



SPECIAL CABINET – 16TH JANUARY 2025

SUBJECT: TO REPORT ON THE FIRST PHASE CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT STRATEGIC VISION FOR LIBRARY SERVICES AND AGREE NEXT STEPS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the outcome of the first phase consultation on the 'Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028'. The report also provides the views of the Joint Scrutiny meeting of the 6th November 2024 that considered the draft vision.
- 1.2 To inform Cabinet of consequential changes to the original proposals and the reasons for them.
- 1.3 To seek Cabinet's approval to commence a second phase consultation to understand, in more detail, the implications of potentially closing any community libraries, and developing Community Hubs, as part of the review into the future provision of the service under the Mobilising Team Caerphilly programme.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 There is currently significant pressure on public finances across the UK. Central Government, Local Government, Health and other sectors are all facing challenges where the costs of delivering services have accelerated far beyond the level of funding available to the sector.
- 2.2 The impact of these challenges upon Caerphilly County Borough Council have seen the Council facing the need to make £65m of savings during the period 2024/25 through to 2026/27 essentially just to stand still. Having identified a range of permanent savings as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process

totalling circa £20m, the remaining balance of £45m must be found over the next two years.

- 2.3 In July 2023, the Council launched its Transformation Portfolio known as Mobilising Team Caerphilly (MTC). The portfolio consists of two component programmes: Service Transformation and Place Shaping. The Service Transformation Programme is primarily charged with delivering the necessary change across the Council to meet the £45m savings requirement.
- 2.4 Service Transformation includes several workstreams with a key focus on Customer Journey, Collaboration and Partnerships, People and Ways of Working and Unavoidable Change. There are currently 15 projects currently 'in flight' which are focused on contributing towards the financial target and transforming services.
- 2.5 Each Project is being developed using Agile Programme Management methods while, the portfolio as a whole, is supported by a Portfolio Management Office (PMO). The PMO is responsible for developing and ensuring adherence to agreed governance arrangements and decision making, as well as driving and tracking benefits realisation.
- 2.6 Portfolio governance arrangements are built upon the Welsh Government endorsed HM Treasury Green Book business case guidance and five case model (cases for Strategic, Economic, Commercial, Financial and Management). On this basis, each of the 15 projects will be underpinned by business cases that covers these aspects.
- 2.7 This report focuses on the outcome of the MTC Portfolio Review of the Council's Library Services. The review has been operational since March 2024 looking at options for the future of the Library Services, as well as the outcomes of the pilot Community Hub model at Rhymney Library.
- 2.8 Cabinet agreed to consult on the 'Draft Library Services Strategic Vision for 2024-2028' for a period of six weeks from the 22nd of October. The outcome of that consultation is summarised within the report and provided in full in the form of a Consultation Report at Appendix 3.
- 2.9 Cabinet are asked to note the outcome of the first phase consultation and the views of Joint Scrutiny and, should they be minded, agree to launch a further public consultation to examine, in more detail, the implications for the potential closure of community libraries as the review into the service develops. The further public consultation will also focus on the services that may be provided at the proposed Hub libraries, following the success of the model at Rhymney Library.
- 2.10 The report provides more detail on the development of a Community Outreach Service to mitigate against potential closures. It also provides further information on the proposed development of Hubs and categorises them into

Tier 1 and Tier 2 Hubs. The data that supports the review (Appendix 2) has been updated and will be kept under development as the review progresses. Draft Integrated Impact Assessments for individual locations, that may be subject to closure, have been included and are provided to Cabinet to inform future decisions, these too will be updated as further data and engagement output becomes available.

- 2.11 Finally, following the first phase consultation, the recommendation is that two locations housing the libraries at Newbridge and New Tredegar in the Newbridge Memorial Hall and the White Rose Resource Centre, respectively, will remain as libraries, with the library at New Tredegar to be reviewed again in three years' time. This is due to the Council's position as 'anchor tenant' and the risk to wider delivery at both locations should the Council withdraw its financial support. In addition, the community consultation, particularly in these locations but not exclusively, highlighted a strength of feeling, across all age groups, that closure of the libraries would be significantly detrimental to the communities nearby. Combining the Councils' position as anchor tenant, and the views of the communities, suggests that a different approach is needed in these locations.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Cabinet:

- 1) Note the outcome of the first phase consultation on the draft Strategic Vision for the Library Service 2024-2028 and the development of the review.
- 2) Agree to proceed with a second phase consultation that will focus on the proposed development of the Community Hubs which will house library services, and the potential closure of some library locations. This seven-week consultation will begin on the 22nd of January.
- 3) Agree that Newbridge Library, located in the Memorial Hall, will remain as a library and be developed as a Tier 2 Hub, along with Ystrad Mynach Library.
- 4) Agree the New Tredegar Library, located in the White Rose Centre, will remain open, to be reviewed after three years, and that work will begin with the Management Committee to model the library service to be delivered over that period.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The first phase consultation on the 'Draft Library Services Strategic Vision for Library Services 2024-2028' has provided insight on the views of communities as the Council seeks to provide a more sustainable and resilient library service through a hub model at town centre locations across the county borough.
- 4.2 The Council is facing an unprecedented financial challenge with £45million of

savings to be found over the next 2 years. This review seeks to help achieve some of those savings by:

- Rationalising the library estate
- Supporting the development of town centre Community Hubs
- Providing a new Community Outreach Service
- Providing the opportunity for Community Asset Transfer of buildings that may no longer be part of Council run library delivery in the future, subject to a community benefits business case.

4.3 The potential enhancements for the Library Service as part of Community Hubs are:

- An end to lunchtime closing
- No single staffing*
- Greater capacity to develop services at fewer locations
- An opportunity to access more Council services in one location
- An opportunity to provide digital assistance to access Council services
- Supporting anchor buildings in town centres
- Cementing contribution to town centre footfall and regeneration
- Working collaboratively with the community, voluntary and private sectors to deliver services from hubs

*** See discussion on the future of New Tredegar Library**

4.4 The second phase consultation will look in more depth at the development of the hub model in town centres and how potential closures may impact communities. The consultation will be more geographically focussed and will look at what alternatives may be possible through a different delivery model in various locations, supported by a new Community Outreach Service.

4.5 Following the seven-week period, and consideration of views and further data, a firm proposal for the delivery of the service will be developed, supported by the final strategy, the draft strategy will be updated to reflect both phases of consultation. This will be presented to a Joint Scrutiny meeting later in spring 2025.

5. THE REPORT

5.1 The Cabinet report of the 16th of October, and the Joint Scrutiny meeting of the 6th of November, discussed the information provided on the size and scope of the current service. The first phase consultation concluded on the 3rd of December. This report takes the review forward and considers the direction of travel including the intention for a geographically focussed community consultation on the development of hubs and the possible implications of library closures for communities. The review will be iterated as more engagement data and service data is developed. The intention is that a final report for decision will be considered by Joint Scrutiny and Cabinet in the late

Spring 2025.

To allow for further consideration and debate on the review, this report is sectioned by theme.

5.2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL

The data and engagement outputs that have supported this review are being kept up to date. Appendix 2 has iterated since the previous reports to Joint Scrutiny and Cabinet, and the first phase consultation results are now known. Further Integrated Impact Assessments have been drafted, available at section 7 of this report.

Data has shown that two locations should no longer be considered for closure, at Newbridge and New Tredegar. For both locations the Council acts as an anchor tenant in a third sector building and removal of the rent/lease amount provided annually would potentially render all of the third sector delivery from that building unaffordable and therefore unsustainable, presenting more of a risk to those communities than the loss of a library alone. The community consultation in these locations highlighted a strength of feeling, across all age groups, that closure of the libraries would be significantly detrimental to the communities nearby.

In addition, Newbridge is considered a small town centre and to meet the regeneration aims of the Council it is not proposed that any cut to provision will be made at this time. Newbridge Library will be considered alongside Ystrad Mynach library as a Tier 2 Community Hub. Services at both locations will be enhanced by providing more Council and partner services at the location. However, due to the size of the buildings and the slightly shorter opening hours the provision will be developed differently to the Tier 1 Community Hubs at Rhymney, Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly and Risca. Further information will be provided in future reports and the locally based consultation will focus on the services to be provided at these locations, in conjunction with partners in the public and community/third sectors.

New Tredegar's White Rose Centre would be disproportionately negatively affected by the Council's immediate withdrawal from the building and hence the proposal is to continue to pay a rental income for a period of three years and to conduct a further review within this period. To support the financial sustainability of the venue, the proposal is to move the library provision to a smaller footprint in the building, thereby freeing up the larger space for commercial income generating use by the management committee to assist with the future financial sustainability of the venue. The library is currently single-staffed. There are five full time staff employed by the venue and discussions will be had with the management committee about what community and volunteer support can be given to the library service at the venue to minimise the impacts of single-staffing. Remembering that one of the aims of this review was to end single-staffing.

The model to be consulted on in phase two would therefore be:

TIER 1 HUBS

Rhymney
Bargoed
Caerphilly
Blackwood
Risca

TIER 2 HUBS

Ystrad Mynach
Newbridge

TO BE REVIEWED WITHIN 3 YEARS

New Tredegar

LIBRARIES THAT MAY BE SUBJECT TO CLOSURE

Aberbargoed
Abercarn
Abertridwr
Bedwas
Deri
Llanbradach
Machen
Nelson
Oakdale
Pengam

5.3 DATA AND BENCHMARKING WITH OTHER SERVICES

The Library Service Strategic Assessment at Appendix 2 is being kept up to date as the review develops

All Wales Outturn data for the 2023/2024 financial year has confirmed that the Council spends more per head on its Library Services than any other Welsh Council, ranking second in overall expenditure behind Cardiff. This must be caveated with the fact that not all budgets are structured the same but is indicative of one of the reasons why the Mobilising Team Caerphilly review of the library service needs to focus on its future sustainability.

Recently libraries have had to close some sessions. We know that our staffing capacity is spread over comparatively more locations than Councils with similar demographics. The service tries to limit these occurrences as much as possible but managing staff absences to maintain advertised opening hours remains difficult.

Draft Integrated Impact Assessments have been developed for each library location, including Newbridge and New Tredegar, and these are drawing out community related data to inform future decisions.

The review will need to consider the best options to maintain and support a sustainable and resilient Library Service and so data to inform decision-making will become increasingly important in later stages.

A high-level analysis of the 2023/2024 data comparison between delivery at the proposed Hub locations and the libraries that are currently under review for the last full financial year, confirms that the proposed Tier 1 Community Hubs and Tier 2 Community Hub Locations are delivering a larger proportion of the library services currently on offer.

Average	Tier 1 Hubs	% of total	Tier 2 Hubs	% of total	Potential Closures	% of total
Footfall	63,959	58	33,006	30	13,179	12
Issues	42,640	59	22,861	31	8,091	10
Total Lending Stock	41,588	66	13,165	21	7,927	13
Registered Users	7,838	60	4,156	32	953	8
Active Users	3,617	66	1,467	27	423	7
PC Usage Hours	3,629	68	1,275	24	458	8
Opening Hours	40.7	44	32	34	21	22
Staffing Hours (FTE)	5.3	68	1.9	25	0.62	7

FTE= Full Time Equivalent

5.4 WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS

The Welsh Government evaluation on attainment of the Welsh Public Library Standards for the 2023/2024 financial year has recently been received. The Executive Summary contains the following paragraph:

Caerphilly Library Service is performing well in many areas. Staff are clearly proud of the service they offer and have taken great time and care to provide detailed information in the WPLS return. Partnership working is a strength of the library service as staff collaborate with a wide range of partner organisations to support customers, and in particular to ensure libraries are inclusive for those who may have particular needs. The 15% reduction in the acquisitions budget (and consequently per capita acquisitions) this year is a concern. It is, of course, essential that the library service has an adequate budget to allow it to offer current and high-quality stock. It is positive that the staffing situation is now more stable, although the anticipated return to fixed term posts in the medium term is obviously a concern. The high number of single-staffed service points clearly continues to limit the

ability of staff to provide in-depth support for customers and, in this context, the level of informal support reported is impressive

The effect of this review on the attainment of the Welsh Public Library Standards is being monitored and the likely impact was reported in the Cabinet Report of the 16th of October.

The Executive Summary for the last financial year, again, highlights that single staffing at some sites is a cause for concern. Recent appointments to the service have been made on a fixed term basis, while this review is underway, to minimise the effect on longstanding staff of any potential staff reductions. The hope is that permanent contracts would be the mainstay of a reduced Library Service going forward.

Central service budgets will remain under pressure as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and it is acknowledged that one of the benefits of the review will allow management capacity and central support budgets to be focused on fewer locations.

The fact that the service collaborates with a range of partners to support customers from locations in an inclusive way is one that is integral too and will be nurtured under the proposed Hub model.

5.5 DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY HUBS

The development of the pilot hub at Rhymney Library followed an extensive community and partner consultation on the most beneficial services to be delivered from the Hub. We intend to take a similar approach in extending the hub model to the locations identified and, as part of the phase two consultation, will be replicating this engagement work in each proposed hub location, for both Tier 1 and Tier 2 hubs.

Each of the communities is different with different needs. Each of the buildings is different and has more, or less, capacity to offer up spaces for partner use and for the use of other Council services to meet clients out in the community. This work is being delivered through the simultaneous Contact Management Review that is also one of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly projects. Our experience shows that our town centre locations will be more likely to attract external funding for reconfiguration or redevelopment of the spaces in the proposed hubs, as happened in developing the Rhymney Hub.

Previous reports have given information on the successes at Rhymney, which will not be repeated here, but the focus is very much on replicating those benefits in other hubs.

As part of the seven-week engagement period, focused consultation will occur with partners, protected characteristic groups and current and potential hub users and what they would like to see at each Hub. The consultation will identify the service needs in the area that complement the wider Contact

Management Review.

By basing more Council services at Tier 1 Hub locations, we aim to enable lunchtime opening without any increase in the overall staffing budget at the location. Currently all libraries are closed over the lunchtime period and full opening hours is one of the key proposed benefits. Further examination is needed in respect of what opening hours might be deliverable at the Tier 2 Hubs. However, the opening hours will be no less than they are currently for both Newbridge and Ystrad Mynach.

At this stage, a single Draft Integrated Impact Assessment has been developed to guide the hub model engagement. Individual impact assessments will follow for each Hub in later reporting.

5.6 FUTURE OF THE LIBRARY ESTATE

The model recognises that some of the 10 libraries that are not proposed to be Hubs may cease to be run by the Council as library locations. The first phase consultation asked initial views on this; reporting to Members, and the draft strategy has begun the discussion on what may happen to these buildings. Not all the buildings are Council-owned and where a leased building is no longer required there will need to be a negotiation with the landlord on surrendering the lease.

Where the buildings are owned by the Council they could be declared as surplus to requirements and will enter a disposal process to be managed by Property Services. Another Mobilising Team Caerphilly project that is looking at the Council's function as a Corporate Landlord will pick up on this work, if needed and after final decision. Part of that review will support options for Community Asset Transfer where there is a suitable case to be made for the building. The Community Asset Transfer model is currently being trialled for other buildings that have been declared surplus to requirements by the Council. It will be used to support this review and the disposal of buildings that are no longer required for Library Services.

A number of community groups have contacted the Council showing an interest in taking over some of the buildings. At this stage, early-stage discussions would be welcomed with established community groups who may have an interest in the identified sites. However, it is important to stress that no decisions have been made and a formal 'Expression of Interest' and application process would need to follow a final decision on this review. We would expect a programme for Community Asset Transfer; marketing, application and Expression of Interest, to begin sometime during the Summer of 2025. Not all sites will be suitable for transfer and alternative disposal options may need to be considered for some of them.

5.7 LOCATIONS AND TRAVELLING DISTANCES

The report to Cabinet on the 16th of October highlighted the difficulties of calculating the travel distance elements of the Welsh Public Library Standards and we continue to improve the mapping that is supporting this in the Library Service Strategic Assessment (Appendix 2), further maps have been added.

The Council's Local Land and Property Gazetteer Team have been in touch with Welsh Government counterparts to seek advice and we believe that the methods we are using to make the calculations are best practice. The criteria are based on population density:

20 or more persons per hectare	95% of households should be within 2 miles road distance of a static service point
≥1 but ≤ 20 persons per hectare	75% of households should be within 2.5 miles road distance, or 10 mins public transport travelling time, of a static service point
≤ 1 person per hectare	70% of households should be within 3 miles road distance or, 15 mins public transport travelling time of a static service point

Library authorities look at a range of ways of getting as close to the calculation as possible. Population density varies across the county borough. The population density for each mapped ward has been clipped to settlements, the brown lines on the maps, as these are the most densely populated areas and the blue areas around them show the overlapping travel distances and times to each of the proposed hub libraries. Areas outside of these settlements will have a more dispersed population.

Public transport travel time is very difficult to calculate by mapping. To counteract this the Library Service Strategic Assessment and the Integrated Impact Assessments show travel times to the nearest proposed Hub as displayed by Google maps.

It is important to note that the travelling distances in the Welsh Public Library Standards are not statutory or mandatory. The standards recognise that alternative measures can be taken to ensure that communities have reasonable access to library services, alternative measure can include home delivery and outreach services provided in non-library spaces.

5.8 PROPOSALS FOR A COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICE

The draft vision suggests that it would be beneficial to develop a new Community Outreach Service to mitigate against the effects of potential retractions from communities if libraries close. Appendix 4 to this report gives more information on what this service would entail.

For the awareness of Cabinet, the new service would include several elements:

- The **Community Collection** of rotating book stock at key locations across the county borough, potentially in the buildings of third sector and other partners.
- The **Order & Collect** service will continue but will also be available at outreach locations as well as in Community Hub Libraries.
- A **Reservation +** service using an on-line form linked to the on-line catalogue, that would allow residents to receive and return books at outreach locations or Hub Libraries
- **Community Librarian Visits** to outreach locations
- Continuation of the **LibraryLink** service delivering to vulnerable residents unable to visit a library or outreach location (subject to eligibility criteria)
- Greater promotion of the **eDigital** offer of books, magazines, audiobooks and newspapers
- Promotion of the new **Enterprise App**. The new Library Management System is application based and will allow users greater functionality on their accounts including searching and reserving titles.
- Review of the **Schools Engagement** offer, promoting and offering library services to children.
- Continue to support the 26 **Library and Community Reading Groups** offering multiple copies to support the 'book club' approach

The new service offer could be met within existing resources, and it would provide, effectively, an access service that is not dependent on library buildings.

5.9 INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

There are a number of models of non-Council run library services that are recognised in the Welsh Public Library Standards. The preferred model that this review is considering are Independent Community Libraries. Independent Community Libraries are run by the community and voluntary sector.

They may have been set up after the Community Asset Transfer of former library buildings or may be set up in alternative buildings already owned or managed by the community and voluntary sector.

At this stage the Council will be open to approaches to consider how this may happen from Summer 2025 onwards, understanding that no final decision has yet been taken. The Council would be willing to consider the transfer of library stock, shelving etc. to a constituted community group. The Council will support the volunteer capacity through advice and guidance at set up. The Welsh Public Library Standards do give Council's guidance on training and supporting volunteers.

The proposed model would allow for self-determination by independent

libraries with a 'light touch' of council volunteer support. Independent Community Libraries would be free to access external grant funding that may not be available to the Council. Independent libraries could become an outreach location for the Council's Community Collection, described above.

5.10 SUPPORT TO ACCESS DIGITAL SERVICES

Access to digital services has been a recurring theme through community and member engagement thus far. Community Hubs will be more able to support residents to access digital services. Accessing wider Council services as more of them become digital by default will be an important part of the Contact Management Review. Community Hubs offer more scope to provide digital assistance. To illustrate, staff working at the Rhymney Hub in the Caerphilly Cares and Adult Education teams have the skills and ability to support digital confidence and remove barriers to digital exclusion.

Digital literacy courses teach learners the essential skills to carry out day to day tasks online. Courses run at community locations across the county borough.

Access to public town centre Wi-Fi has been installed at Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly, Newbridge, Risca, Rhymney and Ystrad Mynach. Publicly accessible Wi-Fi is in place across many community buildings in the county borough.

5.11 Conclusion

The review seeks approval to begin a phase two consultation to continue to gather the views of communities on the proposed model for the future of the Library Service as part of a Community Hub Model. This builds on the successes of the Rhymney Hub previously reported to Scrutiny and Cabinet and suggests that the review continues to focus on developing hubs as set out.

The phase two consultation will also seek to understand, at a geographical level, the implications for communities that may be affected by library closures and will establish what reasonable mitigation could be put in place. This will include the proposed Community Outreach Service to include community access locations. The views of staff will continue to be important as the review moves to its next phase.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 It is assumed that the proposed Hub Model, should it prove acceptable, will create a more sustainable Library Model for Caerphilly.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 This report proposes a second phase community consultation on the future of Library Services taking a more geographical approach to the development of the proposed Community Hubs; and seeking to understand further what the implications may be for particular communities of the potential closure/disposal of library buildings.

The timeline is such that further data and engagement will feed into a final decision-making process in the late Spring 2025. To help inform that decision and also to inform communities of the data around the libraries, draft Integrated Impact Assessments have been developed for each library location, aside from the Tier 1 and Tier 2 Hubs. These will be updated as the review develops.

A single consolidated draft Integrated Impact Assessment has been developed for the Hubs following the model that has proved successful at Rhymney Library. Individual hub impact assessments will follow the second phase community consultation on the types and range of services that may be possible from each of the hubs.

The original Integrated Impact Assessment to support the ongoing community consultation has been updated.

Summary:

Moving to the Hub Libraries model would result in residents being able to access more services from Hub Libraries, as more Council services will be available from these venues, along with those from partner organisations. Each of the Hub Libraries will be in a town centre location, which will be more accessible via public transport. The model will also mean that the Hub Libraries will be open for much longer hours than the smaller libraries are currently, with increased provision during evenings and weekends, as well as lunchtime opening. The Hub Libraries model also builds on recent experiences at the Rhymney Hub Library, which has been in operation since January 2024, and the intention is to build on the learning as other Hub Libraries are created. The proposed model also includes the possible expansion of the Library Link Service (subject to eligibility), to support housebound and vulnerable individuals, and a new Community Outreach Service as a mitigation to the effect of potential closures in particular communities.

Links to all Library Related Integrated Impact Assessments

[English - Click Here for Link to All Library Related Integrated Impact Assessments](#)

Cymraeg – Click Here for Link to All Library Related Integrated Impact Assessments

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 This is an interim-stage report that is being consulted on with a view to developing a final strategy for the future of the library service. The intention is that the final strategy will be adopted late Spring 2025, and that any possible savings will be determined at that point through the development of a full business case and an associated timeline for delivery from Summer 2025. A review of the fees and charges for renting spaces in libraries will be part of the final business case with suggestions for increases.

At this stage, and pending any final decision, the total potential annual saving from the closure of the identified ten libraries has been calculated as circa £477K. This amount includes property related costs and assumes a decision in the Spring and delivery from Summer 2025. It assumes that savings will be fully delivered over the next three financial years. It also assumes one-off costs related to exiting buildings and providing a new staffing structure of £230K.

For a more detailed breakdown of the potential saving per library building please see Appendix 5.

	MTFP Saving 2025/2026	MTFP Saving 2026/2027	MTFP Saving 2027/2028	TOTAL	One-off Costs
10 Libraries	£119,450	£278,232	£79,810	£477,492	£229,896

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Meetings have been held with the Library staff and the Trade Unions and they will continue to be kept updated. Staff will also have the opportunity to engage in the consultation process.

9.2 As stated, feedback from the consultation exercise will help shape recommendations within a further report for Cabinet's consideration. Any changes that impact on staff will be managed in accordance with relevant HR policies and in consultation with staff and Trade Unions as appropriate.

10. CONSULTATIONS

10.1 The consultees listed below have been consulted on this report and its appendices. All responses have been encompassed within the body of the

report. This report seeks approval to undertake a second phase, geographically focussed, consultation on the development of services at the proposed Community Hubs, and to understand the implications of potential closures for individual communities. The results of this second phase consultation will inform a final report for decision in late Spring 2025.

- 10.2 The first phase public consultation began on the 22nd of October and ended on the 3rd of December. The consultation comprised a survey – online and in hard copy, a survey for completion by young people, a range of face-to-face engagement opportunities and targeted engagement with various stakeholder groups. The Consultation Report that provides the outcome of this public engagement is provided at Appendix 3. The outcomes are summarised below.

For a fully accessible version of the report please see:

ENGLISH

[Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024–2028 | The Caerphilly Conversation](#)

WELSH

[Gweledigaeth Strategol Ddrafft y Gwasanaeth Llyfrgelloedd 2024–2028 | Trafodaeth Caerffili](#)

- 10.3 Through the first phase consultation, residents were asked to have their say on the 4 key objectives within the draft strategic vision document:

- Improve and develop the library services availability and offer
- Help residents to access information, advice and support in a 'hub' location.
- Put community needs at the heart of our town centre hubs, to support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting
- Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resources and improve the overall offer

- 10.4 1,110 completed surveys were received by the closing date. In addition, 506 completed young people's surveys were received and a total of 383 people attended a face-to-face engagement session to give their views. A number of letters, pictures and artwork by young people from across the county borough were also received as methods of offering views through the consultation. These are available to view at <http://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk>

- 10.5 The first phase consultation feedback on the draft strategic vision for libraries is summarised:

- Through the main survey, respondents indicated their main mode of transport (58%) to libraries was on foot with 35% using private transport and 5% using public transport
- 96% of respondents are current Caerphilly Library Service users
- The top three reasons given for visiting their local library was to borrow, return or renew library books/audiobooks, to ask library staff for help and

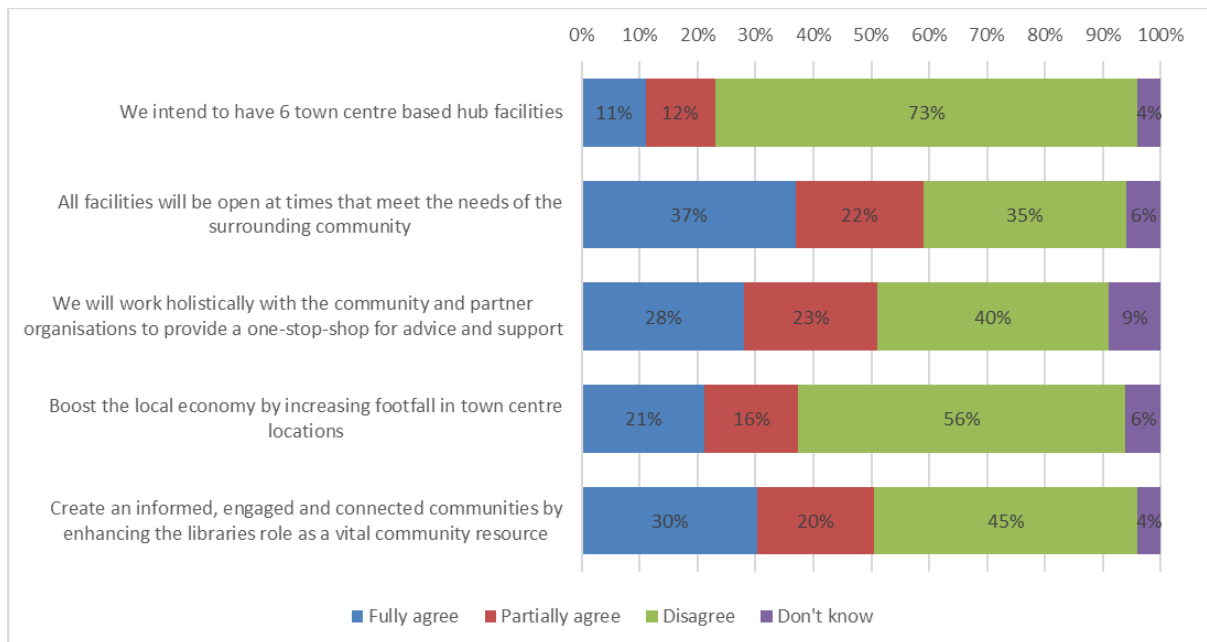
advice, and to attend library organised activities/events/groups. Accessing the children’s library offer was the fourth most frequently given reason.

10.6 View on the draft strategic vision ‘to deliver a welcoming and sustainable Library Service by integrating into a Hub model, to provide all residents with the opportunity to access library resources and other support, in town centre locations across the borough’:

- 66% of respondents disagreed with the overall vision statement. 29% either fully or partially agreed and 5% did not know.
- 67% of respondents indicated that they would experience barriers to accessing services at one of the proposed town centre hub locations.
- The main reasons given for disagreeing with the vision statement included not being able to access a hub library, the cost associated with travel/public transport reliability, the importance of having a localised service (particularly for children and older people) and that access to public services within local libraries would be lost.

10.7 Views on Objective 1 ‘Improve and develop the library services availability and offer’:

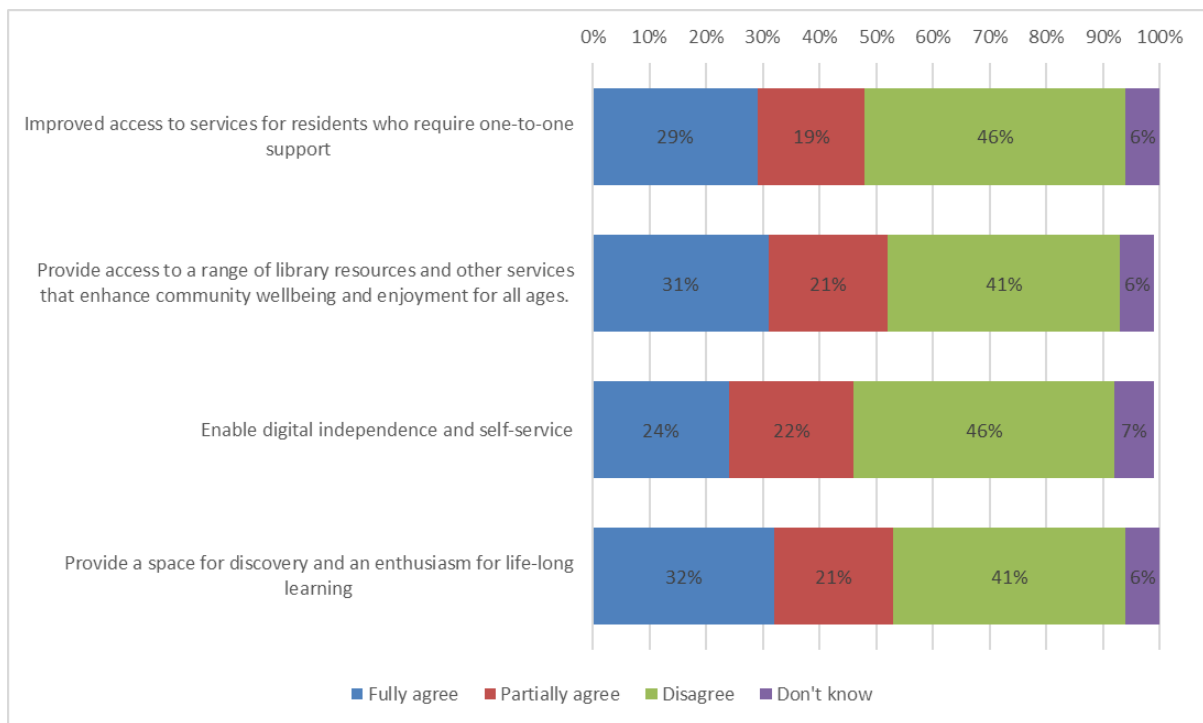
- Overall, 55% of respondents disagreed with Objective 1, 41% fully or partially agreed and 3% indicated that they don’t know.
- Five outcomes were identified under Objective 1 within the draft strategic vision. The below graph summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes. The fully accessible analysis of views can be found in the full consultation report at Appendix 3.



10.8 Views on Objective 2 ‘Help residents to access information, advice and support

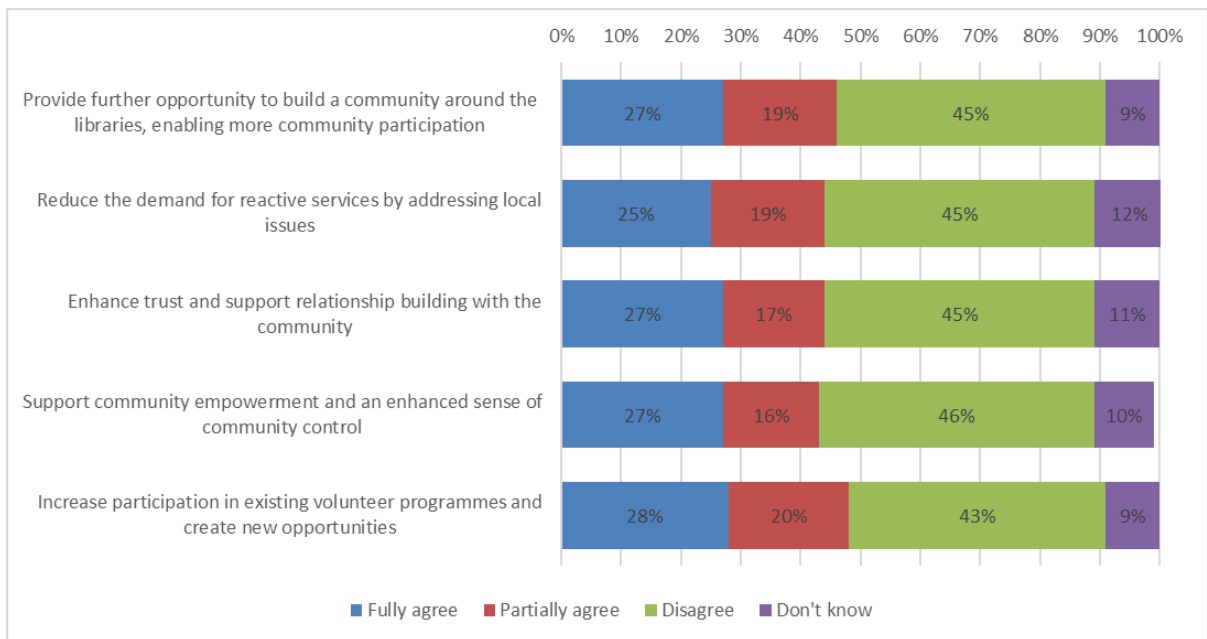
in a hub location’:

- Overall, 55% of respondents either partially (26%) or fully (29%) agreed with this objective, with 40% disagreeing. The remainder didn't know.
- Four outcomes were identified under Objective 2 within the draft strategic vision. The below graph summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes. The fully accessible analysis of views can be found in the full consultation report at Appendix 3.



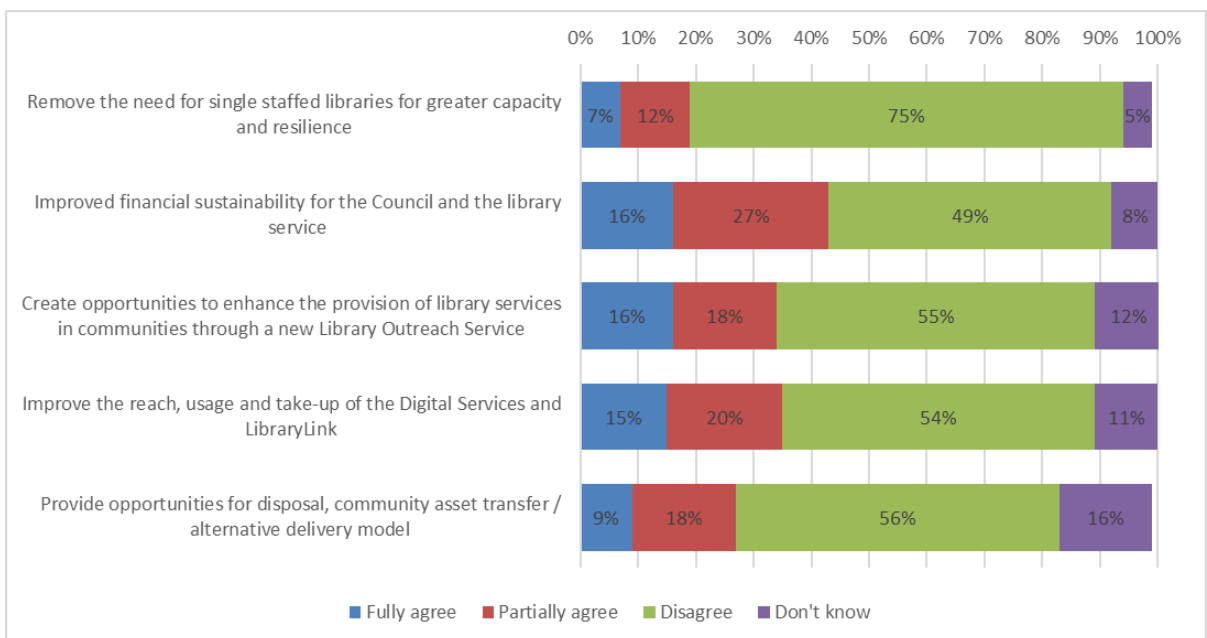
10.9 Views on Objective 3 ‘Put community needs at the heart of town centre hubs, support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting’:

- 50% of respondents disagreed with Objective 3, with 44% either fully or partially agreeing. The remainder indicated they did not know.
- Five outcomes were identified under Objective 3 within the draft strategic vision. The below graph summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes. The fully accessible analysis of views can be found in the full consultation report at Appendix 3.



10.10 Views on Objective 4 ‘Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resource and improve overall offer’:

- 71% disagreed with the objective, with 25% indicating that they fully agree or partially agree (25%) and 4% saying they don't know.
- Five outcomes were identified under Objective 4 within the draft strategic vision. The below graph summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes. The fully accessible analysis of views can be found in the full consultation report at Appendix 3.



10.11 While this covering report offers an overview of some of the key themes identified primarily through the surveys, it is important to highlight the consistency in response through engagement with young people, through

face-to-face engagement at the various drop-in sessions and through targeted stakeholder engagement.

The full consultation report and associated annexes offer a full breakdown of comments received and will be available from the 9th of January 2025 at:

<http://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk>

10.12 The “Draft Strategic Vision for Library Services” was also considered by the Joint Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 6th of November 2024.

One Member suggested that all Members be invited to a site visit at Rhymney Hub to gain a better understanding of the services offered. The Member suggested that Members focus on the opportunity the report provides as the current model is not meeting the needs of communities. In response the Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping offered an open invitation so that Members could visit Rhymney Hub at their own convenience.

A Member asked about the support available for digital exclusion. The Caerphilly Cares Manager outlined the support and digital assistance the Hubs would provide to those lacking confidence or without access to online services. Volunteers would also provide digital support so that more people were able to access services online.

One Member enquired about the number of people who had borrowed books over the last year, and wished to know how the Hub locations were chosen. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review advised that for 2023/24 the physical stock issues were 366,684 which was a reduction on issues before 2020 when libraries closed due to the pandemic. On the second point the officer advised that the six town centres identified for Hubs provided better options around such issues as parking and public transport. The Chair enquired about the Impact Assessment for towns not chosen as a Hub location. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review advised that this was the first phase of the consultation and that later in the process wider geographic Impact Assessments would be conducted.

On the hub model at Rhymney library a Member wished to know more about the range of services available. Members heard from the Caerphilly Cares Manager about CCBC services at the Hub such as Housing and Employment Support, and the officer also highlighted the service provided by partner organisations such as Gwent Police, Lloyds Bank and the ABUHB. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping also advised that the number of library books issued, and general footfall had also increased at the Hub.

One Member asked how the Council could further promote these services. The Caerphilly Cares Manager advised that now the pilot was successful promotional work was being developed with colleagues from the

Communications Department.

A Member asked if Community Outreach Services would include a mobile library service for those who could not get the Hubs. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review advised that the mobile library service ceased a number of years ago, but part of the review was considering the scope of the Community Outreach Service. So, in the future books could be delivered to specific community locations for collection by residents unable to travel to one of the town centres. The Member then enquired how the hub model would benefit the town centres. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review advised that compared with data for 2020, footfall had increased by 15,000 at the library hub. These people would have passed local businesses on their way to the hub which would have had a positive impact on trade. The Caerphilly Cares Manager also highlighted the number of staff based at the hub who would also be using local businesses.

One Member wished to know if there were any examples of community-run libraries in other regions and if so, had the projects been successful. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review confirmed that there were examples and outlined some of the alternative delivery models recognised by the Welsh Government Public Library Standards and provided examples of specific libraries.

A Member sought the total costs for running library services and wished to also know the estimated costs if community groups ran the twelve libraries not selected for Hubs. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping confirmed that the total costs for libraries was £2.9M per annum. The officer also outlined that current projections were showing savings of circa £700,000 per annum for the twelve libraries if the decision on the vision was agreed.

One Member asked about the impact the Hubs would have on other Community Centres. The Caerphilly Cares Manager advised that the voluntary sector and community organisations were included throughout the development stages of the Rhymney Hub. Members heard how the Hub complimented rather than replaced existing community provision and that the consultative process in Rhymney would be replicated in other town centres if the vision under discussion was accepted.

A Member requested examples of budget reductions for the Library Service. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping advised that in 2016/17 the cost of running libraries was £2.7M and that this had now risen to £2.9M per annum but this needed to take into account increases in running costs and staff salaries over that time. The officer also outlined cuts to the Book Fund that have been made over recent years and she highlighted that 11 of the 18 library sites were now single-staffed and that opening hours had been reduced. Members heard how CCBC was spending more on libraries per capita than anywhere else in Wales. The Member also enquired if the new hubs would be in repurposed buildings. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme

Director for Place-shaping advised that opportunities existed in existing buildings at the majority of sites, but challenges still existed at other proposed sites. If the vision were approved CCBC would be seeking Transformation Grants from the Welsh Government to address some of these challenges.

One Member commented on the challenges at Blackwood Library in terms of accessibility for those with disabilities. He also praised Rhymney Hub and the staff who worked at the site.

A Member enquired about the time period if a community group attempted to take on the running of a library as an asset transfer. The Project Manager for the Library Services Review advised that not all buildings earmarked for closure are owned by CCBC and that some are covered by lease agreements. The officer advised that disposal options were still under review but suggested that a properly constituted community group might expect the asset transferred to them after approximately 6 months. However, a newly formed organisation might experience a transfer period of approximately 12 months.

One Member highlighted a model whereby a specific library was run by community volunteers with Council funding and asked if a preferred model of asset transfer had been identified at this stage. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping outlined how the principal aim of the vision was based on no funding from CCBC and stressed that a preferred model for asset transfer would follow the consultation review. The savings of £700,000 were based on no funding from CCBC for the 12 buildings earmarked for closure. The Member enquired if costs such as heating would be the responsibility of volunteers who had taken over running a library and the officer confirmed that this would be the case under a Community Asset Transfer.

A Member asked if the proposed hub locations were identified because of the CCBC Masterplans. The Project Manager for the Library Services confirmed that managers were cognisant of the aims of the Masterplans.

One Member enquired about training requirements to ensure volunteers were able to provide an informed library and information service. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping confirmed that it would and advised that, subject to the final model chosen, the four Community Librarians would be involved in this process.

A Member made a comment about the accessibility of hubs via public transport and suggested that a hotline for resident queries and regular service updates would be useful for residents. Members were advised that the Caerphilly Cares line at the Rhymney Hub was used by residents for this purpose and that a booking system for the hubs would be part of future discussions.

One Member expressed her dislike of the term Hub for the town centre libraries and preferred "One-Stop Shop" instead. During the ensuing

discussions Members agreed that hubs was the best collective description for the services outlined in the report under discussion.

A Member sought clarity on the Pengam Library drop-in centre which was currently closed. The Head of Education Strategy and Planning and Programme Director for Place-shaping expected this centre to be reopened before Christmas and suggested that an alternative local venue would be found for public consultation if it had not reopened before the end of the consultation period.

One Member sought assurances that buildings would be made fit-for-purpose before a Community Asset Transfer took place. The Head of Land and Property Services provided assurances that statutory maintenance took place in these buildings which were open to the public. The Member outlined his view that CCBC should ensure that any building transferred to a community group was decorated and ready to operate. This was noted by the officer.

A Committee raised concerns over public transport and the impact it has on the vision for Library Services in town centres. The Corporate Director for Economy and the Environment updated Members on the challenges faced by the bus industry and highlighted that this was especially the case amongst commercial operators.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964
- Local Government Act 2000
- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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Cllr Jamie Pritchard- Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Prosperity, Regeneration and Climate Change
Cllr Carol Andrews- Cabinet Member for Education and Communities
Dave Street- Interim Chief Executive
Richard (Ed) Edmunds- Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Gareth Jenkins- Interim Corporate Director for Social Services
Mark S Williams- Corporate Director for Economy and Environment
Jo Williams- Assistant Director Adult Services
Stephen Harris- Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer
Sue Richards- Head of Education Strategy and Planning- Programme Director for Place-shaping

Liz Lucas- Head of Customer and Digital Services- Programme Director for Service Transformation
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Lisa Downey- Service Manager Human Resources
Sarena Ford- Communication Manager
Karen Williams- Customer Services Hub Manager
Hayley Lancaster- Engagement Manager
Anwen Cullinane- Senior Policy Officer- Equalities and Welsh Language
Vicki Doyle- Policy Officer (Data and Statistics)

Background Papers:

[Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 16th October, 2024, 1.00 pm](#)

[Agenda for Joint Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday, 6th November, 2024, 5.00 pm](#)

Appendices:

- Appendix 1 Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028 English
- Appendix 1 Draft Library Service Strategic Vision 2024-2028 Welsh
- Appendix 2 Library Service Strategic Assessment (updated)
- Appendix 3 First Phase Consultation Report
- Appendix 4 Proposed Community Outreach Service
- Appendix 5 Financial Breakdown per Library