

Denbighshire Narrative 2022-23

Impact study

The impact which the library has had on an individual, or on a group of individuals, during the year. Describe the use made of the service, and the difference that use made to the individual or group concerned. Indicative length 300 words. Please indicate if permission for the Welsh Government to re-use and/or publish the impact statement has been obtained or not: **Yes - obtained**

Paul's story

"It's such an incredibly helpful and interesting resource – I feel privileged to have access to it"

Before retiring early, Paul was a senior public service officer. He has a great thirst for knowledge and is currently researching cosmology and Roman history, and his own family history. He is also a musician who used to play in bands and still composes his own songs. With a new grandchild in the family soon, he is writing a story for them and creating drawings which he layers with photographs using his iMac. He's skilled with technology, using his iPad daily to read and research.

Paul is also living with dementia and feels lucky to have cognition of what he finds more difficult. After chatting about what might be available to him in his local community, Paul and his wife Brenda decided that it was high time for them to visit the library to renew his membership and find out more.

Brenda approached a member of staff to explain that she was supporting Paul to visit the library as he has dementia and was thrilled when the librarian immediately turned to Paul and dealt directly with him to renew his library membership and explain all the services available.

"It was so inclusive – she enabled Paul to understand what she was explaining and how he could use the library," Brenda said. "I was delighted by how the librarian engaged with Paul without turning to me as so often happens, as if Paul wasn't there or couldn't understand. It was clear that she had been trained in serving people living with dementia, and she showed great empathy and warmth in welcoming Paul as a member. She gave us information to take home about all the digital offers too. How she treated him was perfect.

"We came home buzzing with enthusiasm, and in no time Paul had signed himself up for all the digital resources – the ebooks, the emagazines and the newspapers. We're also planning to go in to do some research on Ancestry – we've been paying for it at home in the past, but now we can use it free in the library. It will be so nice

for him to research in a community place rather than on his own at home. When he goes into respite care he'll take his iPad with him so that he has plenty to read and it will help him to pass the time when he's in a different routine."

Paul said "I found it all incredibly helpful and it's amazing to have access to all these wonderful resources for free. Just today I've downloaded the Cosmos magazine and a historical novel set in Ancient Rome. I could read the New York Times every day if I wanted to – just amazing! I want to keep my brain working as well as it can for as long as possible, so learning and research is so valuable to me. I was delighted to find out about the notifications on the ebooks to remind me to renew them, or the messages about new editions of the magazines I like – they ping up on my iPad and so I can remember to download them. It's so useful to have features like this which help me."

Brenda said "I'm so thrilled that Paul can use the library without difficulty – in a visit and online. He finds noisy crowded spaces difficult now, so the calm, welcoming library is ideal – and he knows that there will be someone there to help him if he needs. It's so nice for him to feel he's in charge – the fact that the staff understand is so empowering for him."

Paul's story highlights the impact of the library service on his life and his wife's – providing him with a place he feels comfortable visiting and which respects his independence, filled with resources he finds stimulating and interesting and available for free, and a digital offer which he can access at home on his iPad for free whenever he wants, with features which help him.

[Names have been changed for privacy]

Wider Welsh Government priorities and strategies

Please provide a narrative that demonstrates how the library service is contributing towards wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals (indicative length: 500 words).

Better Mental Health

For many in our communities, the library is their safe haven, a place to visit regularly to be part of a shared experience, with no obligation to make a purchase and no stigma associated with their visit. Reading groups, art and craft groups, and learning opportunities support people to maintain or recover their mental health. Reading in itself is beneficial to mental health and the local library within the community provides access to a vast range of reading experiences for all tastes, in physical and digital formats.

We continue to provide reading material in a range of physical and digital formats to enable people to choose the format that best suits their needs.

We provide access to the full range of Reading Well schemes (supporting dementia, adult mental health and teens and children's mental health and emotional wellbeing) and work with partners to raise awareness of the schemes and how they can benefit readers.

Library staff are trained in Dementia Awareness, Autism Awareness and Makaton signing awareness. Our dementia-friendly Memory Bags and jigsaws collection support people with dementia and their carers.

Skills and Employability

Working Denbighshire, the council's employability service, works in close partnership with libraries, using library facilities to meet with their clients, and support people to learn digital skills and job search.

Digital

Our libraries offer free physical access to computers, Wi-Fi, scanning and printing including cloud printing. Crucially, library staff offer help to get online and to develop basic digital skills, often to people with very limited skills. Formal IT classes are provided by Coleg Llandrillo at 4 libraries using libraries' IT facilities. Libraries are a key partner in Denbighshire's digital inclusion programme, working closely with Cwmpas. We conduct an annual staff digital skills audit to ensure they keep up with developments.

Our e-resources offer continues to grow and benefits from the collaboration across all of Wales' public library services, the National Library of Wales and Welsh Government. In 22-23 we added Find my Past to our offer to enable customers to access the 1921 Census data.

Early Years & Literacy

Weekly Bookstart Rhymetimes develop young children's language, learning and social skills and have a significant impact on parental mental health, and on parents' skills and confidence as their child's first educators. They introduce many families to the Welsh language, and the informal and non-stigmatised group sessions create a social network for new parents who may be at risk of isolation, mothers dealing with post-natal depression, and foreign national families.

The Summer Reading Challenge remains our key activity to help children aged 4-12 develop their love of reading for pleasure and choosing independently, maintain their reading skills over the summer holiday, and discover new books and authors to enjoy. We support children's learning throughout the year, and the local library is often the only source of free books in Welsh and English.

Support for wellbeing

The Home Library Service provides a personalised service to individuals who cannot access their local library due to disability, illness or caring responsibilities. The monthly home visits are eagerly awaited, providing not only a range of books to read but social interaction and a gateway to other council services for people who are socially isolated.

Talking Points are community-led information sessions in each of our libraries 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. The Community Navigators who run them work closely with library staff to refer citizens and to promote the sessions.

Libraries provide a digital assistance service for online Blue Badge applications and help people apply online for their discretionary travel passes (bus passes) and other services.

We deliver a programme of social engagement activities which encourage people to get together to combat the risk of social isolation – such as craft groups, Welsh conversation groups, and social mornings – and our reading groups remain popular with readers.

Cymraeg

The local library is often the only place in a community where people can access Welsh language resources such as books and magazines, and where they can engage with staff in Welsh and attend Welsh activities. Our self-service kiosks, online catalogue and the PORI app enable library members to choose a Welsh language option to manage their library account.

We provide the full range of Welsh language books, magazines and e-resources for borrowing and downloading and work with publishers, Books Council for Wales and the National Library of Wales to ensure the widest possible choice of resources for readers.

Library provision is central to Denbighshire's Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. Bookstart Rhymetimes introduce many families to Welsh and they are encouraged to consider bringing up their children bilingually. The Summer Reading Challenge is fully bilingual and we work closely with schools to encourage children to borrow and read Welsh books.

We work with Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych and a range of community and cultural groups to put on and promote events and activities, such as children's activities, performance poetry, book launches, author events, and reading groups. We host Welsh cultural events in partnership with local community festivals and we have regular columns in papurau bro to promote the library offer.

Community Resilience

Denbighshire's vision for libraries is that they are the beating hearts of their communities, where local people can access services in their local community; a shared, trusted and welcoming facility with friendly knowledgeable staff. We continue to work collaboratively with local town councils to ensure service sustainability, and with partners to provide services and opportunities locally – from digital learning to social and interest groups; from benefits and rights advice to health support groups; from baby rhymetimes to adult reading groups; from access to elected members to engagement with public consultations.

Future Direction

Please provide a short statement about the future direction and plans for the library service (indicative length 200 words).

Libraries are key to the delivery of Denbighshire's Corporate Plan, and in particular in 23-24 for the 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:

- Providing good quality, up to date library public IT facilities by upgrading and modernising according to demand and technological developments
- Providing facilities and opportunities for digital skills learning opportunities including via the Sir Ddinbych Arlein partnership led by Cwmpas
- 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 keep their digital skills up to date in order to support customers
- Providing free access to a range of digital resources for reading and learning
- Delivering a programme of activities and events to encourage children and adults to re-engage with their local library, 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

We will also continue to further develop our service in others areas, including

- 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 the delivery of 1:1 and small group support services and to enable people to engage socially with each other

However, the Council is facing up to £20m budget shortfall in 2024-25 so the expectation is that the library service will be subject to severe cuts. Work and engagement on this will begin soon.