

**SUBJECT: MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PUBLIC LIBRARIES
STRATEGY 2025–2030**

MEETING: PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 29TH APRIL 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek formal approval and endorsement of the Monmouthshire County Council Public Libraries Strategy 2025–2030, recognising public libraries as a statutory service, a cornerstone of democratic access to information, and a vital component of the Council's Community Hub model, delivering inclusive, sustainable and future- focused services that support wellbeing, literacy, digital inclusion and community resilience across the county.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To endorse the Monmouthshire County Council Public Libraries Strategy 2025–2030 as the strategic framework for the delivery and development of the Council's public library service over the next five years.
- 2.2 To acknowledge the findings of Scrutiny and the positive contribution of consultation feedback in strengthening the Strategy's focus on inclusion, accessibility, partnership working and community benefit.
- 2.3 To support the continued positioning of libraries as integral Community Hubs, aligned with wider Council priorities including prevention, wellbeing, lifelong learning and digital inclusion.
- 2.4 To commit to ongoing performance monitoring and evaluation in line with the Welsh Public Library Standards and the Strategy's stated outcomes.

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 Strategic Context and Statutory Responsibility

Public libraries are a statutory service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and must be delivered in accordance with the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS).

These standards make clear that:

“Public libraries encourage literacy, support lifelong learning, help digital inclusion, connect people and in doing so help to build communities.”

The proposed Strategy responds directly to this statutory framework while recognising the changing role of libraries in modern society. Libraries are no longer solely repositories of books; they are dynamic, trusted and inclusive civic spaces, increasingly central to tackling isolation, inequality and digital exclusion.

The Strategy articulates a clear vision of libraries as:

“Dynamic spaces within our Community Hubs that are places of learning, creativity, and community connection.”

This repositioning firmly aligns the library service with Monmouthshire County Council’s wider ambitions around prevention, resilience and community- based service delivery.

3.2 The Case for Change and Continuity

The Strategy is both ambitious and pragmatic. It acknowledges financial and workforce pressures while making a strong case that investment in libraries is preventative investment—reducing demand on other services by supporting literacy, mental wellbeing, employability and digital confidence.

As stated in the Strategy:

“Libraries are a cornerstone of democracy—where information is free and equally available to everyone. People tend to take that for granted, and they don’t understand what’s at stake.”
(Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress)

At a time of increasing social inequality and digital dependence, withdrawing or diminishing library provision would disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. Conversely, sustaining and evolving libraries ensures equitable access to opportunity for all residents.

3.3 Alignment with Corporate and National Priorities

The Strategy strongly aligns with:

- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, particularly the goals of:

- A more equal Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

- MCC priorities relating to:

- Community resilience
- Digital inclusion
- Education and lifelong learning
- Prevention and early intervention

Libraries act as delivery platforms for these priorities, offering safe, accessible spaces where multiple services and partners can collaborate to improve outcomes.

3.4 Consultation and Scrutiny Engagement

The Strategy has been strengthened through meaningful consultation and Scrutiny challenge. Engagement included:

- Friends groups from Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Chepstow Reading Garden and Monmouth libraries

Feedback consistently highlighted:

- Strong community attachment to libraries
- Support for libraries as inclusive, welcoming spaces
- The importance of protecting local identity while embracing innovation

The process confirmed that the Strategy is credible, aligned to statutory expectations and clearly articulated, with a strong narrative around social value and community impact.

3.5 Measuring Success and Managing Risk

Success will be measured through:

- Compliance with the Welsh Public Library Standards
- Usage data and footfall
- Digital access and engagement indicators
- Qualitative feedback from users and communities
- Contribution to wider Community Hub outcomes

Key risks - such as financial pressures, workforce capacity and changing user needs - are mitigated through:

- Integration within the 2014 Community Hub delivery model
- Partnership working
- Ongoing service review and performance management

4. REASONS:

Approval of the Strategy is required to:

- Discharge the Council's statutory duties
- Provide strategic clarity and direction for the library service
- Enable effective planning, partnership working and investment
- Ensure libraries continue to meet current and future community needs

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The Strategy will be delivered within existing Community Hubs & Libraries budgets, supported by:

- Efficient use of existing assets
- Partnership working and external funding opportunities
- Continuous service review to ensure best value

Future grant opportunities and collaborative funding models will be actively explored to enhance service delivery and resilience.

6. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

The Strategy has a significant positive impact on equality and future generations by:

- Ensuring universal access to information and learning
- Supporting digitally excluded and vulnerable residents
- Providing safe, inclusive and welcoming spaces
- Promoting literacy, wellbeing and lifelong learning
- Strengthening community cohesion and resilience

While service delivery models continue to evolve, the Strategy's emphasis on inclusion and access ensures that impacts are mitigated, monitored and addressed.

7. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Options considered included:

- Do nothing / maintain status quo without a refreshed Strategy – discounted due to statutory risk and lack of strategic direction.
- Service reduction or withdrawal – discounted due to disproportionate impact on vulnerable communities and conflict with MCC and Welsh Government priorities.

The preferred option—approval of a refreshed, forward- looking Strategy—offers the most sustainable, equitable and future- proof solution.

8. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The Strategy will be evaluated through:

- Annual performance reporting against WPLS
- Trends in usage and participation
- Feedback from users and partners
- Contribution to Community Hub outcomes (SBP)

9. CONSULTEES:

- Friends of Libraries Groups
- Internal MCC officers and service leads

Feedback has been incorporated into the final Strategy, strengthening its focus on accessibility, inclusion and community partnership.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- Monmouthshire County Council Public Libraries Strategy 2025–2030
- Welsh Public Library Standards

11. AUTHOR:

Richard Drinkwater

Manager of Community Hubs, Community Education & Public Libraries

12. CONTACT DETAILS:

Tel: 07768055283

E-mail: richarddrinkwater@monmouthshire.gov.uk

