

**Our Ref/Ein Cyf:**  
**Date/Dyddiad:**  
**Please ask for/Gofynnwch am:**  
**Direct line/Llinell uniongyrchol:**  
**Email/Ebost:**

NAFW/PC/LIBRARIES  
29<sup>th</sup> June 2015  
Steve Cushen  
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William Powell AM  
Assembly Member for Mid & West Wales  
Chair – Petitions Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Dear William

**Re: Petition P-04-617: Stop the Wholesale Hiving Off of Public Libraries to the Voluntary Sector**

Thank you for your recent letter, dated 16<sup>th</sup> June 2015, to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in relation to the above petition your committee has received. I am pleased to respond to you on behalf of WLGA as the Association's Spokesperson for Culture, Sport and Tourism.

For over 150 years, our public libraries have played a central role in the fabric of communities throughout Wales. Our libraries allow us to improve literacy, attainment and learn new digital skills; they provide us with free access to knowledge and information, regardless of background and wealth; they play a strong role towards tackling poverty, supporting health and wellbeing – I know I speak for all of Wales' local government leaders when I say that their benefits as cultural and educational hubs can never be underestimated in the real difference they make to the lives of people and communities.

You will of course be aware that under the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*, local authorities in Wales, as public library authorities, have a statutory duty to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service" for all citizens wishing to make use of; a duty to which all Welsh local authorities guard seriously and exercise conscientiously.

Although the WLGA cannot comment specifically on service delivery proposals by an individual authority as referred to within the petition, I would like to remind the Petitions Committee of the severe funding challenges our local authorities in Wales are facing – funding challenges which were acutely recognised in both the Assembly's Communities, Equalities & Local Government (CELG) Committee *Inquiry into Public Libraries in Wales* and in the most recent *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales*, which was commissioned by the Welsh Government back in December 2013.

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This financial year (2015-16), we have seen throughout Wales a reduction of 4.5% in the local government settlement, in addition to a 3.5% reduction in last year's (2014-15) settlement; this is of course on top of the prospect of a further reduction in public spending in the coming years ahead.

In light of on-going budget pressures and year-on-years cuts, local authorities, not just in Wales but throughout the UK have had to respond accordingly to these challenges by re-examining current "in-house" delivery models, along with exploring new and innovate ways of delivering public services, such as through charitable trusts and community asset transfers, as a way of protecting services without compromising on their quality and value.

Although the WLGA recognise that these challenging times do call for new approaches when managing, delivering and sustaining both our statutory and discretionary service areas, the Association does believe that there should not be a pan-Wales "one model fits all" approach, and that each local authority is, in consultation with members of the public, best placed to decide which service delivery method is most appropriate to successfully meet the needs and expectations of the local community. It is also important to recognise that the way people are using their local libraries is constantly changing, particularly with advances in digital information and technology.

With regards to the *Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014* report, local government in Wales has broadly welcomed the report and recommendations, and work with key stakeholders, including Welsh Government and the Society of Chief Libraries Wales (SCLW), is already underway towards implementing many of the key recommendations outlined.

Certainly, best practice surrounding any potential service delivery change does consist of open and transparent public consultation, fully costed options, identifying appropriate timescales, completing relevant impact assessments, along with assessing potential opportunities for collaboration and co-location with other services (as outlined by *Recommendation III* of the report); it is the view of the WLGA that such best practice and guidance is already being used and followed by all Welsh local authorities in assessing potential future models of delivery for local library services.

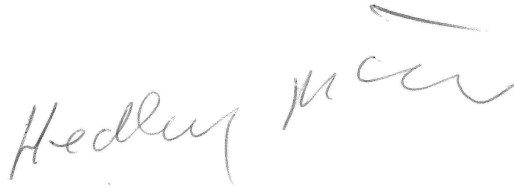
With reference to the petition itself, the Association would point out that voluntary sector involvement in running our local libraries, commonly referred to community managed libraries (CML), is not a new phenomenon.

As the Deputy Minister's written response mentions, the WLGA have worked closely with Welsh Government officials in CyMAL in developing new guidance for local authorities to voluntarily adopt (as outlined by *Recommendations VIII & IX* of the report) in addressing the role of community managed libraries as part of a statutory service provision under the under the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964*; I am pleased to say that this guidance was recently noted by local authorities for an immediate 12 month pilot period at our last WLGA Co-ordinating Committee meeting in May 2015.

Can I therefore reassure both the original petitioner and the Petitions Committee that local government in Wales remains wholeheartedly committed to continuing to deliver on providing a comprehensive and efficient local library service in all corners of Wales for the benefit of communities and future generations to come.

If you, or members of the Petitions Committee should require any further information from myself and the WLGA in relation to this petition or our public libraries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hedley McCarthy'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Cllr Hedley McCarthy BA (Hons)**

*WLGA Spokesperson for Culture, Sport & Tourism*  
*Leader of Blaenau Gwent CBC*