

Committee: **Partnership Scrutiny Committee**  
 Date of meeting: **16<sup>th</sup> November 2023**  
 Report Subject: **Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) Annual Return 2021/22**  
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Sue Edmunds, Cabinet Member for Education**  
 Report Submitted by: **Jo Sims, Service Manager – Young People and Partnerships**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Governance Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Council	Other (please state)
✓	✓	08.11.23			16.11.23	29.11.23		

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the report submitted to the Culture Division of Welsh Government with respect to the fifth year of the Sixth Assessment Framework for the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) return 2021/22. Previous years' reports have focussed on Welsh Government's detailed feedback to Blaenau Gwent. However, this year limited feedback is provided by Welsh Government to each Local Authority. Consequently, this report will supplement the feedback with a Blaenau Gwent Libraries local update.

This report should have been presented in March 2023. However, there has been a significant delay in the sign off of the annual report within Welsh Government.

**2. Scope and Background**

- 2.1 Aneurin Leisure Trust has been commissioned by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to deliver the Library Service as part of their general operations since 2014. In April 2020, the client function for the Leisure Trust moved to the Education Directorate. This is the third year that this report has been submitted since this arrangement and the first to the Partnership Scrutiny. Public libraries are a statutory service as laid out in the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. For over a decade the Welsh Government has implemented successive assessment frameworks which have helped bring a more consistent level of public library provision across Wales.
- 2.2 Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is a statutory duty for every library authority (Local Authorities) in Wales to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof'.
- 2.3 The Sixth Assessment Framework for Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Return 2019/20 covers the fifth extended year of a three-year cycle

of the new quality framework “**Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Libraries 2017-20**”.

- 2.4 This report has been prepared based on information provided by Blaenau Gwent’s annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of Welsh Government in July 2022. This was submitted through the Aneurin Leisure Trust.
- 2.5 The sixth framework of Welsh public library standards builds on the developments in the fifth framework. It comprises 12 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators to monitor how well library services realise these benefits for the local community and the people of Wales.
- 2.6 Blaenau Gwent’s Library annual return highlights the following performance against the WPLS:
- Blaenau Gwent continues to achieve all 12 core entitlements.
  - 10 of the quality indicators were removed due to the pandemic and post recovery during 2021/22. There are only 6 remaining. These include: WPLSQI 7 Location of Service Points, WPLSQI 8 Library Use, WPLSQI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material, WPLSQI 10 Welsh Language Resources, WPLSQI 13 Staffing Levels and Qualifications, WPLSQI 14 Operational Expenditure. Impact is detailed below against each indicator. Further detail and actual figures linked to the percentages below are detailed in Appendix 1 and 2.
  - WPLSQ1 8 Library use:  
The number of active borrowers increased by 7% increase from the previous year. Adult book issues increased by 108%, while children’s issues increased by 309% based on the previous year.
  - WPLSQ1 9 Up to date Reading Equipment:  
Total materials expenditure increased to £63,921, against £62,971 for the previous year.
  - WPLSQ1 10 Welsh Language Resources  
Welsh Language issues saw a tenfold increase from 250 to 2,643.
  - WPLSQ1 13 Staffing Levels and Qualifications:  
Remained stable (still the lowest in Wales). Job descriptions have been revised and the additional post holder is working towards a MCLIP qualification.
- 2.7 Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority and are a key component in both the Local Authority and Trust’s service delivery plans.
- 2.8 The continued partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within

communities and deliver appropriate activities e.g. the Community Hubs provision.

- 2.9 Importantly, the return indicates that overall Blaenau Gwent has improved its performance in this fifth year of the sixth framework.

### 3. **Options for Recommendation**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Members scrutinise the content of the report and consider the following options;

3.2 Option 1 – Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report and accept the report.

3.3 Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and contribute by making appropriate recommendations to the Cabinet.

### 4. **Evidence of how this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 sets out the statutory duties of the public library authorities to 'provide a comprehensive and efficient library service' to their communities.

4.2 The Library Service fully supports Blaenau Gwent's Well-being Plan and also acts as an agency for economic wellbeing in our local communities through supporting learning at all stages of life helping with illiteracy, lack of skills and the digital divide. The Library Service also contributes to a range of Welsh Government outcomes such as literacy, skills and learning, digital inclusion, poverty, health and well-being. Library provision spans these outcomes, offering a range of services which often support two or more of the outcomes simultaneously.

4.3 The Library Service is seen as a key partner in tackling the problems of social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health.

4.4 The library service acts as a single point of contact for local people to access public services and also gain information on local health issues, providing space for local voluntary organisations to provide advice and information on health and other matters

### 5. **Implications Against Each Option**

#### 5.1 **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**

There are no current implications associated with the options proposed in section 3 above.

5.1.1 During the review of the Leisure Trust, the Trust committed to increasing the book fund from £27,000 to circa £43,000 in 2018/19 and be reviewed year on year in order to achieve a more appropriate budget going forward. In 2021/22, the Trust spent £63,921, a further increase exceeding the original agreement.

5.1.2 Furthermore, the Trust continues to invest on a pan Wales level in Borrow box to increase the availability of eBooks. This includes spend on Welsh Language books to meet that target.

## 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are no risks associated with this report. Regular dialogue through newly established governance arrangements ensures that collectively, between the Council and the Trust, the library service is supported to meet the standards required.

## 5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal issues associated with this report.

## 5.4 ***Human Resources***

5.4.1 There are no direct staffing issues with respect to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in relation to this report. However, the report highlights concern about the level of staffing within the library service.

5.4.2 This will be an area of discussion and monitoring through the governance arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

## 5.5 ***Health and Safety***

ALT have good health and safety measures in place across all services, in line with the Council's Corporate Health and Safety requirements.

## 6. ***Supporting Evidence***

### 6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 Blaenau Gwent continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

The return has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has improved its performance in this fifth year of the sixth framework. Key highlights include:

- The successful implementation of the community hubs across all 6 libraries, in collaboration with the Council. As a result, footfall has increased in all libraries.
- The launch of the Sports Libraries has been highlighted as a notable achievement by Welsh Government. This scheme directly links into the wider health and wellbeing offer delivered by the library service. Many families have taken advantage of this free loaning scheme, with positive feedback received.
- By the Autumn of 2021, all activities had resumed as pre-Covid delivery. Over the year, the public perception of libraries, has positively changed, with the community acknowledging that libraries are the hubs of community, offering much more than books. There has been an increasing number of new partners accessing the service, using the informal space to engage with local communities.
- The service delivered a successful Winter of Wellbeing programme of activities. A wide range of events were delivered targeting 0-25 age group. The service delivered 29 events attended by 52 parents

and 596 young people, enabling re-engagement with young people post pandemic.

**6.2 *Expected outcome for the public***

To be able to continue to access a fully accessible and professional library service within the local community.

**6.3 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

Local people, groups/agencies and volunteers are engaged through regular customer surveys, in line with the Welsh Public Library Standards (WLPS).

**6.4 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The library standards will help establish a sustainable model for the Library Service going forward.

**6.5 *Preventative focus***

Libraries provide support with many key preventative approaches, such as improving literacy levels for children and young people through early intervention within communities.

**6.6 *Collaboration / partnership working***

Partnership working with a number of agencies/organisations is embedded in the ethos of the Library Service.

**6.7 *Integration (across service areas)***

The library service has close links to Education, Adult and Community Learning and also acts as a direct link to other Council Services through providing the use of ICT to the local community, also providing access to third sector organisations. The establishment of Community Hubs in the Libraries has further strengthened these links.

**6.8 *Decarbonisation and Reducing Carbon Emissions***

The Trust play a key role in working towards this area and are actively included in the approach across the Council.

**6.9 *Integrated Impact Assessment***

N/A

**7. *Monitoring Arrangements***

Performance reports related to the Leisure Trust are monitored through the Leisure and Libraries Strategic Group, Partnership Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Council.

**Background Documents / Electronic Links**

- *Appendix 1 – Annual Report*
- *Appendix 2 – Welsh Public Library Standards Data 2021-22*
- *Appendix 3 – Case Study, Narratives and Future Direction 21-22*