

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	27th January 2022
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 in relation to the 6th Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-20 (extended for 20-21) 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 2023.

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.
- 4.4. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, reporting requirements for 2020-21 were reduced to recognise and reflect the limitations and restrictions on service provision during the year. As a result, individual authorities will not receive an Annual Assessment Report as usual. The reporting submitted from each authority has been collated into a narrative national report for Wales (to be published in March 2022) which will reflect how library services provided services in 2020-21 and contributed to the community support and recovery efforts in their area.
- 4.5. This report therefore reflects the data submitted by Denbighshire in relation to 2020-21, on performance against 12 Core Entitlement and 6 Quality indicators.
- 4.6. Denbighshire continues to meet all 12 Core Entitlements.
- 4.7. Authorities were requested to report against 6 quality indicators (QIs), none of which have constituent targets for 2020-21, and no comparative data or assessment is available. There follows self-assessed commentary on each of the 6 QIs.
- 4.8. QI 7: Location of service points

No change
- 4.9. QI 8: Library use (website visits, members, active users, and borrowing levels)

Website visits were 52% lower. Active users were 39% of previous year and borrowing of physical items was at 23% of the level in the previous year. Digital downloads saw a 166% increase due to the switch to digital during the first lockdown when libraries had to close.
- 4.10. QI 9: Up to date and appropriate reading material

53% more individual items were purchased for stock due to a realignment of the resources budget to purchase more resources for children, more digital resources, and to reduce purchasing of newspapers. The overall spending on resources was 7.8% lower than in previous year.

4.11. QI 10: Welsh language resources

No significant change

4.12. QI 13: Staffing levels and qualifications

Staffing levels reduced by 7.3% as vacancies were not filled in order to meet historical budget pressures. 0.9% of staff time was spent in training.

4.13. QI 14: Operational expenditure

Total revenue expenditure was £1,167,437, 5.4% lower than previous year. Capital expenditure was £127,950. Note that these figures reflect the library service functions and do not include expenditure on the One Stop Shop element of the service. 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.

4.14. Authorities were asked to report on online digital activity. Denbighshire libraries dealt with 26,428 enquiries for books via Order and Collect. 143 online events or activities were created, which generated 80,272 views.

4.15. Authorities were also required to submit a narrative report in the form of 6 case studies to reflect the service's activity in 2020-21 and a commentary on the service's contribution to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. The narrative report for Denbighshire is attached as Appendix 1.

Update on recent developments in 2021-22

4.16. The service has adapted its service provision in line with the changing Covid Alert Levels during the year. The Order and Collect Service launched in the first lockdown has continued and remains popular with many customers. Autumn 2021 saw the return of some small group activity such as reading groups and craft groups. College classes returned to 3 libraries, and Bookstart rhymetimes

restarted in most libraries. Some of this activity has been affected by the move to Alert Level 2 in late December 2021. All provision is subject to risk assessment and complies with the current rules around the numbers attending and social distancing.

- 4.17. In common with anecdotal evidence from across Welsh library service, and general levels of town centre footfall, service usage has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. Partner service provision in libraries and group activity has not yet returned to anything like its previous level which has a clear impact on library visits and usage.
- 4.18. The Digital Transformation project, funded from Welsh Government's Cultural Recovery Fund has been completed. It has created Solo Digital Spaces which provide facilities at all our libraries to enable customers to participate in 1-1 virtual consultations, interviews and meetings in relative privacy. It also enabled us to provide portable devices to enable library staff to work in a more flexible and safe way.
- 4.19. The 2021 Summer Reading Challenge on the theme of Wild World Heroes saw 1710 children participating and re-engaging with their local library in person and online. The challenge also contributed to the Council's Net-Zero Carbon and Biodiversity Strategy by raising children and families interest in the natural world.
- 4.20. A major project to upgrade and improve libraries' public access technology has improved our offer to customers who rely on their local library to get online, and will contribute to the Council's Digital Inclusion project. The service has invested in a new PC management system, all the public PCs and scanners will be renewed, new self-service printing facilities have been introduced, and new services including Wi-Fi printing and online PC booking will be available shortly.
- 4.21. The all-Wales Estyn Allan training programme to develop library staff skills and confidence in creating digital content and activity continued to make an impact on service provision nationally and locally. The project was led by Denbighshire's Principal Librarian on behalf of SCL Cymru (Society of Chief Librarians) and its success was recognised when it was named as Library Team of the Year 2021 by CILIP Cymru Wales.

4.22. The service's activity in Health and Wellbeing has continued to be a particular focus. Progress has been made in raising awareness of the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme for children. Work continued on the Reading Well: Books on Prescription mental health collaborative project with Conwy, funded by the Healthier Wales Transformation programme, which 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.

4.23. Libraries have continued to deliver on their role as community focal point for services, offering face-to-face customer service for the Council's services, and a safe place within the community for people to visit and interact. Since September 2021, libraries have also been a key community distribution point for lateral flow test (LFT) kits and saw a huge surge in demand from mid-December following the new Welsh Government messaging around self-testing.

4.24. Development in the near future include a major national campaign promoting the benefits of reading, books and libraries to children and young people's wellbeing, funded by the Welsh Government's Winter of Wellbeing initiative; and engagement with schools on a project to help children learn empathy skills via characters in books.

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 March 2021 considered the Welsh Government's Assessment of the Library Service's performance for 2019-20. There have been no further consultations regarding this particular report.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. There are no direct financial implications of this report.

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."