

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee CELG(4)-13-14 Paper 9

Thank you for your letter dated 26 March 2014 in relation to the Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales.

In response to the questions posed in this letter, please find our responses below:

1. *Has your local authority undertaken equality impact assessments when considering the potential closure of libraries in your area, and if so, please can you provide details;*

The authority has undertaken two equality impact assessments for both the cessation of the mobile library service as well as the reduction in opening hours for the branch libraries.

The equality impact assessment relating to the cessation of the mobile library service highlighted the following:

- The changes would be relevant to the following groups: age, disability, poverty/social exclusion, Welsh language and carers
- Four of these groups (age, disability, Welsh Language and carers) could be negatively affected by the proposed changes
- Two main age groups would be affected by the changes (over 50s and school age children) as they formed the majority of the customer base
- Consultation was undertaken with the public, alongside other proposed changes to service areas. 58% of the respondents agreed with the proposal.

The EIA further highlighted that work had already been undertaken to mitigate the effects on protected groups. This work included the extension of the Homelinks service (for those who are unable to access normal services points due to a physical or other impairment) to include carers. Revision of the Homelinks timetable also allowed us to extend the number of calls we were able to make and further improve the service to customers.

Where impact was considered on the following:

- Foster good relationships between different groups
- Elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Reduction of social exclusion and poverty

The equality impact assessment highlighted the following:

- Service reduction will inevitably have negative impacts
- The wider service at the four static service points will remain at a level over and above the stipulated level for library services contained within the Welsh Public Library Standards
- Opening hours would be protected at the busier static service points able to reach a wider audience

- The static service points were in a better position to be able to have a positive impact on the points above
- Welsh language provision would be maintained and extended where appropriate at remaining static service points
- There were no perceived impacts on community cohesion

It was also highlighted that monitoring arrangements would remain in place to monitor the effects of the changes, these include:

- Welsh Public Library Standards reports
- Corporate and National PIs
- Monitoring of Visitor Figures
- Monitoring of Issue Figures
- Completion of survey over scheduled timeframes
- Customer comments/complaints

The Equality Impact Assessment for the Reduction in Opening Hours highlighted the following:

- The changes would be relevant to the following groups: age, disability, poverty/social exclusion, welsh language and carers
- Four of these groups (age, disability, Welsh Language and carers) could be negatively affected by the proposed changes
- Consultation was undertaken with the public, alongside other proposed changes to service areas. 58% of the respondents agreed with the proposal

No particular actions were highlighted that would mitigate the adverse impact.

Where impact was considered on the following:

- Foster good relationships between different groups
- Elimination of discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- Reduction of social exclusion and poverty

The equality impact assessment highlighted the following:

- Service reduction will inevitably have negative impacts
- The service at the four static service points will remain at a level over and above the stipulated level for library services contained within the Welsh Public Library Standards
- Opening hours would be protected at the busier static service points able to reach a wider audience

The levels of card use were evaluated and the decisions on when and where to make changes based on the levels of visitors and usage.

There were no perceived impacts on community cohesion and there were no perceived barriers against the provision of Welsh Language materials and use thereof.

It was also highlighted that monitoring arrangements would remain in place to monitor the effects of the changes, these include:

- Welsh Public Library Standards reports
- Corporate and National PIs
- Monitoring of Visitor Figures
- Monitoring of Issue Figures
- Completion of survey over scheduled timeframes
- Customer comments/complaints

The local authority undertook extensive consultation with the public via a corporate process which was available on line and in hard copy and relevant officers also took part in events across the borough open to the public to discuss the proposals and make their views known. No specific groups were targeted during this consultation process.

Merthyr Tydfil Public Libraries work closely with the Education Department where we are able, especially in relation to supporting reading schemes through available appropriate stock. We have good working relationships with local schools and have been involved in a number of initiatives. Like many areas however there is room for improvement and there are more links that could be made. We are constantly working to promote the services we have that support education and to deliver new and innovative ways of engaging with children through schools to encourage independent reading for pleasure. We have a very good relationships with the local Basic Skills Co-ordinator who is a very good advocate for libraries within our local schools.

We recognise that there is more work to do and with shrinking budgets and reduced staffing we are aware that there are challenges ahead to both maintain our current position and to improve on where we currently are. While having gone through a difficult time in relation to budgets and cuts that have had to be made, as a service we are confident we can build on partnerships to maximise the impact the service can and will have on the residents of and visitors to the county borough of Merthyr Tydfil.

