Library Strategy 2016-2021

1. Vision

Neath Port Talbot will provide a strong, sustainable network of public libraries, both statutory and community managed together with a digital, 24/7 online library service that embraces new media, adapting to the ever changing needs of library users. The service will support communities across Neath Port Talbot, benefiting residents and visitors in a wide range of ways and ensuring that libraries contribute to a society in which everyone has an equal opportunity to participate and prosper.

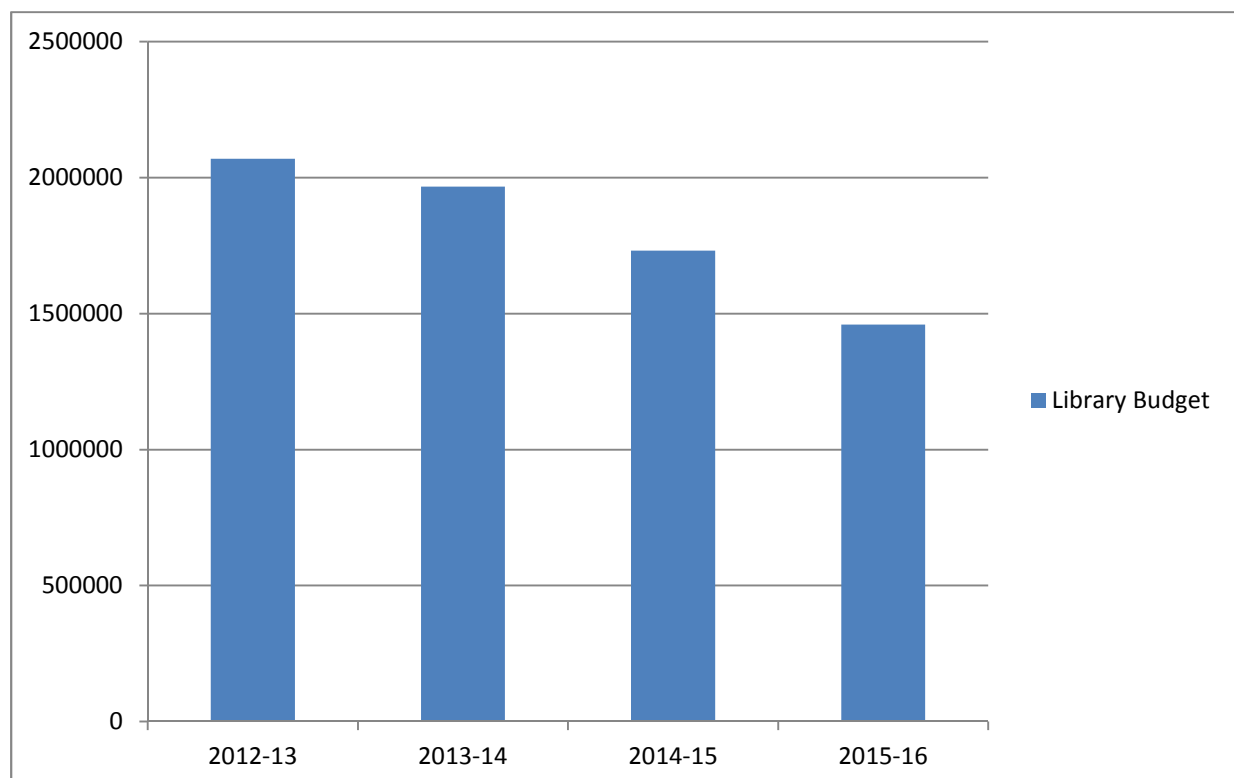This vision has as its core themes:

- Access to digital, online services
- Supporting the local economy through learning and training
- Health, independence and well being
- Social, community and cultural well being
- Literacy intervention
- Reading for pleasure
- Education for all and lifelong learning
- Responding to the study needs of school pupils
- Empowering users by offering access to the widest range of quality and accurate information and allowing opportunities for creating and sharing of information
- Supporting local Council services

Delivering this vision will create a vibrant library service that places libraries as a partner working with other agencies and the voluntary sector in meeting Neath Port Talbot Council's key priorities. The Strategy also takes into account current changes in library provision as a result of financial pressures. There is a need to ensure that statutory obligations are maintained and that Welsh Government policies and targets as set out in the Welsh Public Library Standards are followed. New legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) has also been taken into account within this strategy. This is a vision that will make a difference to all who use the library service.

2. Background Narrative

A combination of financial pressures on the local authority together with the need to modernise and become more efficient has meant that the Library Service has undergone radical changes in recent years. As a consequence overall spend on the Service has fallen by £600k since 2013. This equates to approximately a 30% reduction in budget. This has led to significant reductions in staffing and a marked decrease on the purchase of books and other stock. The service has also decommissioned one of its two mobile libraries which previously covered smaller communities.

Library Expenditure

In the autumn of 2013 a report was presented to Cabinet outlining options for a review of the library service. Following public consultation this resulted in the transfer of nine libraries to community management. This was achieved with the contribution and ongoing support of

colleagues in the Property and Regeneration Team. These nine libraries had been identified as being inefficient in terms of cost and usage and had building deficiencies highlighted in an Asset Plan (2010). The nine Community Managed Libraries were set up in April/May 2014 prior to any official guidelines from Welsh Government. The transfer of these libraries led to the overall loss of 157 opening hours per week to the authority's statutory service. In addition, the library service lost nineteen posts and, as a result of the process, led to Neath Port Talbot having one of the lowest staffing levels in Wales.

Following the transfer of the nine libraries there was a considerable drop in performance in terms of issues and visitors. The number of issues of books at Community Managed Libraries fell by on average 64% in the first year, ranging from decreases of 11% to 81%. For the library service as a whole the number of reported visitors fell by over 100,000 and the number of issues by 80,000 in the twelve months after the transfer.

Since 2011 there have two frameworks of Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards. From 2011-2014 Neath Port Talbot improved its performance and was above the average for Wales in many of the key performance indicators but consistently fell back on spending targets for book stock and staff. The current standards (2014-2017) present much more of a challenge to Neath Port Talbot. Successive budget cuts in 2014 and 2015 has meant that Neath Port Talbot is now amongst the lowest spending authorities on its library service in Wales, impacting on

- Staffing levels
- Book stock
- Opening hours
- ICT provision

3. Current Situation

The Library Service now operates eight branch libraries and one mobile library. In addition, there are the support services provided through central staff, namely:

- ICT Development
- Bookstart – introduction to literacy and numeracy for babies and young children
- Community Services – providing support to community managed libraries and sheltered/residential homes
- Home delivery service – providing books to the housebound
- Supporting children's literacy – delivering national programmes and targeted intervention in partnership with schools
- Mobile Library Service

The Library Service continues to provide support to Community Managed Libraries via updated book stock, access to the library management system, a request service, events and professional support. However, at present these libraries aren't considered to be part of Neath Port Talbot's statutory service. Welsh Government, fearing a rush to the community managed model by local authorities issued new guidelines published in 2015 stating that for a library to be considered as part of the statutory service the local authority must provide at least 50% of the staff hours. This obviously impacts upon any potential savings but must be considered for any future potential transfers to community management. Neath Port Talbot currently has more community managed libraries than the rest of Wales combined, none of which meet the current Welsh Government guidelines. They do, however, deliver a local service which is valued.

Performance, in terms of the number of visitors and the number of items issued, has varied. As can be seen from the table below the number of overall issues has fallen, due largely in part to the cuts made to the mobile library service. This mirrors a national UK-wide trend which has

seen book issues fall by 6% in the last year. Overall visits, however, have increased, indicating that libraries are still well supported by the majority of residents with a higher than average membership in Neath Port Talbot. Presently there are 82,249 registered members of the service.

The increase in visitors and usage also reflects the wide range of outreach work that goes on at the library and at other venues. The number of people attending events held by libraries has increased by 36% over the last two years. In 2015-16 there were 61,664 attendees at all events.

Visits and Issues at Branch Libraries since 2013

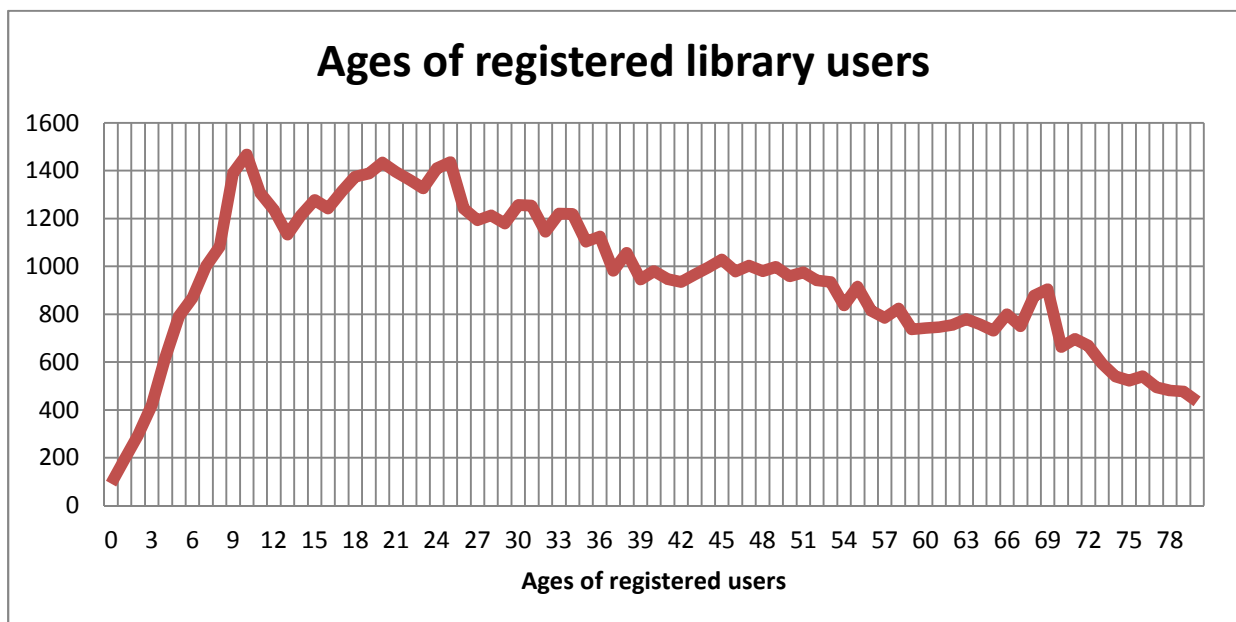|	2013-14		2014-15		2015-16	
	Visits	Issues	Visits	Issues	Visits	Issues
Baglan	29346	18281	26769	19121	29604	19069
Cwmafan	56850	24423	58870	23303	61586	24724
Glynneath	73515	27975	72956	25166	73447	23513
Neath	158243	118578	150902	104762	147438	100745
Pontardawe	54279	51343	55932	41037	74572	44597
Port Talbot	127506	66802	140910	60786	137057	65079
Sandfields	70376	53044	70231	53077	72830	57162
Skewen	27218	30385	29659	29888	28725	27680
Mobiles	21360	72952	21354	46293	10164	28088
Ebooks		4552		6011		6390
Website	218161		171026*		171654	
TOTALS	**836854**	**468335**	**798609**	**409444**	**807077**	**397047**

* Adjustments to the way Google analytics data was collated led to a fall in reported website visits between 2013 and 2014.

Citizens now use libraries for a wide range of activities other than traditional book borrowing. Based on the feedback obtained from the 2014 User Survey there is a high level of satisfaction with the service provided.

- 99% of those surveyed at all libraries rated the library as very good or good
- 73% of adults said that the library had made a difference to their lives
- 72% said that the library had helped them develop new skills
- 84% said that the library was a safe and inclusive place
- 93% of children aged 7-16 said that the library helped them in their learning and in finding things out
- 85% of children (7-16) said that the library made a difference to their lives

With regard to the usage of computers there are currently 88 computers that are available for public use. At present they are being used for a combined total of about 81,000 hours each year. Wifi facilities are now available at all Neath Port Talbot libraries enabling the public to use their own devices, such as laptops and tablets, at the library.

Libraries are used by a wide cross section of the population. This is demonstrated by the table below.

Ages of registered library users

Ages of registered users

4. Financial Analysis

Library Service Budget 2014-15

Library (Opening Hours)	FTE Staff	No. of PCs	Operating Costs	Salaries	Total Budget*
Neath (48.5)	8.59	18	£49,478	£198,021	£228,033
Port Talbot(50)	5.46	20	£66,168	£137,317	£187,072
Pontardawe(45)	3.54	12	£18,740	£93,725	£105,095
Sandfields(35)	2.22	10	£24,772	£63,018	£82,560
Glynneath(30)	1.62	8	£18,112	£39,249	£55,748
Skewen(30)	1.62	4	£16,380	£43,127	£56,844
Cwmafan(25)	1.22	7	£32,868	£26,898	£39,784
Baglan(25)	1.22	9	£24,974	£30,523	£53,758
Mobiles(25)	1	0	£35,525	£24,820	£60,347
Library Headquarters	9	n/a	£31,020	£278,264	£309,284
Libraries General (books, materials etc.)	n/a	n/a	£285,755	n/a	£285,755
					£1,464,280.00

*Figures for total budget include any income that is generated at the library either through charges or the rental of rooms. Cwmafan Library, for example, receives over £12,000 from Communities First. Not all libraries however are able to provide rental space.

Efficiency Savings

To deliver a viable and sustainable service requires that a review of potential efficiency savings must be undertaken. Neath Port Talbot has one of the highest costs for internal recharges in Wales at approximately £500,000 plus. Within these recharges three particular areas stand out.

1. Cleaning costs – an immediate saving of £20,000 could be achieved if cleaning services for libraries were reviewed and agreed.

2. Broadband charges – costs for broadband are disproportionate across all libraries. In many cases libraries are paying the same for broadband service as a local school. An example of this is Skewen Library who are currently paying more than £800 per computer for its broadband.

3. Building maintenance – a review of costs and services should be undertaken to ensure that the Library Service is receiving full value for money.

Further savings should be achieved as the lease terms on the mobile library vehicles expire. One of the vans sees its lease end in December 2017. At the moment this would not be renewed bringing about a £10,000 in savings in 2017/18. The second van sees its lease expire in December 2018 which could result in a further potential saving of £10,000.

 Port Talbot Library, located in the Aberafan Shopping Centre, has high annual rental and service charges which are increasing year on year. Relocating the library, as outlined in the recommendations in Section 7, should be an obvious consideration for this strategy.

5. A Modern Library Service

Libraries continue to play a vital role in society offering a wide range of activities to support citizens throughout life. It could be argued that at no point in their history have libraries provided a more valued, relevant service to as wide a range of users as they do today. Various national and local case studies have shown the value of libraries to health, the

economy, digital literacy, learning, culture and reading. Libraries are delivering this because they are continuously modernising and adapting their services to fit the needs of users and communities. This can clearly be illustrated by the ongoing programme of surveys of residents and communities of Neath Port Talbot.

Neath Port Talbot are at the forefront in implementing new and efficient methods of service delivery. Considerable improvements have been made in the implementation of self-service issuing (RFID) at two of our main libraries and in the book supply process through a combination of new technology (EDI), a consortium approach to purchasing and direct delivery to individual branches by our suppliers.

The Library Service has also been proactive in taking the lead on the development of an all Wales service for e books, e magazines and, more recently, e audio. Neath Port Talbot also acts as the lead authority for the Welsh Book purchasing consortium which currently includes all 22 local authorities in Wales. Additionally the Service plays an active role in regional library partnerships which promote inter lending between public and academic libraries, providing users with a wider range of resources. They also enable greater skills sharing between staff with opportunities for personal and professional development. This is vital to ensure that Neath Port Talbot continues to play an active role in modernisation throughout the region.

The challenge to the Library Service, over the next five years, is how to remain at the forefront of modernisation and provide a modern, sustainable library service that meets the needs and ambitions of its users.

Central to any discussion about a modern library service has to be the user. Here it is worth noting that what fits one community may not be suitable for another. What works in a busy town centre library may not work in a local, village library.

Identifying the needs of users will ensure that the Library Service will remain relevant. What people expect from the library is constantly changing, either through changes in society e.g. unemployment, migration or changes that the pubic experience during their lifetime. It is the role of the library to ensure that it caters for all these needs.

This strategy identifies three stages in people's lives and indicates what the Library Service offers to meet those needs.

Children and Young People

- Bookstart and Song and Rhyme sessions for under 3s and parents/carers
- Storytelling sessions and family craft activities
- Summer Reading Children to encourage children to read during the summer holidays and become active, independent readers
- Every Child a Library Member - Welsh Government initiative to foster a love of reading and improve literacy within primary schools
- Reading groups
- Study space and homework help
- Technocamps providing computer and robotics skills for children
- Free wifi
- Creative writing workshops with professional writers
- Literacy intervention – direct support to schools
- Books and information – including free e books and e-resources
- Online reading schemes to support children's reading development
- Safe, free, social spaces for children to learn and enjoy
- Free computers and free internet access for information and leisure
- Free library events programme

Active Citizens

- Quality information resources in print and digital format
- Books and reading for pleasure
- Access to online Council services
- Reading and Writing Groups
- Free wifi and computers with free internet access
- Job Clubs
- Access to Universal Jobmatch
- Local information

- Community venue
- Learning and training support
- Events programme
- Access to health information and Books on Prescription scheme
- Family activities
- Meeting space
- Local history and archives
- Family history workshops
- Free downloadable resources i.e. newspapers, driving theory test

Older People

- Free wifi and computers with free internet access
- Books, including spoken word and large print formats
- Access to online Council services
- Downloadable resources
- Free social and community space
- Access to health information and Books on Prescription scheme
- Informal support to health and well being
- Reading groups
- Creative writing workshops
- Home delivery service for those who are housebound
- Book deliveries to residential and sheltered homes
- Events and activities
- Local information
- IT support - informal learning
- Family history workshops
- Local history and archives

The Impact of Libraries

The Library Service is addressing some of society's biggest issues including:

- Physical and mental health
- Digital inclusion

- Isolation amongst the elderly
- Literacy and numeracy
- Unemployment
- Child poverty

The Library Service's Contribution to Council Priorities

The Library Service is playing an active role in contributing towards social inclusion, digital inclusion, literacy and learning, health and well-being, tackling poverty and assisting people into work. All actively contributing to meeting the Council's six priority areas which are:

1. Safer, brighter futures

2. Better schools, brighter prospects

3. Improving outcomes, improving lives

4. Prosperity for all

5. Reduce, reuse, recycle

6. Better, simpler, cheaper

However the needs of the public continually change and the Library Service must ensure that it has the resources and the staff skills to meet these requirements.

There should be a well-trained, highly skilled workforce enhanced by professionally qualified staff. Skills and training must be updated on a regular basis and kept relevant to meet demand. Where appropriate the Service will look to the voluntary sector and to external partners to support the service.

Resources must be relevant and stimulating. By the end of this strategy the Service needs to be able to demonstrate the widest range of high quality physical and digital resources that will inspire library users of all ages. They also need to be purposeful in order to address the core themes.

Library buildings should be "places of inspiration and aspiration where people can come to access high quality resources, to learn/study, to enjoy or to take part in activities in a safe relaxing environment." Between 2008-2016 Neath Port Talbot received over £1m from Welsh Government to refurbish seven of our eight branch libraries. In most cases the libraries were transformed into places fit for a modern 21st century library service providing an attractive environment with a flexible use of space, an enhanced IT service and disabled friendly access. Also, the Service has continued to review its branch library opening hours so that they fit in with the needs of the community.

Neath Port Talbot can be proud that some of its libraries are amongst the best in Wales. In 2014 the Library Service was featured by the Guardian newspaper as one of the four most innovative services in the UK. More recently Port Talbot Library has been shortlisted for the UK Library of the Year 2016 award.

The challenge must be to ensure that as many people as possible are aware of the wide range of free services that libraries provide. In order to reach new and existing users a range of marketing and promotional activities will continue to be undertaken by the Service.

6. A New Model for the Library Service

In recent years a number of authorities in Wales have explored the option of transferring some services out to trust with the incentive of potential savings from business rates. After looking closely at the three authorities that have opted to transfer to trust there are a number of concerns to Neath Port Talbot which include

- Libraries have very few income streams which make them unattractive to leisure trusts and therefore suffer a lack of investment
- Local authorities are still held accountable for providing a statutory library service even if they are transferred to trust
- Lack of direct operational control
- A number of recent Welsh Government reports have recommended that business rates for libraries and museums be

abolished thus removing the incentive to transfer to trust in the first place

- Those library services that have transferred have seen a serious decline in investment in both staffing and resources
- The Library Service's core themes reflect the authority's key priorities ensuring a coherent, joined up approach in both education and social services

For these reasons the majority of authorities in Wales have dismissed the trust option.

Creating the foundations for a sustainable and innovative library service requires new thinking as to how the branch library network operates. A new approach will establish a network that puts each library on a sustainable footing, ensuring that the services they provide are relevant to the community they serve.

The Library Service therefore proposes to create a tiered network of libraries, from Tier 1 through to Tier 4.

Tier 1 Libraries - Neath, Pontardawe and Port Talbot

These three libraries will be the main central hubs offering the widest range of library services. They will serve both their local community and the visitors to the three towns. They will be open for 40-50 hours per week and have a professionally qualified librarian with a team of library assistants. The libraries will offer professional support to the Community Managed Libraries.

What each library will provide is:

- Access to all types of book and audio visual stock
- Minimum of 10 computers available for use
- Community event space
- Full programme of events
- Services of a professionally qualified member of staff
- Free Wifi and free internet access
- Operate as a hub giving access to other Council services
- Wide range of information services including link to e-government

- Offer a self-service issue and return desk (This option is not yet viable for Neath due to building limitations. If the library were to relocate to a larger venue then self-service would be provided as an option)
- Co-located with customer service centre or local authority partners
- Class visits
- Job Clubs
- Programme of learning and training events
- IT support
- Local history collection
- Map collection
- Books on Prescription
- Reading and Writing Groups
- Bookstart / Song and Rhyme sessions

Tier 2 Libraries – Glynneath, Sandfields and Skewen

These three libraries will also deliver a high quality service to their local community. They will be open between 30-35 hours per week and managed by a Branch Librarian and part time library assistants.

What each library will provide is:

- Access to a wide range of book and audio visual stock
- Computers available for public use
- Programme of events
- Free Wifi and free internet access
- Class visits
- Job Clubs
- Programme of learning and training events
- IT support
- Books on Prescription
- Reading and Writing Groups
- Bookstart / Song and Rhyme sessions

Tier 3 Libraries – Baglan and Cwmafan

These two libraries will deliver a quality library service meeting the individual needs of their local community. They will be open between 20-

25 hours per week and managed by a Branch Librarian with library assistants.

What each library will provide is:

- Access to a good range of book and audio visual stock
- Meeting rooms
- Programme of events
- Free Wifi and free internet access
- Class visits
- Job Clubs
- Programme of learning and training events
- Books on Prescription
- Reading and Writing Groups
- Bookstart / Song and Rhyme sessions

Tier 4 Libraries – Community Managed Libraries

Blaengwynfi, Briton Ferry, Cymmer Afan, Cwmllynfell, Gwaun Cae Gurwen, Resolven, Seven Sisters, Taibach and Ystalyfera.

The Library Service will continue to support community managed libraries through the provision of new stock, regular stock changes, access to a requests service, the library management system and professional support and advice together with training for volunteers. However they will all still be staffed by volunteers with the premises funded and managed by individual community groups. The services they provide are not within the direct control and management of Neath Port Talbot Library Service.

Following the publication of guidelines on Community Managed Libraries by Welsh Government in 2015, any further transfer of library provision will require the authority to maintain a minimum of 50% of the opening hours with paid staff.

The four tiers of libraries will be supported by:

- Professional specialist staff based at Library Headquarters who will deliver much of the targeted outreach work. They will also

work with branch libraries to implement new projects together with regional and national initiatives

- A mobile library service serving the smaller and more remote communities of Neath Port Talbot
- A home delivery service meeting the needs of housebound borrowers

7. Recommendations for the future development of a library service in Neath Port Talbot

1. Consideration should be given to relocating Port Talbot Library from the Aberafan Shopping Centre to a suitable alternative location. We need to ensure that opportunities to co-locate or integrate Port Talbot Library with other Council services are fully explored. There would also be considerable savings from relocating away from a commercial retail site which has higher rental and service charges.

2. Neath Library is housed in a building that is over 100 years old and is situated in two separate buildings over two floors. It no longer meets the accessibility needs of users and has considerable long term maintenance costs. Therefore possible relocation to alternative Neath town centre premises should be considered together with the possibility of service integration.
(For Recommendation 1 & 2 it should be noted that there are currently grants of up to £300k available from Welsh Government to assist in the enhancement of the library.)

3. Sandfields Library is in a perfect location to deliver the services of a Tier 2 library but there are some building maintenance issues which will need to be addressed in the next five years.

4. The building that Skewen Library currently occupies is too small to provide a full range of services required of a Tier 2 library. A refurbishment grant application was submitted to Welsh Government in 2015, but was refused due to the limited benefits and enhancements that could be achieved in the current building. However usage is relatively high and shows the potential for developing a wider range of services in Skewen. In order for the Library Service to deliver a Tier 2 library then consideration should be given to relocating from the present

building. There is a possibility of developing partnership working with the local community council to provide alternative premises and this should be fully explored. Such an agreement could secure efficiencies of circa £32k.

5. The Mobile Library vehicles in Neath Port Talbot have a current life expectancy of approximately five years. Moreover the lease period of both vehicles will expire by December 2018 (the lease on one of the vans expires December 2017). Replacement costs of at least £150k is prohibitive. Consideration therefore should be given to developing an alternative offer in the next five years which could consist of:

- An enhanced home delivery service
- Small community deposit collections
- Greater participation with the voluntary sector/other partner organisations in delivering a library service to remote areas.

This would secure savings of £30k

6. Neath Port Talbot must continue to play an active part in local and regional library initiatives such as the development and implementation of the all Wales Library Management System. This will facilitate greater cooperation between authorities, both regionally and nationally while providing an enhanced service to users.

7. Neath Port Talbot has one of the highest costs for internal recharges in Wales. Reducing these costs should bring about almost instant efficiency savings and must be a priority in the first year of the strategy.

Implementing all recommendations, over time, could realise savings of circa £200k.

Wayne John,

County Librarian

July 2016