



Ms C. Chapman AM,
Communities, Quality and Local Government Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CARDIFF.
CF99 1NA

My Ref : ce/sm/ChapmanC

Date : 8th April, 2014.

Dear Ms Chapman,

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN WALES

You asked for clarification on 3 points in your letter dated 26th March 2014:-

Equality Impact Assessment

I can confirm that Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council has undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment in respect of its plan to reconfigure library services across the county borough.

In line with the General Equality Duty outlined in s149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Impact Assessment:-

- Assessed specific differential impacts that have been identified for each of the protected characteristics.
- Identified where actions can be considered to minimise or remove any potential negative impacts relating to the proposals.
- Provided opportunities, where appropriate, to advance equality and good relations between different groups.

In addition, feedback received from the public consultation process that took place between 4th November 2013 and 2nd December 2013 was considered. Responses received from the announcement of the proposed service changes on 14th October 2013, before the consultation period officially started, were also included in the analysis of results.



Consequently, the Council is confident that due regard has been paid to the council's duty as specified in the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Impact Assessment and Report on the Consultation can be accessed through the following link:-

<http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/en/councildemocracy/democracy/democracyelections/councillorcommittees/meetings/cabinet/2013/12/16/cabinet16-dec-2013.aspx>

Consultation with Representatives of Vulnerable Users

The Council was committed to undertaking a transparent and comprehensive consultation process. Accordingly, every effort was made to ensure that individuals and groups were provided with ample opportunity to contribute to the consultation using their preferred medium and form, of communication.

Consultation papers were distributed to the following centres and stakeholders:-

- Primary Schools and childcare providers – a number of copies were provided to each primary school for reception areas. Head teachers were sent a letter requesting that they place copies on their Moodle sites and use parent mail and text services to provide parents with the information
- Secondary schools
- Day centres
- Libraries
- Leisure centres
- Communities First Offices
- Main receptions of Council buildings
- One4All Centres
- Councillors to deliver in the communities they serve

In addition letters were delivered to each housebound library service user.

The consultation was promoted to the press via press releases and the coverage included the South Wales Echo, Western Mail, Rhondda Leader, Cynon Valley Leader and Pontypridd Observer. There was also coverage on BBC Wales, TV and radio as well as ITV news and GTFM.

Welsh copies were made available, as well as the option for other formats on request. Requests were made for copies of the booklets in Polish and Lithuanian and these were supplied.



An online webpage was created along with the option of an online survey. A web logo box was placed on the front of the website for ease of access.

A link to the online page was placed on social media. Twitter was used to advertise it.

A dedicated telephone number was set up in the Council's Contact Centre to deal with any queries and to distribute materials as necessary. A dedicated email address and free post address were also provided.

Adults with literacy issues were directed to a library or a One4All Centre where support to complete the form was available.

Consequently, we are confident that any groups or individuals who wished to contribute their views on the proposals were given every opportunity to do so and provided with the support they required to take part in the process.

Links Between Education Services and Public Libraries

In Rhondda Cynon Taf, Libraries are part of the Community Learning Service which also includes Adult Education, Family Learning, Bridges into Work ESF programme and our Welsh Language Unit. These services are managed by the Head of Community Learning who is accountable to the Service Director for Schools and Community. Therefore, there is a strong link between libraries and the Council's directly delivered education services with classes and educational activities being delivered at library venues that have suitable facilities for learners. Our partners in the Adult Community Learning partnership also deliver some of their programmes at libraries that have suitable facilities.

It should be noted however, that not all libraries have facilities that are suitable for delivery of classes, especially if they are accredited courses. Of the 14 libraries that will close, 10 do not have facilities that would support the delivery of effective adult education classes, for example, a suitable room set apart from the main library or sufficient computers to meet the requirements of a training provider. Indeed, only 6 classes will require relocation as a result of the planned closures.

The link between the library service and schools remains unaffected by the closure of static library points, as our Schools Library Service has Service Level Agreements with primary schools across the county borough, supplying a comprehensive service in support of the curriculum.



It is important to realise that library services and facilities are much wider than library buildings and we are currently reconfiguring our library service to ensure that even though some of our static sites are closing, customers will still be able to access our services by other means and at other venues across the county borough. Children's 'libraries' and associated activities will be transferred to our integrated children's centres. Partnership working between Family Learning, Language and Play and other children's services will ensure that children and families in most need will be able to access books and take part in wider library initiatives, including story-telling sessions.

Similarly, relocation of computers to day centres will ensure that older and more vulnerable adults will be able to take part in learning activities and order their books for pick-up and drop-off at the day centre they attend.

An enhanced mobile service, including evening and weekend provision, will ensure that all individuals that want to access books for leisure or personal development will be able to do so.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council has considered, in detail, the likely effects of library closures on individuals and communities and has made every effort to mitigate any adverse consequences on the most vulnerable residents. We believe that the current changes being introduced, will ensure that the library service is more sustainable and resilient and better able to meet the needs of customers in a rapidly changing environment.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Merritt
Chief Executive