

## Appendix 2

### Update on recent developments in 2022-23

- 1.1. Encouraging people back into libraries has been a key strategic focus this year – both customers and partner organisations – and the level of in-person activities has steadily increased over the last 12 months. 1,885 activities were held Jan-Dec 2022 with 23,018 attendances – these included school class visits, Bookstart rhymetimes, reading groups, craft groups and library organised activities for the Winter of Wellbeing and Summer of Fun programmes, Urdd Eisteddfod 2023, Open Doors, and the autumn Living Well in Wales programme. Activities delivered by a wide range of partners saw a significant increase over the year reaching a total of 733 activities with 3064 attendances. All will have made a significant contribution to community and individual wellbeing and connectedness.
- 1.2. Removing barriers to library use to ensure everyone is able to benefit from our services was another key strategic aim this year. Libraries are well placed to support people during the current cost of living crisis and in the post-pandemic recovery, and to help tackle poverty and inequalities. Overdue fines, a significant remaining perceived barrier to library use, were abolished in October 2022 via a Lead Member Delegated Decision.
- 1.3. The 2022 Summer Reading Challenge on the theme of Gadgeteers saw 2077 children participating and re-engaging with their local library in person and online. The reach was 19% of the primary population – once again the highest in Wales (Wales average is 7%). The Summer of Fun funding secured by the Society of Chief Librarians Wales to support the challenge enabled us to run a parallel programme of workshops and activities in libraries.
- 1.4. Supporting children's development from birth is a key priority for the service and we secured fund from the Child Development Fund in 22-23 to enable us to expand our Bookstart programme to offer a wider range of rhymetime sessions, rhyme and rambles, and outreach visits to other settings to engage families. In January 2023 a new book, *Siarad Babi: Du a Gwyn / Baby Talk: Black and White*, was launched. It

will be gifted to newborn babies to give them the earliest possible encounter with books and to support their cognitive, visual and physical development.

- 1.5. The major project to upgrade libraries' public access technology has been completed to improve our offer to customers who rely on their local library to get online. It will enable us to contribute to the commitments of the new Corporate Plan Theme 5. The investment has included a new PC and print management system, all the public PCs and scanners have been renewed, new self-service printing facilities, cloud printing and online PC booking have been introduced.
- 1.6. To further support digital inclusion and reducing barriers to online access, libraries are now part of the National Databank offering free data SIM cards to people experiencing data poverty, and plans are being finalised for a new service lending digital devices to people to help them learn and practice basic digital skills at home.
- 1.7. Family history is a popular subject and in February 2023 we enabled free access to Find my Past including the Census 1921 records at all our libraries – this is in addition to the free access to Ancestry already on offer in libraries through the National Digital Library for Wales project.
- 1.8. The service's activity in Health and Wellbeing has continued. The Reading Well for Teens scheme was launched in October 2022 to support young people's mental health and wellbeing. We also delivered a range of activities funded via Welsh Government's Living Well in Wales programme aimed at showcasing libraries as Places to Connect and to support Ageing Well. They included a sewing group for parents of babies, a panto dame storytime, and a Fictionfest of visits by popular authors.
- 1.9. Libraries have continued to deliver on their role as community focal point for services, offering face-to-face customer service for the Council's services, and a safe place within the community for people to visit and interact. Since November 2022, libraries have also been the council's cornerstone for the Croeso Cynnes/Warm Welcome initiative, providing a welcoming, safe and warm place, with a free hot drink available and access to the wide range of opportunities on offer.