



yn cefnogi pobl ddall ac
â golwg rhannol
supporting blind and
partially sighted people

RNIB Cymru

Cwrt Jones
Stryd Womanby
Caerdydd CF10 1BR

Jones Court
Womanby Street
Cardiff CF10 1BR
029 2045 0440

rnib.org.uk

facebook.com/rnibcymru
twitter.com/rnibcymru

PL 12

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Public Libraries

Response from: Royal National Institute of Blind People

Committee Clerk

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

CF99 1NA

16 January 2014

Dear Sir/ Madam

RNIB Cymru are the largest sight loss organisation in Wales. We provide a range of services and support to blind and partially sighted people, as well as campaigning for improvements in eye health and sight loss services.

There are currently nearly 100,000 people in Wales living with sight loss, and the number of people with sight loss is expected to double in the next 25 years. The impact of sight loss can be devastating, and losing the ability to read the written word is one of the factors that can leave blind and partially sighted people feeling isolated and alone. We believe blind and partially sighted people should have the same access to books and information as sighted people, and so we welcome this opportunity to respond to the committee's inquiry into public libraries.

When considering the role of public libraries and the delivery of local authority library services, we would ask the committee to consider the following points:

Royal National Institute of Blind People

Noddwr Ei Mawrhydi Y Frenhines • **Llywydd** Y Fonesig Gail Ronson DBE

Patron Her Majesty The Queen • **President** Dame Gail Ronson DBE

Cadeirydd/Chairman Tony Rucinski **Cyfarwyddwraig/Director** Ceri Jackson

Rhif elusen gof./Reg charity no. 226227 • Yn gorfforedig gan Siartr Frenhinol/Incorporated by Royal Charter • Cofrestrwyd yn Lloegr rhif/Registered in England no. RC000500

Prif gyfeiriad/Principal address: 105–121 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE

1. The physical accessibility of libraries to blind and partially sighted people

Many blind and partially sighted people find it difficult to travel independently, relying on public transport or taxis for the journeys they have to make. Where local libraries are under threat, the impact of longer and more difficult journeys for people to reach their next nearest library must be taken into account.

The design of the built environment of a library should also be considered, particularly as part of any refurbishment or development programme. Use of colour and lighting, for example, can make a significant difference to whether a blind or partially sighted person can navigate their way around a building.

2. Libraries as a community venue

Public libraries are about more than books. Many are hubs for their local communities, where people can access a range of information, attend training, use computers etc. When these services are provided in a way that is accessible to blind and partially sighted people, they can help to reduce isolation and social exclusion. We observed this through our Get Connected project, for example, when we used local libraries as venues to run sessions aimed at helping blind and partially sighted people to get online and use digital technology. As part of the project we then produced a guide for libraries and other community organisations, with advice and guidance on how they could adapt their own digital inclusion services to make them accessible to blind and partially sighted people. A copy of the guide is available to download at <http://bit.ly/1apjLnN>.

3. Access to reading

Blind and partially sighted people face a dramatically limited choice of book titles. Only seven per cent of books are available in large print, unabridged audio and braille, including titles available in these formats as eBooks. Availability in the Welsh language is even lower. RNIB's Talking Books service, therefore, is a lifeline for many people, offering access to over 20,000 audio books. Historically many local authorities have funded Talking Book subscriptions for blind and partially sighted people but in many areas this support is now under threat. As the committee considers how local authorities can mitigate the impact of public sector cuts on library services we would urge you to consider the impact of withdrawing access to Talking Books,

which for some blind and partially sighted people is the closest thing to 'traditional' library services that is accessible to them.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry. If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best wishes

Alexandra McMillan
Senior Manager (Policy, Communications, Research and Membership)
RNIB Cymru, Jones Court, Womanby Street, Cardiff, CF10 1BR
02920 828560/ alexandra.mcmillan@rnib.org.uk