of digital services and the provision of capital investment for damp proofing at Penarth Library. One of the recommendations was also to look at the phased development of 4 community managed/supported libraries. These included Dinas Powys, St. Athan, Sully and Wenvoe. Following further work and consultation a revised strategy was considered by Cabinet in August 2014 which extended the consideration of Community Libraries to include Rhoose Library.

3. The strategy was driven by the need to make significant savings across the Council during a period of financial austerity. The contribution of efficiency savings to be made by Libraries was £575,000, and a Libraries Review Group was established to investigate how this could be achieved whilst also ensuring that the library service remained vibrant, relevant, efficient and sustainable.

4. Extensive research was conducted into community library models already operating elsewhere in the UK. These varied widely from totally independent and unconnected volunteer libraries, to libraries within Council buildings with or without a level of staff

support. The Council decided that its preferred model would be one where the community library could be considered as part of the statutory service, operating from transferred building assets and with the provision of ICT infrastructure, books and with some library staff and management support.

5. At the Cabinet meeting in August 2014 it was agreed that there would be further consultation on the development of community libraries and this was carried out throughout the Vale but with specific emphasis on engagement in the 5 proposed community library areas. The results were reported back to Cabinet in March 2015 where it was agreed that developments should be progressed to the next stage. There followed a letter from the Deputy Leader to residents of the 5 communities requesting expressions of interest from groups interested in running one or more of the community libraries. The letter set out the support that the Council would give, which included book stock, peripatetic staff support, library management support, help with volunteer recruitment, volunteer training and access to ICT.

6. Expressions of interest were received from the 5 community library areas by May 2015 and this was followed by a process, with support from the Council, during which community groups provided detailed business cases, all of which were approved by Cabinet in February 2016.

7. The initial deadline for the establishment of Community Libraries was 31 May 2016. This date proved to be over-optimistic given various delays related to such matters as the transfer of buildings or reassignment of leases, the establishment of charitable status for the groups, and in the case of Rhoose Library, a fairly lengthy process of judicial review and appeal.

8. It had always been the intention of the Council to progress the establishment of Community Libraries at the optimum pace to ensure the community groups were well supported and that each individual library was given a tailored solution to help achieve the best start for a sustainable future. Service Level Agreements were agreed for each library and these set out the terms of support and the expectations of the undertaking. Libraries were also given start-up sums to deal with specific issues such as outstanding building maintenance and to cover start-up costs. These sums totalled £97,000 and range in value for individual libraries from £10 to £54,000. The start dates of the libraries were as follows:

- Sully & Lavernock Community Library Trust, 27 July 2016

- Wenvoe Community Library Ltd, 30 August 2016

- Dinas Powys Library and Activity Centre, 1 November 2016

- St Athan Community Hub and Library (SACHaL), 2 December 2016

- Rhoose Community Library, 31 January 2017

Relevant Issues and Options

9. As Community Libraries approach or celebrate their first year anniversary it is an appropriate time to make an initial assessment of how the libraries are functioning and how the Library Service works with the various groups.

10. The Community Library model developed in the Vale has been put forward for a Local Government Chronicle Award in the category Best Service Delivery Model, attached as Appendix 1 & 2. The award application summarises the model deployed by the Vale and outlines the benefits of the model. The model happens to be an

almost exact match to that which independently and simultaneously emerged from Welsh Government at about the same time.

11. All Community Libraries work with the Vale Library and Information Service via terms of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and a Service Specification. Over the last few weeks the Library Services Manager has begun to meet library trustees to discuss any issues in relation to these arrangements and will meet the remaining libraries over the next month. Though there are areas for discussion and improvement there is no questioning of the appropriateness of the model.

12. Some of the main areas addressed in the Service specification include the following

- Premises

    Libraries which operated from a Council library building have been transferred on a long leasehold basis to the groups established at Dinas Powys, Rhoose and St Athan. The Library at Wenvoe was rented from the Community Council and the library at Sully was owned by the Council but sits on land leased for the purpose so these rental or leased arrangements were transferred. All libraries now manage their own premises and have responsibility for all maintenance. Several of the libraries have made some minor internal changes and have also invested in photocopiers or other equipment to improve services since transfer. Several libraries have also started planning for major library improvements and have applied for grants or S106 funding for this purpose. These include Dinas Powys which has plans to add an extension with a café to the front of the building and remodel the interior to include a separate function room which could be used for activities and training. Wenvoe Library has plans to rebuild the library as an extension to the community council building. As well as providing library space and a small kitchen area the library will also have an adjoining multi use function room which will form a part of the library during opening hours and can be used for other purposes when the library is closed. Rhoose similarly hopes to move the library to a new community hub which would be funding from S106 monies. Sully are considering ideas to extend the library, possibly by adding a room for activities and meetings. All 5 libraries are looking ahead at potential improvements which make the libraries more open and useful to their communities and which enable the libraries to extend their offer to local residents.

- Opening Hours

    The community libraries were long overdue a review of their opening hours as this did not happen at the same time that town libraries adjusted opening hours in 2015. St. Athan and Wenvoe have maintained the same opening hours. Rhoose decreased from 27 to 23 hours and Dinas Powys from 42 to 22, while Sully increased opening hours to 18 from the original 10. These are adjustments which better suit the needs of the communities while also reflecting the availability of volunteers and volunteer work patterns. The changes were not dissimilar to those considered by the Library Service previously.

- Library Management System (LMS) and ICT

    All volunteers were given very basic access to the original LMS. Most adapted very well but from the outset volunteers pressed to have more access to the system's functionality so that they could operate more independently of library staff input. When the new LMS was introduced in July 2017 the opportunity was taken to give the volunteers more access to the system's functionality so that they could undertake far more front line activities themselves including registering new members from scratch and updating older records. Volunteers have adapted well to this change and

appreciate the much fuller access to systems they now have. As well as providing the LMS to community libraries the Council also provides and funds the broadband link to the libraries. The Council supports a PC for volunteer use and another for public access to the library catalogue. There is also free WiFi and public internet access and an optional choice of buy-in to maintenance for public access machines provided by the Council's ICT service. Each library has taken up the option of public internet access via an agreement with the ICT section to support and maintain the access. In this way 4 of the libraries provide 3 public internet access machines and Dinas Powys provides 6.

- Record keeping and data

  Given that the community libraries are part of the statutory service it is important that records are kept and shared, particularly those related to issue figures, visitor figures and activities. Recording statistics is an area of work where peripatetic staff will provide more support in future. The first year in operation has shown that there may have been underreporting of some statistics, particularly the number of attendees at events and activities and also outreach work to schools. Statistics (refer to Appendix 3) currently show that community libraries have fewer book issues and visitors in April-September 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 but the level of issues is still reasonable, at 17,000 loans, and shows that the community libraries retain a loyal user group of readers. The book issue figures are taken from the library management system, the visitor figures and figures for the number of attendees are provided by the community libraries and peripatetic staff and have been under recorded because in many cases they have not included school visits and outreach activities. Nevertheless there were almost 35,000 recorded visitors to the libraries in the first 2 quarters of 2017/18 and there were 1105 attendances at activities and events.

- At least two volunteers work at community libraries at any one time compared to a single member of staff when run by the Council (with the exception of Dinas Powys). This means that the community libraries can run and host far more activities than could be achieved before. The 1105 attendances at activities in 2017/18 compares with only 180 for the same 6 month period in 2016/17 and there is probably scope for more activities in the future. The range of activities have been impressive and have included, for example:

  Adult crafts for up to 50 participants fortnightly at Rhoose.

  Children's story times at all libraries with regular or seasonal craft activities at some.

  Class visits at most libraries including St Athan where classes make use of project boxes provided by the library.

  Local history groups meet at several libraries.

  Lego clubs at Dinas Powys and Wenvoe, a code club at Dinas Powys and digital drop-ins at Wenvoe.

  Book sales at most libraries, author visits, carols and opera in the library at Dinas Powys.

- Volunteers

  The recruitment of volunteers has been a great success, with over 150 volunteers being recruited and DBS checked. The majority of them (118) are active and regularly engaged in supporting the libraries on a regular rota. The highest number of active volunteers (42) are based at Dinas Powys, which also needs the most due to

longer opening hours. Rhoose, St. Athan and Sully share a roughly equal number of remaining volunteers though Rhoose has slightly more, while St. Athan has the fewest.

- The majority of volunteers are retired people but there is also a good mix of people from all age groups including people currently working in other fields, students in further education plus pupils at school. Many volunteers come from professional backgrounds which include the likes of radiology and nursing, local government, architecture and building, accountancy, law and education. Several ex members of library staff volunteer for the community libraries along with several current casual library assistants and volunteers who have professional experience of academic library work in the UK and public librarianship abroad. The volunteers work in all types of capacities from library assistants and trustees to reading group helpers and others who assist with building maintenance. Most volunteers have gained new skills, not the least of which is the ability to use the library management system to carry out the same functions as library staff. The range of experience that the volunteers bring with them, combined with new skills, means that volunteers manage day to day aspects of the libraries confidently. Volunteers also run promotional activities from story and author events to reading groups and class visits. These activities will no doubt expand further as the libraries gain experience and respond to the needs and interests of their own communities.

- Training & Support

  Two peripatetic library support officer posts were established to work at community libraries for up to 50% of their opening hours. Their main role is to provide training and support on site, involving all aspects of the service but particularly day to day work. The staff are able to answer questions about library systems and practices, give direct help to customers if required, withdraw or transfer unwanted stock and keep the libraries up to date with wider library developments and initiatives. The posts have been essential in helping establish the community libraries and their on-going advice and support at the libraries will ensure good communication links between the Council and Community libraries as we go forward. The community libraries have become largely self-sufficient in many day to day matters along with the regular support of peripatetic staff. In due course and as appropriate it is hoped that volunteers will join Council library staff in joint training initiatives when these occur so that staff and volunteers will also gain more contact with each other. Peripatetic staff are funded by the library service.

- Book stock

  New books are purchased and delivered to Community Libraries using the same criteria regarding type of books and level of new books as before the transfer of libraries. A separate book fund was established for each library for the first time to facilitate this. The book fund for community libraries in 2017-18 was set at £18,700, currently 10% of the overall libraries book fund. Each library has an individual book fund which is based on the differing stock capacities and levels of use at each library, these funds vary between £2000 and £9000. All libraries also have full access to all Vale of Glamorgan Library Service books and may reserve books from any Library in the Vale for their customers. There is a twice per week courier service between all Vale libraries which delivers new and reserved books to cater for this need. Previously all stock had been purchased by stock category and shared out to libraries proportionately by numbers of stock items rather than by amount spent. The new separate book fund approach will remain the same in the next financial year but

the funding for some libraries will probably become more generous to reflect what has been learnt by apportioning stock in this way for the first time. At present there is no structured mechanism for rotating stock between libraries but book swapping between libraries is carried out regularly by the peripatetic staff to ensure current stock is refreshed and unwanted stock withdrawn.

- Income

    One of the ways in which community libraries can derive some income is to keep sums raised through book fines and book sales. These sums are taken and retained by the libraries and contribute a small amount to support the libraries. The sums involved are not substantial but are estimated to be in the region of £1000 for the 5 community libraries in total if based on the same six month period in the previous year, 2016-17. In addition, libraries are able to retain the proceeds taken from the sale of withdrawn stock which the service no longer needs and any donated books. Libraries may choose to have ongoing small shelf sales of books as and when they are withdrawn, which is what main libraries do, or they may hold a publicised larger book sale of stockpiled books. Either way the library retains the proceeds.

13. The Library Service and staff have adapted well to working with Community Libraries to supply a Library and Information Service to the Vale of Glamorgan. The process of establishing Community Libraries and developing ways of working together has proved successful in the first year. Now that basic system and operational training has been delivered and experience has been gained, all libraries are in a good position to move forward. Key targets in the next year will be developing systems to accurately record statistics and assist community libraries to develop promotional activities to attract users. Now that Community Libraries have a greater knowledge of their book stock there will also be work on reviewing the selection criteria for new stock at community libraries.

14. As part of the statutory service the Community Libraries, together with the Vale Library Service, are considered as one in regards to Welsh Government Library Standards. The Sixth Framework (2017-2020) sets out the definition of Community Libraries which can be considered part of the statutory service and Community Libraries in the Vale meet this definition. As such, aspects of the service in Community Libraries including core entitlements such as free access to books and free internet access must remain the same as for the Vale Library Service. Quality indicators such as book issues, visitors and attendance at events must be reported as a total figure alongside that of the Vale Library Service so it is in the interest of Community and Vale Library Services to work closely together to continue to provide the best possible service to users in the Vale and maintain these services at a consistently good level. The expectation is that this will be achievable and the on-going support provided by the Council along with the commitment of Community Libraries will ensure this happens.

Resource Implications (Financial and Employment)

15. The establishment of Community Libraries was a key priority set out in the Council's Library Strategy, contributing to the achievement of £575,000 revenue savings.

Sustainability and Climate Change Implications

16. The establishment of community libraries has not only enabled a good quality library service to be sustained within significantly reduced funding, it has led to the

development of other bespoke services to meet the needs of each of the 5 communities.

Legal Implications (to Include Human Rights Implications)

17. Legal advice was taken in the process of establishing Community Libraries. The Council is a Library Authority under the terms of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and as such has a statutory duty to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service". The Public Library Standards provide a framework within which to evaluate the performance of the Service.

Crime and Disorder Implications

18. There are no direct implications arising from this report.

Equal Opportunities Implications (to include Welsh Language issues)

19. Equality Impact Assessments carried out for each Community Library

Corporate/Service Objectives

20. The Library and Information Service supports the Council's Wellbeing Outcome 3: An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale and contributes to Corporate Objective 6: Valuing culture and diversity, Action: Work with community partners to deliver a vibrant and diverse library service.

Policy Framework and Budget

21. The recommendations of this report are within existing policy framework and budget and are matters for Executive decision by Cabinet.

Consultation (including Ward Member Consultation)

22. Not applicable.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee

23. Learning and Culture.

Background Papers

None.

Contact Officer

Christopher Edwards, Library Services Manager

Officers Consulted

Phil Southard, Culture and Community Learning Manager

Responsible Officer:

Paula Ham, Director of Learning and Skills