

## **Blaenau Gwent Library Service Strategy 2020-2025**

This strategy gives an overview for the vision of the library service in Blaenau Gwent. It will outline the aims and objectives of the service and demonstrate how it will contribute to the local and nation governments agendas.



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## **Background**

The library service in Blaenau Gwent is managed and delivered via Aneurin Leisure Trust. It was the first library service in Wales to be fully transferred, as a whole, to trust status, when Aneurin Leisure Trust was created in 2014. With a twenty year contract from the local authority, the trust delivers leisure, learning and cultural services across Blaenau Gwent. The trust is a Not for Profit Distributing organisation and a registered charity. It is managed by a Board of Trustees and has a close working relationship with the local authority to ensure that the services makes a positive impact to people's lives by improving community life.

## **The service**

For a small authority, Blaenau Gwent has a higher number of static libraries, compared to other boroughs. There are four full time libraries, Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Brynmawr and Abertillery and two part time libraries, Cwm and Blaina. In addition to this, a home delivery services operates across the borough, delivering stock to residents who are unable to access local libraries. The service is well connected to communities, with 98% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library. Therefore, as a locally accountable service, they are well-placed to respond to local needs and issues. As a 'cradle-to-grave' service, the libraries in Blaenau Gwent offer significant reach into local communities, providing a cost effective way of ensuring that people are connected to services they need when they need them.

Across Blaenau Gwent, libraries serve as community hubs. They have a proven track record of working in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders; they are trusted community spaces, free to enter and open to all and they are highly valued by local communities and partners.



## Our Vision

Blaenau Gwent Library Service Vision – ***‘Improving people’s life opportunities, inspiring and enriching lives by providing high quality library services that are relevant and accessible to all’***

This vision relates directly to Aneurin Leisure Trust’s vision statement of ***‘Improving Community Life’***

We believe that libraries are vital community hubs, bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to help them live better.

Our ambition is for everyone to:

- benefit from the positive outcomes that libraries can offer and to choose libraries because they see clear benefits
- have access to impartial, professional library services, aimed at empowering, upskilling and building confidence, through access to information and reading in all forms
- experience excellent customer service

The vision will also be linked to achieving the 12 core entitlements from the Welsh Public Library Standards.

The core entitlements are:

- Libraries in Wales will be free to join and open to all.
- Libraries in Wales will ensure friendly, knowledgeable and qualified staff are on hand to help.

- Libraries in Wales will provide access to a range of services, activities and high quality resources in a range of formats to support lifelong learning, personal well-being and development, community participation, and culture and recreation.
- Libraries in Wales will provide appropriate services, facilities and information resources for individuals and groups with special requirements.
- Libraries in Wales will provide appropriate safe, attractive and accessible physical spaces with suitable staffed opening hours.
- Libraries in Wales will lend books for free, and deliver free access to information, including online information resources available 24 hours a day
- Libraries in Wales will provide free use of the internet and computers including Wi-Fi.
- Libraries in Wales will provide access to services, cultural activities and high quality resources in the Welsh language.
- Libraries in Wales will work in partnership to share catalogues and facilitate access to the resources of all Welsh Libraries, enabling more people to benefit from those services.
- Libraries in Wales will work with a range of partners to promote and deliver services to new and diverse audiences
- Libraries in Wales will regularly consult users to gather their views in the service and information about their changing needs.
- Libraries in Wales will provide access to the library service's strategy, policies, objectives and vision, in print and online, in a range of languages appropriate to the community.



### **Statutory role**

Under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, it is a statutory duty for every local authority in Wales to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”. Each year all public library services in Wales are required to submit a report to Welsh Government regarding the performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards. The Welsh Public Library Standards are the measures which the Minister with responsibility for Libraries can make a decision about their compliance with the 1964 Act. The responsibility for libraries in Blaenau Gwent remains with the local authority despite Aneurin Leisure being the vehicle for delivery.

### **Strategic Context**

Libraries contribute to a wide range of local and national Government agendas including



## **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Strategic Context**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ensures that public bodies across Wales, including local authorities, think about the long-term, work better with communities and each other, look to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

To achieve this, the Act puts in place 7 well-being goals:

- A globally responsive Wales
- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

The library service in Blaenau Gwent contributes to a number of these goals by supporting education and lifelong learning; promoting health and wellbeing and improving digital inclusion.

The Welsh Government programme, 'Taking Wales Forward' also outlines the commitments made to drive forward improvement and to make a difference to the lives of everyone in Wales. The aims and objectives of the library service in Blaenau Gwent directly link to this programme.

## **Local Policies**

### **2022-2027 Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan**

This plan is the Council's roadmap that sets out the vision, values and priorities of the local authority. The plan identifies the key priorities in which the council can play a significant role in helping transform the area and have a positive impact on the wellbeing of current and future generations.

[Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2022/27 | Blaenau Gwent CBC \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)

### **Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan 2018-2023**

This plan links all the well-being objectives into an overarching high level strategy, 'The Blaenau Gwent We Want 2018-2023'

[Well-beingPlan\(Layout\)-D8.pdf \(blaenau-gwent.gov.uk\)](#)

The strategic objectives of the library service reflect the national and local strategies in Wales and Blaenau Gwent. The emphasis will be encompassing the context of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act with a key focus on general health and being.



## Our Key Strategic Aims

### Welsh Culture and Creative Enrichment

We will promote our services in order to establish them as a focal point for community cultural life, hosting and running a range of activities. Our libraries are well-placed to extend cultural engagement because of our use by all social groups and our role as inclusive cultural hubs within communities. A pro-active approach to partnership work will ensure we offer a wide range of activities that will appeal to wide audiences. These activities support social cohesion, build skills and reduce social isolation by encouraging participation in shared activities.

We will support this by

- Promoting Welsh language and Welsh themed stock



- Encourage use of our free, informal spaces for partners to deliver cultural activities
- Manage collections of local history materials and provide access to family history resources
- Actively encourage people to engage in cultural activities to combat social exclusion and aid health and well being.

### **Improved Digital Access**

We will encourage our libraries to be the 'go-to' provider for all IT support in the community. We provide a trusted network of accessible PCs and free WiFi, with trained library staff, volunteers and partnership support to provide a wide range of digital support and activities

We will support this by

- Empowering people to develop digital skills by building confidence and supporting learning
- Develop new digital projects to help combat the digital divide, e.g loaning of tablets and the roll-out of Wi-Fi printing
- Develop staff skills to reach a wider audience through digital engagement
- Develop a shared community hub model with the local authority to support residents to access local and national e-Govt services

### **People's Lives are Enriched and Informed by Reading**

Reading and literacy are vital as two of the most fundamental skills in life. Our service will offer free access to stock, with no fines, to all members of our community. We will offer a range of formats, including talking books, large print and digital.

We will support this by

- Delivering reading schemes, e.g Summer Reading Challenge and develop new programmes
- Hosting reading groups, author events, creative writing sessions and other activities that support literacy
- Develop further reach within communities by extending community loans and home delivery services
- Effective marketing of e-book services



## Helping everyone achieve their full potential

Our libraries will encourage and motivate people to take advantage of a wide range of learning activities. Our close working partnership with adult community learning helps us achieve this aim. Our role of being an informal learning provider is firmly embedded into the local community, with clear referral mechanisms to more formal learning.

We will support this by

- Being the access point in each community to local and national information to support individuals employment, health, wellbeing and learning. All information resources will be up to date, relevant and accessible.
- Providing free resources for study and learning, including e-resources and quiet spaces for study. Also informal training in information literacy and digital support.
- Enabling and encouraging partner organisations to deliver their services from libraries, taking advantage of our free, informal space.
- Exploring opportunities to provide new services to residents to increase the library offer, e.g development of the council's community hub model and the proposed relocation of Abertillery library to Trinity Chapel which will be a co-located service.

## Increased Prosperity

The prosperity of Blaenau Gwent is a vital link to help improve quality of life and wellbeing.

We will support this by

- Working with Blaenau Gwent Council to facilitate business start up support via the BG Effect programme.
- Delivering tailored support for job-seekers, including workclubs in all libraries
- Using footfall as local performance indicators, supporting the high street by encouraging as many people as possible to use local libraries, helping to boost the local economy.
- Supporting anti-poverty agendas, such as giving babies the best start in life to access books through the BookStart programme.

## Helping everyone to be healthier

Libraries are ideally placed to support well-being. Every aspect of the library service contributes to people feeling better. From the social aspect of tackling loneliness to helping people better understand their health conditions. Our non-clinical, trusted environments provide a wide range of health and well-being groups, activities and initiatives.

We will support this by

- Providing Reading Well, Books on Prescription, Dementia and Wellbeing titles.
- Further developing the Home Delivery service to target more isolated people.
- Encourage more health and wellbeing services and providers to work in partnership with local libraries, e.g Hospice of the Valley and Carers groups
- Increase the number of health and wellbeing activities that are delivered in libraries



## How we achieve these outcomes

### Workforce Development

We will encourage and enable staff to pursue formal qualifications and professional registration. We will strive to exceed the minimum 1% of aggregate staff working hours for training and professional development during the year. All staff will have regular training audits, where needs will be identified. A particular emphasis will be placed on digital engagement training.

### Increase Usage and develop community support initiatives

We will work with local groups and partners to reach isolated communities. We will seek to deliver library services from these locations, e.g Llanhilleth Miners Institute. All libraries will be set local targets to increase usage and regular membership drives will be coordinated across social media channels and through community outreach. The community support role of our libraries has become more important in recent years and the whole ethos of this agenda is about changing lives for the better. All our library services will encompass this and we will ensure users are able to access these service at local libraries, when they are needed.





## Fit for purpose buildings

We will ensure all our buildings are modern and welcoming. Opening hours will meet the needs of the community and services will be focused on meeting local needs. We have a rolling programme for IT renewal and will ensure to refresh technology to meet customer needs. We will continue to seek opportunities for funding that will enable us to refurbish and modernise our libraries. We will develop opportunities to provide co-located services and work in partnership with the local authority to develop community hubs, which will provide a long term sustainable library service.



## Stronger co-ordination and partnership working



The service will play a pro-active role in regional and national library schemes and projects. As a small authority, the service recognises the strong benefits in working collaboratively, in reducing costs and sharing good practice. Our sector can achieve more impact by combining expertise and sharing improvement ideas and insight. We will continue to champion a pro-active approach to partnership working, by linking with local public, private, voluntary and community organisations.

## **Being Relevant**

We will ensure our collections are up to date and will review our stock policy annually. We will select a wide range of stock, regularly consulting with our users. We will keep up to date with technology and continue to help digital inclusion through a range of activities. We will develop a social media strategy and work more closely with the Digital Marketing Officer with the trust. The all-Wales digital platform offer will feature heavily through all our social media channels.

## **Work with volunteers**

We will support volunteers to 'add value' to the library offer. We will further develop our volunteer policy and ensure all volunteers have a clear role description and are managed by a designated volunteer co-ordinator. Volunteers will be trained and will be aware of the aims and objectives of the library offer. Offering volunteer opportunities will also improve the confidence and health and well-being of the individuals involved.



## **Performance Reporting**

Monthly performance indicators will be shared with senior management and all library staff. Quarterly reports will be completed and shared with the local authority. The service will complete an annual assessment report for Welsh Government. (The Welsh Public Library Standards) The assessment report is published on the Welsh Government website (Museums, Archives and Museums Dept). It is also published on the Aneurin Leisure Trust website. The report is also presented to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis. Library performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards is also reported to the local authority for Public Accountability Measures (PAMS) and is approved by the Board of Trustees.

### **Customer Consultation**

The service regularly conducts user surveys to gather their views and information about their changing needs. A customer survey of adults and children was conducted in Feb-March 2023

- 70% of adults think that using the library has helped them develop new skills
- 100% of adults think the library is enjoyable, safe and inclusive.
- 96% of adults think that the library has made a difference to their lives.
- 94% of children aged 7-16 thinks the library has helped them learn and find things out
- 99% of adults think the standard of customer care is 'very good' or 'good'
- 97% of adults think the library is 'very good' or 'good' overall.