

Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Denbighshire

Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Denbighshire's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

1. Executive summary

Denbighshire met all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Denbighshire is achieving 8 in full and 2 in part.

Denbighshire performs well in a number of areas, in particular in relation to access, with attendance at events, visits per capita and active borrowers all being above the median. The service also performs well for e-issues and demonstrates an awareness of the changing demands on IT provision in libraries. Denbighshire demonstrates a commitment to the provision of both children's and Welsh language resources, and also shows a commitment to meeting the needs of young people within its future development plans. Whilst Denbighshire is currently performing well and has well-considered plans for its short-term future direction, there are concerns about how the service will be able to respond in the medium term if the forecast cuts to library services in 2024-25 come to fruition. In this context, it is especially important that the service conducts user surveys in 2023-2024 or 2024-25 to ensure that library provision is meeting the needs of customers.

- User training is popular amongst library users; attendance at both formal user training and informal training are above the median (Q15).
- Libraries are well-used; visits per capital and virtual visits per capita are both above the median and the number of active borrowers per capita is in the top quartile of Welsh library services (Q18).
- Welsh language provision is well-supported, especially children's materials; Denbighshire is in the top quartile of library authorities for the proportion of the materials budget devoted to Welsh language resources (Q110).
- Denbighshire is performing better than the median for unplanned closure of static service points and no mobile stops or home delivery services were missed (Q116).

2. Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against these areas. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is provided in Section 3.

2.1. Core entitlements

Denbighshire reported meeting all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment, providing helpful commentary where there have been changes from the previous year. The independent assessor agreed with the self-assessment.

2.2. Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which 10 have constituent targets. Of these, Denbighshire is achieving 8 in full and 2 in part.

Quality Indicator	Met?	
QI 3 Support for individual development:		Met in full
a) ICT support	√	
b) Information literacy and skills training	√	
c) E-government support	√	
d) Reader development	√	
QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being		Met in full
i) Book Prescription Wales scheme	√	
ii) Better with Books/Reading Well scheme	√	
iii) Designated health & well-being collection	√	
iv) Information about healthy lifestyles and behaviours	√	
v) Signposting to health & well-being services	√	
QI 6 all static service points offer events/activities for users with special requirements	√	Met in full
QI 7 Location of service points	√	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Met in full
Acquisitions per capita	√	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	-	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
<u>or</u> Spend on Welsh per capita	-	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	√	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	√	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Partially met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	√	
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Partially met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	√	
iv) CPD percentage	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

2.3. Impact measures

The framework includes three indicators aimed at assessing the impact of library use on people's lives. These indicators do not have targets, and authorities were only required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the original three-year period of the framework (2017-20). The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 return. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. However, it is important to bear in mind that some authorities have conducted surveys since 2020, whilst others report survey data from before the Covid pandemic. Some responses therefore reflect the situation several years ago, whilst others may have been affected by disruption during the pandemic period. As a result, there are limitations on the extent to which these data might be considered comparable.

Denbighshire completed its adult user survey in November 2018 and its children's user survey in February 2020. No full survey was undertaken in 22-23 as it is anticipated that a survey will be conducted as part of the work to develop a new Library Strategy.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	87%	12/16	58%	90%	98%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	78%	=13/16	41%	86.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	Not provided	-	82%	96%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide an impact statement describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year.

Denbighshire provided an impact statement concerning a man who had retired early and is living with dementia. Having a thirst for knowledge and wanting to continue learning for pleasure and to keep mentally stimulated, he visited to library to see what it could offer, accompanied by his wife. The couple found the environment to be inclusive and welcoming and appreciated the staff members skills in communicating with someone with dementia. The wide range of online and physical resources were also valued; *"it's such an incredibly helpful and interesting resource – I feel privileged to have access to it"*. The library provides a place he feels comfortable visiting and which respects his independence. It is also filled with resources he finds stimulating and which are available for free and include a digital offer which he can access at home whenever he wants.

2.4. Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor and benchmark their performance over time, in comparison with other authorities. The following table summarises Denbighshire's position for 2022-23. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where

relevant data was not available from some authorities. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	55%	13/16	24%	69.5%	90%
c) health and well-being	44%	=12/16	35%	66.5%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	93%	=14/16	93%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	82%	15/16	80%	91%	99%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	96%	16/17	92%	98%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	65%	16/16	65%	86%	99%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	94%	17/17	94%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.3	=8/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 5 User training					
a) attendances per capita	18	7/22	1	10.5	222
c) informal training per capita	424	1/19	5	131	424
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	230	7/22	13	165	559
QI 8 Library use					
a) visits per capita	2,495	6/21	781	2,106	4,814
b) virtual visits per capita	633	10/22	124	537.5	7,979
c) active borrowers per capita	155	2/22	43	106.5	167
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	203	6/22	13	53	864
QI 11 Online access					
a) Computers per 10,000	10.52	4/22	3.32	7.99	16.99
b) % of available time used by the public	13%	7/19	7%	11%	77%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications¹					
(v) a) total volunteers	9	-	0	8	256
b) volunteer hours	978	-	0	583.5	14,014
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£13,589	7/21	£6,726	£11,476	£27,330
b) % on staff,	63%	=13/21	46%	64%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=16/21	5%	12%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	9%	4/21	1%	3%	29%
% on other operational costs;	20%	=7/21	1%	15%	35%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£336	=6/21	-£479	£145	£2,865

¹ Following discussion with the peer review group it was decided not to include rankings for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 15 Net cost per visit ²	£2.56	9/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22
QI 16 Opening hours ³					
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.04%	10/22	0%	0.05%	0.95%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0%	=1/20	0%	0%	3.74%

3. Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators can be divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance under these areas.

3.1. Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Denbighshire meets the targets for Support for individual development (QI3) and health and well-being (QI4), with the service displaying a strong commitment to community well-being. Talking Points returned fully to all libraries in 22-23. Delivered via a partnership between Adult Social Care, the third sector and libraries, it provides a face-to-face opportunity for people to have a conversation about maintaining an independent life and accessing local support and activities. Libraries are embedded in the authority's Age Friendly and Dementia Friendly strategies and action plans. Attendances at both formal user training and informal training are above the median for library services (QI5). Most reported indicators for Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2) are below the median. However, these results relate to library provision pre-Covid and it is important that the service conducts further surveys in 2023-24 or 2024-25 to ensure that library provision is meeting the needs of customers.

3.2. Access and use (QI 6-8)

Attendance at events is above the median (QI6), as are visits per capita and virtual visits per capita (QI8). The number of active borrowers per capita is in the top quartile of Welsh library services (QI8). Borrowing was higher than in 21-22 and Denbighshire performs particularly well in terms of e-issues, which are in the top quartile of library services.

3.3. Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Denbighshire shows a strong commitment to children's provision, with 25% of its materials being spent on children's resources (QI9). Denbighshire is in the top quartile of library authorities for the proportion of the materials budget devoted to Welsh language resources and it is above the median for Welsh language issues per capita Welsh speakers (QI10). The service reports that 71% of issues of Welsh language material were for children's books - with only two bookshops in the county, the local library is the main source of Welsh language books for children. Although indicators relating to online access are above the median (QI11), Denbighshire reports that usage of public access ICT is at a much lower level than pre-Covid, reflecting the general trend of people having their own devices. The service only

² Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.

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partially met the target for supply of requests following a reduction of its internal delivery system due to budget pressures (Q112).

3.4. Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-16)

Denbighshire does not meet the targets for overall staffing or qualified staff per capita (Q113). However, it is worth noting that the fact that most libraries in the service are one stop shops, and the majority of frontline, supervisory and managerial staff spend approx. 50% of their time on their Customer Services roles therefore only 50% of the staffing level is reported as library provision. Opening hours have now returned to pre-Covid levels, with the exception of a reduction of half a day each at Ruthin and Denbigh Libraries due to budget pressures. Denbighshire is performing better than the median for unplanned closure of static service points, and no home delivery services were missed (Q116).

4. Strategic context

As part of the return, authorities are asked to report on how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. The following are amongst the examples provided by Denbighshire.

- **Better Mental Health:** access to the full range of Reading Well schemes and work with partners to raise awareness of the schemes.
- **Skills and Employability:** Working Denbighshire, the council's employability service, uses library facilities to meet with their clients and support people with digital skills and job search.
- **Digital:** library staff offer help to get online and to develop basic digital skills; libraries are a key partner in Denbighshire's digital inclusion programme, working closely with Cwmpas.
- **Early Years & Literacy:** weekly Bookstart Rhymetimes develop young children's language, learning and social skills; Summer Reading Challenge helps children aged 4-12 develop their love of reading for pleasure and choosing independently.
- **Support for wellbeing:** Home Library Service provides a personalised service to individuals who cannot access their local library due to disability, illness or caring responsibilities; Talking Points are community-led information sessions where citizens meet with health and social care staff, third sector support services and peers, to have a person-centred conversation about their health and wellbeing needs.
- **Cymraeg:** library provision is central to Denbighshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Bookstart Rhymetimes introduce many families to Welsh. The Summer Reading Challenge is fully bilingual.

5. Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the library service refers to Denbighshire's Corporate Plan, and in particular the 23-24 theme A Better Connected Denbighshire, where libraries are seen as the key point of delivery of activity to reduce digital exclusion. Activities and developments in the 2023-24 Service Business plan include:

- Upgrading and modernising IT facilities
- Providing facilities and opportunities for digital skills learning
- Developing the scheme to lend digital devices to the public and distribute National Databank free sim cards to people in data poverty
- Supporting library staff to update digital skills
- Providing free access to a range of digital resources for reading and learning
- Delivering a programme of activities and events for children and adults to support engagement and wellbeing and to combat social isolation and loneliness
- Updating the Library Strategy in the light of the new Corporate Plan and Welsh Government's Culture Strategy.

Other areas of development include:

- Collaboration with Denbighshire Youth Service to pilot open access youth provision at libraries
- Participating in the forthcoming all-Wales collaborative re-tendering process for a new digital platform and Library Management System
- Contributing to the council's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan to support children and young people's Welsh language skills in the community
- Further developing library facilities as flexible, adaptable and safe spaces to facilitate support services and to enable people to engage socially with each other.

However, the Council is facing a budget shortfall in 2024-25 so the expectation is that the library service will be subject to severe cuts.

6. Conclusion

Denbighshire performs well in a number of areas, in particular in relation to access, with attendance at events, visits per capita and active borrowers all being above the median. The service also performs well for e-issues and demonstrates an awareness of the changing demands on IT provision in libraries. Denbighshire demonstrates a commitment to the provision of both children's and Welsh language resources, and also shows a commitment to meeting the needs of young people within its future development plans. Whilst Denbighshire is currently performing well and has well-considered plans for its short-term future direction, there are concerns about how the service will be able to respond in the medium term if the forecast cuts to library services in 2024-25 come to fruition. In this context, it is especially important that the service conducts user surveys in 2023-24 or 2024-25 to ensure that library provision is meeting the needs of customers.