

Report to	Performance Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	16th March 2023
Lead Member / Officer	Councillor Emrys Wynne, Lead Member for the Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage/Liz Grieve, Head of Communities and Customers
Head of Service	Liz Grieve, Head of Communities and Customers
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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 21-22) 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 2024.

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 Division (WGC) 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, to which WGC Division responds with an Annual Assessment Report.
- 4.4. Due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, reporting requirements for 2021-22 were again reduced to recognise the limitations and restrictions on service provision during the year. As a result, individual authorities will not receive a full Annual Assessment Report but will receive a narrative report with commentary on performance which will also reflect how library services provided services in 2021-22 and contributed to the community support and recovery efforts in their area. This narrative report is significantly delayed and is now due for publication in March 2023. It is therefore not possible to include it in full with this report. The service has received an early draft and selected comments are included.
- 4.5. This report therefore reflects the data submitted by Denbighshire in relation to 2021-22, on performance against 12 Core Entitlement and 6 Quality indicators, with some commentary on the performance by the WGC Division assessors.
- 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 2021-22, and no detailed comparative data or assessment is available. It should be borne in mind that comparison to 'the previous year' refers to the lockdown year of 2020-21 when libraries were closed for a period and the service operated under significant restrictions.
- 4.8. QI 7: Location of service points

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

Active borrowers increased by 70% as customers returned - at 12.4%, it was the highest % of population across the north of Wales. Adult borrowing increased by 93% to 1,013 issues per 1,000 population, and children's borrowing increased by 202% to 592 issues per 1,000 population. The draft assessment report comments: "Denbighshire saw particular success in issues of e-materials, where it was among the top-ranking services for e-issues per 1,000 population. Over the year Denbighshire libraries were able to increase their opening hours, as the service continues its recovery from the effects of the pandemic. The service retained its order and collect and home delivery services."

4.10. QI 9: Up to date and appropriate reading material

The overall spending on resources was similar to the previous year. We took a decision to invest more of our budget in children's resources in 21-22 (24%) to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on children's learning, to encourage re-engagement with libraries and the Summer Reading Challenge and Winter of Wellbeing, and invest in key collections such as Reading Well for Children and EmpathyLab for all libraries.

4.11. QI 10: Welsh language resources

13% of the resources budget was allocated to Welsh language materials. The draft assessment report states: "A significant amount of the materials budget is spent on Welsh language material with the service in the top quartile for both expenditure and issues. This stock is available in all libraries with more stock available in those communities with a high proportion of Welsh speakers. The high expenditure on Welsh language materials and number of issues suggests this stock is meeting the needs of Denbighshire's communities."

4.12. QI 13: Staffing levels and qualifications

Staffing levels reduced by 1.85% as vacancies were not filled in order to meet historical budget pressures. 1.7% of staff time was spent in training. The draft assessment report states: "Denbighshire is in the top half of services for qualified staff per 10,000 population. Staff are encouraged to continue their learning and 1.7% of staff time was spent on development. There is mandatory e-learning and staff also undertook training to develop their digital and communication

skills. Staff are also encouraged to pursue formal educational qualifications. Furthermore, staff are encouraged to develop their Welsh language skills, and 56% of staff are already bilingual.”

4.13. QI 14: Operational expenditure

Total revenue expenditure was £1,209,845, 3.63% higher than in 20-21. Capital expenditure was £29,526. Note that these figures reflect the library service functions and do not include expenditure on the One Stop Shop element. Frontline and managerial staff working in our service deliver a wide range of customer services which are not included within the requirements of the Standards. We report 50% of the total staffing levels and expenditure on staffing.

4.14. Authorities were asked to report on online digital activity. Demand for the Order and collect service tailed off over the year as libraries fully reopened and people became more confident to visit and select their own books (April 21 saw 1703 requests, March 22 saw 56). The service remained an option for people who would prefer for staff to select for them. Capacity to deliver online activities reduced as services reopened, but 33 Bookstart Facebook Live sessions were delivered with 13060 views. One reading group remained online for its meetings but most have chosen to return to in person. The draft assessment report states: “E-issues per 1,000 population have increased by 15% and they remain in the top quartile. They also provide an extensive set of online resources, including resources in Ukrainian. They attribute this growth in e-resources to support from the Welsh Government and the National Library of Wales.”

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 2021-22 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.

4.16. Appendix 2 provides an update on more recent developments during 2022-23.

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

5.1. The Library Service is a statutory responsibility of the Authority, and its service delivery contributes to a number of corporate objectives and themes including a healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire; a learning and growing

Denbighshire; a better connected Denbighshire; a fairer, safe and more equal Denbighshire; a Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language; and a well-run, high performing council.

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 in January 2022 considered the Welsh Government's Assessment of the Library Service's performance for 2020-21. 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."