***Borrowing books can and does help people transform their lives, but librarians do so much more.***

**Library Users:** librarians support library users from 1yr olds to 90 yr olds with numerous queries from books to digital inclusion. Library users present new and exciting challenges every day from literacy support to support for additional learning or physical needs. Librarians modify the library experience for the individual to ensure exceptional customer care.

**Helping People Find Information & Research Help:** librarians provide professional advice to help people develop the skills they need to continue with their own research. This includes family/local history, school or further education assignments, helping businesses or individual research. Librarians also signpost council services and provide people with information to access the correct departments.

**Internet/Technology Support**: this is a key duty for librarians as they support library users by providing digital inclusion sessions, job search/CV help sessions, support everyday use on public access PCs from printing, email access, homework help, accessing/printing travel documents, logging onto PCs or WiFi. Technical support includes photocopying to sending faxes.

**Organising and Running Events and Activities**: librarians run events for both children and adults from craft activities, Lego clubs, techno clubs, jewellery making, homework support, song & rhyme sessions, school/class visits, book clubs, author events, fitness events, health & wellbeing activities, adult education sessions, creative writing, job clubs, local history talks/clubs, Knitting/Crochet groups, coffee mornings and much more. They then market/promote all events.

**Partnerships with other Organisations**: librarians work very hard to build relationships with and promote the use of their libraries among outside organisations which include Flying Start, TWF, CVS, Job Centre, Working Communities, Communities First, Book Start, PASE team, Local Historical Societies, Charities, Safer NPT, PCSOs and many more. Librarians also go out into the community to promote the service by providing promotional/informative talks, promotional displays at outside events or activities within schools etc.

**Library & Collection management**: providing a professional service, a safe environment, promoting, ordering and displaying stock, taking responsibility for building management, dealing with difficult/aggressive customers, problem solving, attending training, support and promote NPTs objectives, promotion of Library via marketing material/social media and , working with local councillors to ensure the needs of the community are met.

**Archives and Special Collections**: promoting and maintaining local history collections, supporting access to collections. Promoting cultural heritage among groups/schools and creating educational exhibitions.

***Professional Librarians are dedicated to delivering an all-encompassing library service that continues to support NPTs objectives and ensuring libraries remain relevant to their communities.***

NPT Libraries have evolved over the past 10 years to become a central resource within their communities. Books are still our business but we now do so much more to support and educate people within our communities.

**NPT Libraries: a vital resource.**

**Engaging with Children**

NPT libraries are the venue for numerous children’s activities that help to support and develop children’s literacy. We engage with pre-school children through weekly song & rhyme sessions and we engage with health visitors to support parents/pre-school children from all sectors of the community. Libraries also host TWF events that promote the Welsh language to a wider audience. NPT libraries endorse national literacy campaigns such as The Summer Reading Challenge, Reading Ahead and Every Child a Library Member. These schemes encourage children in every NPT community to visit their library and discover the joy of reading.

NPT libraries organise and run free children’s activities throughout the year. High attendance to all events highlights the extent to which libraries play a role in children’s lives on a social, creative and educational level. Libraries are venues used by other organisations to host their own events/activities; these groups include Communities First and Flying Start.

**Supporting Schools**

All libraries in NPT have built up strong links with local schools. School pupils visit on a regular basis for organised activities and to borrow books. Librarians provide reading groups, digital and literacy support. Some libraries offer a ‘Book Box’ delivery service which includes delivering books to schools to help support ‘free reading’ sessions. The Mobile Library is a vital resource to schools in remote communities.

**Digital Inclusion**

Free access to computers is central to our service, without this provision there are a high percentage of people who would not have internet access. Library staff are trained to support digitally excluded customers and are at hand to help at all times. We provide dedicated IT classes including digital inclusion, family history research and CV/UJM help sessions. We work in partnership with organisations such as Communities First, CVS, Job Centre, CAPs and The Red Cross. We also work with the local health board to deliver the Books on Prescription scheme. Different organisations provide support and advise vulnerable people/the unemployed in a neutral venue. People within the community are more open to attending sessions within this setting.

**Community Support**

NPT libraries have become a social centre as they provide coffee mornings, Welsh and English reading groups, creative writing workshops, family history help sessions, sewing workshops, knitting groups, local history events, author events, adult education workshops, craft groups and so much more. These events are not only educational tools but they make many vulnerable people feel less isolated therefore libraries are crucial venues for community events.

**To Conclude**

Social deprivation throughout NPT means that many families, adults and senior citizens do not have the disposable income to purchase books. Library staff work tirelessly to promote literacy within the community and to ensure all their needs are met. Provision of FREE books to the community is one of the main objectives for libraries and why we have to ensure this service continues to be professional, efficient and effective. However, we must always remember that NPT libraries do so much more than provide books!

**NPT Libraries counter proposal.**

**Background**

NPT Library Service has undergone significant budget cuts of £500,000 since 2013 which has resulted in the transfer of over half of the branch Libraries into the community with limited degrees of success, the decommissioning of one mobile library, a significant reduction in the book fund and the loss of eighteen posts.

The further cuts 2016/2017 proposed to Cabinet of £79,000 to close Baglan and Skewen library decommission the last remaining mobile library and close Cefn Coed Colliery Museum. However, as staff throughout the service have expressed their ongoing concern for the level of library provision within the county Unison set up a working party who have come up with several counter proposals. Staff recognize the financial situation the council is in and acknowledge the county needs to make savings. However, we also recognize the importance and value the library service brings to the citizens of NPT in terms of digital inclusion, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, lifelong learning, literacy etc and would rather try to make savings from the service as a whole than isolate particular libraries for closure.

**Counter Proposals**

These can be divided into three parts:

**1. Counter proposals that can be applied to all libraries to provide an instant saving to the authority**

1.1. Cleaning

Looking at the budgets for libraries we suggest a review of the cleaning of library buildings as there seems to be a disparity between buildings despite their size. As a council we need to look at the usage of each building and the priorities for cleaning each location on its own merit as usage has changed over time but the cleaning has not been reassessed to reflect this. This would provide the authority with an instant saving.

1.2 Ad-on costs

The library and Museum service are still being charged the same for payroll, admin etc. even though there are less than half the libraries left under direct management of the authority. This needs to be reassessed and reduced to reflect the reduction in service. This would provide the authority with an instant saving.

1.3 IT Support

There has been no reduction in cost for IT support provided to the library service despite the fact that NPT IT also now provide support for Swansea. This needs to be reassessed as, at best the library service is in effect paying the same for a reduction in the level of IT support and at worst, the current provision will be detrimental to the council’s Digital By Choice and Digital Inclusion policies. As the choice has already been made the cost should reflect the reduction in the level of support provided. This would provide the library service with an instant saving.

1.4 Broadband Issues

With the transfer of community libraries cost transferred to all libraries so this figure is artificially high . The broadband costs for each library should be clearly stated in the budget and if needs be the cost for closed libraries be written off not charged to libraries that are already paying for their own broadband. This would provide the authority with an instant saving.

**2. Counter proposals that could lead to income generation and see an increase in library usage:**

These could offset the need to make the perceived savings that have been proposed. Additionally, in the light of the better than expected settlement from government, we would ask that the service be given the time and opportunity to prove this.

2.1 Income generation

There is great potential to generate an increase in the income libraries currently produce. Libraries need to embrace the business opportunities within their communities which will provide much needed income generation. There a several viable options which can achieve this:

* Self Certification Forms

G.P.s send patients to the library for a Self Certification form. Libraries currently charge 10p - the cost of a print out. However, we suggest that the customer be charge 50p for the print and for the service.

* Passport Verification

Members of the public require passport verification which has to be provided by a professional such as a librarian. The post office currently charges for passport checking service and therefore it makes monetary sense for the library service to charge for verification.

* Room Hire

Several libraries have a room that can be hired out to agencies or members of the public, However, the full potential has not yet been realized because this is usually carried out by individual libraries on an adhoc basis. If this resource is marketed intensively throughout the county to partners and outside agencies the prospective income generation could be significant.

* Increased Revenue

With the decline in Post Offices we have a niche market that can be cornered. Libraries have many customers who need to print and send documents. We are frequently asked if we sell stamps, envelopes, poly pockets and pens. We propose to set up a box for each library with a stationary supply for sale to the public containing these items. This would take minimal staff time but adds value to the service and would generate some income.

**3. If the above proposals do not reach a significant saving further counter proposals to avoid closure of Skewen, Baglan, Mobile Library and Cefn Coed Museum on an individual basis are listed below.**

3.1 Skewen

Option 1 Look to a Community Group such as Coedffranc Community Council to take over the Library building and staff as it stands which transfers all the costs, saving the authority all costs. This is the preferred option as it would be business as usual’ for Library users. All services would essentially be the same and professionally run.

Option 2 Look to Coedffranc Community Council to move the Library to an alternative building and employ the current staff, making a significant saving to the Authority. This would be the next best option. Although a change of building could have an impact, keeping the staff means that a professional service can continue.

Option 3 Look to Coedffranc Community Council to move the Library to an alternative building and keep a professional member of staff for 50% of the opening hours (in line with Welsh Government standards), again making a saving to the Authority. This is the least preferred option as community libraries are by their nature unable to offer the wide range of much needed services for the people who need them the most e.g. the socially excluded, the digitally excluded, the vulnerable etc.

3.2 Baglan

Look to a Community Group to take over the Library building and staff as it stands which transfers all the costs, saving the authority all costs. This is the preferred option as it would be business as usual’ for Library users. All services would essentially be the same and professionally run.

3.3 Mobile Library

Although NPT currently runs one mobile library, the Authority still pays for the lease on a second van which was decommissioned as part of the budget cuts last year. If a buyer for the second mobile Library could be found there would be significant savings to be made, possibly negating the need to take the last remaining mobile out of service. The impact the withdrawal of this service to the people in the rural communities, many of whom as isolated, elderly, and unable to travel to a main branch and who rely on mobile service, greatly outweigh the savings to be made

**4. Conclusion**

While we recognize the need for the Authority to make cost savings due to a reduction in budget, which has been addressed in the counter proposals above, we feel that Libraries are at the heart of the Council’s policies and should continue to help deliver these. Reducing the Library service through closures, reduces citizen’s access and participation. For example Libraries enable the Authority to offer residents numerous ways to engage in Digital By Choice by providing access in their local communities to the internet but also provides the help learn the skills needed to engage in today’s internet society. This brings down the cost of Digital By Choice. In an economically deprived area, for people who cannot afford the internet or a computer Libraries offer a life line, and with skilled qualified staff on hand to help apply for job, universal credit, C V creation Libraries provide a professional service that helps people out of poverty and into employment.

Libraries are not just about books any longer, they adapt and change over time to reflect changes in society yet remain a safe neutral multifunctional environment which encourage residents to take part in many activities from children’s song and rhyme, story time, craft sessions, Lego Clubs to IT Help sessions for adults, Talks, Reading Group, Writing Group, Knitting Groups. These help people who are socially excluded to gain confidence, learn a new skill, and become healthier and happier.

In short, Libraries help ***‘****to create a more prosperous, better educated, healthier, greener, safer and more confident future for the people and communities of Neath ...’*

(NPTCBC Mission Statement).