

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	18th March 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Lead Member for Housing and Communities/Head of Communities and Customers
Report author	Principal Librarian
Title	Library Service Standards and Performance

1. What is the report about?

1.1. The report highlights the Library Service's performance against National Standards

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To provide information regarding the Council's performance against the 6th Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-20 and the progress made in developing libraries as places of individual and community well-being and resilience.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That the Committee considers and comments on the performance against the 6th Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards and considers requesting a progress report in January 2022.

4. Report details

4.1. Welsh Public Library Standards

4.2. Library authorities in Wales have a statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to deliver a 'comprehensive and efficient' service to its residents. The Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards enables Welsh

Government Culture and Sport Division (WGC&S) to measure and assess how authorities are fulfilling their statutory duties.

- 4.3. Library Services submit an Annual Report, noting performance for the previous financial year, following which WGC&S responds with a formal assessment in the autumn. The most recent Annual Assessment Report covers 2019-20 and performance against the second year of the 6th Framework 2017-20, and consists of 12 Core Entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators. The report is attached as Appendix A.
- 4.4. Denbighshire continues to meet all 12 Core Entitlements.
- 4.5. There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which 10 have constituent targets. Due to the impact of Covid-19, 3 quality indicators were removed for the 2019/20 reporting year (QI3, QI6 and QI15), of which QI6 had a constituent target. Of the **9** remaining targets for 2019-20 Denbighshire achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1 of the indicators. (details in paragraph 2.2 of the assessment report).
- 4.6. Denbighshire has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with no significant change since the first year in 2017/18. The report notes the strong commitment to health and wellbeing, the increasing importance of digital resources, and that the intention to focus on the development of staff should enable Denbighshire libraries to remain at the heart of their communities and continue to deliver services effectively.
- 4.7. We partially met QI13 on staffing levels and qualifications but did not achieve this fully. The staff per capita level is below the target (we reported 2.44 FTE per 10,000 population when the target is 3.6) and the number of staff holding a recognised library qualification is below target (we reported 0.48 FTE when the target is 0.65). Frontline and managerial staff working in our libraries and one stop shops deliver a wide range of additional customer services which are not included within the requirements of the Standards. We report 50% of the total staffing levels and expenditure on staffing under the Library Standards.
- 4.8. We did not meet QI9 on up-to-date reading materials: we acquired 135 new items (the target is 243), spending £1307 (target £2180), per 1000 population.

4.9. WGC&S do not publish a comparative data table across Wales, but each authority is ranked on its performance against the Quality Indicators (section 2.4 of the assessment report). In 2019-20, of the 22 Welsh authorities, Denbighshire was 1st for the number of Welsh books borrowed per capita, 5th for the number of active borrowers and for the number of virtual visits per capita, and 9th for physical visits.

Update on recent developments: Library services during the pandemic

4.10. The Service continued to provide a valued service during the first lockdown, despite the buildings being closed. The staff team were redeployed to provide the council's Proactive Calls service to residents who were shielding – a recognition of their skills in engaging with people, understanding their needs and referring them to support.

4.11. The Digital Library offer was expanded and promoted. A new digital newspapers service was launched and the e-reading offer was strengthened by a £250k investment from WG into the all-Wales Borrowbox service of downloadable e-books to increase the range of stock available to meet increasing demand. Digital borrowing in Denbighshire increased by 118% during the year, and 812 new library members have joined online.

4.12. The Bookstart team switched their service to online immediately in mid-March and have delivered to date 33 weekly live rhymetimes (viewed on average by 734 families each week), 30 weekly YouTube videos (each viewed on average 1003 times), and 12 Siarad Babi videos to support parents (154 average views each) – with a total of 73,932 views across all the output. They have thus maintained regular contact and close links with families and engaged new ones (over 300 new followers on Facebook). One parent said *“Thank you for helping to bring a little normality to our little ones’ lives”*. The team's sector leading practice was recognised when they were asked to deliver a webinar to the early years sector in Wales in February.

4.13. As restrictions eased in the summer, the service created a new Order and Collect service for access to library books, and gradually re-opened buildings to offer PC access, One Stop Shop services and limited browsing. During the

subsequent lockdowns, Order and Collect services have been allowed to continue and One Stop Shop services are provided by phone and online. Since early January staff have handled 4541 incoming calls from customers, made over 1050 proactive calls to library customers and new shielding residents to keep in touch and inform them of current services, and made a further 2251 calls to arrange collection appointments. Feedback from residents has proven how valuable access to books and help from library staff has been to people during this time of isolation:

“I have missed a few things. I’ve missed my choir, but I think I’ve missed the library most of all”

“I just wanted to say how wonderful it is that even though it is closed the library is doing an Order and Collect service. I’ve been so alone, my family live abroad and all I have are books. It’s wonderful to see the friendly faces of the staff, but most of all the books. It’s like having friends returning from a long trip, and the gift is the stories locked up inside them. The library is an essential service for a lonely man living in uncertain times.”

4.14. A Digital Transformation project, funded from Welsh Government’s Cultural Recovery Fund, will see the creation of solo digital rooms at all our libraries to enable customers to participate in 1-1 virtual consultations, interviews and meetings in relative privacy. The project will also provide portable devices to enable library staff to work in a more flexible and safe way.

4.15. The staff development focus during Covid-19 has been on digital skills, to deliver the Proactive Calls service, and to deliver and promote digital library services. Denbighshire’s Principal Librarian is leading on a successful bid by SCL Cymru (Society of Chief Librarians) to Welsh Government’s Cultural Recovery Fund for an all-Wales collaborative project to develop library staff skills and confidence in delivering virtual library activities.

4.16. The service’s activity in Health and Wellbeing has continued to be a particular focus. The Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme for children was launched in Wales in October 2020. The Reading Well: Books on Prescription mental health collaborative project with Conwy, funded by the Healthier Wales Transformation programme, was redesigned to focus on reaching potential

beneficiaries directly rather than via GP surgeries. The Age Connects Community Navigators have embedded the scheme into the toolbox of options for social prescribing to support people dealing with mental health challenges. Over 2600 Reading Well books have been borrowed in Denbighshire since first scheme launched in 2018.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. The Library Service is a statutory responsibility of the Authority, and its service delivery contributes to a number of corporate priorities such as fostering community resilience, service modernisation, digital inclusion, literacy, lifelong learning and community engagement.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. The transformation of libraries into community focal points for services enables a range of other council services and partners to reach out to local communities through the existing network of premises and facilities. There are no financial proposals involved with this report.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. A Well-Being Impact Assessment has not been undertaken, but the 6th Framework of Library Standards is set up to demonstrate that libraries have a clear contribution to make to the seven goals of Well-being of Future Generations Act.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. Performance Scrutiny Committee in January 2020 considered the Welsh Government's Assessment of the Library Service's performance for 2018-19. There have been no further consultations regarding this particular report.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. Not applicable

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. Not applicable

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

11.2. Section 7.4.2(b) of the Council's Constitution stipulates that scrutiny may "review and scrutinise the performance of the Council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas."