

Fy Nghyf / My Ref: NRS/RM/PBr/05.11.15

Dyddiad / Date: 11 November 2015



Councillor Peter Bradbury
Cabinet Member: Community Development, Co-operatives & Social Enterprise
City of Cardiff Council
County Hall
Cardiff
CF10 4UW

Dear Councillor Bradbury

ECONOMY AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 NOVEMBER 2015

Thank you for attending the November meeting of the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee, where we considered a range of items relating to Libraries in Cardiff. I will be grateful if you could also pass on the thanks of the Committee to Sarah McGill, Isabelle Bignall and Nicola Richards for the presentations delivered and for addressing the questions that arose during the meeting. The Committee had a few comments and observations following the meeting, which are set out below.

Welsh Public Library Standards 5th Framework – Annual Report

Members of the Committee were pleased to be informed how well Cardiff is performing against the WPLS 5th Framework and to hear that there are only a small number of Quality Indicators the authority is failing to achieve in full. Members initially raised concerns with regard to WPLSCE15, where the Council has not carried out the formal surveys required by the Welsh Government. We are however reassured with the explanation that a great deal of informal surveys, not fully recognised by the Welsh Government, are undertaken regularly, and that the formal requirement will be achieved for the 2015/16 annual return.

The Committee welcomes the achievements made in making superfast broadband available across the libraries in Cardiff and the brilliant technology available on the digital floor in Cardiff Central Library Hub. As was discussed at the meeting we hope that this can help close the digital divide that exists across the city. We also hope consideration is being given to ensure libraries reach people in their homes, and efforts are being made to ensure residents understand how they can access library services or books using their own tablets or personal computers.

Members agree with your comments that some of targets and performance measures are restrictive and limit the scope for Cardiff to advance with its vision of libraries for the future. You mentioned that you are in discussions already with the Minister regarding this, and we would support and encourage you to continue these conversations, as we too question the appropriateness of some of the measures in the 5th Framework. It is particularly concerning that we are only in the first of three years under this framework and yet already some measures could be seen to be less than appropriate.

During this section of the meeting Members also discussed the fact that Roath Library is approaching a year of closure. We note your apologies and the efforts that have been made with various organisations to secure a sustainable way forward for Roath Library, but we remain disappointed that the residents in this area have been left without this service for such a length of time. In our letter dated 10 July 2015, following our scrutiny of the Roath Library Cabinet report, we anticipated no Community Asset Transfer solution would be found and recommended testing the appetite within the business community to take over this building, exploring if the continued provision of library services alongside an operational business is a realistic proposition. In your response dated 15 July 2015 you indicated that you would consider raising a Prior Indication Notice to explore commercial interest in running a library service from the building. There was no mention of this exploration with the business community during the most recent meeting, and we hope this is something being seriously considered going forward.

Cardiff Central Library Hub

The Members of the Committee wish to congratulate you on the success that has been delivered at Cardiff Central Library Hub. The figures presented at the meeting, such as the increases in footfall, substantial increases in weekly benefit gained, and a fall in waiting time to see the Money Advice team, really do speak for themselves and demonstrate the fantastic results being achieved through the Hub approach. Members would like some assurance that this approach will provide some long term stability at Central Library – there have been so many changes, and proposals for change across libraries in Cardiff for a number of years and we would hope that Cardiff Central Library Hub now has a sustainable future and will be protected from this annual uncertainty.

Members discussed the issue of accessibility of the Central Library Hub for disabled individuals wishing to access the services on offer. We recognise that this is not an issue with the internal design of the building, which is highly accessible, but rather more to do with the location of the building, which doesn't have disabled parking close by or a location for individuals to be dropped off and collected. We recognise you are willing to meet with Councillor Mohammed Javed regarding his concerns and hope this can lead to some resolution of the problem. One option you may wish to

explore is the approach taken at the Wales Millennium Centre, where there is the provision of pre-bookable parking spaces for disabled visitors.

Members note that a volunteers project is run at Cardiff Central Library Hub, with Into Work Services and Advice also located in the building. We also note that there are currently vacancies and volunteer opportunities within the Digital Suite. We expect this is already taking place, but would recommend that those individuals responsible for the Digital Suite explore the opportunity to fill vacancies via the services provided on the Third Floor.

Finally, members of the Committee wish to thank you for your willingness to participate in the pilot of third sector question currently being undertaken across the Cardiff Scrutiny Committees. We welcomed the answers you provided to the questions of Sheila Hendrickson-Brown, Chief Executive Officer of the Cardiff Third Sector Council, and are pleased to see that you clearly know each other well already and are committed to continuing this relationship. As stated in your response to Sheila, we hope that real opportunities for the third sector to contribute to the evaluation of the Hub Strategy will be provided, and a genuine partnership approach will be developed.

Library Stock Management Strategy and Local Studies Service

With regard to the Library Stock Management Strategy and Local Studies Service, Members of the Committee support the intention to move the Local Studies to Cathays Library and more generally to move away from the Dominions Way facility. We recognise that far too much money is being spent housing library stock and local materials in a manner that is inaccessible, and welcome the move to prioritise spend on front facing service delivery through efficiencies in back office functions.

As was discussed at the meeting, Members recommend that consideration is given to selling residual books and materials that are not of interest to the general public. We recognise this is a sensitive matter, and that the Council has a stewardship responsibility for a number of important historic works, or those that have been gifted to the Council – however we see this as an opportunity to review the stock we have in storage and reduce the volume moved to the new location. Officers will recall that the Council has previously passed books and materials on to Cardiff University, with the proviso that they remain openly accessible to the public – if the appetite to sell any material is not there, this may be an option to explore again with interested organisations and establishments across Cardiff.

A final point members wish to raise, which falls outside the remit of the Library Stock Management Strategy but was discussed at the meeting, is the possibility of loaning out our collections, or art works that are in storage to the public. We are conscious that the Council owns and has in storage a large number of works, and feel they could be explored as an opportunity to raise income for the Council, or failing that,

loaned out for free in order to maximise the enjoyment derived but Council owned assets.

To re-cap for ease, the Committee asks that the following points are addressed:

- Committee recommends discussions with the Welsh Government are continued with regard to the appropriateness of some of the quality measures and indicators of the WPLS 5th Framework
- Committee recommends market testing work commences to explore options for this building with the business community
- Committee seeks assurances that there will be stability for Central Library now that the hub approach has been successfully implemented
- Committee requests you meet with Cllr Javed to discuss accessibility at Cardiff Central Library Hub
- Committee supports the proposals to move away from Dominions Way and to relocate the Local Studies Service to Cathays Library
- Committee recommends consideration is given to selling unwanted books or materials currently stored by the Council
- Committee recommends consideration is given to loaning out art works that are not in the public eye and kept in storage.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments, observations and recommendations, and look forward to receiving your feedback.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rod McKerlich', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Councillor Rod McKerlich
Chairperson, Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee

cc Sarah McGill, Director, Communities, Housing and Customer Services
Cabinet Support Office
Members of the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee