

Report



Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure

Part 1

Date: 18 August 2017

Subject Welsh Public Library Standards Return 2016/17

Purpose The purpose of the report is to seek Cabinet Member for Culture & Leisure's approval to submit the return detailing the Library Service's performance in 2016/17 against the Fifth Framework of the Welsh Public Library Standards.

Author Library Operations Manager

Ward General

Summary The Welsh Public Library Standards were first introduced in 2002 as a mechanism for Welsh government to assess the performance of local authorities in delivering the statutory requirement of "a comprehensive and efficient" public library service. Each framework has covered a three year period with the new fifth Framework covering the period from April 2014 until March 2017.

The fifth framework introduced a different reporting format to the first four frameworks. This new framework replaces standards and performance indicators with 18 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators to measure the impact of library services in Wales.

The initial self-assessment of the return indicates that the library service has performed well against certain elements, where there has been a progressive improvement over the three years of the framework. However, increasing pressure upon revenue budgets has had an impact on the service's ability to meet targets based upon resource inputs.

Proposal To approve the return detailing the Welsh Public Library Standards performance to Welsh Government

Action by Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Culture and Heritage Manager
- Head of Regeneration, Investment and Housing
- Director, Place
- Head of Finance – Chief Finance Officer
- Head of Law and Regulations – Monitoring Officer
- Head of People and Business Change

Signed

1. Background

- 1.1 The Public Libraries and Museum's Act of 1964 requires local authorities to "provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof" and makes it a statutory duty of the relevant Welsh Minister "to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred upon them as library authorities under this Act."
- 1.2 The introduction of the Welsh Public Library Standards in 2002 was the mechanism through which the Minister was able to fulfil the duty in relation to public libraries in Wales.
- 1.3 The standards have covered areas such as opening hours, levels and quality of stock, expenditure on resources and satisfaction with staff and services. In the previous frameworks, Newport has consistently been amongst the highest performing library authorities in Wales in meeting the standards and in both the third framework from 2008-2011 and the fourth framework of 2011 – 2014 was the only authority to achieve all of the standards.
- 1.4 The Fifth Framework introduced a significantly altered reporting format. Previous frameworks have identified dedicated standards and performance indicators to report against. Instead, the latest framework introduced 18 core entitlements and 16 quality indicators that will be used to measure the impact of library services on the lives of the people of Wales.
- 1.5 The stated aim of the Fifth framework was to introduce an increased focus upon how library services are working to meet the strategic priorities of the Welsh Government and to allow the opportunity for services to work flexibly at a time of financial restraint. Consisting of a mix of input and output measures as well as qualitative and impact/outcome analysis the framework is themed around four core service aspects:
 - Customers and communities
 - Access for all
 - Learning for life
 - Leadership and development.

2. Assessment of Performance 2015-16

- 2.1 The assessment report on the second year of the Fifth framework was received in September 2016. Although the aim of the new framework had been to move away from input based assessment, in practise much of the analysis of performance was still based upon inputs and quantitative data, rather than outcomes. A number of the quality indicators are entirely related to resource spend, e.g. Q18 Up-to-date reading materials and Q13 staffing levels. Against these measures the service performed poorly, as budget levels have been reduced in recent years to a level where the target per population cannot be met. Consequently, our performance against those indicators with associated targets declined from meeting 4 in full and 3 in part in 2014-15; to meeting 3 in full, 3 in part and not meeting 1 in 2015-16. The indicator which was not met was that for total opening hours per 1,000 population, which is directly attributable to the closure of two branch libraries.
- 2.2 The service performed better in relation to the core entitlements as these are not so dependent upon resource and the Service is better able to ensure we prioritise delivery to meet these entitlements. Overall, in 2015-16, Newport Library Service was assessed to have met 17 of the core entitlements and not met 1.

3. Performance against Standards 2016-17

- 3.1 An initial self-assessment of the 2016-17 return indicates that the service has improved our performance against the core entitlements, meeting all 18 of them for the first time. We have been able to meet all the core entitlements this year following the ratification and publication of the Library Strategy 2017-2020.
- 3.2 It is possible that the assessor of the WPLS return will not agree with the self-assessment and that the number of core entitlements that are said to have been met will be less. This will potentially depend upon whether performance against the quality indicators is taken in to consideration when reviewing the core entitlements. This was not the case in last year's assessment and there has been no indication from the Welsh Government that they will adopt a different approach this year. Core entitlements that may not be assessed as passed and the indicators affecting them are listed in the table below.

Core Entitlement	Quality Indicator target not met
1. Ensure friendly, knowledgeable and qualified staff are on hand to help	QI13. Staffing levels and qualifications Total number of staff per 10,000 population Number of qualified staff per 10,000 population
6. Provide a safe, attractive and accessible physical space with suitable opening hours	QI16 Opening Hours Aggregate annual opening hours per 1,000 population

- 3.3 Performance against the 16 quality indicators is mixed. As indicated above, where the quality indicator is input based and largely dependent upon resources our performance has declined from last year's return and we have not met the required target. 2016/17 was the first full year in which the service changes resulting from the library review were in place following their implementation in October 2015. This has led to a reduction in the Service budget from £1,049,028 in 2015-16 to £942,095 in 2016/17. Within the 2015-16 Assessment Report from the Welsh Government it was noted that Newport had the lowest level of funding per capita in Wales at £7,516 per 1000 population. Following the further reduction in the budget this figure stands at £6,745 per 1000 population for 2016-17. It is highly likely that the Welsh Government will choose to raise this funding level in the 2016-17 assessment report and that it may colour how they choose to assess performance against the Standards.
- 3.4 The most marked decline in performance is in QI16 Opening Hours, where the total library opening hours per 1000 population has fallen from 112 in 2015-16 to 87 in 2016-17. The target within the Standards is 120 hours per 100 population, so the service is now considerably below that target.
- 3.5 In those quality indicators which are not so dependent upon budget levels the service has continued to perform well by targeting resources, working flexibly and building upon existing good practice. The service has met the requirement to provide a programme of reader development, information and digital literacy support across our sites and has maintained our strong performance in meeting customer requests.
- 3.6 Where possible, we have sought to improve performance. For example, the 2014-15 assessment highlighted the poor levels of attendance at pre-arranged training within our libraries. At 2 attendees per 1000 population the service had the lowest attendance levels in Wales. In 2015-16 we were able to increase attendance to 14 per 1000 and last year by continuing to work with partners performance against this measure has improved again to 59. Another area of improvement has been in the level of expenditure on materials and the number of items acquired for our collection, achieved following the re-allocation of funding within Regeneration, Investment and Housing and a re-alignment of priorities within the Library budget. Expenditure on materials increased by £33,000 (15%) in 2016-17 with the result that we purchased nearly 5000 more items, an increase of 21% on the previous year.

- 3.7 Another first for this framework, we met the target that 1% of aggregate staff time should be spent on training and personal development. This has been achieved despite having the lowest staffing level in Wales and reflects our priority to continue to develop staff skills so that they meet the changing demands of our library customers.
- 3.8 For the first time the Fifth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards incorporated a qualitative element to measure the impact of service on the lives of the people of Wales. Each authority must submit case studies that describe the impact the service has had upon an individual or group and a narrative account of how the library service is working to meet the strategic objectives of the local authority and Welsh Government. As the library service has always aligned the delivery of services closely to the strategic aims of the local authority it has been able to produce a clear narrative of how we meet this requirement. Three case studies have been chosen that highlight the positive impact of library services on people's lives.
- 3.9 The proposed submission is attached to this report within the Background Papers section.

4. Staffing

- 4.1 There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

5. Financial Summary

- 5.1 The performance of the library service against the Fifth Framework of the Library Standards is achieved with the lowest revenue expenditure per head of population in Wales. Where the ability to meet a quality indicator target is directly linked to expenditure levels the service is unable to meet those targets.
- 5.2 There are no financial implications associated with the decision set out in this report.

6. Risks

Risk	Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect	Who is responsible for dealing with the risk?
Failure to submit a return will have an adverse effect on Council reputation	M	L	Seeking Cabinet Member approval of a proposed Welsh Library Standards return	Operations Manager Culture and Heritage Manager

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

7. Links to Council Policies and Priorities

- 7.1 As a universal service operating in communities across the City, the Library Service contributes to all five of the themes and outcomes identified within the Corporate Plan "Standing up for Newport"

8. Options Available

8.1 The options available are:

- Option 1: To agree the content of this report and to approve its submission to Welsh Government
- Option 2: To not agree that the report will be submitted

9. Preferred Option and Why

9.1 The preferred choice is to submit the return detailing Library Service performance to Welsh Government.

10. Comments of Chief Financial Officer

10.1 The standards have been achieved within each of the five frameworks and within current financial resources approved each year. There are no direct financial consequences associated with the report to be submitted to the Welsh Government.

11. Comments of Monitoring Officer

11.1 There are no specific legal issues arising from the Report. The Council has a duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to deliver a comprehensive and efficient library service. The Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards helps to maintain and improve standards and to enable Welsh Government to assess whether authorities are complying with this duty. This initial self-assessment indicates that there has been a continuous improvement in the library service over the past three years and that all of the core entitlements under the new fifth framework have been met in 16/17. However, performance is more mixed in relation to the quality indicators, particularly where reduced resources has had an impact on the service's ability to meet targets.

12. Comments of Head of People and Business Change

12.1 The report notes the challenges the Newport library service faces in terms of staffing and resources but also indicates strong and improving performance, for example meeting all 18 core entitlements, providing a reader development service, digital literacy support and achieving staff training and development targets. The case studies provided demonstrate the value of library services in improving wellbeing for instance in terms of mental health, child development and adult learning. These are regarded as preventative services providing long term societal and individual benefits. The Library Strategy 2017-2020 helpfully sets out the contribution of library services to the national goals set out in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and will act as a template for the provision of a sustainable service in the medium term.

13. Comments of Cabinet Member

13.1 Cabinet Member has approved the report.

Comments from Non-Executive Members

Councillor Ferris

It's very disappointing to read that our library provision has been found lacking. Is this a regrettable "first" in our history as we always made every effort to keep our accreditation scores? It is even more galling to read that the fall in our scores is due to the closure of two branch libraries. This was done, in my ward despite the library being only one of two very small community facilities that the Council provide in the whole ward and despite the vigorous protest made by the whole community against the Library's closure. We were given the strongest assurances that the closure wouldn't lead to a fall in the library accreditation stakes as we were complacently told, "people could use the central library",- despite the branch library being valued part of the local community and shopping centre's visitor offer. Shamefully, this was done to make the insignificant saving of a mere £10,000 P.A. The Library has now been taken over by volunteers and is used as a small arts centre. Does the Council propose redressing the noted lack of provision by re-establishing a branch library? I wouldn't want to see the little art centre evicted, but there are vacant adjoining premises that could be used, or even made to link into the arts centre.

Response from Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Housing

Thank you for your comments in relation to the report.

Please find below a response to your concerns raised during the All Member Consultation:

I note your concerns about the level of library provision in your local area due to changes in Library venues, however there are still a number of library services available and there is option of ordering books on line.

14. Scrutiny Committees

14.1 N/A

15. Equalities Impact Assessment

15.1 N/A

16. Children and Families (Wales) Measure

16.1 Although the provision of Libraries falls outside the direct scope of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure, Libraries make a contribution to child development and therefore contribute to a wide strategy to ameliorate the effects of Child poverty. Additionally Libraries offer a safe and fun place for children to develop their reading skills and therefore makes a contribution to play based learning.

17. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

17.1 The Welsh Library Standards are the Welsh Government's method of ensuring Local Authorities discharge their statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient Library Service. As such it is a nationwide process that uses a common approach ensuring well developed collaborative and integrated approach.

18. Crime and Disorder Act 1998

18.1 Libraries support cohesive communities fostering active citizenship and thereby challenging the causes of some criminality.

19. Consultation

19.1 N/A

20. Background Papers

Dated: 18 August 2017