



# **Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru The National Assembly for Wales**

## **Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol The Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 12 Chwefror 2014  
Wednesday, 12 February 2014**

### **Cynnwys Contents**

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon  
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

Ymchwiliad i Lyfrgelloedd Cyhoeddus yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 1– Cymdeithas  
Llywodraeth Leol Cymru  
Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales: Evidence Session 1–Welsh Local Government  
Association

Ymchwiliad i Lyfrgelloedd Cyhoeddus yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 2—Sefydliad  
Siartredig y Gweithwyr Llyfrgell a Gwybodaeth Proffesiynol  
Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales: Evidence Session 2—Chartered Institute of Library  
and Information Professionals

Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r Cyfarfod  
Motion under Standing Order No. 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the Meeting

Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir  
trawsgriafiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In

addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

**Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol**  
**Committee members in attendance**

Leighton Andrews	Llafur Labour
Peter Black	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Christine Chapman	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Janet Finch-Saunders	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Mark Isherwood	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Gwyn R. Price	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

**Eraill yn bresennol**  
**Others in attendance**

Carol Edwards	Cadeirydd Sefydliad Siartredig y Gweithwyr Llyfrgell a Gwybodaeth Proffesiynol Cymru Chair of Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Wales
Peter Gomer	Cynghorydd Polisi, Hamdden, Diwylliant a Threftadaeth, Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru Policy Adviser, Leisure, Culture, Tourism & Heritage, Welsh Local Government Association
Richard Hughes	Cynghorydd CLILC a Phennaeth dros dro Byw'n Iach, Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr WLGA Adviser & Interim Head of Healthy Living, Bridgend County Borough Council
Dr Chris Llewelyn	Cyfarwyddwr Dysgu Gydol Oes, Hamdden a Gwybodaeth, Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru Director of Lifelong Learning, Leisure & Information, Welsh Local Government Association
Mandy Powell	Swyddog Polisi, Sefydliad Siartredig y Gweithwyr Llyfrgell a Gwybodaeth Proffesiynol Cymru Policy Officer, Institute of Library and Information Professionals Wales
Jane Sellwood	Cymdeithas Prif Lyfrgellwyr Cymru Society of Chief Librarians, Wales

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol**  
**National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Sarah Beasley                      Clerc  
   Clerk  
Leanne Hatcher                    Dirprwy Glerc  
   Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:14.  
The meeting began at 09:14.*

### **Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions**

[1]     **Christine Chapman:** Good morning, and welcome to the National Assembly's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee. We have apologies today from Rhodri Glyn Thomas. I also remind Members that, if they have any mobile phones, they should be switched off, as they affect the transmission.

09:15

### **Ymchwiliad i Lyfrgelloedd Cyhoeddus yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 1– Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales: Evidence Session 1–Welsh Local Government Association**

[2]     **Christine Chapman:** The first item today is the inquiry into public libraries in Wales and this is the committee's first evidence session. I warmly welcome the Welsh Local Government Association. I welcome, first of all, Peter Gomer, who is policy adviser for leisure, culture, tourism and heritage, and also Richard Hughes, WLGA adviser and interim head of healthy living at Bridgend County Borough Council. Welcome to you both.

[3]     You have sent a paper in advance, and Members will have read it carefully. We will go straight into questions on the paper. I want to start off. In the paper you talk about visitor numbers. Could you tell me why you feel that visitor numbers have increased in Wales, and why Wales has bucked the UK trend for decline with libraries?

[4]     **Mr Gomer:** The clear evidence is that the investment has gone in. Certainly when the first standards came in for libraries, just over 10 years ago now, local authorities committed to the standards, and with that commitment came money both from Welsh Government, through CyMAL: Museums Archives Libraries Wales, and from local authorities themselves, recognising what they needed to do. There was a significant impetus. The first libraries that were developed then as a part of that project were showing phenomenal increases in usage—there were better facilities, a better service, more people coming in. That has happened continually, year on year, and even the latest libraries that have just been completed this year are showing significant visit numbers. It is not just the initial, opening numbers that are up. They tend to be static. It is no honeymoon period. It carries on throughout the period, and that is the clear evidence as to why the numbers have held up very strongly in Wales.

[5]     **Christine Chapman:** I know that Jenny Rathbone wants to develop some of this. Jenny, do you want to come in?

[6]     **Jenny Rathbone:** What is your strategy for delivering the Welsh Government's programme for government libraries commitment in the light of reduced budgets?

[7]     **Mr Gomer:** Sorry, I could not hear the first bit.

[8] **Jenny Rathbone:** What is the Welsh Local Government Association's strategy for delivering on the commitment to libraries?

[9] **Mr Gomer:** We are working very closely with CyMAL at the moment. As I said, we have done—

[10] **Jenny Rathbone:** With who?

[11] **Mr Gomer:** CyMAL, sorry. For the last number of years we have been working, not only on the community investment programme, but Libraries Inspire and so forth. Albeit we are entering a very difficult period now with finance, we have obviously been going through that for a number of years, working with CyMAL, and local authorities have worked together, sharing best practice, and we have managed to be able to mitigate a lot of the issues. There has been more efficiency. There has been a sharing of best practice. We are talking to a group like the Wales Council for Voluntary Action now about volunteers, and how we use volunteers in community library settings, and so forth. There has been a lot of work going on, and ongoing on that now. In fact, we have a seminar tomorrow again with the Minister on the sharing of good practice, the sorts of issues raised, ways of delivering—we have three speakers from different authorities—and how they are tackling the issue to ensure that they can continue to deliver a very good library service.

[12] **Jenny Rathbone:** Overall, would you say that all local authorities have that commitment to continue that library service, or are some much better at it than others?

[13] **Mr Gomer:** As in anything, there is, I would not say great commitment, but you can see it across Wales in the standards. I noted in the report which authorities are achieving which standards and the average level of standards, and, as in anything else, local authorities have priorities. Some are possibly achieving more than others, and have done in terms of the standards in the past, but across the commitment, every local authority is committed to delivering the libraries and to working with the standards to move them forward and to develop them. If anything, this period of time now, with a lot of public consultation going on, will give us a more sustainable service into the future.

[14] **Jenny Rathbone:** Can you give me a couple of outstanding examples of both an urban and rural service that you think would be models for the future?

[15] **Mr Hughes:** To come in on what Peter just mentioned there, one of the benefits of the learning communities funding that has gone into libraries is that it is allowed to manifest itself locally, so you do have each local authority using that funding in a very different way to the others, to take into account rurality or urban settlement and so forth. That has been a strength. You could argue on the other hand that it leads to disparity in terms of quality across the whole of Wales, potentially. I do not think that has been the case because the library community tends to work very closely together. It is one of the few services, I think, that is fairly generic in what it does and, therefore, you are able to put a national model in place far more easily than you may be able to do with some other service areas.

[16] I can speak from our experience in Bridgend. We have moved towards what we deem to be a life-centre model of delivery. We look at integrating services as a means of sustaining them and making them more sustainable in future, and particularly in the current financial climate, and it is a tough financial climate in which to operate. It is a statutory service, but perhaps it is still deemed by many to be less statutory than some others because the definition—and we may come to that—is rather loose. However, what we have done is look to incorporate libraries within sports centres and other community centres, co-locating facilities and looking at cross-fertilisation, therefore, of usage. Our evidence to date suggests that that has proved very successful for us. We launched a new library at Bridgend life centre

last week. We moved out of a traditional Carnegie building in the middle of town, not without some opposition, I may add, because it is a big change, however, the evidence suggests that, even in the first couple of months, there have been 3,000 more visits per month to the new facility than would have been the case at the old one. That is the model that we have developed. In rural areas, that may not be as effective and, therefore, you still have to look at enhanced mobile library services and more libraries, but perhaps based on one-stop-shop facilities as opposed to stand-alone libraries, going forward.

[17] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, on the whole, you would say that co-location was the key to maintaining the numbers of people using libraries.

[18] **Mr Hughes:** I think that behaviours have changed and we need to take that into account. The Public Libraries and Museums Act was passed in 1964; it is half a century old and people's mobility and behaviours have changed. You need to look at the retail model. It is never far wrong. Look at the big stores based out of town with plenty of car parking. People need to get there easily and to be able to get away from there easily, and the same goes for library services. People want to access the material. We have self-service facilities now as well, so it is a far easier transaction, and they can do their business in one place. Whether that is having a swim and then taking a book out or whatever, it works for them, particularly for families.

[19] **Christine Chapman:** I have a supplementary question from Leighton Andrews.

[20] **Leighton Andrews:** I do not accept, and I never have accepted, the binary divide between urban and rural because Valleys communities, it seems to me, have elements of both about them. So, there are different challenges in Valleys communities. I wanted to ask about something different though, which is about whether you are seeing the growth of a significant market for digital downloading as a library service. I do not mean in the library; I mean online, from home.

[21] **Mr Hughes:** We are seeing it and I think that that is one area in which we need to invest more—in the eBooks service. The all-Wales eBooks service is a very good service. I use it myself. However, the availability of resources on there compared to the ease of the commercial market, and in particular the Kindle market, is something that we need to keep up with. That may mean that, in future, we may need to consider some capital investment—rather than going into bricks and mortar, we need to be going into digital services. That is how a lot of people, and young people in particular, are accessing resources these days.

[22] **Mr Gomer:** I have some statistics. I can give them separately to the committee—I can send them in. We picked up some issues around the digital library. Last year, one of the issues pan-Wales was the procurement of all Wales newspapers, for example, and subscriptions and colleges. It is not just local libraries, but it is colleges, universities and so forth. On a monthly increase on e-book downloads for the e-books for Wales consortium, there are now almost 9,000 downloads a month, and a total of 21 local authorities are involved in that at the moment. The e-magazine service was launched late in November 2013, so this is fairly new. Almost 4,000 borrowers have already registered with the service and there have been almost 16,000 magazine downloads in January 2014. I think that you can see the changes that are happening by working pan-Wales. The procurement, working with CyMAL, is having a significant impact and the change is now in terms of that market. They are complementary markets. Whenever we refer to anything like Kindle or anything else, the more people who read the more people who read. It grows itself. It is not seen as a competition; it is a matter of how we all deliver in that particular market and meet the needs, which is very important. They do feed off each other.

[23] **Christine Chapman:** If you could send us those statistics, that would be very

helpful, Peter.

[24] **Mr Gomer:** I will do.

[25] **Jocelyn Davies:** Could you give us a breakdown by age? With those statistics, is it broken down by age? You are assuming that it is young people, but—

[26] **Mr Hughes:** I find that there are more young people reading. I am not just making the assumption that more young people use the service. There is a subtle difference in what I am saying there. I think that we can attract more young people to read by increasing digital services.

[27] **Jocelyn Davies:** I see.

[28] **Mr Hughes:** It may not be the case that they are accessing it now. I think that people of all ages are moving towards digital resources.

[29] **Mr Gomer:** Just to answer that, we will try to get the figures broken down as much as possible.

[30] **Christine Chapman:** That would be great. Perhaps I could move on now. I think that Peter Black has a question.

[31] **Peter Black:** Yes; thank you, Chair. As you have already made reference to the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the current Welsh public library standards are statutory guidance issued under that particular Act. So, there is an issue in terms of the relevance of the Act. Clearly, issuing updated guidance does make it more relevant. Do you think that there is actually a case to revisit that Act and maybe introduce new legislation to change the approach to libraries?

[32] **Mr Hughes:** I think that the Act itself needs clearer definition. We have to be careful of creating a de minimis level of service through clearer definition. What I mean by that is that if you suddenly get a minimum standard, you may see that there is a move towards the minimum standard, particularly at a time of financial austerity for public library authorities, as opposed to what the standards have given us, which is an improvement framework rather than a minimum standard framework. So, there is a subtle difference. However, I do think that we need to have a greater understanding and I think that the Welsh Government needs to take the lead in giving us a greater understanding of how it interprets and how we, as a community of public library authorities, interpret that Act regarding an efficient and comprehensive service. In 1964, communities were very different to what they are today. We know that in south Wales in particular, in a lot of our Valleys communities, unfortunately, the population has declined, but we still have libraries for those populations. It is a question of whether they are fit for purpose and suitable. Just because they are there does not mean that it is a comprehensive and efficient service. There is a debate about what is fit for purpose these days, particularly when considering mobility and the digital debate that we have just had.

[33] **Peter Black:** Are all those issues not addressed through the guidance? It is the guidance that sets out that you have to have a library within so many miles of population centres et cetera, rather than the Act itself.

[34] **Mr Hughes:** Yes. I think that the guidance has been particularly helpful in improving public library authorities in Wales—certainly the first four frameworks. Going forward, I think that we need to ensure that we still have that guidance. I think that the 20-minute drive time, or what we have, is useful. However, I think that we also need to move towards more outcome-driven frameworks, as opposed to perhaps the resource-driven frameworks that we

had previously in guiding public library authorities.

09:30

[35] **Mr Gomer:** May I come in there? The standards themselves have never been statutory, per se; they have been voluntarily taken on by local authorities as a way of making sure that we have a way of at least trying to measure where they are going. I think that local authorities embraced the first standards and have moved on from there. They now see the standards and trying to achieve them as part and parcel of daily life in libraries. The standards have evolved. As Richard was saying, in terms of the time period, even in the last 10 years, we have moved on. Obviously, there are financial issues and other issues within society. We are currently working very closely with CyMAL to try to develop standards that are relevant for the next cycle of three years. So, notwithstanding the statutory base of libraries, it is those standards that help to guide our way forward.

[36] Hopefully, when the standards are announced in the next few weeks, local authorities will again embrace them. The new standards will allow more innovation. When the standards started, libraries were very input-driven—it was about, ‘How much money do you spend on this?’, ‘Where is your library based?’, and ‘What do you deliver?’ More and more, it will be about what they contribute to society, what they contribute to the overall education process, social mobility and so forth. So, the guidance is very helpful, at the moment, as is the change in that guidance, because it allows us to move forward into a more modern system, rather than relying, maybe, on the statutory basis, which, as you said, is 50 or 60 years old now.

[37] **Peter Black:** My understanding is that, if the guidance is issued under the 1964 Act, it is statutory guidance, which means that you have to have regard to it. Perhaps we will get a legal note on that, but that is my understanding; it is statutory guidance to which you have to have regard.

[38] **Mr Gomer:** Only on the basis of the recent communication. Obviously, we have a review coming up on library services—

[39] **Peter Black:** What recent communication is that?

[40] **Mr Gomer:** A letter from the Minister to local authorities and so forth. Our understanding is that, obviously, libraries are statutory, but the standards themselves are not statutory—they have put in place and have been agreed by local authorities over the years. So it is worth pursuing—

[41] **Peter Black:** The Minister said that in a letter, did he?

[42] **Mr Gomer:** Well, that is our understanding, as local authorities—

[43] **Christine Chapman:** Do you have a copy of the letter?

[44] **Mr Gomer:** Not with me, no, but our understanding—

[45] **Jocelyn Davies:** *[Inaudible.]*

[46] **Mr Gomer:** No. *[Laughter.]* Our understanding, as WLGA, is that the standards themselves, per se, are not statutory.

[47] **Peter Black:** If they were issued under the 1964 Act, they are statutory guidance.

[48] **Christine Chapman:** We will look into this.

[49] **Peter Black:** The point that I am trying to get to here, and the main question is: do we need a new Act, or can the standards deal with the issues that you are raising?

[50] **Mr Gomer:** In the fullness of time, a change in the Act might be worth while, but at the moment, it is a review of the standards. We are going to the fifth framework; we will have had 15 years then of a real good understanding. The progress that has been made under the standards in that time, albeit in very difficult financial times, is that library services have certainly improved and moved forward. So, it is a case of what any new statutory Act would give us beyond what we have already. You mentioned at the beginning of the session how well Wales has done in comparison. So, it is a difficult one, but we certainly embrace the standards—it is not a case of ignoring them—as guidelines to try to move the service forward.

[51] What we are trying to do with the review and standards over the next couple of months is see where libraries are now, after having had four frameworks, and how that then leads into the next three years and beyond. It may well be that the review comes up with some recommendations.

[52] **Christine Chapman:** I know that Gwyn has a question on this—

[53] **Gwyn R. Price:** Just to follow on from that and move on to the WLGA and the fifth quality framework, as you just pointed out, how much input have you had into presenting that to the Welsh Government?

[54] **Mr Gomer:** We work with CyMAL very closely—they are your libraries people. We have a very close working relationship. We have the Inspire advisory board that looks not just at the standards, but the whole of the strategy behind how libraries are delivered in Wales. It is a very close working relationship; ‘co-operation’ and ‘collaboration’ are words that are thrown around a lot, and there is an expectation on local authorities. However, with libraries, as Richard alluded to earlier, because of their generic nature and the standards, we are able to work pan-Wales, even though there is local delivery and local flavour. Through the standards, and working with CyMAL, we have very good pan-Wales working, and they lead on some of the national issues that we talked about earlier in terms of e-books et cetera, which have very much come from that working together.

[55] **Christine Chapman:** We will move on to another area. I think that Leighton wants to come in on this one.

[56] **Leighton Andrews:** Can you explain what you have to do in your own local authorities in relation to future library provision?

[57] **Mr Gomer:** I will pass this one on to Richard.

[58] **Mr Hughes:** Is that set within the financial context?

[59] **Leighton Andrews:** Yes.

[60] **Mr Hughes:** I will speak on behalf of my authority—every authority will have its own plans, and I would not want to make any assumption on behalf of others. Generally, it is a matter of looking at different models of service. I do not think that there is a real appetite to close libraries or to do anything that is significantly detrimental to the service. I think that it is generally about modernising the service and being as innovative as we can be within the boundaries set for us by the standards and by the Act itself to provide something that is efficient and comprehensive.



[61] I mentioned earlier that what we are doing in Bridgend County Borough Council is looking at innovative ways of working—not just by co-locating, but also working with our leisure service partner. Over the next few years every public library authority will have to explore those options: are there alternative service delivery options to run libraries in the same way that there has been a buoyant market for leisure services? It may not suit every authority—it may not happen—but I think that we have to look at other innovative options for service delivery. We mentioned the volunteer question earlier; I think that there is a danger in putting too much emphasis on the use of volunteers to run libraries. The very essence of libraries and why they are very highly thought of as public services is because of the trained staff, the professionalism and the customer service that you get when you go into a public library. It is an ethos that runs through the service, wherever you go. It will be explored, but I think that there is a danger in thinking that that is the panacea—that we will just have volunteers running services.

[62] **Leighton Andrews:** That raises a separate set of questions; I may come back to it. Is it your impression that every local authority in Wales is going to reduce the number of physical libraries that it holds?

[63] **Mr Gomer:** It varies. It is statistics, statistics. There are 280 libraries in Wales and, at the moment, from our research and from working with CyMAL, we thought initially that this year there might be around 30 libraries that were under consultation for closure. The figure has changed dramatically. Some local authorities—having gone to consultation—have either deferred a decision or decided not to go down a particular route. What is happening more and more—and I understand what Richard says about volunteers—is that there has been a lot more engagement with communities. Communities have come forward and are making enquiries as to what they can do to assist the library to remain open. Different models are being looked at. There is one where you retain a certain level of professional staff within the library environment, but they are supported by volunteers from within the community who are then properly trained. One of the issues for us is working with people like the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, which has experience of working with volunteers, on advice and guidance for them and so forth. That work is beginning, because people are still looking at this.

[64] There was that initial worry that there would be a whole swathe of libraries closing. Some of the confusion may have come as a result of people seeing headlines about library closures—such as with the Carnegie Library in Bridgend—where there has been a transfer, a library has been put into another facility as a life centre. Other authorities have developed libraries with Communities First or local authority offices. It is almost a case of horses for courses in different environments where we have been able to look at best practice. There have been a number of good regeneration projects, where a library has closed but has reappeared in a fantastic new form on another site not that far away.

[65] Our initial feeling was that the headline was that 30 libraries may close, but we do not have a final figure yet. However, that figure is significantly reduced, and is changing almost daily for that public engagement. For all local authorities, the process is very much about impact assessment: if we do this, what impact will it have on our communities, and what will it take away? Libraries are beyond the books area now, and we now have universal credit, Jobcentre Plus and all those other issues. So, local authorities are looking at the question of, if that library closes, how would that service be delivered? So, it is beyond that book lending—it is a much wider picture.

[66] **Christine Chapman:** Just before Leighton comes in, I wanted to ask a supplementary question on volunteers. Do you think that having a group of volunteers could be different in different areas, and would there be a danger in that—that services would suffer?

[67] **Mr Gomer:** Absolutely definitely. With the best will in the world, if you have a library, some people in the community might feel that it is needed, but, when you do a needs analysis, it might not necessarily be in the right place. However, people will really fight tooth and nail, and they want it there, and they will deliver it. With the right training, yes, they might be able to open the door, but without the right support, will they have the right books in place, will they have the right service, will they have access to the internet and so on? The community-managed one is a very, very difficult one.

[68] I mentioned that we have the seminar tomorrow; part of that seminar is being given by someone who has had some experience in an English context of running community libraries. He is from a rural authority, but there are traumas and difficulties. There is obviously a capacity issue as well, because it would rely very much on the citizen taking on a lot of responsibility. There are also other issues, such as whether there are enough people in a community, and it does not matter—coming back to your question—whether it is a rural or an urban community, we need to know whether the capacity is there, with the right people in place, to be able to do that volunteering. It is not just about the front of house sometimes; it is about the caretaking-type role, and different things.

[69] It is an issue that local authorities have to think very, very clearly about and understand, and they also need to give the right advice and guidance to people coming forward and volunteering. I do not think that it is a case of someone saying, 'We want it', and that someone just hands them the key; that would almost be dereliction of responsibility. We had a meeting this week with WCVA on another issue, but we are going to follow that up, to use its experiences in this area as well, to find out what it is that we can work forward with, in order to get the right things in place.

[70] **Leighton Andrews:** Are we not being a bit precious and protective about this? I mean, after all, miners' libraries were run by volunteers in our communities a century ago, occasionally with the full-time co-ordination of a disabled ex-pit-worker. What is the problem with that level of co-production? I see in my own community, some very active efforts to create the community management of a library. In older political language, that was not called 'co-production', but 'democratic participation'. What is wrong with that?

[71] **Mr Gomer:** Nothing at all. If you have the right people in place, the right spirit, volunteering—we know that there are people like that in our communities—with the right support, there is absolutely nothing wrong with it at all in my view. However, sometimes, people will come together who may not have some of those skills, so it is about being able to identify what it is that we need to do to be able to deliver the right service. I mentioned before the digital issues around computer access, and things like that. We need to make sure that people are properly 'tooled up'—that is the term that I use—to be able to do the job. I think that you make a very, very good point, and in some communities, that may be what we are moving to, but with support; it is not just, 'Here are the keys, open the door, and get on with it'. That would actually be abandoning it to a certain extent.

[72] **Leighton Andrews:** Was there a certain moment this year when library services across Wales realised that the cuts were going to be deeper than they expected?

[73] **Mr Gomer:** Yes. It was in the autumn.

[74] **Leighton Andrews:** Would you like to elaborate on that?

[75] **Mr Gomer:** Basically, all library services were planning for the future on the basis of the knowledge that we had at that time of where we thought the level of cuts would be. If anything, things have speeded up, which obviously creates a little bit of a problem, because,

normally, you would like a little bit more of a lead-in time in terms of some of the plans and the action plans that are in place. Some of that has to be speeded up, although, obviously, there still has to be the proper consultation process, time and so on. However, if anything, things have concertinaed, so I think that things are happening at a far faster rate than was originally envisaged.

[76] **Christine Chapman:** Janet has the next questions, and then Jocelyn.

09:45

[77] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** On communities running libraries, we have one at the moment that we are trying to keep open; it has been a successful library for many years. I think that it costs around £12,000 to £15,000 a year for that library to operate at the moment, taking out the staff costs. However, the community group that has formed is being told—. We know that if you get a constituted group, it can draw down funding that a local authority cannot draw down, which, for me, is a win-win situation. However, the business case that it is almost being persuaded to build is for £200,000 or something like that, when really all the community wants to do is to be able to keep that library functioning as it is. I did raise this with the Minister. The options are that the library closes—. I know that people become quite precious about buildings, but this is actually about the facility, the library itself. We have a really active community group going now, but it just needs that little bit of expertise and support from the local authority. Given that this is going on in some parts of the constituency, the local authority is saying, ‘Look, we can’t support all of these groups’, but, for me, it could just support them for a few months, until they get going. I asked whether the Minister would give some advice, guidance and support to local authorities so that they can give these community groups a chance. If it fails, it fails. I know of a community group that has kept a local park open and filled it with brand-new equipment. To me, keeping a library going should not need a massive business case.

[78] **Mr Gomer:** It is difficult to comment on an individual case without having the details, but on the whole, our advice to local authorities—and there is a capacity issue because, at the same time as we are doing this, there is a reduction in numbers of staff and things—is to do as much as they possibly can, but also to tap into other groups. I mentioned the WCVA before and there is advice and guidance out there through other avenues as well. One, for example, is the community facilities programme. People are saying, ‘We’d like to do something in our community centres’ and there is now that programme that the Welsh Government is running, but it takes time because they have to build up the bid and everything else. So, you are right that, in some circumstances, it may be a case of saying, ‘We’ll just keep it open for now, but our long-term plan is to do this in a year’s time’. So, our advice to local authorities is to work with those communities and do what they can. However, without knowing the details, it is very difficult to comment on individual cases.

[79] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I think that the point I am trying to make is that you can have too high a standard sometimes, where the size of the business case would put off a small group if it thinks that it has to raise about £200,000 when £50,000 would keep it going at the level it is at currently. I sometimes think that there needs to be a little bit more empathy for the groups, and for them to be told, ‘You’ll end up with the model that you create, but if it is the model that you want, who are we to say that it has to be up to some of the standards that CyMAL dictate?’

[80] **Mr Gomer:** The standards are generic for the authority, as opposed to being standards for an individual library. The authority would certainly have to check on things like health and safety and all those sorts of issues, but our push would be—and I am sure that Richard would say the same in terms of Bridgend—to do as much as they possibly can to support and work with community groups. It is in the local authorities’ interest, in terms of

the good news and bad news. It is certainly our advice for them to work with them, even if it is a hand-holding exercise in the initial period. There is certainly a drive—I think Richard mentioned this—to ensure that the ongoing professional support is there as the years go by.

[81] **Christine Chapman:** Time is moving on. I know that Jocelyn wanted to ask a question of our witnesses and Mark wanted to come in. Jocelyn is first.

[82] **Jocelyn Davies:** I was going to cover this point later on, but I can do it now. You keep saying ‘our advice would be’. Have you issued any guidance on this? Are you concerned that these community-led, volunteer initiatives in terms of libraries will compete with your vision of relocating something further away in this all-singing all-dancing, brand-new facility that is being set up, given that the traditional reader might just carry on going to the local library that is run by volunteers and might not even bother to go to the new council-run facility?

[83] **Mr Gomer:** We have not issued any guidance. We have been working closely with CyMAL around the next framework standards. We have a seminar tomorrow. We have run a number during the year—we have had one for leisure—to share best practice. Part of tomorrow’s session is around community-managed libraries and the experiences of local authorities. We then have panel sessions in the afternoon to dig in deeper in terms of the network. The Minister is speaking, so I am sure that he will be putting across some of his views in terms of support and things like hand-holding—short-term things like that. That is the way that we work. Local authorities come together and we meet the chief officers on a regular basis to discuss these issues. We meet with CyMAL through the Libraries Inspire advisory group. All of these areas are ones on which we would have a constant dialogue with local authorities at different levels. In tomorrow’s session, cabinet members from many of the local authorities will be there to look at these issues at first-hand.

[84] **Jocelyn Davies:** Regarding the competition between the community-led libraries and the facility that is going to be further away, are you competing for the same readers?

[85] **Mr Hughes:** No, we would not be. The answer to much of this is for local authorities to establish the model of delivery for their library services. That is the key. Rather than having this air of panic in terms of how to get to a financial bottom line, you need to establish your model of delivery in terms of geography and what you want to deliver. That helps to ensure that if you have community-managed libraries, they are not in competition. We would also want to ensure that people have the best possible experience of coming into a library, and to open their minds to other things that are possible in new, fit-for-purpose modern venues. In Bridgend, we had the detractors who would rather stay in a traditional library, which has been there for a century, because that is what they are used to. They are now more than happy with the new facilities. They are using the self-service facility, they are able to park there, they are able to spend time there with their families, they can have a cup of coffee and they can partake in other activities that are going on.

[86] We have a duty, almost, to make sure that people have access to the best possible facilities. So, we might put a model in place and say, ‘We won’t support that community-managed library because this is close enough and it is what we want to do’.

[87] **Jocelyn Davies:** You cannot have it both ways, can you? You cannot say to me, ‘No, we’re not competing for the same readers’, and then say, ‘What we want is for those readers that were going there to come here’. You cannot have it both ways.

[88] **Mr Hughes:** In some areas, if there is no library within reasonable distance and if there is not the necessary public transport to get people from A to B, then that community-managed library needs to be supported. I think that Peter is absolutely right that it is down to

the model that the authority puts in place to ensure that those community-managed libraries are well supported and that they do not compete. However, there is a difference—I think that you mentioned this—between a book-lending service that is sufficient for a community and a full library. I am sure that that will be debated tomorrow. Within a framework of standards, each public library authority would have to understand what it is able to include within those standards, because the standards will go far beyond just providing a book-lending service. However, I totally understand that that will be the answer in some areas and that it allows people access to that service.

[89] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in on this?

[90] **Mark Isherwood:** What risk, if any, is there of local authorities not being able to meet the statutory requirement to provide public library services at a time of contracting budgets?

[91] **Mr Gomer:** It is going to be difficult—there is no doubt about that. Libraries are facing a very difficult time, along with other services in local authorities. I mentioned in the report that more authorities have been bucking the trend in the last four to six years by achieving more standards at a time of contraction. The forecast this year, which is perhaps a little too optimistic, is for more authorities to achieve more standards. We need to see what comes out at the end of the year. So, on the face of it, it is about working together, looking at all the options available and developing options that are suitable for each local authority area, while very much working on this national model, working with CyMAL on the purchase of e-books and so on. I am fairly optimistic that we are beginning to move to a field of a sustainable, good, statutory library service. Yet, there will be areas where people feel that that is not the case, because they will have a local issue—their library will not be there or it will have moved. However, certainly, there are examples like this, in Bridgend and in a number of other areas. Only a couple of weeks ago, a main library was opened again in Caerphilly and in Prestatyn—there were three or four opened in the space of three or four weeks. So, the evidence on the ground is that there is a very strong commitment from local authorities.

[92] What has happened, I suppose, is that in leisure services, which were previously not statutory and there was more capacity, we went through the bad old days of contracting out directly. Maybe they experienced more of having to do that earlier. What is happening now is that libraries are very much coming on to that and looking at a much more effective and efficient way of operating. I am always the optimist—glass half full—so, we will get through this and we will have libraries fit for the twenty-first century, not for the twentieth century. They will be more efficient and effective.

[93] **Christine Chapman:** Mark Isherwood is next.

[94] **Mark Isherwood:** You mentioned, quite rightly, that, in assessing libraries, you look at the broader range of services that they provide, including Jobcentre Plus et cetera. What consideration is being given to using libraries as a means of revenue generation themselves, perhaps through broadening the service base? We all pay to use rooms in libraries for surgeries, for example, but could you expand that principle into other areas?

[95] **Mr Gomer:** It is not easy in the library service. The thing about the library service is its uniqueness in that it is free at the point of delivery in terms of access to IT, WiFi, books, and so forth. In the past, some small areas have been tried, but they are small scale in terms of what can be generated. For example, the change in the market for leisure services was the arrival of fitness rooms. They went from being boxes with four courts, with quite low incomes, to being these buildings with fantastic leisure facilities and thousands of people coming to the fitness room. It has become a massive income earner. It is not the same in libraries. I suppose that, yes, when we put internet in, we could have started charging for

internet access, but that would have completely defeated the whole object of what libraries are about. It is much more difficult. Some of the models that have been developed for some other services that can income generate are not there for libraries because they do not have the same market.

[96] **Mark Isherwood:** I was referring to add-on services, certainly not the services that you are referring to, particularly in a community that may happen to be very low on local services and may have lost many of its local services. I wanted to see whether there is some sort of fusion there that could support and sustain the free services, while delivering services that the community is otherwise missing.

[97] **Mr Gomer:** The rental of rooms and things such as that are the obvious ones, where a library has that capacity. What we are finding is that more and more libraries, because they are bringing services together, are becoming more efficient and effective, in that, instead of your having a building over here and another over there delivering council services, those are brought together. That is more efficient and effective, and Richard might go into more detail about why Bridgend did what it did in terms of its efficiency, but it then takes away the ability to rent out that room space, so, again, it comes down to that business model, almost on a building-by-building basis. There is not one obvious model that you could turn to and say, 'Well, this is how we could generate the income'. Some do generate very good use in terms of being able to slide things away and rent out a room in the evening, but, then again, we talked about competition earlier, and most authorities have perhaps 40 community centres that have activities going on in them and you start competing in that area. So, it is very much an individual case—you take a building and you do your business model and then look at what is best for what is there. However, it is not an easy one to tackle in libraries, unlike in some other services.

[98] **Mark Isherwood:** May I add to that?

[99] **Christine Chapman:** Yes, and then I have Leighton who wants to come in.

[100] **Mark Isherwood:** I was thinking more of the pub is the hub model: if you do not have a pub and are in an isolated community, it could be that the library is the hub model. The National Federation of Women's Institutes has called for community-managed libraries to be better integrated within the library service. There is talk about a drive for community libraries because of budgets, but others argue that it is a good in itself as part of the wider community reablement and regeneration agenda. How do you think that could be managed to ensure it is a real partnership, rather than, effectively, the voluntary sector delivering public services at the behest of and not under the control of a local authority?

10:00

[101] **Mr Gomer:** I think this goes back to the discussions that we had earlier where the model will be very much that, if a community managed library service is part of the local authority's library service, it is supported and driven, maybe the IT access is supported and so forth, and the staff will go through the training processes. So, if you like, there is almost the same expectation. Where you have a slightly different model, where people set up a reading group or whatever, it is supported in that it might use a room within a facility owned by the council or whatever. I will give an example. In my own village we have a telephone box that has been redundant for I do not know how many years. Somebody has put shelving up, people are going to put books in it and you take them out as you want, and it is very much an honesty box. It is that basic, but they feel that they want something there. I think more communities might do that.

[102] **Jocelyn Davies:** I have some lovely books that you can have.

[103] **Mr Gomer:** Thank you. [*Laughter.*] Again, it will come down very much to horses for courses. That is what it is about: what the local authority has been able to do and what it can support, and, then, if the community itself feels strongly that it wants to do something, it should do it. The local authority will not stop it, because it goes back to what I said earlier: the more people who read, the more people who read—it generates more reading. So, it is not competition. It is just more people doing it and getting in there.

[104] **Christine Chapman:** We are running very short of time. We have a few more areas to cover. I know that Leighton and Jenny want to ask some questions.

[105] **Leighton Andrews:** I just want to ask, following up what you said about local authorities planning community centres and operating a whole series of different resources: to what extent are library facilities seen as strategic assets by local authorities, and is the footprint of libraries considered in the planning of the development of future community assets, or is there a tendency to operate on a silo basis within local authorities?

[106] **Mr Gomer:** I will speak about my experience and knowledge first, and I am sure that Richard will come in on the situation specifically in Bridgend. All local authorities have to have a community assets management plan. My detailed knowledge from my previous authority, but also my knowledge of other authorities, is that libraries are very much seen as part of regeneration processes in terms of specific issues in particular towns. Bargoed is one good example. Risca library is another example, working alongside Tesco, where you can attract people in because they are already going next door to do their shopping. So, they very much have to be a part of it. The issue then is where the library is positioned in terms of maybe the local community centre. Again, it comes down to the local community plan or local area plan. Certainly, my knowledge on that is that it is not a silo. Yes, there are some opportunities that come up now and again when something will happen, but, sometimes, the opportunities are created because the plan has already been put into place. So, when somebody talks about a regeneration project in a particular area, all the facilities in that area—. I know, in the case of Bargoed, that the library had to be knocked down because it was the footprint to enter into the regeneration site. So, there are examples such as that, with—

[107] **Leighton Andrews:** We funded that.

[108] **Jocelyn Davies:** You ought to declare an interest. [*Laughter.*]

[109] **Mr Gomer:** Good forward planning, normally, and strategic plans are what bring us to where we are at. I think most local authorities could point to that. Within their LDPs and so forth they will clearly show where their future provision is with regard to their leisure facilities, libraries and so forth.

[110] **Christine Chapman:** Richard, did you want to come in?

[111] **Mr Hughes:** Yes, thank you, madam chair. I think that more than ever every local authority would consider library assets in their overall planning now. Indeed, I think they would consider leisure assets in the wider sense anyway. One of the issues, as we have spoken about, is that many of the library assets are old. They are traditional buildings and, with that, there comes a certain emotive issue, because people are attached to them. However, I think any opportunity to develop new fit-for-purpose venues for libraries would be taken up by authorities. I think that the capital fund that CyMAL has made available for the past few years supports that because it gives authorities the incentive to think of libraries as part of the cultural regeneration of their towns, as well as the physical and social regeneration. More and more, that cultural regeneration is becoming more central than perhaps some of the more

retail-driven regeneration that we have seen in the past.

[112] **Jenny Rathbone:** I just want to pick up on your point about the more people who read, the more people get to read. Do we know how many people actually ever use the library? With regard to these 14 million visits that you record, what proportion of the population is that? My concern is the 25% of the population who are functionally illiterate.

[113] **Mr Gomer:** There are detailed figures for the use of library services. All libraries have a library management card, for example. So, everyone goes in and passes their card over and whatever. One of the collaborative things that we are doing at the moment with CyMAL is that the north Wales authorities are coming together and procuring a new library management system for all of their authorities as one, which may then roll out pan-Wales once that first tranche is done. Some of the cards used have much more detail, so, they can be broken down into age range, for example. Therefore, some authorities would be able to tell you exactly how many six-year-olds come into the library at any particular time or how many adults of a particular social group would come in. So, those statistics are there nationally in terms of the standards. One of the things that we think will be developed under the new standards, for example, is not just how many people come in and how much money is spent, but the value for money in terms of what it costs for the numbers coming through and the population that they are serving. So, more and more, it is becoming more sophisticated.

[114] **Jenny Rathbone:** Does anyone analyse what proportion of the population does not bother to have a library card?

[115] **Mr Gomer:** Yes. Part of the marketing strategy and of audience development for libraries is knowing who is not coming in, as much as knowing who is coming in.

[116] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, those figures are available in the statistics.

[117] **Mr Gomer:** They are, and they will be within the library standards in Wales. Also, one of the things that I think I put in the report was about the summer reader challenges. I think, off the top of my head, that there was a 7% increase last year in terms of the summer programme, which was to get young people and children into libraries and reading. There was a significant increase again last year. So, all of those figures are available to a greater or lesser extent.

[118] **Christine Chapman:** Again, we are running short of time, but I know that there are some other areas to be covered. Did you want to come in on this, Mike? I will then bring in Jocelyn.

[119] **Jocelyn Davies:** I think that my points have been covered.

[120] **Christine Chapman:** Okay. Just Mike, then.

[121] **Mike Hedges:** I have two points that I would like to cover. First, you have university libraries around Wales that have lots of reference books and are very well stocked. Is there an opportunity to work more closely with them in terms of the reference facilities that are available? I know how difficult it is to work with universities on these things, but, really, it is all being paid for via public money, and duplicating, with things as they are at the moment, I think is a waste. Are there any opportunities for greater and closer collaboration?

[122] **Mr Gomer:** It is happening under the Libraries Inspire programme and so forth. Libraries in universities and colleges of further education are now much more tied into the public library service. There is far better access and, if you like, the market has opened up. There is no longer the closed-door scenario. There will be further progress on that over the



next couple of years. Again, Chair, I know that we are short of time, but, if you want us to give a bit more detail on that, we can do so.

[123] **Christine Chapman:** That would be useful.

[124] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, that would be very useful. I have been to the re-opening of three libraries in my constituency since 2011, all of which have been massively improved. I suppose that I ought to say ‘thanks to the Welsh Government’. They have all been massively improved. I also know, however, that the Welsh-medium talking books service, whose name I cannot remember, has reached a stage now where it sends almost all of the talking books out by download rather than actually posting them out. Is there greater opportunity to use downloads for sending books out to people? I know that you talked a bit about it earlier, when you referred to Kindle, but not everyone has a Kindle. Many people have computers. Downloading onto computers, I think, makes it much easier to read. Is there an opportunity for further development of that?

[125] **Mr Hughes:** Absolutely. Going back to the point made earlier, I think that we need to invest far more of our resources in the digital market. We are in a competitive market, but I think that we do need to research and develop our ICT resources. With the library service we have a unique opportunity to do that nationally. We can have one solution that allows us to do that, and e-books are such a solution. So, that is happening, but it is about getting more money into it so that the titles, the reference books and everything can be bought. You are right that not everyone has a Kindle—I do not have one, I have a different tablet that allows me to use the e-book service. It is a very effective service, but one of the things that we have to do is to make sure that people out there know how to use their devices and how to download. I know that we have touched on the digital divide, but many of our traditional readers—and the older readers as well, although that is not to say that all older people cannot use devices—need familiarisation and that is where the library service comes in in making sure that we can offer that personal service, if you like, that allows people to understand how to use devices to better access digital resources.

[126] **Christine Chapman:** Are there any further questions?

[127] **Mike Hedges:** No. That is fine.

[128] **Christine Chapman:** Before we move on, can you tell me what assessment you have made of the idea of local authorities adopting trust status for libraries in your area? Has the WLGA offered any guidance on this point?

[129] **Mr Gomer:** We have not offered guidance. As I said, we have run seminars, and we are running one tomorrow. Part of the discussion with CyMAL and local authorities is around different delivery options. The dilemma with trust status—. There are a number of reasons for going for trust status. One significant reason is the argument that, if you go to trust status for a particular part of your service, it becomes more focused—all of the energy focuses on that and you are not diverted into other areas. Part of the dilemma with libraries is their role. They have a major educational role, so, if you suddenly have the library service off and it becomes a separate body, how does it relate to schools? It is a difficult one. Also, to be totally honest about it, part of the reason why some authorities are looking to move to trust status is that there is a massive financial saving: you save on your national non-domestic rates, and you can save on VAT. The dilemma with libraries is that they are often in buildings that are not particularly high in terms of NNDR, and there is no VAT saving as such. When you look at the pros and cons and you do the analysis that everybody has to go through, a lot of the pros are for staying inside the local authority and working with further education colleges, universities and everything else. The very strong education base can, and does to me, outweigh any other benefit, but there are no other financial benefits. However, there are

authorities, and one in particular at the moment, that are looking at a bigger trust, and putting all of their culture and leisure services into one trust. It may be that they can evidence real gain there. What we will then do is to share that with other local authorities to see what they are doing, how they are doing it and where the gains are. Others may then develop. So, it is not a closed door, but, in terms of the analysis with leisure, there is certainly a big difference.

[130] **Mr Hughes:** I think the key here is that authorities—. I will use the example of Bridgend, and we have a partner that runs our leisure services, but we very much feel that, with the agreement that we have set up, it is a partnership. We are a commissioning authority and that is the key, I think, rather than just setting something up and letting it run or getting somebody in and over it goes. You have to be a proactive commissioning authority and set out from the off the outcomes that you wish to get from any specific model, and they should not always be financial outcomes. So, if you are doing something, it is up to the authority to manage any future contract and any future agreement and look at where the most effective partnerships are. There are effective models out there—there are a few in London—and our leisure trust runs two of our libraries on the ground. The staff were moved across under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, they run them, and we manage that contract and the outcomes that we expect from those two libraries. It works very effectively. It is about making sure that you know—going back to my point about knowing the model—what you want to commission from a particular partner, rather than just setting it up perhaps just to optimise the financial benefits through NNDR et cetera.

10:15

[131] **Christine Chapman:** We have reached the end of the time allocated for this and we have another panel of witnesses coming in shortly, but I know that Jenny and Janet wanted another quick question. Please be very concise so that we can allow our witnesses to answer.

[132] **Jenny Rathbone:** To Richard, on e-books, I just wanted to know whether there is any specific programme in any local authority to enable older people who are losing their sight to access e-books because, obviously, one of the benefits of e-books is that you can alter the size of the print to suit your vision.

[133] **Mr Hughes:** I think that there are; we have a programme running under the Communities 2.0 project, which is a Welsh Government and European-funded project. We have an individual who provides surgeries and goes out there to allow people to understand how to increase font size or access certain things and do all of that. So, that is there, but what needs to happen now is that that becomes part and parcel of what we do. The library service is always trying to keep up with changes in technology. Indeed, in the new library that we have just opened, as well as your standard PCs, we have also moved to have tablet devices because that is how a lot of people are accessing the internet now—that is how they are accessing material—rather than on standard PCs. It is about that education.

[134] **Jenny Rathbone:** The RNIB has mentioned this type of service that could be available. Obviously, it needs to be available.

[135] **Christine Chapman:** Janet is next.

[136] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** I can roll four questions into one because we have covered some of the others. Do you think that local authorities sufficiently recognise the wide-ranging contribution that libraries make in terms of a variety of policy ideas? If you do, do you think that libraries should be insulated from budget cuts?

[137] **Mr Gomer:** The answer on budget cuts is ‘no’. The problem is that if you keep insulating every service from budget cuts, what will you end up with? If you insulate it, it is

almost that, at a national level, you are making a decision about what a local authority no longer delivers. This is a difficult one, but the answer is 'no'. Libraries have to be in the mixing pot with everything else because, as soon as you put a straitjacket on something, you remove the flexibility. In terms of its importance, I can only go back and say that we can historically prove that local authorities have taken libraries very, very seriously in that they are part and parcel of any regeneration project that has happened in communities over the past couple of years. With regard to their local development plans, libraries are clearly in place. I think that they fully recognise that libraries have gone from being lenders of books, through massive IT changes and, now, with regard to JobCentre Plus and universal credit, they have become very important to local authorities. Therefore, local authorities are now thinking that they will put their other community services in there as well because if they have got people going in to JobCentre Plus, they could be the same people looking at universal credit. So, they are becoming more and more important in terms of their value to local communities.

[138] **Christine Chapman:** Richard, do you want to say something?

[139] **Mr Hughes:** I just want to add that I think that local authorities understand the value of libraries, but, with regard to protecting budgets, I do not think that that is feasible. We have also found that some of our models are actually cheaper models but they are more effective. If you protect something, you sometimes take away the incentive to create efficiencies that are staring you in the face. However, at a national level, at a governmental level, we also need to understand the role of libraries. If young people's and children's literacy is high on any government's agenda, that should not work in any silo, separate from another department where we know that children's literacy can be improved by getting more and more young people to access libraries. The studies have been done and we all know the facts and figures. I think that we all need to ensure that libraries are bolted into the wider agenda.

[140] **Christine Chapman:** Thank you. I think that that is a good point to finish on. Thank you for attending this morning and for giving us your very valuable evidence for our inquiry. We will send you a transcript of the meeting to check for factual accuracy. I wish both of you all the best with your endeavours in this field. Thank you very much. The committee will reconvene at 10.30 a.m.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:20 a 10:33.  
The meeting adjourned between 10:20 and 10:33.*

**Ymchwiliad i Lyfrgelloedd Cyhoeddus yng Nghymru: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 2—  
Sefydliad Siartredig y Gweithwyr Llyfrgell a Gwybodaeth Proffesiynol  
Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales: Evidence Session 2—Chartered Institute  
of Library and Information Professionals**

[141] **Christine Chapman:** We move on now to the second item on the agenda today, which is evidence session 2 of the inquiry into public libraries in Wales. Today, our panel consists of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. I warmly welcome Carol Edwards, chair of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, and Mandy Powell from the same organisation. I also welcome Jane Sellwood from the Society of Chief Librarians Wales. Welcome to you all. You have sent a paper outlining your evidence. Members will have read that, so, if you are happy, we will go straight into questions. I will start off with a very broad question. We know that the number of visitors to Wales's libraries has increased. Could you outline why you think Wales has bucked the UK-wide trend for decline?

[142] **Ms Powell:** Yes, certainly. Last year saw 14 million physical visits to libraries, so that is not counting the actual visits to e-services. I think there is a combination of factors that

have led us to that really good figure. The first thing I have to mention is the hard work of the library and information staff both on the ground and at senior and middle management level. Undoubtedly, we benefit from our work with CyMAL—Museums, Archives and Libraries Wales. Without its guidance, support and funding through capital investment, I do not think we would reach this great figure. Also, the Welsh public library standards are a great help because they are a guidance to all local authorities to show them where they should be as a public library authority, and they are then able to work towards a common goal. I think that is very important. We also benefit from the fact that there is an all-Wales audience development team based in Wrexham. Fantastic work is being done by people, including Jane Purdie. They have done an awful lot to promote the services of all the library sectors. So, they are promoting not just public libraries, but academic, health and school libraries. I think, following on from that, the fact that we do a lot of cross-sector work means that we work not just with other public librarians, but with all librarians in Wales. That has also contributed to this good figure.

[143] **Christine Chapman:** Do any of the others want to come in or shall I move on to other questions? Okay. Jenny, did you want to come in with some questions?

[144] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes. Of these 14 million visits, can you tell us what proportion of the population uses the library, because, obviously, these are multiple visits by single individuals?

[145] **Ms Powell:** Yes. The 14 million relates to physical visits. I suppose you compare that with the 3.6 million population of Wales, I think. I do not have a breakdown via each individual authority, but I can provide that information later.

[146] **Jenny Rathbone:** I think that that would be particularly useful for us to be able to analyse where our targets should be in terms of—

[147] **Ms Powell:** I know that Swansea in particular has done some really good work looking at how much a library is used compared with where it is in a location. So, the further away you live from a library, the less likely you are to use it. There are some figures out there that we can supply you with.

[148] **Jenny Rathbone:** That would be useful, because I think it is particularly interesting for us to know what strategies library services across Wales use in trying to get people who do not currently use libraries to use them. I wonder whether you can say a little bit about your experience of the strategies, and you have mentioned Swansea.

[149] **Ms Powell:** Obviously, these are physical visits but we also have e-services. We have e-magazines and e-books, and these are targeting not only traditional users, but people who have not used the library service before. If you think about your daily life—you are very busy and you may not have a chance to go to a library, but you can still be a member and use the services by using them from home. I have with me a pamphlet on e-magazines—I do not know whether you are all signed up to this initiative, but if you are a member of a library in Wales you get free access 24/7 to magazines. There are some 250 different titles, and that is a free service across Wales. Obviously, that appeals to people who are unable to physically go into a library.

[150] **Jenny Rathbone:** It would be really interesting to analyse how many new library users the new e-magazine service has brought in.

[151] **Ms Powell:** It is a very new service, as it has only recently been launched. So, we will be keen to see figures from that and we will share them.

[152] **Jenny Rathbone:** Turning to the Society of Chief Librarians, in your evidence you have said that you think that there is inadequate mention of public libraries in the programme for government. I wonder whether you could just say what is missing and what you would want to see.

[153] **Ms Sellwood:** From the Society of Chief Librarians' point of view, we feel, as a professional body, that there is a lack of acknowledgment of the number of different—I have lost my words—

[154] **Jocelyn Davies:** Aspects?

[155] **Ms Sellwood:** Yes, aspects—the number of different aspects that libraries contribute to but are not recognised within some of the documents, such as the health agenda and education and literacy. We feel that there is not joined-up thinking in some of these documents that shows where a library will fit in. We are not a separate entity that does one thing; we contribute to an awful lot. From the society's point of view, what we feel is lacking is the amount of mention of the library service and what it can do to support the different agendas.

[156] **Jenny Rathbone:** There might be a need to refresh the mission statement, but I find it hard to believe that the education and literacy agenda is not hardwired into any public library strategy, even though it was written in 1964.

[157] **Ms Sellwood:** What I am saying is that we feel that we are not mentioned in national, and in some cases local, strategies. We can say, 'We contribute to this', but we need the other departments to be saying, 'Actually, we can work with libraries, which will help to contribute to what we are doing'. That is where we feel that there is a lack of cohesion.

[158] **Jenny Rathbone:** Nevertheless, libraries have seen an increase in their numbers across Wales. Therefore, there must be some priority being given to the importance of libraries for the wellbeing of citizens in the way that we deliver our services in local authorities.

[159] **Ms Sellwood:** Yes. Without a doubt, different authorities have different levels of commitment to what their libraries are providing. As a society, we would like to see a more joined-up national strategy that promotes us as well.

[160] **Jenny Rathbone:** The WLGA has just been telling us about the importance of co-locating library services with other services and that that has increased the numbers. That sounds to me like they are joining up library services.

[161] **Ms Sellwood:** It definitely is starting. We are not saying that it is not happening at all. Libraries are starting to become more important to people, but there is a lot of work to be done still.

[162] **Jocelyn Davies:** Are you saying that you do not get the acknowledgement for the work that you do? There are these documents and so on and you are not mentioned, but actually you are probably doing that stuff and you are just left out of it and not given the by-line for the work that you are actually doing.

[163] **Ms Sellwood:** Yes.

[164] **Ms Powell:** It is in the Welsh Government's programme for government. We would like to see Libraries Inspire mentioned more in there. We have Libraries Inspire, which is a really good framework and is incredibly useful, but we would like to see libraries mentioned

more in the wider programme for government. As Jane was saying, we are helping to bridge the digital divide and we provide health information, which contributes to mental health and wellbeing. Libraries contribute to all sorts of things like that. We would like to see libraries mentioned more in the wider programme for government. On the figure of 14 million, although it is a really good number, we should sound a note of caution because there is a sign that that could be slowing down. At the moment, the deep cuts have not hit us just yet, but if buildings are closed, staff are lost and services diminish, we will see that impact on that figure.

[165] **Christine Chapman:** Jenny, before you come back in, Gwyn has a supplementary.

[166] **Gwyn R. Price:** To follow up on that, how are you looking, along with CyMAL, to make sure that your views are represented?

[167] **Ms Powell:** Speaking for CILIP, we have a very good working relationship with CyMAL. We are on the Libraries Inspire team. We have a meeting on Friday in Aberystwyth. I have been working with CyMAL and other interested parties, including the Society of Chief Librarians, on the development of the new standards and framework, due out in April. We need to make sure that we continue that good relationship, but make sure that the professional body, CILIP, is invited to key meetings. There are going to be a lot more meetings and discussions about new ways of developing the service and delivering the service. It is incredibly important that the profession has a voice.

[168] **Gwyn R. Price:** So, you have the opportunity through that body.

[169] **Ms Powell:** Absolutely, yes.

[170] **Gwyn R. Price:** That is what I was interested in. Thank you.

[171] **Ms Edwards:** We also have a member of CyMAL who attends our meetings as an observer. It also gives us great support for our annual conference every year.

[172] **Jenny Rathbone:** To come back to the strategy for increasing the number of people who actually use libraries, we already know about the co-location with leisure and advice services, but what are the specific strategies? For example, the Royal National Institute of Blind People is concerned about the reducing number of large-print books, but does not talk about pathways for people to use e-books as they start to lose their sight. I wondered what strategies you have in place to ensure that people who need some support to continue reading are aware of the new technologies that allow you to increase the size of the print.

10:45

[173] **Ms Sellwood:** Each individual local authority has different strategies in place to help their local communities. From the society's point of view, we have worked together to increase access to e-books. I think that 19 of the authorities have worked together to provide access to e-books, which means that we can do it on a really good economy of scale. Obviously, there are issues then around the availability of technologies, but libraries work very well across Wales to provide different things through the library standards, to allow people to access information, reading and other things via different technologies. As I say, local strategies have to concentrate on local areas and each individual authority has its own particular way of dealing with that. We are keen to see, in terms of the new technologies that come through, that we can help as a library service to make these technologies available and to teach people how to use them. We do that through the use of skilled staff. Without the support of the staff and CyMAL, which provides us with an awful lot of support through the grant funding programmes, we would struggle.

[174] **Jenny Rathbone:** So there is no specific strategy for reaching disadvantaged groups, which would include people who are losing their sight or people who are functionally illiterate, but for whom audio books would—

[175] **Ms Sellwood:** There is not one strategy, no, but within the standards there is mention of making sure that people who cannot access traditional services are able to access services. That then drills down on a local level, rather than having one overarching strategy.

[176] **Jenny Rathbone:** Within specific local authorities, are there strategies for serving the needs of people whose first language is other than English? I am talking about foreign languages, rather than Welsh.

[177] **Ms Sellwood:** Well, it depends on the demographics in each authority.

[178] **Jenny Rathbone:** Indeed.

[179] **Ms Sellwood:** Yes, there are strategies within each of the authorities for making available information and books.

[180] **Christine Chapman:** I know that Leighton has a general question.

[181] **Leighton Andrews:** It is really about the future planning on the basis of public spending for libraries. From your members' reports, to what extent do you feel that there has been a sudden switch in priorities this year?

[182] **Ms Sellwood:** From the society's point of view, we have been in close discussion. We know that there is going to be a huge change to how we deliver services from this year on with the cuts that have come. We have known that these cuts are coming and we have worked together very well to access things like the e-books and e-magazines on a national level, which allows us to provide services at a much lower charge for each authority than would have been the case were we working individually. For example, in my own authority—I work at Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council—using the all-Wales e-magazine service has meant that we have had a reduction of over £1,500 in the cost of that service. That is the same across Wales for those people who are doing it. So, we know that we have to work hard and work together to provide services, and there is a lot of work that goes on in libraries on that collaboration. We know that it is going to be difficult, we know that there are going to be very hard times to come, and we know that there will be cuts to services, but as a profession we are doing everything that we can to mitigate those cuts, so that they do not affect people as much as they could and as much as we have seen in England, perhaps.

[183] **Christine Chapman:** What about Carol or Mandy, or both of you, on Leighton's point?

[184] **Ms Powell:** From the professional organisation's point of view, we would emphasise the fact that we do not expect to be immune from the cuts, but we need local authorities to be aware of the wider remit of libraries. So, for example, if you closed a building to save money, you may, in the very short term, save some money on that building and on the staffing costs, but you have to think of the longer term consequences. So, in the immediate term, you have taken away a resource for the community; so, it is denied access to the physical building as well as access to the knowledge and skills of the professional staff. Also, it has a knock-on effect on other agencies. We have a very good working relationship with a lot of different agencies across Wales; for example, Communities 2.0 does fantastic work to help people to get online. It uses public library buildings to reach the public. Obviously, if you close that building, you are taking away that service at a time when we know that there is a digital

divide. I have supplied a figure in my evidence from Go On UK, the UK-wide campaign to get people online, and we know that one in five adults do not have the digital skills that they need. However, by 2015, 90% of jobs will need ICT skills. So, librarians are helping to bridge that digital divide already. When you make cuts, you do not just affect that building and that community, you affect the wider chances.

[185] **Christine Chapman:** I will move on now. I think that Peter wants to come in.

[186] **Peter Black:** I am just wondering whether you feel that Welsh Government Ministers make sufficient use of the powers available to them in the 1964 Act to intervene if local authorities are providing inadequate public library services.

[187] **Ms Powell:** At the moment, we have the Welsh public library standards that, as I have said, I think are fantastic. They bring everyone together; they have a common goal, and each authority is able to measure itself against them. So, if any are falling below, they are able to ask for extra help from CyMAL. To my knowledge, the Minister has not had to step in so far, but ultimately the buck stops with the Minister, I suppose, and he does have the powers to intervene if an authority is failing. We were very pleased to read his written statement on libraries recently, where he reminded local authorities of the statutory nature of libraries. It is a legal requirement to provide an efficient and comprehensive service. We would welcome discussion about perhaps updating the Act so that it took on board new technologies. Obviously, it was written in 1964, so there are things like e-books, e-magazines and access to the internet that are not covered and we would welcome their inclusion.

[188] **Peter Black:** Do you think that you actually need to update the Act, or can that be covered in the Welsh public library standards, which are, as I understand it, statutory guidance anyway?

[189] **Ms Powell:** Yes. They are covered in the standards. Perhaps the Act would help to reinforce it. I am particularly proud of the fact that, in Wales, we have free internet access in public libraries. It is one of those things that I parrot on about quite a lot when I visit England, because I think that it is something that we should be really proud of. If we want a fair and prosperous Welsh society, we need to give our citizens access to free information. It is a concern of mine that, as cuts start to bite, authorities may be tempted to go down the route of charging for these services. Again, it may be something that we could look at with the Act.

[190] **Peter Black:** Yes. Some people who have given evidence in writing to us have suggested that one of the reasons for modernising the Act would be to enable fees to be charged. Would that be something that you would support?

[191] **Ms Powell:** No.

[192] **Peter Black:** I was just checking.

[193] **Ms Powell:** There are some elements of a library service that are charged for, such as the hiring of CDs and so on, but the basic tenet of a library service is to offer a free service to those who wish to use it. As I say, if we are to aim for a free, fair and prosperous Wales, we need to give our citizens access to free information.

[194] **Christine Chapman:** Did you wish to come in, Carol?

[195] **Ms Edwards:** Yes. I work at the National Library of Wales and this is something that we also endorse and want to see. Access to our core services is also free of charge. We are currently preparing a new strategy, 'Information for All', which states that we will ensure that all our core services will remain free of charge. That also includes access to digital resources.



[196] **Christine Chapman:** Jane, do you want to come in on this?

[197] **Ms Sellwood:** The Society of Chief Librarians is exactly the same. The information and the way we get information have changed. Now, so much of it is digital that to start charging for services like that would be detrimental to Wales.

[198] **Christine Chapman:** Gwyn, did you want to come in?

[199] **Gwyn R. Price:** I asked mine earlier on.

[200] **Christine Chapman:** If we can move on now then, I think that Leighton wants to come in first, and then Mark.

[201] **Leighton Andrews:** Going back to what you said earlier about—I think that it was you, Jane—being aware that cuts are coming, in practice, of course, local authority budgets were not originally expected to be hit as much as they have been because of the UK Government's cuts until quite late in this financial year, for next year. So, has there been a marked change in attitude on the part of local authorities reported to you as a society?

[202] **Ms Sellwood:** As I said, I think that most authorities were aware that cuts would be coming, but—

[203] **Leighton Andrews:** They were not, with respect. I mean, they were not aware of the depth of them—

[204] **Ms Sellwood:** No, that is what I was going to say. The depth of the cuts was so much worse than they had originally planned for and looked towards. One of the things that has been reported to the Society of Chief Librarians in particular is the use of terms like 'quasi-statutory' and 'statutory light'. Those and others relating to the nature of statutory services have concerned us. Either we are statutory or we are not. To refer to us as 'light' or 'quasi-statutory' is dangerous, I think. There are authorities across Wales that are making some very, very difficult decisions. How they will do that, against all of the other things that are statutory, is a very difficult situation for any authority. There are concerns from us as a professional body that the statutory nature of this service is not being taken into account as heavily as for other statutory services.

[205] **Leighton Andrews:** What is the attitude of your body, your society, to working with members of the community to provide alternative library facilities?

[206] **Ms Sellwood:** As a body, we have endorsed the use of volunteers to add value to the services that we provide. Our difficulty comes where we would perhaps be seen to be going down the route of providing a statutory service with the use of volunteers and all of the problems that that can cause. We have had issues reported relating to the recruitment of volunteers, retaining volunteers, the training and even things as silly as how we get them onto the corporate networks so that they can operate the public library management systems. There are an awful lot of issues to do with working with volunteers, but it is not something where we would say, 'Absolutely not', because we value the community coming into libraries and working with us. Without the community using us, being with us and engaging with us, we will not survive anyway—no-one will come in to us. So, we are pro-volunteer, but we do not want that to be to the detriment of having a professionally run service.

[207] **Christine Chapman:** Carol, do you want to come in?

[208] **Ms Edwards:** Yes. The National Library of Wales has a very successful volunteer

programme, and the volunteers work there on projects that would not be achieved by the staff otherwise. They add value to existing collections by maybe giving added descriptions to collections and so forth. However, I think that, as well as it being important for us and for any authority to have volunteers working, it gives something back to them. It gives them the skills to enable them to go on. I know that one of our volunteers has successfully found employment following their period at the library. It gives them added confidence and added skills to enable them to go out into the workforce. This is the importance, again, that public libraries, especially, can provide to people.

11:00

[209] **Ms Powell:** From the professional organisation's point of view, in the same way as the Society of Chief Librarians, we are against volunteers replacing paid professional library staff. We are very clear that a public library's biggest asset is not its building or its books, although they are very important; it is the knowledge and the professionalism of the staff who are employed there. It is not just their professional knowledge and their skills, but their local knowledge, which enables them to use those skills effectively with their community.

[210] **Jocelyn Davies:** Could we have, for the record, what qualification you would hold as a librarian?

[211] **Ms Sellwood:** As a librarian, I hold a BSc in library and information management, but there are a number of different qualifications that can be held.

[212] **Ms Powell:** The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, which I represent, has a PKSB—I have to remember what it stands for now; I wish that this was not been recorded—

[213] **Jocelyn Davies:** You can let us have a note on what you would normally expect.

[214] **Ms Powell:** It is the professional knowledge and skills base. Apologies to Simon, who has developed the framework—

[215] **Jocelyn Davies:** However, normally, it is at degree level

[216] **Ms Sellwood:** For some roles, but there are a variety of different roles within libraries and a variety of different skills, qualifications and accredited programmes that we would look for staff to have.

[217] **Christine Chapman:** Mark, did you want to come in with some questions?

[218] **Mark Isherwood:** We heard from the WLGA representatives, when I put the same question to them, that, although they recognised the very difficult budgetary environment, they did not believe that the statutory requirement to provide public services would be threatened if they worked differently. Do you agree with that or do you feel, following on from your comments a moment ago, that that statutory requirement could be compromised by contracting budgets?

[219] **Ms Powell:** I think that there is a very real risk that, if local authorities are looking to cut budgets, they may see libraries as an easy target, if they are not aware of the wider remit of libraries, which I have already discussed with you. Yes, that is a big concern for us. There are a lot of different models out there that are starting to emerge. I would hate to see happening in Wales what has happened in England, where there is basically a patchwork of a service now. We would like the expert working group to use its powers to gather information on the different types of new models that are emerging so that we are able to use that

information wisely.

[220] **Mark Isherwood:** You referred to the patchwork service and I think that in one of the questions, Leighton referred to the National Federation of Women's Institutes having campaigned and produced a report on this, which you will be aware of, calling for better integration of community-run libraries into the library service. Do you agree with that? How could that work without impacting on the charitable/voluntary ethos, which can be a key driver in regenerating and reabbling communities?

[221] **Ms Powell:** Are you referring to 'On Permanent Loan'?

[222] **Mark Isherwood:** Yes.

[223] **Ms Powell:** That is a very good report. Basically, it is a difficult one to answer in Wales, because we are still seeing people consider new options at the moment, so there are no real data out there. We gather our numbers from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy each year, and I understand that it will start collecting data on the different types of library models that are out there, so we will start to get data from community-managed libraries, which will be interesting. However, we would urge the Minister and the expert working group to gather more information.

[224] **Mark Isherwood:** Given that libraries represent only a small proportion of local authority expenditure, to what extent do you believe that library services should shoulder the burden of spending cuts?

[225] **Ms Powell:** I do not think that any of us can be immune from the cuts, simply because of how deep they are, but as I have mentioned a few times, what I would stress is the wider impact of the library service and the way that the public library service helps the Welsh Government to deliver on its policies in areas such as health, wellbeing and child poverty. Public libraries have a role to play in all of those areas. So, no, I do not expect us to be immune to cuts, but I do not want to see us cut disproportionately, because we are seen perhaps as an easy target, when we are not.

[226] **Mark Isherwood:** I put a similar question to the WLGA: provided that the free services remain free, is there scope, particularly in communities where local services have withered away, for libraries to provide add-on services that might generate revenue?

[227] **Ms Powell:** What sort of services do you mean? Could you give me an example?

[228] **Mark Isherwood:** An example: a library in a community that has lost its shop and its pub—I am not suggesting that libraries should start serving alcohol. [*Laughter.*]

[229] **Ms Powell:** Prince Charles suggested that, actually, at the Hay festival. Libraries in pubs—he thought that that was a good one.

[230] **Mark Isherwood:** The analogy is Pub is the Hub—which sometimes opts to run libraries, for example, or other services. So it could be that, with a social or community-interest company on a not-for-profit model, a library could be thinking outside the box to generate further income by providing add-on services that the community needs, and then perhaps bringing in the volunteers for that while protecting the core services free for the public.

[231] **Ms Powell:** This is where the gathering of information is crucial, and this is where the team in CyMAL is especially useful for running pilot schemes and gathering information to share with the rest of us.

[232] **Mark Isherwood:** Finally, what benefits do you believe would accrue from your belief that the Minister should publish an annual report on the state of public libraries?

[233] **Ms Powell:** An annual report would help to keep this issue at the forefront of his mind. Also, it would help with gathering information. As we know, things tend to gallop on at a pace. A year from now, I am sure the landscape will look very different. It would be useful to be able to compare the differences from year to year, but mainly, I think, to keep it at the forefront.

[234] **Christine Chapman:** Peter, I think that you had a question.

[235] **Peter Black:** You referred to the patchwork of services in England. One local authority in my region is closing nine libraries, for example. We heard before from the WLGA that it considered the Welsh public library standards to be advisory as opposed to statutory guidance. What do you understand as the statutory requirement for local authorities in relation to libraries? What does that amount to?

[236] **Ms Powell:** The statutory nature is that they have to provide a ‘comprehensive and efficient’ library service to those who wish to use it. Those are the particular words. There is obviously a lot more in the Act. There is a lot of detail in there—for example, the Minister has powers to gather evidence and to step in if an authority is failing. It is the provision of a ‘comprehensive and efficient’—

[237] **Peter Black:** The ‘comprehensive’ part is defined in the Welsh public libraries standards. Is that how you understand it?

[238] **Ms Powell:** Yes. It goes into more detail.

[239] **Peter Black:** So that would be statutory guidance that local authorities have to have regard to, from your understanding.

[240] **Ms Powell:** Yes.

[241] **Peter Black:** I just wanted to be clear on that.

[242] **Ms Powell:** I could send you more information on that.

[243] **Christine Chapman:** If you could, that would be good. Thank you. I will move on now. I know there are some questions from Jocelyn and Mike.

[244] **Jocelyn Davies:** Just one question, really. You mentioned pilot schemes being funded by CyMAL just to see new models. Can you tell us a little more about those pilot schemes? Do you know anything about them?

[245] **Ms Powell:** Certainly. There is an all-Wales library management system—LMS. Obviously, that would have huge benefits if all the library authorities in Wales used the same library management system. You would be able to deliver services altogether. You would not have to pay for patches on individual services. If you had to rely on each authority doing that themselves, obviously the cost would be huge, as would the organisation, whereas with CyMAL leading it, it tends to do a pilot project with one or two authorities, such as this scheme on the e-magazines.

[246] **Jocelyn Davies:** So that is where the e-magazines came from.

[247] **Ms Powell:** Yes, that is how it emerged. CyMAL did a pilot scheme with one authority, then it went away and gathered evidenced UK-wide, came back and rolled that out to everyone. Now we are able to market Wales-wide, which is much more efficient. In a similar way, I believe that some progress is being made on the Wales-wide library management system. I believe that six north Wales authorities are signed up for the first stage.

[248] **Mike Hedges:** What, if any, further support should be available to help local authorities find new and innovative ways of delivering library services? I would like you to talk about working more closely with colleges and universities, which have substantial reference sections, and about the opportunity to provide downloads—for example, almost all of the talking books for the blind in Welsh are sent out now by download rather than physically. As you will know better than I do, a number of classic books are well out of copyright, so having them readily available for download could be easily done and would not cost anything. Are there opportunities for these sorts of things?

[249] **Ms Powell:** One of the really great benefits of the public library service in Wales is that we work in collaboration across the sectors, with colleagues in academic libraries, school libraries et cetera. There are schemes out there already. You may have heard of Walk-in Access Wales, which started off as a pilot scheme and which allows the public access to academic materials. It was a CyMAL-supported project in collaboration with WHELP—I will struggle to remember the full title, but it—

[250] **Ms Edwards:** The Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum.

[251] **Ms Powell:** The Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum; thank you, Carol. We already work in collaboration with other sectors to roll out things like that.

[252] **Jocelyn Davies:** What is Walk-in Access Wales? What does it involve?

[253] **Ms Powell:** As a member of the public, you can go into academic libraries and have access to certain academic resources.

[254] **Jocelyn Davies:** Would I have to go to the university library for that or could I come to your library?

[255] **Ms Powell:** I believe that you do have to go, although—

[256] **Ms Sellwood:** To access some of the digitally available materials, you can come to some libraries, and, for other material, you would have to access the individual—.

[257] **Jocelyn Davies:** So, a student studying in Cardiff, or any member of the public, could come to Merthyr library to access that material.

[258] **Ms Powell:** There has also been a lot of work with the People's Collection Wales at the National Library of Wales. I do not know whether Carol wants to say something about that.

[259] **Ms Edwards:** The national library is committed to collaborative working, and the People's Collection Wales staff have been out into various communities to meet with people and to encourage them to bring items, photographs and so forth. We will then upload those. People record stories, and all of these are added to the People's Collection Wales website to encourage people to collaborate really.

[260] **Jocelyn Davies:** I have learned a lot from it.

[261] **Christine Chapman:** The Women's Archive of Wales is coming here next week, and I am hosting that event.

[262] **Ms Edwards:** May I also say, as Mandy mentioned the library management system—the public libraries system—that the National Library of Wales is now working with academic libraries? It is in the first stages of procuring an all-Wales library management system for the universities and the national library. We are working with them on that.

[263] **Christine Chapman:** Mike, do you want to continue?

[264] **Mike Hedges:** I would like to look at ICT systems, as I spend a lot of my time talking about them. Surely a library service, whether run by a university or by a local authority, does not change because you cross Offa's Dyke. A lot of money could be saved by having one standard library system that could run everywhere and would make life easier for everybody—perhaps it could even allow people to see what books are in other places that they may wish to go to on the other side of local authority boundaries.

[265] **Ms Edwards:** I totally agree with you.

[266] **Ms Powell:** That is the ethos of the pilot scheme really.

[267] **Mike Hedges:** Are you crossing Offa's Dyke as well?

[268] **Ms Powell:** I would have to check.

[269] **Mike Hedges:** That is no longer a physical boundary.

[270] **Jocelyn Davies:** You still do not need a passport then. [*Laughter.*]

[271] **Christine Chapman:** Jocelyn, do you have any other questions?

[272] **Jocelyn Davies:** No. I think that all of the points have been well covered.

[273] **Christine Chapman:** We will move on, and I think that Janet has some questions for the last section.

[274] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** Do you feel that policy makers in national and local government sufficiently recognise the wide-ranging contributions made by public libraries to a wide variety of policy areas? If you do, do you think that libraries should be insulated from budget cuts?

[275] **Ms Sellwood:** I think that Mandy covered this when she said that we should not be insulated from cuts. We live in the real world. We know what it is like out there at the moment. What we do want is for there not to be a disproportionate cut in our budgets as opposed to other budgets within local authority.

11:15

[276] **Ms Powell:** It comes back to what we were saying that we would like to see libraries and our wider remit mentioned more in the wider programme for government. It is about things like literacy and the Make Time to Read campaign that you have at the moment, which has a really lovely statistic—children who read outside of class are 13 times more likely to read above their expected age level. Public libraries are obviously a fantastic place for children to read outside of their class. You may have heard of the summer reading scheme, which is a UK-wide scheme. Last year, in 2013, it reached 24,000 children, which is

phenomenal. To bring it down to a local level, and be a bit cheeky and mention my local library, which I do not work for but am a member of, it had 223 children who finished that challenge. So, that is 223 children who, throughout the summer holidays, read six or more books at their local library. Think of the impact of that not only on their literacy and their confidence, but on their interaction in their local community, while, possibly, coming along with siblings and parents. Also, it is quite a long time ago for me now, but I remember the summer holidays, and they are quite long and quite boring and they can lead to you getting into a bit of trouble if you are just hanging around, but that is 223 children who were in a library and reading and doing something to improve their minds.

[277] **Janet Finch-Saunders:** How do you think library staff engage with the local population to ensure that services provided in the local library reflect the needs of the local community? You have CyMAL and you talk about framework standards, but we all have our own interpretation of what those standards should be. We have had an all-singing, all-dancing one in Llandudno, which is a really good library, but many residents in other communities within Aberconwy feel that that has come at the expense of some of the smaller libraries that are just as important to those communities who will not use the Llandudno one. They want some of the ones dispersed out there. How do you feel about that? How can we work with community groups and link up? You talked about volunteers in the community.

[278] **Ms Powell:** That is the biggest strength of the public library service, namely that it has professional, trained staff who work with their communities, so they work with other groups. Most Welsh libraries that I know have police drop-in surgeries. So, say for example that you are having a problem with a neighbour and that has a big effect on your life, but you may not want to go to your local police station to discuss it because you may feel like you are wasting police time or you may get in trouble, but in the neutral space of a community or public library, you are able to go to have a word and an off-the-record discussion with people in authority, and that has a huge impact. About two years ago, a survey said that librarians are the second most trusted profession after doctors. Again, if you think about the implications of that for things like community engagement, democratic engagement and getting people to vote and involved in their local community, it has a huge impact.

[279] Basically, if you ever move house and move to a new community, the first thing you should do after you have unpacked your kettle is go to your local library because it provides walk-in access to all the other services in your community. You could go to your doctor's surgery and find out about the opening times and then go to your school et cetera, but if you go to your local library, they will have it all there; it will probably be bilingual but you will be able to find out how you can learn Welsh, and other languages as well. It is a one-stop shop in the community. Also on that point, libraries help with the regeneration of the high street, as we have seen high streets go downhill in recent years. However, there are some fantastic libraries; Prestatyn Library has recently opened and it has a citizens advice bureau within it. It also has flexible meeting rooms so that social services are able to deliver services there. Librarians are very good at working in their community. You need to have those librarians doing that, and you need them to have the time to be able to do it.

[280] **Christine Chapman:** I have a couple of Members who want to speak, and I want to come in on one question as well. Mike is next, then Jenny.

[281] **Mike Hedges:** While we are name-checking libraries, Penlan library in Morriston does a huge amount of work in supporting children with homework, and a lot of work with children pre-school. This is a Communities First area. Morriston library provides an awful lot of support for people who are trying to access benefits via the system. Brynhyfryd library does a huge amount of work in having lots of different surgeries there. What more can be done to get this good practice spread around the whole library service in Wales?

[282] **Ms Powell:** That is where the Society of Chief Librarians comes in. They all work together, and we are a very good community at sharing best practice. The standards will help with that. The new set of standards is due out in April, and it is basically a case of everybody working together. Jane might want to elaborate on that.

[283] **Ms Sellwood:** We have often sat together and just had that chat, ‘I am doing so and so’, ‘Oh, we could pick that up’. That is the beauty of being a small service within Wales. We are very small and we all know each other very well. We will ring each other up and say, ‘This has worked for me—give it a go’. The grant funding that a lot of libraries have received now has made a difference to the way that we can provide services. For example, within my own authority, without the grant funding we would not have had the rooms available for these enhanced services that allow us to further engage with the community. That grant funding has been very important in allowing us to provide the added-value activities that we need to, and which our communities are now expecting from us. These include citizens advice and benefits advice. Lots of different organisations are now engaging with their libraries, because we are a safe place. We are not seen as part of the local authority, or an authoritative, legislative, learning environment; libraries are somewhere people can come and be safe. That is one of the great beauties of the library service and the library buildings—that people do not feel that they cannot come to us. People feel it is somewhere where they can go, where they will be safe, where their views will be taken into account, and where they can meet people they would not meet elsewhere, as they perhaps would not feel comfortable going into more formal environments to meet those people.

[284] **Ms Powell:** I would add that with more and more access to benefits coming online, libraries will be really important to help deliver things like universal credit. That is why you need professional staff—you are dealing with sensitive information, and you need to have the professional skills to deal with it. Again, following on from being a trusted space, my organisation, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, organises a Libraries Change Lives award each year, and the winner of the 2013 award was Surrey County Council, for its work with survivors of domestic abuse. That was all about how people were able to go to a trusted space to find out vital information to help them recover.

[285] **Christine Chapman:** I know that Jenny wants to come in.

[286] **Jenny Rathbone:** I just wanted to come back to the hard choices ahead. You have given lots of excellent examples of how libraries are developing and changing, and providing safe services, but, when push comes to shove, local authorities will have to do more with less. I know, Mandy, you said you would be uncomfortable about the idea of one of your staff being replaced by a volunteer, but what if that was the difference between not having a mobile library and managing with fewer personnel in the static library? What involvement is there by grass-roots librarians in how services are reshaped?

[287] **Ms Powell:** It is a very difficult subject, because, as you say, there are very hard decisions to make. What I would say—and this is not to vilify people who put themselves forward as volunteers at all; the reason they are doing it is because they do not want to see a much-loved and needed service disappear—is that, if you are to have a comprehensive and efficient service, you have to have the professional staff.

[288] To give an example, do you all use the National Assembly for Wales’s research and library services? They provide you with impartial and expert research advice for committees such as this. That work is done by very lovely professionals. Would you be comfortable conducting your business if the research and information you had was done by very enthusiastic and willing volunteers? I know that I would not. I came here today and used my professional library skills to research information that I hope has provided you with relevant examples. So, if it is not good enough for you good people, then I do not think that it is good



enough for the citizens of Wales to expect their library service and access to information to be delivered by just volunteers. I feel that volunteers enhance the service. I am a volunteer at my local library; I am on the friends' group. We promote the library and help the librarians promote it in pubs and other places, but we do not take over the running of that service. We leave that to the professionals.

[289] **Jenny Rathbone:** Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world. We live in a world where we have to make hard choices. So, I wanted to know whether you think grass-roots and front-line librarians are involved in the way that services are having to be reshaped.

[290] **Ms Powell:** That is a difficult question to answer, because it is still an emerging picture. There are a number of authorities that are starting to look at different models. We do not know at the moment. That is one of the things that I would like the expert working group to gather more information on. Tomorrow, there is a seminar in Caerphilly organised by the Welsh Local Government Association, which, originally, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals Wales was not invited to, but we have rectified that and are now invited. The Minister will be speaking at the seminar and there will be a discussion about different models of service. However, looking at the examples from England, there is a variety of different models out there. Some of them are trusts that still employ professional librarians. Others are handed over to the local community with varying degrees of success. We have a number of examples of where libraries have been handed over to the local community with very enthusiastic and keen volunteers, but the support is not there and the professional skills are not there to develop that service.

[291] **Christine Chapman:** I have one question before we finish. I just wondered what safeguards are in place to ensure that libraries are only closed in the proper circumstances. Also, are you confident—or how confident are you—that these safeguards are being properly followed?

[292] **Ms Powell:** Again, it is about relying on the Welsh public library standards as a guide and, ultimately, on the Minister to step in if an authority is not able to fulfil those standards. There is no one source of information for closures. At the moment *Eye on Wales*, the very good current affairs radio programme, has estimated that 27 libraries across Wales are under threat of closure this spring, with the potential for more in 2015 as services are remodelled. There is an excellent librarian called Ian Anstice, who is not based in Wales but is originally from Wales, who has set up a blog called 'Public Libraries News'. That documents all the library closures, library openings and libraries under threat. However, that is, again, what we would urge the expert working group to gather information on.

[293] **Christine Chapman:** On that note, we have to draw this evidence session to a close. I thank the three of you for attending. I think it has been a very informative session and it will help to shape the committee's report on our inquiry. Thank you very much for attending. We will send you a transcript of the meeting, so that you can check it for factual accuracy.

11:29

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r  
Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the  
Meeting**

[294] **Christine Chapman:** I move that

*the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance*

*with Standing Order 17.42(vi).*

[295] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.  
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:29.  
The public part of the meeting ended at 11:29*