

Committee: **Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee**
 Date of meeting: **9th March 2021**
 Report Subject: **Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) Annual Return 2019/20**
 Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. Joanne Collins Executive Member for Education**
 Report Submitted by: **Joanne Sims, Youth Service Manager**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
✓	25/02/21	24.02.21			9/03/21	14.04.21		

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the attached report (appendix 1) received from the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division (MALD) of Welsh Government with respect to the third year of the Sixth Assessment Framework for the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) return 2019/20.

2.0 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 first year since the portfolio changes that this report has been submitted to the Education and Learning Scrutiny.

2.2 The Trust is now requesting that the Council consider the attached WPLS Annual Assessment Report 2019-20 with respect to the current position of the third year of the Sixth Assessment Framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards “Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Libraries 2017-20” for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

2.3 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.

2.4 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”.

2.6 The attached report (Appendix 1) with respect to the Sixth Assessment Framework for Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Return 2019/20 covers

the third year of a three-year cycle of the new quality framework “**Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Libraries 2017-20**”. It has now been confirmed, however, that the framework will be extended for another year.

- 2.7 The WPLS annual report 2019/20 has been prepared based on information provided by Blaenau Gwent’s annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of Welsh Government in July 2020. This was submitted through the Leisure Trust.
- 2.8 The WPLS Annual Assessment Report includes the following;
1. Executive Summary
 2. Performance against Standards
 3. Analysis of Performance
 4. Strategic Context
 5. Future direction
 6. Conclusion
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 The report has highlighted that:
- Blaenau Gwent has met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.
 - Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part (QI 13 staffing levels and qualifications) and did not achieve 1 (QI 9 up to date appropriate reading material).
 - Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and Trust’s service delivery plans
 - The service continues to be reliant on staff from other areas of the Trust, Council and partner organisations to help deliver services. The future resilience of the service remains a concern.
 - The continued partnership work with key organisation remains a strength of the service and enables Blaenau Gwent to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities.
 - The staff within the service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training, reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good although staffing levels remain critically low.

- The service scores well for impact and making a difference to people's lives.
- Recognition of an increase in the book fund, which led to an increase in loans and active borrowers and the percentage reporting that they felt the choice of books was good or very good.

2.11 The report has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with an improvement in Welsh Language resources in 2019/20.

2.12 The report concludes that the impact of the new review undertaken in 2019 is not clear, but it is essential in any future planning that staffing and resources levels are appropriate to ensure the service is able to meet its statutory duties.

2.13 It is proposed that any considerations identified in the annual assessment report will now be considered through the new governance arrangements established between the Council and the Aneurin Leisure Trust. Full details can be found in the attached report at appendix 1

3.0 **Options for Recommendation**

It is recommended that Members scrutinise the content of the report and consider the following options:

Option 1 – Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the report, contribute by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee and accept the report.

Option 2 – Members do not accept the report and offer comments.

4.0 **Evidence of how does 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.

4.3 The Library Service 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.

4.4 The Library Service is seen as a key partner in tackling the problems of social isolation, inequality, disadvantage, fractured communities and ill health. 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. Moreover, the intention is that the library service will be a key component of the Council's community 'hub' provision moving forward and this will bring benefits to both the work of the Council and the Library Service, including enhanced footfall.

5.0 **Implications Against Each Option**

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

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

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 2019/20, the Trust spent £51,681, an increase of 5%, exceeding the original agreement. Furthermore, the Trust has invested on a pan Wales level in Borrow Box to increase the availability of eBooks given the current pandemic. This includes a 6% spend on Welsh Language books which will meet this target. There is a planned increase of 20% in the book fund for 2020/21.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

The risks highlighted in this report are predominantly linked to two areas. The gradual increase of the book fund mitigates the one area. Regular dialogue through newly established governance arrangements will ensure that collectively, between the Council and the Trust, the Library Service is supported to meet the standards required.

5.3 ***Legal***

5.3.1 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 new governance arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

6.0 **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

6.1.1 Blaenau Gwent continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part (QI 13 staffing levels and qualifications) and did not achieve 1 (QI 9 up to date appropriate reading material). See Appendix 1 for details. The report has highlighted that overall Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with an improvement in Welsh Language resources in 2019/20. The Library Service is only required to undertake a customer survey once in each framework and that was completed this year. The outcome of that survey demonstrated that staff within the service remain a strength with a strong focus on staff training. This was reflected by the fact that 99% of customers think the standard of customer care is good or very good.

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

6.2.1 The outcome for the public is to continue to provide a fully accessible and professional Library Service within the local community to meet needs.

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

6.3.1 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)***

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

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 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***

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

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

6.7.1 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 move towards a community 'hub' model and the alignment of the Leisure Trust to the Education Directorate's portfolio will only strengthen further these links.

6.8 **EqIA**
N/A

7.0 **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 Performance reports related to the Leisure Trust are monitored through Education Scrutiny Committee, the Executive and Council. There is also the recently established Leisure and Libraries Strategic Partnership Board that will oversee the collaboration arrangements between the Council and the Leisure Trust.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 - Sixth Assessment Framework for the WPLS; Annual Return 2019-20 report*