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National Assembly for Wales

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into: Public Libraries

Response from: Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum

Committee Clerk

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

Cardiff CF99 1NA

6 January 2014

Inquiry into Public Libraries

I am writing on behalf of the Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELF). Its members include the Directors of Information Services and Heads of Library Services from all the Higher Education Institutions in Wales and the Chief Executive and Librarian of the National Library of Wales. WHELF's mission is to promote library and information services co-operation and collaboration, to encourage the exchange of ideas, to provide a forum for mutual support and to help facilitate new initiatives in library and information service provision.

We welcome this opportunity to comment on the inquiry into public libraries. Please see our comments below.

Yours sincerely

Rachael Whitfield
WHELF Development Officer

Email: r.b.whitfield@swansea.ac.uk
Website: <http://whelf.wordpress.com/>

WHELF would like to contribute its views in particular on:

The contemporary and community role of public libraries in Wales

1. In his written statement on Public Libraries in Wales (03/12/13) the Minister for Culture and Sport, John Griffiths states that libraries “*provide a vital community service for people of all ages and are an essential component of a civilised society*” and “*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*”. A recent survey by the Carnegie UK Trust on “Public library services in the 21st century found that “77% of people in Wales said that libraries were very important or essential to their community”¹. Public libraries support education as part of the transition to higher education and lifelong learning. Reciprocal borrowing schemes² between public libraries, further education libraries and higher education libraries support students studying in their local community, enabling many to access opportunities that might otherwise be unavailable. In order to provide these opportunities for learning it is essential that public libraries are staffed by professionally qualified librarians to support education and lifelong learning. Professionally qualified librarians impart knowledge and skills to library users to ensure that the print and digital resources offered by library services are accessible and fully exploited.

2. Many public libraries hold unique local history collections. These collections hold printed works about the locality along with newspapers and periodicals, maps and plans, memoirs, parish records, census returns, trade directories, electoral registers, and oral history. These resources are of major importance and are invaluable to academic and non-academic research into social history, family history and community life. The local history collections held in public libraries are not duplicated in archives and museums and are an essential supplement to the special collections held in higher education libraries and archives. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) states that “*local studies collections, and those engaged with the management and delivery of services associated with them, make a significant contribution to fostering and promoting community identity and cohesion, and improving the quality of people’s lives, by preserving and providing equality of access to our diverse local and national written and pictorial heritage. It is a core element of public library provision and, as such,*

it is fundamental to a thriving economy, democracy, culture and civilisation".³
In housing these local history collections the public library service is the core of the community enabling people from all social and economic backgrounds to benefit from free access to these rich and varied resources.

3. The long term preservation of these collections is consequently a matter of great concern. Therefore, WHELF would like to request that the importance of the local history collections held in the public libraries is noted by the National Assembly for Wales and request an enquiry into the future care and provision of these resources in the light of potential public sector cuts to library services.

References

1. <http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=c3b228db-9db0-48f8-90f5-b9cc5e0c35bb>

2. Reciprocal borrowing schemes include:

North Wales: Linc y Gogledd <http://library.wales.org/index.php?id=7457>

South East Wales: Books 4U <http://librarywales.org/find/find-a-library/local-lending-schemes>

South West and mid Wales Partnership

<http://voicesfromtheswamp.wordpress.com/about/>

3. <http://www.cilip.org.uk/local-studies-group/about/mission-statement>