

National Assembly for Wales Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales

Submission from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, Wales (CILIP Cymru Wales)

February 2014

Introduction

CILIP: The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals is the leading professional body for librarians, information specialists and knowledge managers. CILIP's vision is a fair and economically prosperous society underpinned by literacy, access to information and the transfer of knowledge. CILIP Cymru Wales is the national office for CILIP in Wales and has its own governing Committee.

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I. **Progress made by the Welsh Government towards achieving its Programme for Government commitments relating to libraries, and how sustainable any progress is in the current climate.**

Support from the Welsh Government is vital to sustaining an excellent public library service in Wales and avoiding the long term consequences for literacy and employability that risk being the result of the de-valuing of public library services elsewhere in the UK.

1.1 CILIP Cymru Wales welcomes the support and guidance given by the Welsh Government on the delivery and development of public libraries in Wales through its Programme for Government commitments. These are set out in CyMAL's Libraries Inspire programme, which "*...will help deliver priorities outlined in the Welsh Government's Programme for Government such as literacy and other skills, accessible digital opportunities, promoting our culture and helping to reduce inequalities*".

Public Libraries are important community hubs at the centre of most Welsh communities and help address all ten areas identified in the Programme for Government, including promoting growth and tackling poverty which the First Minister has previously described as his top priority.¹

1.2 We believe the performance measurement frameworks, the Welsh Public Library Standards have helped public libraries in Wales improve and develop. We believe that a supportive government & CyMAL and the commitment of frontline staff have helped the sector in not seeing as heavy a decline in issues and visits as elsewhere in the UK. Over 14 million people visit public libraries in Wales each year.² The investment in library refurbishments through CyMAL funding grants has contributed to these positive visitor numbers. In the last 10 years 89 libraries out of a total of 280 in Wales have benefited from remodelling as a result of Community Learning and Libraries funding.

- 1.3** Our concerns for the continuation of this positive progress relate to the budget reductions faced by local authorities to core funding and the Welsh Local Government Association announcement in October 2013 of reductions of £175m in 2014/15 with a further £65m in 2015/16.³

Recommendations:

- The Welsh Government, via the Minister for Culture and Sport and CyMAL, working with organisations such as the Society of Chief Librarians, Wales, Welsh Local Government Agency and CILIP Cymru Wales continue to monitor the situation in Wales.
- That the situation be kept under constant review as the impact of the cuts start to take shape and for the Welsh Government to collect and publish this information. **See also recommendations for question 3.**

2. Extent to which the current legislative and policy frameworks are suitable to meet the challenges facing local authorities delivering library services in Wales.

Public libraries are a statutory service and local authorities will be challenged in how to meet their duties in a time of constraint. Proactive use of standards and frameworks will help in this challenge.

- 1.2** The Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) provide a framework for each local authority to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service. The standards do not proscribe **how** authorities should provide a library service.
- 1.3** The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964⁴ makes the provision of library services statutory. Section 1 of the act allows for the collection of information or inspection of a public library authority and Section 10 for an inquiry where an authority may be in default of its obligations and an order specifying improvements required following an enquiry. Ultimately, the Minister for Culture and Sport has powers to take over the running of services in Wales.
- 1.4** CILIP Cymru Wales welcomes the Minister's recent written statement on public libraries in which he reminded local authorities of the legal requirement to provide a public library service.
- "I expect local authorities to be mindful of their statutory responsibilities to provide 'comprehensive and efficient' library services in setting their budgets going forward".⁵*

Recommendations:

- The Welsh Government, via the Minister for Culture and Sport and CyMAL ensure the new set of Welsh Public Library Standards, currently in development, continue to be inspirational and developmental and do not only reflect the situation as it is now.
- The Minister and his team continue to monitor the impact of any changes in service provision and are prepared to use the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act to ensure local authorities provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

3. How well-prepared the Welsh Government and local authorities are to mitigate the impact of public sector cuts on library services.

Collaboration both within the library and information sector and across local authority services is key to ensuring future resilience. Libraries should not bear disproportionate levels of cuts.

- 3.1** As with other local government services libraries were also included in the Simpson Review ("Local, Regional, National: What Services are Best Delivered Where?")⁶ and the resulting **Compact for Change between the Welsh Government and Welsh local government agreed** in December 2011⁷. This committed the Welsh Government and Local Government to review existing collaborative arrangements in library services and agree an implementation plan for further collaborative arrangements by November 2012. There are a number of reasons to promote collaboration but undoubtedly one is to secure savings by more efficient and effective working. It is also about increasing the capacity and resilience in the sector to meet the challenges ahead and respond creatively to the opportunities.
- 3.2** One of our great strengths in Wales is that library planning is across all sectors, including the National Library of Wales, academic and school libraries and those in other sectors. Therefore the National Library of Wales is taking a strong lead in the development of a national online reference service and the development of important heritage online resources such as "The People's Collection Wales"⁸.
- 3.4** The National Information Literacy Framework⁹ will harness resources and expertise in all types of libraries to enable all Welsh people to live their lives to the full by engaging effectively with the information society. Such developments would only be possible by collaboration across the library sectors and the important role of CyMAL in helping to cement these partnerships must be acknowledged.
- 3.5** Although the partnership and collaborative working achieved is impressive, and leads the UK, it needs to be accelerated and taken forward with even greater determination. The development of a common Library Management System across Welsh public libraries will unlock the possibility of greater administrative integration and sharing of expertise and management resources as envisaged in the Simpson report.
- 3.6** We acknowledge that all of the new developments, economies of scale and other initiatives may still not be enough to mitigate the depth of the impact of the budgets savings that will be required. CILIP Cymru Wales concern is that libraries should not be expected to bear disproportionate cuts. The average spend on public libraries in Wales is just 0.89% of local authority expenditure.¹⁰
- 3.7** CILIP has already welcomed the Minister's proposal (Minister's Written Statement 3 December 2013) for a review of current and future plans by local authorities to deliver public library services, planned to report in the Spring¹¹. We hope that this will begin an informed debate as to what will be needed to ensure a sustainable public library service

in Wales. We believe the Welsh Government should lead this debate and broker the way forward. CILIP Cymru would wish to be participants in that debate.

Recommendations:

- The Welsh Government to consult on outcomes of report of the Expert Working Party on current and future plans of local authorities to deliver public library services with view to establishing a credible way forward through the Compact for Change.
- The Minister to publish an annual report on the state of public libraries as a way of ensuring that libraries are kept to the forefront of the Government's agenda (Section 17 of 1964 Act requires him to produce an Annual report on the exercise of his functions under the Act).

4. Options for improving the financial sustainability of library services, including alternative models of provision.

Innovative options for improving services are currently under investigation and should be optimised. Services need to be professionally led and staffed to ensure that they deliver the benefit of these for local communities.

- 4.1** There are service reviews in progress both locally and regionally, and a number of pilot schemes funded by CyMAL that are investigating new ways to deliver library and information services to communities, such as plans to automatically give school children membership of the library, all Wales e-magazine subscriptions, and a shared Library Management System for Wales. The continued ability of CyMAL to fund and support these projects is of vital importance to the development of library services in Wales.
- 4.2** Internet access is free in Welsh public libraries. As local authorities look for new ways to bridge the saving gap, charges should not be introduced for information services that restrict access for those most in need. We believe that free access to information contributes to a knowledgeable and economically active society and public libraries are well placed to help citizens develop vital information skills. 1 in 5 adults in the UK do not have basic online skills, but 90% of all jobs will require ICT skills by 2015¹², public libraries are helping to combat the digital divide.
- 4.3** Both CILIP Cymru Wales and The Society of Chief Librarians, Wales are clear that library and information services rely on the skills of trained professionals to shape and deliver services fit for their communities. Volunteers can provide support to enhance a service, but they do not replace the need for trained professionals.

CILIP Cymru Wales does not support use of volunteers as a replacement for paid, professional staff.¹³

Recommendation:

- That the Welsh Government continues to support the CyMAL grants programme to fund pilot projects that investigate potential developments in the provision of library services.

5 The contemporary and community role of public libraries in Wales.

Public libraries should have a crucial role in connecting people in a digital world and ensuring universal access to literacy, learning and information. That role is needed more than ever today as part of ensuring that the divide between the rich and poor in society does not increase and we build strong communities.

- 5.1** Public libraries provide opportunities for learning and literacy development, access to information and knowledge and support for families and disadvantaged communities. Libraries must be at the forefront of digital innovation in the creation and delivery of services, mobile communications and e-content, becoming an integral part of a networked society, promoting the information literacy and digital skills necessary for participation. Libraries help to create literate and articulate individuals and communities that can better support themselves.
- 5.2** Professional library staff shape services to the needs of local communities, engage them effectively in service development, and ensure safe and impartial access to services. They are trained in these skills and work to a unique professional code of practice and ethical values. They bring expertise in reading and learning, acting as guides to the mass of data and online information that is increasingly used for decision making in daily life.
- 5.3** Public libraries are a key delivery mechanism for local solutions to the real difficulties faced by disadvantaged communities in partnership with other local providers. By helping to bridge the 'digital divide' libraries can support people to access and understand the wealth of resources available in the Information Age. In partnership with other agencies and services libraries can combat poverty and disadvantage, support social mobility and fairness, and enable employability and economic self-sufficiency. Most library services have diverse established partnerships with providers of education and adult learning, health care, neighbourhood and policing services, youth intervention, community groups and business.
- 5.4** Skilled and knowledgeable staff are vital to ensure that libraries engage effectively with users and make a difference to the lives of individuals and the communities they are part of. Evidence from a forthcoming CILIP UK survey of public library staff shows real concern that cutbacks will not allow them to provide that support and that their role will be devalued. CILIP brings quality accreditation for the skills and knowledge of library staff through the Professional Knowledge & Skills Base, our key skills map for the profession and its framework of professional registration.¹⁴

We will be undertaking a major workforce study across all library and information sectors in the UK during 2014 which will identify how the skills and expertise of library staff has developed and continues to change.

CILIP is working closely with the Welsh Government Library Service in developing a professional development framework for library and information staff and we would want to do similar for public library staff in partnership with appropriate bodies.

- 5.5.** The Society of Chief Librarians has published a number of documents that demonstrate the wealth of knowledge and skills that library services offer and show how public libraries help address the Programme for Government: *'Brighter, Bolder, Better'* (2009), *'Addressing the Digital Divide'* (2010), *The Importance of Reading* (2011), *Public Libraries: Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits*, *'Public Libraries: Reducing Child Poverty'* (2013).¹⁵

Recommendations:

- Government should review the role of libraries under each area of its Programme for Government. This should be fed into future planning and collaboration with local authorities
- CyMAL should explore with CILIP possibilities of producing a library staff development plan as part of its workforce development plan.

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References

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<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/libraries/librariesinspire/?lang=en>

² Over 14 Million visits <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/cultureandsport/2013/130404libraries/?lang=en>

³ £175m down and counting, councils say “local services will be cut”. WLGA press release, 8 October 2013.
<http://www.wlga.gov.uk/newslisting/175m-down-and-counting/>

⁴ Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75>

⁵ Written Statement – Public Libraries in Wales.
<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2013/8265614/?lang=en>

⁶ Local, regional, national: what services are best delivered where? [Simpson report]. Welsh Government, 2011. <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/localgovernment/publications/lnrdelivery/?lang=en>

⁷ Compact for change between the Welsh Government and Welsh local government, Welsh Government, 2011.
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/improvingservices/publicationevents/publications/compact/?lang=en>

⁸ Peoples Collection Wales. See <http://www.peoplescollectionwales.co.uk/>

⁹ Information Literacy Framework for Wales. Welsh Information Literacy Project, 2011.
<http://welshlibraries.org/skills/information-literacy/useful-documents-and-links/>

¹⁰ % of local authority expenditure, Welsh Average 0.89%
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/libraries/wpls/annual-reports-12-13/?lang=en>

¹¹ CILIP welcomes Welsh Minister’s statement on the value of public libraries. CILIP press release, 3 December 2013. <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip-cymru-wales/news/cilip-welcomes-welsh-minister-s-statement-value-public-libraries-0>

¹² Go On UK <http://www.go-on.co.uk/challenge/uk-snapshot>

¹³ CILIP use of volunteers policy. <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/advocacy-awards-and-projects/advocacy-and-campaigns/public-libraries/policy-statements/use>

¹⁴ Professional Knowledge and Skills Base. CILIP, 2012. <http://www.cilip.org.uk/cilip/jobs-and-careers/professional-knowledge-and-skills-base>

¹⁵ Society of Chief Librarians, Wales <http://www.goscl.com/scl-wales/>