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Dyddiad / Date: 02 January 2015



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

ECONOMY AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 DECEMBER 2014 LIBRARIES

On behalf of the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you and officers for attending the Committee meeting on 4 December 2014. The Committee had a number of comments and recommendations following the meeting, as set out below.

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Report

Members of the Committee would like to express their congratulations for the Council's achievements against the Welsh Public Library Standards this year. We are pleased that Cardiff has achieved above the Welsh average for 2013/14, and that the Council has increased the number of Standards met for each year of the fourth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards. We look forward to scrutinising the Council's performance again next year against the fifth quality framework – Libraries Making A Difference.

Members would like clarification of an issue discussed during the meeting, around the contribution of Community Libraries towards the achievement and evaluation of the Welsh Public Library Standards. As we understand it, the current position is that the performance of Community Libraries is not included in the achievement of Standards. With the potential that exists for a number of branch libraries to be run by community groups or partners in the future, we feel it is important that this position is confirmed and challenged. The Committee recommends that this issue is formally raised with the Minister, and we feel strongly that all Library provision supported by the Local Authority, even if the building is maintained by an external organisation,

should contribute toward the achievement of the Welsh Public Library Standards in Cardiff.

Future Provision of Library Services in Cardiff - Options

At the meeting Members were provided an overview of the financial challenge faced by the Communities, Housing & Customer Services Directorate over the next three years, which has prompted a full review of Library Services in Cardiff and resulted in the proposed strategy. The Committee welcomes the fact that this has been undertaken at an early stage, allowing for public consultation to take place, and publishing an options paper on the Council's website.

Members explored whether there was potential for Library provisions in the city centre to cease, in order to continue funding the branch libraries that are proposed to have their Council funding withdrawn. You indicated that this was not a realistic proposal, given the level of money the Council has invested in Central Library, and that CyMAL would not be satisfied by this course of action. The Committee did not fully accept this reasoning, and would be interested in receiving evidence of CyMAL's viewpoint on the closure of Central Library to sustain seven community libraries, and also CyMAL's point of view on the proposed future options as a whole, which we assume will have been sought as part of the consultation process.

It was clear to us that research has been undertaken into the approaches taken in other local authorities across the United Kingdom, with a number of good examples referenced. The Committee would like to see this research, and have particular interest in both examples of good and bad practice, and also evidence relating to Trusts for libraries, exploring what makes them thrive or fail. Please could you share this with the Principal Scrutiny Officer who will circulate it to the Committee, in sufficient time to inform Committee's final recommendations on this matter at our February 2015 meeting?

Members were informed that a range of options are being explored to secure funding for the libraries which are proposed to have their Council funding ceased, including commercial, community and partnering approaches. We were also informed of the 'Stepping Up' Toolkit, which has been developed by the Council to assist groups or individuals interested in helping deliver services or take over the running of suitable Council buildings. The Committee however remains concerned at the level of proactivity by the Council in generating interest and supporting groups who may be in a position to take over the running of a library facility. Members are not convinced that a clear strategy is yet in place to attract community and commercial interest further than publishing a toolkit on the Council's website. Finally, Members question whether enough thought has been put into the tender processes required, should a commercial option be sought. Through our close involvement with the Alternative Delivery Models for Leisure Facilities procurement exercise, we have seen how the achievement of savings can be delayed when a robust procurement exercise is

undertaken – and we question whether this is something that has been given due consideration in finding alternative arrangements for the running of libraries.

The Committee is also mindful of the fact that any Community group or Trust that takes over the running of a library in Cardiff may require ongoing advice and support from the Council. We would be interested to know what support services have been explored, and recommend a system similar to that of the Governor Support Service available for school governors be considered.

As you will be aware, I agreed at the meeting to allow Councillor Cowan to address the Committee, and to provide an overview of her concerns in relation to the Library proposals. During this overview, it was proposed that the Council could look at charging the public to use Libraries, or to be a Library member. The Committee has strong reservations about this course of action, and while we accept it is an option that should be explored alongside others, we feel it would have a detrimental effect on deprived communities, and act as a disincentive to access services at Libraries. We also question whether this approach runs counter to the 5th Quality Framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards, with one of the Core Entitlements being ‘Libraries in Wales will be free to join’ (WPLSCE5).

As part of the presentation given to the Committee, Members were informed that there are plans to increase the number of Neighbourhood Development Librarians (NDL) in Cardiff, from two up to six, so that every Neighbourhood Partnership Area in Cardiff has its own NDL. We are aware that the skills required for Neighbourhood Librarians are very different to that of Community or Branch based Librarians and we would be interested to know what plans are in place to upskill existing staff to enable them to undertake these new roles and new ways of working.

Both the presentation given at the meeting and the Options Paper highlight changing demand as a driver for change in library provision, and that a move towards e-books and e-zines will mean that customers may not need to visit a library as frequently as before. However, figures show that only 1% of books loaned out in Cardiff are eBooks rather than physical books, and this leads us to question whether there will be a dramatic shift toward electronic formats in the future. We welcome assurances given by officers that the quality and choices of e-stock are improving, but we request that information on the plans to promote and push this service are sent to the Committee, as we question whether the public are aware that Council libraries offer this service.

The Committee were pleased to hear that you value the input Scrutiny can have in helping shape policy and services, and in this respect we would welcome future involvement as the proposals for the future of library services are finalised. We request that the results of the consultation exercise, interpretation of the figures, and information on commercial and community groups that have come forward in relation to the various branch libraries is provided for the Committee’s consideration.

Community Action for Rumney Library - Petition

As you are aware, the Committee provided the opportunity for a representative of Community Action for Rumney Library (CARL) to outline and present their petition at the meeting. The Members appreciated the willingness you demonstrated to continue dialogue with this group, and hope that progress can be made in exploring options for this service.

It was commented during this presentation that there are examples of class instructors being turned away from Rumney Library and being informed to look for alternative venues to hold their class, as the facility will be closing. We worry that these actions make it appear that a decision on the Library has already been predetermined, and could jeopardise the public perception of the consultation period. We also fear that, should a decision be reached to keep Rumney Library open, the Council could have driven away potential sources of income, which will be vital to the future sustainability of such a facility. At the meeting you commented that you were unaware this had happened, and we hope you will put measures in place to ensure that this is not repeated in other Libraries across the city.

A final point raised during this section of the meeting that the Members hope can be clarified is in relation to the local history section of Rumney Library, and any other branch library, should the decision to close the facility be made. Will these be relocated to a nearby facility, or co-located centrally?

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and provide a response to the recommendations and requests made in this letter.

Regards,



Councillor Craig Williams
Chairperson Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee

cc Sarah McGill – Director, Communities, Housing and Customer Services
Isabelle Bignall – Assistant Director, Customer Services
Nicola Richards – Central Library Manager
Cheryl Cornelius and Jo Watkins, Cabinet Office
Members of the Economy and Culture Scrutiny Committee