



Ar gyfer gweithwyr llyfrgell  
a gwybodaeth **For library and  
information professionals**

## WRITTEN RESPONSE

### Responding to the Senedd's Local Authority Library and Leisure Services inquiry

27 March 2023

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 CILIP is the Chartered Institute for people working in knowledge, information management and libraries. We have operated under Royal Charter since 1898 with a remit that includes professional certification, training and development and advocacy.
- 1.2 CILIP Cymru Wales (CCW) represents CILIP in Wales. The elected CCW committee and CILIP staff advocate on behalf of the profession in Wales and support the professional development of CILIP members in Wales.
- 1.3 CILIP Cymru Wales represents a community of over 400 information professionals – people working in knowledge, information, data and libraries across the public, health, education, and private sectors.
- 1.4 Our members support information skills, access to trusted content, ethical practice and evidence-based decision making, with an increasing remit for supporting the data needs of the communities and organisations they serve.
- 1.5 We are pleased to have this opportunity to respond to this inquiry into local authority leisure and library services led by the Local Government and Housing Committee. Our response is submitted on behalf of the librarian and information professional workforce in Wales.
- 1.6 We would be glad to provide any further information or context in support of this submission.

#### 2 Key Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Welsh Government and local authorities in Wales capitalise on effective national networks such as the National Library of Wales and the Society of Chief Librarians, and provide capacity for them to contribute more fully and strategically to Welsh life.
- 2.2 That the Welsh Public Library Standards be used more effectively to measure, develop and promote public libraries in Wales via better dissemination and professional discussion.

- 2.3 That the Welsh Public Library Standards be used more effectively to measure the impact of budgetary cuts to services and to instigate meaningful feedback to local authorities addressing this impact.
- 2.4 That local authorities in Wales review their library organisational structures and roles in the context of the new definitions of ‘professional’ and professionalism’ and use the opportunity to develop their ‘Employer Deal’.
- 2.5 That local authorities in Wales consider commissioning a project like that recently undertaken in Ireland where the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) worked with CILIP to devise a skills audit of all 1,500 public library staff across the country.

## Summary response

### 3 Statutory Context

- 3.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 created a statutory duty for local authorities in England and Wales “to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons.” (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1964/75/section/7>)
- 3.2 This Act rightly makes librarians proud of their sector and offers wider library stakeholders (from local and national government, professional bodies like CILIP, allied organisations like schools and local health services, ‘friends of library’ groups and users in general) a solid base from which to defend library services from cuts and diminishing standards of service.
- 3.3 The Act and its guarantee to provide library services across Wales offers the Welsh Government a network of consistent service delivery at the heart of local authorities. As one of the most trusted professions, this library network is able to directly fulfil the Programme for Government. Public libraries develop literacy and digital skills, they nourish the Welsh language via collections and activities, they challenge loneliness, they work with health care professionals to deliver quality information, they assist users with council services, and they have been providing free warm spaces since 1964 – and before!
- 3.4 CILIP Cymru Wales has been able to highlight the potential that local library services offer in our responses to the Digital Strategy for Wales and the LGBTQ+ Action Plan – both of which were cross sectoral library and information responses that public libraries are at the centre of ([https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=927821](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=927821) and [https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=965906](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=965906)).
- 3.5 CILIP’s current ARWAP funded project is working with public libraries in Wales to develop anti-racist library collection training. This is a project that demonstrates the power of librarianship and professional collection development training to deliver government policy in the heart of our communities: [https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=1017109](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=1017109)
- 3.6 Between the National Library of Wales and the Society of Chief Librarians in Wales we have a national infrastructure that can deliver ambitious locally consumed services strategically and efficiently, as the national digital offer in Wales illustrates.

- 3.7 CILIP and CILIP Cymru Wales hope that the Culture Strategy for Wales will recognise and capitalise on these networks and provide capacity for them to contribute more fully and strategically to Welsh life.

#### **4 Service Delivery**

- 4.1 CILIP Cymru Wales is aware that local authorities across Wales deliver statutory library services in different ways. We believe that the key to understanding, developing and maintaining “comprehensive and efficient library services” is to promote and measure professional standards whether library services are traditionally delivered, partnered with other services, or community run.
- 4.2 Anecdotally, however, we have seen that alternative models are no cheaper to run or can attain the quality of local authority delivered services. The model only works in affluent areas where staffing levels remain stable and volunteers are plentiful. The greatest need for excellent public library services might arguably not be in these authorities.
- 4.3 In Wales, the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) put us in a strong position to promote and measure professional standards and CILIP believes that the WPLS should be seen as a route to ensure service delivery, professionalism and equity of service.
- 4.4 CILIP believes that WPLS can be used more effectively to measure, develop and promote public libraries in Wales. We would like to see more stakeholder conversations being instigated around the standards and a development and open sharing of the resulting data as this forms essential evidence for decision making and sector development more widely. We believe that with its WPLS and strong national infrastructure – which includes CILIP as the professional body – Wales has the opportunity to lead in the UK.

#### **5 Capacity**

- 5.1 CILIP is aware that the commitment that the 1964 Act requires of local government, the National Library, the Society of Chief Librarians, and of CILIP itself, to help develop excellent local authority library services in Wales is hampered by capacity. While resourcing is always difficult, we are facing a lack of qualified and experienced library staff who have the remit and time to work on local service infrastructure.
- 5.2 We know that the Welsh Government and Culture Division have funded and instigated important projects that will impact public library provision but these are rarely well disseminated, discussed and fed back on because the staffing of the division is so stretched.
- 5.3 CILIP also knows that the National Library of Wales has an ever increasing public remit without a commensurate increase in budget and staffing. We would like to see an acknowledgement of the important sectoral development influence the National Library has.
- 5.4 The Society of Chief Librarians forms an incredibly important part of the public library service in Wales but as the directors of service are pulled in different local authority directions it is difficult to disseminate this work appropriately and effectively. CILIP would like SCL's role in collaborating on the delivery of public library services to be acknowledged.

- 5.5 In addition, many local authority library services are at full stretch just to keep branches open. Anecdotally we know that organising rotas is becoming very difficult and one staff illness can mean lunch breaks can't be covered without closing. This is just to keep the doors open and means that any additional activity (children's activities, display creation, ordering, bibliographical work or stock development) becomes increasingly difficult.
- 5.6 Crucially, this also means that frontline staff who need training (for dealing with difficult situations, or in new software, for example) are struggling to find the time. When they do undertake training this is often online at the same time as dealing with a queue of people so staff are unable to network, share practice or fully engage in training. Several members of our Anti-Racist Library Collections Project Steering Group have been unable to attend training for these reasons.
- 5.7 CILIP is concerned that cuts to local authority library services across the whole of the country are happening piecemeal budget by budget, without supportive data and without a meaningful plan to expand when budgets are healthier. See our open letter on cuts to Cardiff Libraries posts:  
[https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group\\_content\\_view.asp?group=200145&id=1022207](https://www.cilip.org.uk/members/group_content_view.asp?group=200145&id=1022207)
- 5.8 CILIP would like to see the WPLS being used effectively to measure the impact of budgetary cuts – on staffing, book budgets, opening hours, and usage – and to instigate meaningful feedback to local authorities on this impact.
- 5.9 CILIP would also like to welcome conversations and feedback on how we as the professional body for librarians can work with the sector in Wales to support public libraries.

## **6 Professionalism**

- 6.1 Routes into the library profession vary. CILIP's 2020 definition of "profession," "professional," and "professionalism" (after a consultation led by the British Library's Liz Jolly) accommodates the many and varied ways people enter the library and information profession and does not prescribe particular pathways. The definitions do, however, recognise that to be professional, librarians "need to evidence they have acquired a body of professional knowledge and are applying it in reflective practice. Whilst the definition is not prescriptive in how they do this, qualifications, membership of a professional association and Professional Registration, are excellent and advised ways of demonstrating this."  
<https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/CILIPProfessionalismDefinition>
- 6.2 The WPLS indicate a worrying decrease in professional librarians working in public libraries which may indicate a broader move towards more generic customer services staffing. There doesn't appear to be any research into the impact on services of losing information and literacy specific skills, a shift which is being resisted in evidence-based sectors such as the NHS library and information services in Wales and England.
- 6.3 The above trend in public libraries may in part be due to the different delivery of library services, via hub models, for example, but also perhaps highlights a decrease in local authority interest in and promotion of the library as a professional place of work.
- 6.4 The second Workforce Mapping survey report on the library and archives profession is due for release imminently and it indicates a strong professional commitment and stable sector

but public library employers have work to do to persuade staff that their professional development and career opportunities are important to the organisation. The full report should be available here shortly: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/Workforcemapping>

- 6.5 CILIP would like to recommend that local authorities in Wales review their library organisational structures and roles in the context of the new 'professional' definitions and use the opportunity to develop their 'Employer Deal'.

## **7 Best Practices**

- 7.1 It is important that the sector in Wales learns and benefits from best practice across the world. CILIP and other organisations can help local authorities discover more about initiatives like Sweden's open source staff platform Digiteket: <https://digiteket.se/>
- 7.2 Excellent research into and recommendations for public libraries have been made in the UK in the last decade so we don't need to invent the wheel to ensure the sustainability of our services. The Public Library Skills Strategy 2017-2030 has 9 recommendations that are still relevant today: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/PublicLibrarySkillsStrategy>
- 7.3 CILIP has been working on a number of the above recommendations with Arts Council England funding in its Future Skills Programme which can be adapted and translated for a Welsh audience if appropriate: <https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/RD#futureskills>
- 7.4 CILIP would like to recommend that local authorities in Wales consider commissioning a project like that recently undertaken in Ireland where the LGMA worked with CILIP to devise a skills audit of all 1,500 public library staff across the country. From this audit, it was able to determine the key skills gaps and to put in place a prioritised live, online training programme for the country's librarians. The LGMA will be working with CILIP again in 2023 to reassess the staff's skills.