

Denbighshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

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.

Contents

Executive summary	2
Performance against the standards.....	2
Core Entitlements	2
Quality indicators with targets	5
Impact measures	5
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	6
Analysis of performance.....	7
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	7
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	8
Facilities and services (QI 9-10)	8
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	8
Strategic context	9
Future direction	9
Conclusion	10

Executive summary

Denbighshire reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. However, the independent assessor considers that the service has met 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 1 in part. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Denbighshire is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Attendance at formal training has increased, indicating that Denbighshire Libraries are working effectively with partners to offer relevant courses. The service also performs well in terms of active borrower numbers, event attendance, issues and Welsh language provision. However, virtual visits have declined. Denbighshire is due to carry out customer surveys in 2024, which will, hopefully, help in providing further information about customers' use of library services and their expectations. Whilst appreciating the challenges of budget cuts, the time allocated for staff training is a concern and it is hoped that this is something that will be addressed as part of the new library strategy.

- Attendance at formal training sessions has increased by 26% compared to 2022-23 (Q15).
- The number of active borrowers is increasing, and Denbighshire is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q18).
- Denbighshire is above the median for per capita Welsh language issues and Welsh language issues have risen by 14% compared to 2022-23 (Q110).
- The service has made efforts to preserve opening hours to date and is above the median for opening hours per capita (Q116).
- Denbighshire is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities in terms of staff time allocated for training (Q113).

Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of Core Entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures.

Core Entitlements

Denbighshire reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. The service provided detailed and helpful commentary within the return. Based on this, the independent assessor considers that the service has met 12 Core Entitlements in full and 1 in part.

- 1. Libraries in Wales are free to join and open to all.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 2. Libraries in Wales ensure friendly, knowledgeable and qualified staff are on hand to help.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**

- 3. Libraries in Wales provide access to a range of services, activities, and high quality resources in a range of formats to support lifelong learning, personal health and well-being, community participation, cultural experiences, recreation, and reading for pleasure.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 4. Libraries in Wales provide appropriate services, facilities and information resources for individuals and groups with special requirements.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 5. Libraries provide appropriate safe, attractive and accessible physical spaces with suitable staffed opening hours.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met.
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 6. Libraries in Wales lend books for free, and deliver free access to information, including online information resources available 24 hours a day.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 7. Libraries in Wales provide free use of the Internet including Wi-Fi, and access to digital equipment, in all service points.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 8. Libraries in Wales provide access to services, cultural activities, and high quality resources in the Welsh language.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 9. Libraries in Wales work in partnership to share catalogues and facilitate access to the resources of all Welsh libraries.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 10. Libraries in Wales work with a range of partners to promote and deliver services to new and diverse audiences, enabling more people to benefit from those services.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**

- 11. Libraries in Wales regularly consult users to gather their views on the service and information about their changing needs.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**
- 12. Libraries in Wales provide access to their library service strategy, policies, objectives and vision, in print and online, in a range of languages appropriate for the community.**
Self-Assessment: Fully met.
Independent Assessor: **Partially met ■**
This is because the service reports that the 2019-22 strategy has been extended, but this is not indicated in the strategy itself or the website. As a result, there are no measures of success over a relevant time period. The return states that the service 'plans to produce a new strategy in spring 2024, when the budget cuts and new opening hours have been implemented'.
- 13. Libraries in Wales provide support to help improve people's digital skills and confidence, including the use of e-government services**
Self-Assessment: Fully met
Independent Assessor: **Fully met ▲**

Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Denbighshire is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

- QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being, **met in full ▲**
 - i) Reading Well scheme, **met**
 - ii) Designated health & well-being collection, **met**
 - iii) Information about healthier lifestyles and healthy behaviours, **met**
 - iv) Signposting to health & well-being services, **met**

- 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
Acquisitions per capita, **met in full ▲**

- QI 10 Welsh Language Resources
% of material budget spent on Welsh, **met in full ▲**

- QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications, **partially met ■**
 - i) Staff per capita, **not met**
 - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **not met**
 - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
 - iv) CPD percentage, **not met**

- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **met in full ▲**

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 are required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the 2022-23 to 2024-25 period. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 returns¹. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

¹ Denbighshire did provide data, but as these related to surveys conducted in November 2018 and February 2020 (i.e. pre-Covid), they are not included in the comparison table as the figures cannot be meaningfully compared to more recent data.

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:	N/A	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	N/A	31%	89.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending:	Not provided	86%	98.5%	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 which referred to the value of the Bookstart Rhyme Times sessions delivered by the dedicated Bookstart Team. Sessions provide an opportunity for the young children to become members of the library; foster a love of reading; and develop their speech and language skills. Attending the sessions also contributes to developing children’s social and emotional skills and confidence. Parents who attend enjoy socialising with other parents, which supports their well-being. A mother who has attended Bookstart Rhyme Time sessions with all of her four children over the past ten years commented: “...all of my children love reading and the library thanks to the encouragement you gave them... I really value the routine and the social contact and getting out of the house to a friendly face. It’s not all about the books!”

Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Denbighshire position for 2023-24. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. 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		N/A	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being		N/A	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive		N/A	90%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books		N/A	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care		N/A	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities		N/A	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall		N/A	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten		N/A	8.0	9.4	9.7
QI 5 User support					
a) attendances per capita	23	10/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	329	2/18	12	137	449
QI 6 Attendances at events per capita					
	287	7/22	3	224.5	620
QI 8 Library use					
b) virtual visits per capita	354	17/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	164	2/22	57	123	233
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material					
b) % material budget children's resources	20%	7/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	9%	15/22	4%	15.5%	49%
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita					
	1,246	3/22	161	631.5	2,725
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications²					
(v) a) total volunteers	4	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	644	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£13,982	7/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	62%	=15/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=13/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	5%	=7/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	23%	=6/22	0%	16.5%	34%

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.

Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5)

The service meets the Health and well-being target (QI4) in full and libraries offer a weekly Talking Points service, run jointly by Denbighshire County Council and Betsi Cadwaldr University Health Board, where Community Navigators share information about help and support available in an area. Per capita attendance at formal training sessions is around the median and attendance has increased by 26% compared to

² Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.

2022-23 (Q15). The library service works with Cwmpas to offer a range of drop-in sessions, workshops and essential skills courses. Although the number of informal support sessions has declined compared to 2022-23, Denbighshire is still in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for informal support per capita. No customer surveys have been carried out in 2022-23 or 2023-24, but Denbighshire is planning a survey for autumn 2024 when the budget cuts and changes in opening hours have been implemented (Q11/2).

Access and use (QI 6-8)

Total attendance at library events has increased by 25% since 2022-23 and Denbighshire is above the median for per capita event attendance (Q16). Events include reading groups, Craft and Chat; Knit and Natter; Paned a Sgwrs; English and Welsh reading groups; craft groups; author events; class visits; and Bookstart Rhymetimes. The service has a strong under 5s offer and Rhymetimes account for 45% of event attendances. The service offers activities and services for customers with particular needs, for example, providing SIM cards to people unable to afford their monthly top up through the National Databank scheme. During the winter months libraries were part of the Warm Welcome scheme, offering free teas and coffees to residents. Denbighshire Libraries worked with local organisation Making Sense CIO on a memory box project for people living with dementia.

The number of active borrowers has increased by 7% compared to 2022-23 and Denbighshire is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q18). Over 70% of reported library members are active borrowers. Adult book issues have risen by 12% and children's stock by 11%, and both are above the median. Electronic issues have increased by 9%, despite the cancellation of the library's Pressreader subscription, and the service is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure. However, Denbighshire is below the national median for virtual visits, which have declined by 44% in comparison to 2022-23. The service reports that social media subscribers have increased slightly (2%).

Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Denbighshire meets the acquisitions rate target and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q19). The percentage of the budget allocated to children's resources is above the median, whilst the proportion spent on electronic resources is below the median. The service exceeds the target for per capita spend on Welsh language resources. It is above the median for per capita Welsh language issues which have risen by 14% since 2022-23 (Q110). The service reports that 71% of Welsh language issues were for children's books. During the Summer Reading Challenge the library service teamed up with Denbighshire Leisure to run a sports equipment loan scheme. It also loans footballs via the Alive and Kicking scheme.

Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Although the total number of staff shows an increase compared to 2022-23, Denbighshire still does not meet the targets for either total staff or qualified staff per capita. It is at the median for the former and slightly above the median for the latter (Q113). Staffing levels are due to be reduced in June 2024, which will affect next year's return. This includes one manager post which had been temporarily covered

since the Principal Librarian left in November 2023. Denbighshire is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities in terms of staff time allocated for training, which has been limited as a result of budget cuts. There are a small number of volunteers, although it is noted that budget cuts have made it a difficult time to recruit and train volunteers. Denbighshire is above the median for total expenditure per capita (Q114). Opening hours remain stable, although the service anticipates budget cuts will lead to a reduction in opening hours in future years. The service meets the target for opening hours per capita and is above the median for this measure (Q116).

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. Denbighshire identified a range of ways in which it contributed to these priorities. These themes include:

- **Promoting the Welsh language** e.g. having Welsh speaking staff available in all libraries, offering a wide range of print and digital resources in the Welsh language, and hosting reading groups and author events.
- **Celebrating diversity** e.g. developing and promoting the LGBTQ+ History Timeline for Denbighshire including hosting a special event in Rhyl Library to promote LGBT+ History Month.
- **Promoting better mental health** e.g. highlighting the Reading Well collections and involvement in the local Dementia Friendly Towns initiatives.
- **Addressing social isolation** e.g. offering a warm welcome and activities to help people who may be lonely.
- **Providing digital support** e.g. helping people apply for blue badges, making tablets and Chromebooks available for loan, providing free SIMs and partnering to make digital courses available in libraries.
- **Becoming ecologically positive** e.g. introducing an electric van for the Home Library Service.

Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Denbighshire notes that major budget cuts have impeded the progress of some projects and that, following a public consultation, library opening hours will change from June 2024. The service plans to conduct a full user survey in the autumn, with the results informing a new Library Strategy which will be in place by spring 2025. The library is committed to supporting the themes in the Council's Corporate Plan through various activities including: helping people get online; hosting job clubs; providing meeting spaces; promoting Reading Well resources; supporting well-being initiatives; and providing a safe, welcoming space for individuals. The service is investigating ways to deliver a programme of activities and events to re-engage the public and are planning an application for a Transformation Grant to refurbish one of its libraries.

Conclusion

Attendance at formal training has increased, indicating that Denbighshire Libraries are working effectively with partners to offer relevant courses. The service also performs well in terms of active borrower numbers, issues, event attendance and Welsh language provision. However, virtual visits have declined. Denbighshire is due to carry out customer surveys in 2024, which will, hopefully, help in providing further information about customers' use of library services and their expectations. Whilst appreciating the challenges of budget cuts, the time allocated for staff training is a concern and it is hoped that this is something that will be addressed as part of the new library strategy.