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**Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth**  
**Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism**



**Llywodraeth Cymru**  
**Welsh Government**

**Ms Christine Chapman AM**  
**Chair**  
**Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee**  
**The National Assembly for Wales**  
**Cardiff Bay**

21 October 2014

Dear Christine

**The Communities, Equalities and Local Government's Committee's Report on Public Libraries in Wales**

Thank you for the letter of 23 September regarding my response to the Communities, Equality and Local Government's report on public libraries in Wales. I am pleased to forward you a copy of my response to the Committee's report as agreed to coincide with the launch of the *Expert review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014* report.

I have arranged for you and the Members of the Committee to receive a copy of the Expert Review report direct from the printers. If you require an electronic copy in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours ever,

**Ken Skates AC / AM**  
**Y Dirprwy Weinidog Diwylliant, Chwaraeon a Thwristiaeth**  
**Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism**



Written Response to Communities, Equality and Local Government's report "Public Libraries in Wales" by the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism.

14 October 2014.

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*Libraries will inspire the people of Wales to enjoy reading, enhance their knowledge and skills, to enrich their quality of life and empower them to realise their full potential. (Libraries Inspire)*

For over 150 years public libraries have played a central role as cultural and educational hubs in communities across Wales. They have provided free access to resources, information and activities. They promote literacy, lifelong learning, digital inclusion and the wellbeing of the people of Wales. Knowledge is power and libraries empower people and make a real difference to their lives.

In light of the proposed changes to public library service provision being considered by many local authorities due to financial pressures, the then Minister for Culture and Sport issued a Written Statement on 3 December 2014<sup>3</sup> announcing an Expert Review (Review) of public library services in Wales. The Review would cover current and future provision of public libraries in Wales and the statement outlined that:

The review will need to take into account any published recommendations from the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery and the forthcoming report on public libraries from the National Assembly's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee.

The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee's (the Committee) report, *Public Libraries in Wales*, was published in July and I would like to thank all the members of the Committee and to everyone who contributed to their inquiry into public libraries in Wales. The Expert Panel undertaking the Review met to discuss the Committee's report and their recommendations and their views are included in the Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014 to be launched on 22 October. I will ensure that copies of this report are distributed to all Committee Members.

Both the Committee's and the Expert Panel's reports highlight the "very important" role that public libraries play in our communities and the contribution they make to a range of local and national priorities, including the *Programme for Government*. The two reports outline that our public libraries contribute to key priorities such as:

- High quality public services
- Literacy
- Lifelong learning
- Health and wellbeing
- Supporting people with digital skills and accessing online public services
- Equality of access to all to a neutral space
- Assisting people into work
- Tackling poverty
- Promoting sustainability and

- Promoting our culture and heritage

The reports outline evidence of the continuing need for a professional public library service. However, the evidence also suggests that we are in a period of significant change and that the public library of the future must respond to changing needs of the public as well as political and economic changes. The changing context of public service delivery therefore poses a significant challenge for our library services and local authorities who have a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service under the Public Library and Museums Act 1964.

These two reports serve as a catalyst for us to review and take action progressing a library service to serve the future needs of the people of Wales.

I am pleased to see that there are similarities in many of the recommendations tabled by Committee and the Expert Panel's reports. I have set out below my response to the Committee report's individual recommendations.

**Recommendation 1.** We recommend that the Minister produces and publishes an annual report on the state of public libraries in Wales.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. In addition to reporting on the state of public libraries in Wales, this report will provide an opportunity to highlight examples of best practice in the delivery of library services and the difference that public libraries make to people's everyday life. It will also update progress against the Welsh Government's library strategy, currently *Libraries Inspire*.

This annual report will compliment the Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards (Standards) development framework. The Standards measure the performance of each public library service over a three year cycle. Annual reports for each local authority service are published online in October. Since their inception in 2002, they have been credited with improving resource provision and the equality of access to services.

Wales is leading the way in the UK and Ireland in implementing a library strategy that covers public libraries, educational, research libraries, and workplace libraries. This enables improved public access to the resources of these libraries and I hope that the Committee will support the publishing of an annual report that covers the contribution of libraries across these sectors in-line with the *Libraries Inspire* strategy.

I propose to publish the report in January of each year starting in 2016.

**Financial implications** - £2,000-£3,000 funded from existing programme budgets.

**Recommendation 2.** We recommend that the Minister makes arrangements for the central publication of disaggregated data showing the use of public libraries by demographic groups.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. In 2012 the Carnegie Trust UK undertook a detailed survey of public library use, including by demographic grouping in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and England. This provided valuable data, but was a one-off survey and there is a need to collect evidence on a regular basis to inform future planning of public library provision.

The Welsh Government is currently undertaking a review of its surveys and publicly funded surveys undertaken by other organisations. It may be possible to add a question to existing surveys to capture the required data. My officials in CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales division are currently reviewing these options. Some library services already collect this data, but it would be beneficial to have a countrywide overview.

This information will be in addition to the evidence provided by the Welsh Public Library Standards and the annual data collected by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

**Financial implications** – Any additional costs will be funded from existing programme budgets.

**Recommendation 3.** We recommend that the Minister works with partners to develop a contemporary definition of “comprehensive and efficient” library services for local authorities to deliver under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Such a definition should include the provision of internet access which, we believe, should remain free of charge.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. Evidence from the Experts Panel’s call for evidence also highlighted the need for a definition of what constitutes a “comprehensive and efficient” service. Librarians, local authority officials, public library support groups as well as your Committee have raised this issue. This is not a new issue and previous publications such as the *Report of a Working Party on Public Library Standards*, Library and Information Services Council (Wales), 1988 and the Local Government Act of 1999 with its Best Value framework have all aimed to address this issue.

Since 2002, the Welsh Ministers have fulfilled their duty to “*superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service*”, and to ensure that local authorities provide a “*comprehensive and efficient*” library service through the implementation of the Welsh Public Library Standards (the Standards). The latest framework, *Libraries Making a Difference*, was introduced in 2014 and was developed in consultation with local authorities, the Welsh Government Association (WLGA) and librarians. The

latest Standards also reflect requests for the inclusion of outcome focussed measurements.

I propose to continue to use the Welsh Public Library Standards as the main mechanism for monitoring the provision of a “*comprehensive and efficient*” library service by local authorities. The current Framework of Standards outlines a set of core entitlements that the public can expect from their local library services and core entitlement 10 states that:

*Libraries in Wales will provide free use of the Internet and computers, including Wi-Fi.*

I fully support this entitlement as there is evidence from library services across Wales of the key role of our public libraries in ensuring digital inclusion, especially as an increasing number of public services are delivered online.

A related issue raised by the Committee and the Expert Review was the legal status of the Welsh Public Library Standards. The current Standards are not statutory guidance. One of the Recommendations of the Expert Panel is as follows:

Expert Panel Recommendation XI: The Welsh Government should undertake the necessary legislative process which would make the Welsh Public Library Standards statutory guidance in relation to the duties imposed by the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Welsh Government should also consider introducing new legislation to reflect the changing requirements for the public library to deliver services collaboratively in digital environments.

I have asked my officials in CyMAL, as a priority, to scope the possibility of making future standards framework statutory guidance in order to provide greater clarity in relation to what is meant by a “*comprehensive and efficient*” library service. After this research is completed, I will ask my officials to prepare a detailed report on current more modern public library Acts and scope the possibility of introducing such an Act as part of the Welsh Government’s future legislation programme.

**Financial implications** - Any additional costs will be funded from existing programme budgets.

**Recommendation 4.** We recommend that the Minister considers developing a voluntary accreditation scheme for individual libraries in Wales.

**Response: Accept in principle**

I reject this recommendation as it stands. As stated under Recommendation 3 above, the Welsh Government has introduced the Welsh Public Library Standards to monitor public library service delivery in Wales. They have been successful in improving the consistency of library service provision across Wales and has had a direct impact on individual service points, e.g. the introduction of Wi-Fi, improved range of resources.

One of the main reasons behind this request was the need to try and develop an Accreditation framework, similar to the UK Museums Accreditation scheme, which would help measure and develop the level of service provided by community managed libraries. The introduction of a robust Accreditation scheme would be both costly and add an additional layer of monitoring/data collecting and analysis.

The current Museum Accreditation scheme (voluntary participation) was developed on a UK level and took 2 years to develop. It has taken almost two years to consult and develop the current Welsh Public Library Standards framework at a cost of £25,000, which is in addition to the significant staff input from the Welsh Government and local authorities.

Almost all core entitlements outlined in the current Standards framework can be implemented on a service wide level and on an individual service point level. My officials at CyMAL will work with stakeholders to identify the core entitlements outlined in the Standards that the public should expect from any public library service point. This will inform if a library can be included as part of the statutory provision. This work will be incorporated as part of the implementation of Recommendation VIII and IX of the Expert Review by CyMAL.

*Expert Panel Recommendation VIII: Community managed libraries (as outlined in para 80) should not be considered as part of statutory library provision at the present time, subject to the findings of the research proposed in para. 103. Data relating to libraries which are not part of statutory provision should not be included in returns under the Welsh Public Library Standards Framework.*

*Expert Panel Recommendation IX: CyMAL should work with stakeholders to develop guidelines and appropriate documentation for partnership agreements setting out the minimum requirements which would enable a community supported library to be considered as part of an authority's statutory provision. Relevant legal advice should be sourced as part of this process. The criteria for a community supported library to be included as part of the statutory provision should be developed by CyMAL by January 2015 for implementation from April 2015.*

**Financial implications** - Any additional costs relating to the implementation of recommendations VIII and IX of the Expert Panel will be funded from existing programme budgets.

**Recommendation 5.** We recommend that the Minister continues to work with local authorities and their partners to identify and promote further opportunities for collaboration and co-location arrangements in the delivery of library services.

**Response: Accept**

I fully accept this recommendation. This relates closely to two of the main and most urgent recommendations of the Expert Panel:



*Expert Panel Recommendation VII: Local authorities should recognise and respond to the need for more urgent and greater emphasis on collaborative schemes in their future strategies for public library provision, especially between and among local authority departments, across local authority boundaries, and with other public sector libraries. That the Minister for Natural Resources, Culture and Sport takes into account, in what constitutes a “comprehensive and efficient” service, the local authority’s record and commitment in collaborative service delivery.*

*Expert Panel Recommendation X: The Welsh Government should work with the WLGA and local authorities to progress the following strategic actions as immediate priority:*

- a) greater collaboration on a more extensive scale between authorities as an immediate priority*
- b) to develop library services in-line with any future model for local government in Wales*
- c) the necessity to develop a regional or national consortium approach to the delivery of public library services in the medium-term (3-5 years), to be facilitated by a suitably funded organisation supported by the Welsh Government*
- d) the creation of a nationally co-ordinated library service for Wales as the ultimate goal.*

The need to progress this work is also a Programme for Government commitment:

*Programme for Government - Strengthen regional collaboration in the delivery of library, museum and archive services and ensure that local authorities meet national standards of public library provision.*

In Wales we have been leading the way in the UK on collaborative working on a local, regional and national level in order to develop more sustainable models of service delivery. This is one of the main strands of the Welsh Government’s *Libraries Inspire* strategy. However the current financial situation requires a step-change in the roll-out of best practice and the development of new more innovative models of service delivery. The Committee’s inquiry heard about a number of examples of best practice already in operation in Wales that have the potential for wider roll-out.

I agree with the views of the Expert Panel that the status quo is not an option and we need to build on existing evidence to develop new costed models of service delivery to inform discussion. I note the comment of the Expert Panel that to delay until any local government reorganisation is not an option and that there is a need to start planning now.

A key element of implementing new models of service delivery will be to develop a library management system for Wales, a digital library offer and greater co-location of local services.



I have asked my officials in CyMAL to place even greater emphasis on supporting collaboration as part of the Welsh Governments Innovation and Development revenue grant programme and the Community Learning Libraries capital grant programme.

**Financial implications** – Financial support for collaborative working will be a priority for the ongoing Welsh Government capital and revenue grant programmes administered by CyMAL.

**Recommendation 6.** We recommend that the Minister ensures that the necessary ongoing support and guidance is available in order to increase the long-term sustainability of community managed libraries.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. The Expert Panel also noted the need to develop guidance for community managed and supported libraries in its Recommendation IX. The Panel's Recommendation IV, if implemented, will also provide useful evidence to inform this work.

*Expert Panel Recommendation: CyMAL should work with stakeholders to develop guidelines and appropriate documentation for partnership agreements setting out the minimum requirements which would enable a community supported library to be considered as part of an authority's statutory provision. The criteria for a community supported library to be included as part of the statutory provision should be developed by CyMAL by January 2015 for implementation from April 2015.*

The work to develop documentation in relation to community managed libraries has begun and Conwy CBC is currently undertaking a grant funded pilot project. One of the outputs of the project is to share the documentation created with other interested library services. This documentation should be available before the end of the financial year.

The research to be carried out as part of the Expert Panel's Recommendation IV will also contribute to this work:

*Expert Panel Recommendation IV: CyMAL should take immediate steps to collect evidence and assess the impact of proposed changes to library service provision on the communities affected within the context of statutory requirements in Rhondda Cynon Taf CBC, Neath Port Talbot CBC and Blaenau Gwent CBC to inform future decisions by other local authorities. CyMAL should publish a report after an initial 3 month period of research and a full report after 12 months.*

I note that paragraph 174 of the Expert Panel's report states that:

*Integral to maintaining the sustainability of community managed libraries is the level of on-going partnership/support that will be provided by the local*

*public library service. The Panel fully supports this partnership library model and notes that further work is required to identify the most effective model for delivery.*

Evidence is beginning to emerge from some of the early community managed library projects in Wales that the level of support from the local authority public library service is critical to the sustainability of community managed libraries.

**Financial implications** – CyMAL will continue to provide guidance and support in developing models of community managed/supported library services utilising existing staff and resources.

**Recommendation 7.** We recommend that the Minister ensures adequate support and guidance continues to be available to local authorities to identify and pursue all available funding opportunities.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. CyMAL have recently provided two seminars, one in North and one in South Wales, to assist museum, archive and library services to identify various sources of funding. CyMAL advisers attended these seminars and will provide ongoing support to identify funding opportunities. This is a core element of their work.

Equally important to identifying sources of funding, is the need to develop library staff's skills in preparing application. CyMAL has also provided courses for the museums, archives and libraries sector to address this issue.

There has been some notable success through partnership working. For example Macmillan Cancer Support noted in response to the Committee's consultation that it had invested £800,000 since 2010 in developing information and support services in libraries.

**Financial implications** – This work will continue to be supported from existing staff and resources.

**Recommendation 8.** We recommend that, whilst core library services should remain free of charge, the Minister should explore with local authorities all other available options for libraries to raise revenue.

**Response: Accept**

I fully accept that core library services should remain free of charge and the Expert Panel noted that:

*In Wales there is a strong tradition of providing the vast majority of public library services free at the point of use to support tackling poverty and social inclusion agendas.*

The Expert Panel's report noted that:

*The opportunities for income generation currently under consideration are limited and unlikely to have any significant impact on the current funding situation. Indeed, the evidence suggests that minor fundraising initiatives such as charging for the use of ICT are costly to introduce and administer. In addition, such actions (especially in relation to disadvantaged members of the public) are counterproductive in view of the increasing corporate and national priority to address digital inclusion when access to welfare benefits and assisting people into work require Internet access and digital skills.*

I agree with this statement, but we also need to look at alternative sources of income and learn from other countries and sectors that have been successful in attracting additional income from sources such as gifts and bequests. I will ask my officials at CyMAL to look at these and other options as part their advice on income generation.

**Financial implications** - Any costs will be funded from existing programme budgets/resources.

**Recommendation 9.** We recommend that the Minister works with local authorities and partners to promote better the wide range of services provided by public libraries.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. CyMAL has commissioned research in this area and audience development and marketing has been a key strand of all recent Welsh Government strategies. As part of the current *Libraries Inspire* strategy, £150,000 out of a total revenue budget of c. £805,000 was allocated to audience development and marketing in 2014-15. The audience development work is led by Wrexham CBC Library service on behalf of Welsh libraries and this collaborative approach delivers value for money/maximises the impact of the investment and delivers all-Wales promotional activities and they have included print campaigns in newspapers, radio campaigns and a library festival. This collaborative all-Wales model for the promotion of libraries is also being successfully replicated for museums and archives and is the envy of many other countries.

The team in Wrexham has utilised the low cost potential of social media to promote library services and they have actively taken advantage of a range of services including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, and the range of services utilised is increasing regularly. The team has also arranged training for library staff on social media to embed these skills in local library service staff across Wales.

I recognise that more needs to be done to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from these services. However in the current financial climate it is difficult to increase investment in this area of work. I hope that all members of the Committee will join me in taking advantage of opportunities to promote our public library services and the varied resources that they offer.

In order to promote out public libraries and the services that they provide, the Welsh Government has allocated over £13m since 2007-08 to modernise 98 public libraries. This has led to a significant increase in visitor numbers and the loan of books in these libraries, especially amongst children, in modernised libraries.

**Financial implications** – As part of a key strand the *Libraries Inspire* strategy, revenue will continue to be invested in audience development activities from CyMAL's programme budget. In 2015-16 a further £1m has been allocated in the draft Budget to modernise our public libraries a part of the Community Learning Libraries capital grant programme.

**Recommendation 10.** We recommend that the Minister continues to pursue the case for additional funding from the UK Government in recognition of the increasing responsibilities for library staff in Wales in supporting the delivery of digital-by-default welfare reforms.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. It is important that the work of public libraries in assisting people to access and use the increasing number of public services delivered primarily online by the UK Government is recognised. I will pursue this issue with the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty whose portfolio includes welfare reform.

**Financial implications** – This ongoing work will be carried out from existing programme budgets.

Once again I would like to thank the Committee and its members for their valuable evidence and interest in maintaining and developing our public library services. Your report and the Expert Panel's report has highlighted the need to review and develop a more collaborative and sustainable delivery model that will meet the changing needs of the Welsh people. Evidence from the inquiry and the review highlight that we need to take urgent action to avoid irreparable damage to our library network, physical and virtual. On the 22 October I will speak at a joint Conference with the WLGA to launch the report and recommendations of the Expert Panel for comment.

In response to your inquiry and the Expert Review's, I have requested my officials at CyMAL to start work on some of the recommendations with immediate effect. Also, all this valuable evidence collected will help inform the current *Libraries Inspire Delivery Plan* and future Welsh Government library strategies.