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National Assembly for Wales
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Inquiry into: Public Libraries
Response from: Wales Audit Office

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Ms Sarah Beasley - Clerk
Communities, Equality and
Local Government Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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Date: 15 January 2014
Our ref: HVT/2054/fgb
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Dear Sarah

COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN WALES

Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, I must report each year on how well Welsh councils are planning for improvement and delivering their services (with the same requirement applying also to fire and rescue authorities and national parks). The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables me to fulfil these duties. Other audit work in local government undertaken by the Wales Audit Office, aside from the annual financial audit, includes special inspections, all-Wales studies and any public interest reporting.

Over recent years, our audit work across local government has not included any substantive consideration of issues specific to library services reflecting, in part, the lack of priority given to library services in councils' improvement objectives. I should note that in determining their key improvement objectives, councils may have reflected on the results of public engagement exercises and evidence in relation to existing levels of public satisfaction with library services. When I gave evidence to the Committee as part of its recent inquiry on local government collaboration, I drew attention to the summary report on *Local Improvement Planning and Reporting in Wales* that I published on 26 September 2013. That report pointed to evidence of a growing number of examples of effective dialogue between councils and local people about performance and improvement planning.

On 23 January 2014, I will be publishing a report entitled *Meeting the financial challenges facing local government in Wales*. Based on recent audit work and the knowledge and experience of our local audit teams, the report will provide a high-level overview of way in which councils in Wales are responding to the financial pressures they face. The report will explore the effectiveness of councils' financial planning, their approach to financial decision-making and the actions they are taking to minimise the impact of significant budget cuts. It will also consider the extent to which councils understand the impact of their actions and will provide some early thoughts on the implications of the 2013 Spending Review for local government in Wales. The Committee may find the report helpful by way of wider context to its inquiry. No doubt councils will also be providing their own responses to the committee regarding the specific financial pressures facing library services and future plans for these services.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Huw Vaughan Thomas', is positioned above the printed name.

HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES