

P-06-1485 Introduce a network of Toy Libraries around Wales - Correspondence from the petitioner, 12 November 2024

Dear Senedd Petitions Committee,

Many thanks for forwarding the reply from Welsh Government's Minister for Children and Social Care.

Whilst taking into account the Minister's points, I must say that the response seems to confuse different issues. What we are asking for is for Welsh Government to investigate the possibilities of creating a nationwide network of toy libraries in Wales. We are not commenting on the Play Sufficiency Assessment (Wales) Regulations 2012. This can be found here - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2012/2555/made> . This governs the play opportunities in a given area, including things like playgrounds, clubs and youth groups, holiday play schemes and leisure centres.

The issue of toy libraries is different. There are, I believe, less than 5 in Wales but over 1000 in the UK, mostly in England.

This blog covers some of the issues in more depth - <https://foe.cymru/how-can-play-become-accessible-and-sustainable>

Maia Banks who runs the Honeycomb Toy Library in Cardiff has also written an interesting blog on her experiences - <https://foe.cymru/starting-toy-library-its-easy-if-you-try>

Toy libraries have many benefits and have been proven to work across many years and in many countries around the world. It seems inexplicable that we in Wales have so few, especially given the fact that immediately across the border, there are so many. We don't have any similar equivalents either. It's very much a missing link both in early years provision but also in the circular economy.

A few of the benefits of toy libraries are:

- They can provide more children with a greater variety of toys and games to experience which can help them with their learning and development
- They can help families save money (the average child can have as many as 493 toys by the age of 13 - <https://www.plasticboxshop.co.uk/research-reveals-average-child-will-own-493-toys-i98?srsId=AfmBOoqMg6xGviTrUaA67MDd8OYhZr00X4SuNK55ER8YVlf8g-RAm7Dk>) and the average family can spend around £300 per year on toys in the UK (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/514480/toy-spend-per-child-great-britain-uk/#:~:text=This%20statistic%20illustrates%20the%20average,pounds%20per%20child%20per%20annum.>)

- They can be a very valuable local community networking opportunity, helping to bring together the parents, families and carers of young children
- They can help reduce the amount of plastic we use. Lots of toys nowadays are made from cheap plastic and can often break or be discarded too easily.
- By reducing the amount of plastic, they can, even if only in a very small way, help reduce our climate emissions (with most plastic being made from oil)
- They can help reduce the amount of clutter in people's homes
- If held in a local community hall or as part of book lending library, they can help support these institutions with extra visitors thereby helping support and maintain other community resources and venues

We have a great deal of accumulated knowledge amongst organisations and individuals in Wales who are all keen to work together and support this idea. Welsh Government however have the levers and framework necessary to make this happen and all we ask is that they bring together the relevant experts in Wales to investigate how this could work.

The Minister also mentions Welsh Government's Beyond Recycling Strategy and the Circular Economy. We are of course very well aware of both of these, having long been proponents of action on waste issues, the circular economy and taking action on plastics. The Minister also mentions schemes such as Benthyg.

There are still however many improvements we can make to the circular economy. It most certainly isn't the case that it is complete and that we can't add anything else. We feel toy libraries would be a valuable addition and logical next step, particularly as they cut across many other issues such as the cost of living crisis, supporting communities and the benefits of helping provide children with access to more and different toys which can help stimulate their learning and development.

Benthyg is a great addition to the circular economy but toy libraries are somewhat different. Toy libraries in other parts of the UK and the world, act as community resources, they can help support local community centres for instance or can help support local book lending libraries if held there. We know book libraries are always at risk under local authority spending cuts so toy libraries could actually act as a source of extra support for book libraries if combined.

Toy libraries are not just simply a place to drop off a toy and pick another one up either. They can be a valuable social and networking opportunity for parents and carers of young children to come together, to stay and chat and share a cuppa whilst their children play with some of the toys too. This is especially valuable in rural areas where there simply aren't as many community networking opportunities and resources for those with young children. Toy libraries shouldn't be seen as just simply another Bentyg. They are different and fulfil different needs. Both have their place in a circular economy. The fact that Bentyg's already exist shouldn't mean that toy libraries are not considered.

It is interesting to note the Minister's response stating that: **"The next full 3 year PSA is due to be submitted to the Welsh Government in June 2025"**. Now then would seem like a perfectly reasonable and logical time to be discussing toy libraries in this context. We also note that there is currently even more of a focus within Welsh Government from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change, to look at the reuse and repair angle of the circular economy. Having a wider discussion now on toy libraries is therefore timely and relevant.

As mentioned above, toy libraries would play a valuable role in the circular economy whilst having numerous other benefits. What a nationwide network might look like and how they might work alongside book libraries, Bentygs and other early years provision, would then be for existing practioners and experts to help formulate. The expertise is already there in Wales. There is a golden opportunity here for Welsh Government to bring people and organisations together to work out a plan.

Yours sincerely

Bleddyn Lake