

Date · Dyddiad 13 January 2025

Your ref · Eich cyfeimod

My ref · Fy nghyfeimod

Telephone · Ffôn

Email · E-bost mike.cavanagh@pembrokeshire.gov.uk

www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk / www.sir-benfro.gov.uk



Pembrokeshire County Council Cyngor Sir Penfro

WILL BRAMBLE CBE.

Chief Executive / Prif Weithredwr

STEVEN RICHARDS-DOWNES

*Director of Education
Cyfarwyddwr Addysg*

Pembrokeshire County Council,
County Hall, HAVERFORDWEST,
Pembrokeshire, SA61 1TP

Cyngor Sir Penfro,
Neuadd y Sir, HWLFFORDD,
Sir Benfro, SA61 1TP

Telephone / Ffôn 01437 764551

Please ask for
Os gwelwch yn dda gofynnwch am

Mike Cavanagh

Dear Councillors

Re:- Neyland Library Staff Opening Hours

I write with regard to the financial position of Pembrokeshire County Council's Library Service, and in particular, the potential impact this could have on Neyland Library.

Background context

Last summer, we ran a Library Needs Assessment (LNA) to ask the public about their needs and explore some ideas to reduce running costs. This was done in response to Pembrokeshire County Council's funding gap, which in early January 2025 stood at £27.4 million for the 2025-26 financial year, necessitating cost reductions and increased income to maintain service levels.

Feedback on the six suggestions put forward as part of the LNA was clear. Respondents were not supportive of:

- Closing libraries
- Replacing staff with 24/7 access technology (Note that as Neyland Library already has this technology, this public feedback related to other libraries that do not have it)
- Reductions to the Book Fund

More support was given for:

- Working with volunteers
- Reducing premises costs by co-locating services in libraries or downsizing them
- Reducing opening hours.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English, and will respond within a maximum of 15 working days. We will respond in the language in which the correspondence is received (unless you ask us to do otherwise). / Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg a byddwn yn ymateb cyn pen 15 diwrnod gwaith fan bellaf. Byddwn yn ymateb yn yr un iaith â'r ohebiaeth a dderbyniwyd (oni bai eich bod yn gofyn i ni wneud yn wahanol).

For a copy in large print, easy-read, Braille, audio, or an alternative language, please contact Pembrokeshire County Council on the number above. / Os am gopi mewn print mawr, fformat hawdd ei ddarllen, Braille, sain neu mewn iaith arall, cysylltwch â Chyngor Sir Penfro ar y rhif uchod.

The findings of the LNA were noted by Cabinet at its meeting of 2 December 2024.

The Library Service, along with other services has been asked to put forward proposals to reduce costs and/or increase income. We have been asked to model 10%, 20%, 30% and 60% budget savings options for 2025/26. These options were included in an appendix to a Cabinet budget paper, also on 2 December 2024.

While we do not yet know which percentage cut will be agreed, the proposal to reduce staff opening hours at Neyland library from 13 per week to 6.5 per week is in all 4 options and therefore we can be confident that it, or an alternative to the same financial value, will be required.

We are currently working on the basis of considering the 20% reduction option, which we believe to be the most likely option to be approved. As such, we are embarking on a public consultation exercise within the next week to 10 days, on proposals for change to Pembroke, Pembroke Dock, Milford Haven and Neyland libraries. If a different percentage reduction is agreed, we will consult again on any additional or different savings proposals as appropriate.

Currently, Neyland Library provides unstaffed access, with self-service, from 6am to 10pm daily, 364 days a year. A member of staff is available for 13 hours during the week on Tuesdays and Fridays from 10am to 1pm and 2 - 4pm, and on Saturdays from 10am – 1pm. Our performance information indicates that a large majority of usage of the library occurs during the staffed opening hours, indicating the additional value provided by a member of staff.

We will be seeking public feedback on the following proposal to:

- Reduce staffed opening hours, from 13 to 6 ½ hours each week
- Seek community volunteers to provide some opening hours with volunteers, creating a mixture of staffed opening hours, volunteer opening hours and unstaffed opening hours.

A potential alternative approach

We are mindful that 8 of our 12 libraries across the county receive financial support from their local City/Town/Community Council in some shape or form, be it a direct financial contribution paid to PCC (at Fishguard, Haverfordwest, Pembroke, St Davids and Tenby) or indirect financial support by providing funding to third-party volunteer groups who manage their local library in partnership with us (at Saundersfoot, Narberth and Newport).

This financial support has helped to protect those libraries from reduced opening hours and closure. The most recent example is in Tenby where we were proposing to reduce the opening hours of Tenby library by one day per week last year, and the Town Council decided to make an ongoing annual financial contribution, in order to protect those opening hours.

In that context, I am writing to respectfully request if Neyland Town Council would be willing to make an annual financial contribution in order to avoid the reduction in staff opening hours at Neyland Library. If, following consultation, a decision is made to go ahead with the opening hours reductions, they will take effect from 1 April 2025.

There are no guarantees that we will be successful with finding volunteers to support the library, and even if we are, we would not expect them to be in place by April. If we are successful, volunteers cannot and do not do the whole job that a member of paid staff provides.

The cost saving of the 50% reduction in staffed opening hours is £5,600 in the 25/26 financial year, rising a little each year as a result of inflationary/cost-of-living pay increases. Current assumptions with regard to this increase indicate the following costs over the next 5 years, which would be saved if we permanently reduce the staff opening hours:

2025/26	£5,600
2026/27	£5,770
2027/28	£5,950
2028/29	£6,130
2029/30	£6,315

If Neyland Town Council are minded to protect the library, there are essentially 2 options:

1. Make a one-year commitment to protecting the library opening hours until March 31 2026, to give the Town Council time to consider whether it wishes to continue to invest in the library over the longer term to protect the staffed hours beyond 2026. This option would cost £5,600 but would only delay the opening hours reduction by one year.
2. Make a 5 year commitment to protecting the library opening hours, giving both the staff member and the local community longer term security and comfort that the library will remain open as per its current timetable. Prior to the expiry of such an agreement, we would write again to you in order for the Town Council to decide if it wishes to extend or end the agreement, post 2030.

Of the 5 local Councils who currently provide direct funding to PCC to support their local library, 3 are in 5 year agreements and 2 have simply committed on an ongoing basis without any specific reviews. The one common feature between them is that they all consider their local library to be a vital service, and one that should be protected.

If you were minded to agree a 5 year commitment, I would be in a position to provide a discount by holding the 25/26 savings figure (£5,600) for each of the 5 years, as such an agreement would be beneficial to the service. The saving would be £1765 over the lifetime of the agreement if you were minded to take that option.

Note that if the Town Council is able to make a quick decision to support the library (within the next week), we will be able to stand the consultation down and therefore avoid further uncertainty for the staff member and the local community. We will also have an opportunity to agree a joint press release to share the good news about how Town Council investment has protected the library.

Library Performance

In terms of library performance, this has been strong with over 8,000 visits in the last financial year, nearly 7,500 book issues and over 600 computer reservations. Performance up to November in this financial year (with 4 more months of

performance data to add to it for a complete year) is also looking good as below. In the context of the population of Neyland, which I understand was around 3,708 in 2022, this performance indicates just how well used the library is by the local community.

Performance Measure	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (up to November)
Visits	4,259	8,201	6,312
Issues	7,171	7,368	5,237
Computer Reservations	676	603	557

If you have any queries or would like to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

M Cavanagh

Mike Cavanagh
Head of Cultural, Leisure and Registration Services
Pembrokeshire County Council