PL 07
National Assembly for Wales
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Inquiry into: Public Libraries
Response from: Flintshire County Council

Undertaken by The National Assembly for Wales' Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. Views invited on the following:

1. The extent to which progress has been 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.

1.1 Welsh government has made good progress towards achieving these commitments.
1.2 Digital Inclusion . 280 libraries in Wales offer free access to IT facilities. Flintshire Libraries made IT facilities available for 197795 hrs in 2012-13. Take-up was 30%. WIFI will be available in 5 Flintshire libraries by the end of 2013-14. 10,049 people were assisted by Flintshire library staff to take their first step online in 2012-13.
1.3 Culture and Heritage. Library visits in Wales remain high, with increasing numbers of virtual visits. Library visits increased by 11% in the ten year period 2002-3/2011-12. This compares favourably with the decrease of 5.1 % in UK over the same period. In Flintshire the number of physical visits has decreased by 6% but the virtual visits have increased by 39%, reflecting the expanding virtual offer from the library service. Membership has increased annually for the past 3 years, despite the closure of 3 libraries and one mobile library.

2010-11	55180
2011-12	58709
2012-13	63051

1.4 Capital funding. Over the past 10 years 89 libraries in Wales have been remodelled as a result of Community Learning Libraries programme funding. In Flintshire 2 libraries have been remodelled with funding from 3 separate grants since 2008.

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

2.1 Libraries can make a major contribution to meeting the challenges faced by local authorities in promoting learning, literacy, health and wellbeing, opportunities to increase employment and in tackling poverty. Current policies promote collaboration and partnerships. Libraries are situated within communities and trusted, friendly, informed staff can provide answers and

signpost residents to other services and organisations within the community to assist with employment, health, learning and leisure.

2.2 Within Flintshire the library service works in partnership with Job Centre Plus, Communities First, Communities 2.0 and the colleges to provide help with job searching, IT skills, basic skills and Job Clubs.

2.3 In Flintshire early years developmental activities and literacy initiatives are regularly provided as part of the core library offer (Rhymetime, Bookstart, Summer Reading Challenge, storytimes and school visits) and library staff have input into other programmes such as Chatterbox, Twf, Mentrau Iaith and Family Learning.

2.4 The following organisations have a regular presence in libraries throughout Flintshire as part of community outreach programmes: police, registrar service, MP and AM surgeries, CAIS mentoring.

2.5 The cost of providing the library service in Flintshire was £14.46 per resident in 2012-13 (0.6% of total authority revenue expenditure).

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

3.1 Welsh government and local authorities are well-prepared to mitigate, as far as possible, the impact of expenditure cuts on library services. The impact of public sector cuts on library services has been a matter for discussion between CyMAL and the Society of Chief Librarians (Wales) for the last 3 years. 'Libraries Inspire: the strategic development framework for Welsh libraries 2012-16' includes a recommendation for sustainable models of service delivery. Much has already been achieved during this and preceding frameworks, to enable library services to continue to impact positively on the leisure, wellbeing, health, employment, and educational aspects of people's lives with ever decreasing resources. Collaborative arrangements are already in place for shared purchasing of books and other library resources, online resources, staff training, inter library loans, library service marketing and promotion and an all-Wales core offer of entitlements to library services.

3.2 A project for the procurement of an all Wales Library Management System was established in 2011 with the 6 North Wales library authorities and Powys Library Service taking the lead. This is currently at procurement stage with Welsh Government National Procurement Service.

3.3 In Flintshire, there have been reviews of the network of static libraries, the mobile Library service and the service to housebound people since 2010. The resulting closures, alternate delivery models and reviews were implemented after an Equality Impact Assessment and the residents of the county have continued to have access to all services.

3.4 Future projects in Flintshire which seek to implement cuts in expenditure on library services but enable the council to fulfil the requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act.1964, include the introduction of an integrated council information service within the library at Connahs Quay.

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

4.1 As detailed above at 3.1 CyMAL have led on implementing and in some cases, funding, collaborative arrangements for all public library authorities to procure resources, train staff, deliver online services and promote library services. This has enabled individual authorities to benefit from economies of scale.

4.2 Many library services and resources are now available online free to all users from any location 24/7. Use of social media has brought awareness of the range of library services available to more people within communities. The resulting increase in virtual users has been achieved at no extra cost to the authority.

4.3 CyMAL funded a report investigating alternative costed models of service delivery, which was commissioned by HOLIS (heads of library services in North Wales). ('Alternate structures for public library services in North Wales' by Robert Froud. 2013) This report was discussed by the North Wales Education and Related Services Programme Board and by CCLOW. Some recommendations will be taken forward.

4.4 In Flintshire options were investigated for alternative models of service provision and a funding agreement was agreed with Halkyn Community Council to enable a library service to be provided to the community, managed by the county council but funded by the community council. The resulting service level agreement has been in place for 3 years to date. This model could be implemented in other communities if the funding could be obtained.

4.5 As detailed above, a joint library and council information service will be opened in June 2014 in the existing library at Connahs Quay.

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

5.1 On 3rd December the Minister for Culture and Sport included in his statement regarding the Welsh Government Review of Public Libraries, the following:

We need libraries more than ever to provide opportunities for learning, free access to digital services and places where the whole community can meet in safe public spaces. Knowledge is power and libraries are a tremendous resource for people empowering them and making a real difference to their lives.

The library service in Wales is a free service for all sectors of the community and as such contributes to government and corporate objectives to tackle poverty, enable learning support and digital inclusion, promote literacy through reading for pleasure, contribute to health and wellbeing via initiatives such as Book Prescription Wales bibliotherapy scheme; and assist with the rollout of universal benefits and online job searching.

5.2 The Society of Chief Librarians(Wales) have published the following reports describing the impact of public libraries on people's lives and these detail the importance of the role of libraries in communities in Wales:

a) The Importance of Reading 2011

b) Through Libraries to Learning: the role of public library services across North Wales in children and young people's attainment, participation and engagement. 2011

c) Public Libraries in Wales: Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits. 2012

d) The first Incomplete Field Guide to Wellbeing in Libraries. 2012

e) Public Libraries – Reducing Child Poverty in Wales. 2013.

5.3 Flintshire Library Service is currently one of 6 authorities taking part in a pilot project 'Every child a member'. This project is jointly supported by the Minister for Culture and Sport and the Minister for Education and Skills and led by CyMAL, and the aim is to enable every child in Wales to join their local library.

5.4 Library User Surveys are carried out as part of the requirement for Welsh Public Library Standards. Flintshire Library Service carried out a survey of adults in April 2013 and of children in October 2013.

5.4.1 <u>Adults</u> 2349/3000 adult surveys were completed, a response rate of 78%. Analysis was carried out by APSE. Overall performance of all libraries was rated good or excellent by 92% of respondents. Overall performance of all libraries was rated average, good or excellent by 98% of respondents.

In the above survey a total of 89% of respondents rated the performance of providing a range of books across all libraries as excellent (51%) good (34%) and average (4%)

Respondents were asked to tick boxes for issues that using the library had helped them with.

The subjects with the highest responses were: study/learning, health and wellbeing and getting online.

5.4.2 <u>Children</u>. As part of the preparation work for the fifth framework of library standards LISU invited Flintshire Library service to carry out a pilot children's survey over a short period. The resulting small sample provided the following results, illustrating the impact of libraries on children's lives:

96% thought that using the library helped them to get better at reading.

85% thought that using the library helped them to do better at school.

95% thought that using the library helped them to learn and find things out

98% thought the library an enjoyable and safe place to visit

69% said that using the library had made a difference to their life