PL 29

National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Public Libraries

Response from: Save Pennard Library Action Group

INQUIRY INTO PUBLIC LIBRARIES

1. The extent to which progress has been made by the Welsh Government towards achieving its programme commitments relating to libraries, how sustainable any progress is in the present climate.

    The Welsh Governments aim in "One Wales" is to widen participation in the full range of artistic, cultural, sporting and recreational services and activities. People's background, their level of income or where they live should not be a barrier to access and participation in high quality cultural experiences. This includes access to good library services. The Welsh Government states there is a need to ensure that putting culture on a statutory footing does not create a minimum standard which could have the unwanted impact of lowering provision in some areas rather than securing improvement.   The Welsh Government has provided means of upgrading many libraries which is to be applauded . However it has not ensured that the monies have been utilised by the libraries in most need but has been left to the local authorities to upgrade those that are most politically pertinent to them.

    Many local authorities are arbitrary closing branch libraries without seemingly any involvement with the Welsh Goverment. The outcome being some areas are receiving less and poorer services than others, particularly rural areas.

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

    The Library and Museums Act 1964 places a statutory duty and legislative competence on local authorities to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. This is enforced by the National Assembly for Wales(Legislative Competency) Order 2010 however it does not see

    Fourth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards to ensure core standards and to ensure that Welsh Public Library Authorities carry out their statutory responsibilities. Although those authorities are monitored and audited there seems to be no enforcement to ensure the standards are met. The process does not seem to have the power required which reduces its credibility.

3. How well prepared the WG and LA's are to mitigate impact of public sector cuts on library services?-

    There is a need for all parties to have a positive attitude to finding a solution not just making arbitrary cuts in services.

The success of any mitigation scheme depends upon the willingness to think laterally and to find alternative models that are pertinent and relative to the location and community in which that library is located.

Public funding/ budgets and hence cuts are based upon political priorities unless there is a statutory obligation to provide a service and a standard to which that service is provided.

4. Options for improving financial sustainability of library services-

a. Wider use of all library buildings, incorporation of other services to attract greater footfall.

b. Incorporation of income producing functions or services into the library premises, cafe franchises, branch post offices etc.

c. Incorporation of branch libraries into other buildings

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

Libraries have expanded their services beyond the realm of books, music and DVDs to cover the provision of IT, training, provision of welfare services. Libraries are now multi-function buildings and organisations.

Branch libraries especially those in rural areas have an important community role, often being at the hub of their communities, and a life line for the more disadvantaged.. They provide a focal point and a meeting point for the more vulnerable residents of an area. They provide services for all ages, preschool story groups, school activities, school holiday story times, to adult book clubs, silver surfing groups etc.

Rural and Community Libraries provide access for all: easy access for the elderly and disabled, independent access for young persons, cheap access for poorer residents with the prohibitive cost of public transport. They also provide internet access for those who cannot afford a computer and access for rural residents with poor broadband services.