

**CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.**

**CABINET EXECUTIVE**

**15 Sept 2020**

**REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Rachel Powell  
Portfolio Holder for Young People and Culture**

**REPORT TITLE: Community library partnerships**

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**REPORT FOR: Decision**

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to feedback on the willingness of communities to work with Powys Library Service in order to sustain local libraries, and to agree a period of 5 years' commitment of support for community partners.

1.2 The report relates to the small libraries which we are seeking to pass to the communities. We (as the Council or as a cultural trust) would then work alongside the communities, in terms of the provision of the book stock, training and support to them.

**2. Background**

2.1 The library service has transformed significantly over recent years, in order to reduce the cost of delivering the service. Work with communities and volunteers has been key to this transformation.

2.2 During Feb-April 2019, further extensive public consultation was held with communities and town and community councils, over the future of libraries, which face further significant budgetary reductions over the next 3 years. The multi-faceted value of libraries within our communities was highly recognised and articulated, contributing to the local economy, lifelong learning, digital connectivity, community cohesion and holistic wellbeing.

2.3 The overwhelming outcome of the consultation was that every option should be explored for maintaining as much of the network as possible. This clearly links to the future development of community hubs and wellbeing hubs, aims under the Vision 2025 and the Health & Social Care strategy, and to supporting the PCC digital transformation.

2.4 Since the consultation period, some Town & Community Councils, Community groups and volunteer groups have come forward to express a firm commitment and enthusiasm to work with Powys County Council in order to sustain their local libraries.

2.5 A key request from these key groups is for a fixed 5 year period of agreement, in order to allow them time to develop their local

solutions for libraries, and to embed working practices and funding streams.

- 2.6 The agreement would cover the following elements, but no additional costs:
- a commitment to the ongoing provision and circulation of library stock,
  - regular weekly deliveries to each library,
  - access to library specific online resources and management systems,
  - access to supported general IT equipment and internet usage for the public,
  - professional staff support and training from the library service.
- 2.7 This report seeks Cabinet's support for the principle of a 5 year agreement with communities in order to sustain and develop local libraries, whilst at the same time as reducing expenditure thus delivering cost reductions year on year.
- 2.8 Specific individual agreements will be worked up with each community group that has come forward, depending on local circumstances and solutions proposed. Those communities which have come forward to date requesting a firm period of commitment for their efforts are Llanfair Caereinion, Llanwrtyd, Talgarth and Hay.

### 3. **Advice**

- 3.1 The library service would be pleased to agree support for a 5 year period in order to facilitate and develop pro-active community partnerships, and foresees no difficulty in providing the support requested whilst also working to achieve the most cost effective solution.
- 3.2 The library service would therefore continue to provide the following in principle, acknowledging that local partnerships will all differ in the specific content:
- Library books as part of circulating and refreshing stock
  - Weekly deliveries of requested items
  - Access to the library management system and computer management system
  - Access to online resources for libraries
  - Computers and internet access for public use
  - Training and support for volunteers
  - Support from trained staff
- 3.3 ICT colleagues confirm that they would continue to maintain the ICT network and equipment as is, in order to maintain secure access for all council data and systems. This would only include equipment covered by the refresh programme such as laptops, PC's and monitors. Printers, tablets, scanners, etc would not be

covered by ICT. Network links would be maintained as is, however any upgrades and subsequent rental increases would not be met by ICT funding.

- 3.4 Detailed contracts would need to be developed with each community, depending on local circumstances and funding agreements.
- 3.5 Such an agreement is critical to mitigating the outcome of decreased funding on the library service, preventing lengthy and costly legal challenge over what would otherwise have to mean closure of local libraries. Impact assessment of budgetary proposals shows community involvement as the only feasible mitigation to otherwise poor outcomes.
- 3.6 Closure of libraries would mean the loss of many beneficial outcomes, impacting significantly on rural isolation (physical and virtual) and poverty agendas. Limited public transport makes accessing other libraries difficult, a theme raised consistently during the public consultation. The report by Dr Greg Langridge-Thomas, "Poverty in the Green Heart of Wales; an assessment of multiple deprivation in Powys", recommends working with partners across Powys to offer the best possible opportunities for our residents, through early intervention and a removal of barriers. *"In order to tackle poverty in Powys it will be vital to ensure that we develop cohesive communities which are engaged, and have ownership of their local areas. Due to financial constraints facing the authority and the lack of policy levers, the third sector will have an increasing role in tackling poverty. We need to ensure that we develop the trust and support of the third sector and local communities, and their engagement will be essential in reducing poverty."*
- 3.6 The need for a 5 year commitment was also brought forward by a member in a meeting of the Economy, Residents, Communities and Governance Scrutiny Committee, in January 2020. It was stressed that local communities are showing a willingness to work with Powys County Council in a positive spirit of co-production; if the support is not reciprocated, then that trust and goodwill will be lost.
- 3.7 An example of community commitment comes from Llanfair Caereinion, where the Town Council has led on very positive discussions. The Institute Management Committee (where the library is situated) has agreed to develop a library sub-group within its charitable organisation, and has a sub-committee and bank account in place in preparation. There is also a team of trained volunteers in place and ready to take over the day to day running of the library as soon as there is commitment from Powys County Council to provide ongoing resources and support.
- 3.8 It is important that we consider the views of young people in the future direction of the library service, in terms of the Wellbeing of Future Generations. Young people took an active part in the public consultation drop-in sessions during Feb 2019, with a strong deputation from Llanfyllin High School in particular. Written feedback was also received from pupils at Knighton Primary and Ysgol Dolafon in Llanwrtyd Wells, and a specific session was held

with the Youth Forum. An extract from the feedback report highlights the emphasis that young people place on libraries for their contribution to literacy:

*“Why is literacy and language and vocabulary such a low priority? The high school has lost its library. Children of all ages need books and the library provides perfect access to the high school. Teenagers need words to describe feelings more than ever as anxiety and depression becomes more and more an issue. Official reports that some children are starting school unable to speak let alone read are worrying. Reading is key to education and an articulate society.”*

3.9 The Communications Manager states: The report is of public interest and requires use of proactive communication action to publicise the recommendation/decision.

3.10 The Finance Business Partner supports the proposal for a 5 year period in order to facilitate and develop pro-active community partnerships, providing the service can continue to deliver the required budgetary cost reductions.

3.11 The Vibrant, Resourceful and Connected Communities Recovery Cell considered this paper on 9 July 2020, and recommended that a commitment should be agreed for a period of 5 years, to support community recovery post pandemic. This period of stability would enable development of cohesive transformational approaches to the council presence in communities, linking to the locality front door concepts (with digital connectivity), and with potential to support businesses, new enterprises and town centre recoveries. It was stressed that this transformational work needs to be broad in scope, to avoid duplication of effort and resource where possible.

#### **4. Resource Implications**

4.1 The library service is required to provide a range of resources for public library use under the terms of the Welsh Public Library Standards, including books and other resources, online and computer facilities. These resources are already in place within the service, therefore no additional resource is required. This proposal should see cost reductions being achieved each year.

4.2 Over time some libraries may move into community buildings freeing up council property for sale and a capital receipt.

4.3 The Head of Finance (Section 151 Officer) can support the proposal to agree support for a 5 year period whilst work continues to achieve the most cost effective solution.

#### **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 **Legal : The recommendation can be supported from a legal point of view** It is important the requirements of the Public Library and Museums Act 1964 and the Welsh Public Library Standards are duly considered in all local partnership agreements; for example, books must be loaned for free.
- 5.2 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services ( Monitoring Officer ) has commented as follows: “ I note the legal comment and have nothing to add to the report”.

## **6. Data Protection**

- 6.1 Community groups and volunteers using the computerised library management system for the loan of library resources will be required to undertake GDPR and Cyber Security training.
- 6.2 A data sharing and non-disclosure agreement will be drawn up between the library service and the community library group, and must be signed by each volunteer.

## **7. Comment from local member(s)**

7.1 County Cllr Timothy Van-Rees commented as follows, re community based commitment to Llanwrtyd Library:

“Treflys Community Council have already agreed to make a financial contribution to keep the Library open and support the volunteers and I will be asking Llangammarch Community Council at their meeting on Thursday next also to pledge financial support.  
Certainly what is proposed, has my support.”

7.2 Cllr Gareth Jones of Llanfair Caereinion commented:

“Since becoming a County Councillor three years ago this is the second time I have had to work with our Town Council and community to save the library. The commitment and desire to keep the library within the Town is overwhelming, to many people this is a vital service that needs protecting. . There is a willingness within communities to work with Powys but they need a guarantee that there will be a minimum commitment of five years, if this cannot be offered by Powys then that trust and goodwill that does exist will be lost.”

7.3 Cllr Huw Williams stressed the importance of the library to his community:

“Ystradgynlais Library is a long established cornerstone of the community providing equal access opportunities. It is a civic information centre and a hub for volunteer and statutory groups. A place that offers a broad mix of community services. For example, it currently offers a digital drop-in centre, Welsh language conversation sessions, various child activities, a Ukelele group, Cuppa with a Copper sessions, resident association meetings and

Brecknock Wildlife Trust educational classes amongst others. The Credit Union, the Registrar and Powys County Council officers and Councillors also use the Library. Its proximity to the bus terminal provides access to the wider community.

Of course, it also offers reference facilities and opportunities for children who need to study out of school. Ystrad is the most deprived ward in Powys and some families cannot afford internet subscription. Access to job search, training and support is also offered. The Library is a busy and important community hub with a healthy mix of volunteer and statutory provision.”

7.4 Councillor William Powell, local member for Talgarth, comments: ‘Talgarth Library, co-located with our new area primary school, Ysgol y Mynydd Du, is a genuine hub of our community, promoting equal opportunities and ready to help to lessen inequalities. These have come to light especially during the Covid-19 crisis, with regard to home schooling. It is an information centre on local services and attracts residents from Talgarth, as well as, increasingly, from adjacent communities including Bronllys, Llyswen and Llangorse.

‘The library currently offers a digital drop-in facility and hosts meetings of the emerging Talgarth Energy Cooperative, sustainability workshops and Pilates sessions. Clearly, there has been a hiatus, due to the Covid-19 lockdown and associated restrictions, but we hope that there is some light at the end of the tunnel.

‘The local TiRC, working in partnership with Talgarth Regeneration Group and backed by Talgarth Town Council, has successfully applied for Comic Relief funding through PAVO, to take on a Project Officer, to give fresh impetus to the Library and TiRC and to promote the role of volunteering in sustaining services for the future. An appointment has just been made and the successful person starts work on 7<sup>th</sup> September, with an initial contract up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021. We believe that this local partnership will give us a genuine chance to explore alternative and innovative ways of working for the future.’

## **8. Integrated Impact Assessment**

8.1 Individual impact assessments will be completed for each community partnership arrangement. The impact assessment for the transfer of Llanfair Caereinion Library to a locally managed volunteer run facility is attached, as the foremost development which has strong community commitment in place.

## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 It is recommended that Powys County Council agrees to support community libraries with stock, ICT, relevant staffing and training for a period of 5 years, to allow them a period of stability in order to develop, fundraise and become sustainable for the long term, enabling the library service to work towards achieving a lower cost of delivery.

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