

Place Scrutiny Committee

8 December 2016

Library Review

Purpose of Report: Summary Report

The Group met to review the Wales Library Standards, Annual Report for 2015/16 for Powys. The service is currently in the second year of the 5th Framework 'Libraries Making a Difference'. The report deals with 2015/16 which was the year opening hours were reduced by 20% and the mobile library service was reduced by 50%.

Of 18 core entitlements, 17 have been met – the one which has not, relates to connectivity issues for mobile libraries and it was noted the difficulties of mobile signal in many of the areas in which the mobile libraries have to operate.

Of the seven quality indicators, four had been met in full (up from three the previous year), two had been partially met (three in the previous year) and one failed. Access had been achieved as has the individual development of customers. Online access is available at all static points. One indicator being partially met relates to the level of expenditure on replacement books not meeting the required level of £2180 per 1000 population. This indicator has only been achieved by three authorities. However the rate of acquisitions per 1000 population has been achieved. This includes e-books and e-magazines which represent good value as the service is shared across Wales.

The indicator relating to staffing levels had only been partially met, as it had in the previous year, with the reduction in opening hours contributing to this. This was a trend across Wales and not particular to Powys. There are many extra demands on libraries and less library work being undertaken. When other services were first moved to libraries, there was some transfer of funds which supported the employment of additional part time staff in the main libraries. Ongoing savings and further cuts have increased the pressure on the service. There is no doubt that library services are being affected by these increasing demands and it is thought that the service is reaching capacity.

The service failed to meet the target on spend on Welsh language material and children's books. The Book Runner service had ceased and the stock absorbed into libraries, resulting in less being spent on new material. There are very few readers of Welsh language novels and whilst work relating to the Welsh language is promoted by sessions in libraries, the book stock is not well used. It is hoped that this may be alleviated by moving towards an All Wales Library Management system whereby a resident's library card would be valid in any library in Wales.

Libraries continue to achieve high customer satisfaction and visits are above average for Wales. Loans of dvds and books were down but online usage has increased and Powys has achieved one of the highest number of online users in Wales

The Group debated whether staff were being compromised with ever increasing demands being placed upon them and if there was sufficient commitment to drive the library service forward to ensure modern standards are maintained. Co-location is seen as the way forward but the Authority must recognise that it could affect core library delivery and further services should not be moved to libraries without the appropriate infrastructure having been put in place.

It was noted that the number of younger borrowers was falling and with the cessation of the Book Runner Service, the Group were concerned this may have a long term impact on literacy.

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Sources/background papers:

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Commissioning and Procurement,

Powys Library Service Annual Report 2015-16

Customer satisfaction survey results November 2015

Services available from your local library

Notes of Place Scrutiny Group 1 meeting - 29 November 2016

Group Members: County Councillors G Banks, G G Hopkins, E T Morgan, G Thomas, Chair and Vice and County Councillor J M Williams, co-opted as former Lead Member for Cultural Services