Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Flintshire (Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd.)

Annual Assessment Report 2017-18

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Flintshire's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government.

1   Executive summary

Flintshire met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Flintshire achieved 9 in full, and 1 in part.

Library services in Flintshire are now delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. This has been a transition year for the service, as it moved across to the new delivery and operating model, and there is evidence that the service is performing well in a number of areas. There has been strong investment in the materials budget in particular, enabling the targets here to be met, and improving usage figures for visits, book issues, and numbers of active borrowers. There are also evident challenges however. The continuing low level of qualified staff has to be a concern for the professional development of the service, and financial constraints remain as the service seeks to deliver its plans within a reducing budget.

- Flintshire submitted two case studies demonstrating the positive impact of the service. All service points provide a full range of support for individual development, and for health and well-being.

- Attendance at pre-arranged training sessions has more than halved in comparison with 2016-17, and numbers helped by means of informal training have also fallen.

- While the number of events / activities on offer has increased, attendance has fallen, with per capita performance now among the lowest in Wales.

- Overall usage, in terms of physical visits, book issues, and numbers of active borrowers has improved, although it generally remains below the median level.

- The service continues to invest strongly in the materials budget, which proportionally is the highest in Wales; the targets for overall and Welsh language acquisitions are met.

- Staffing levels have broadly been maintained, and numbers of qualified staff have risen; the targets here are however still missed by some margin, with Flintshire recording the lowest level of professional staff per capita in Wales.

- Total revenue expenditure had decreased, with budgets planned to reduce further.

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

Flintshire meets all of the 12 core entitlements in full. The library service was transferred out of local authority control on 1 September 2017, and is now delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd, an employee owned Community Benefit Society. This represents a significant change of governance, with customer engagement and consultation forming an integral part of the process. The library service plan / strategic objectives form part of the Aura Business Plan 2018-2023, which includes a specific objective 'To meet the 12 core entitlements of the sixth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-20'.

2.2   Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Flintshire is achieving 9 in full, and one 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 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	✔	
or Materials spend per capita	✔	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	x	
or 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		Met in full
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	✔	
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

There has been no overall change in Flintshire's performance compared to the last year of the fifth framework for those quality indicators where direct comparisons are possible.

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 are only required to carry out user surveys for QI 1 once over the three-year period of the framework. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during this first year of the framework. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Flintshire has yet to complete its user surveys; these are due to be carried out in September 2018. The service was unable to report figures for user evaluation of its training offer.

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	73%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	n/a	38%	90%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	n/a	75%	98%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide up to four case studies describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year. Flintshire provided two such case studies:

- Children's Activities – impact of Easter activities on one foster child's approach to participation, applying concentration and effort into producing an Easter egg design. The judge's positive comments reinforced his experience, and the (unexpected) win was a huge boost to his confidence and self-esteem.

- Books and Exercise – impact of the co-location of a library and leisure centre, with the library providing consultation space for National Exercise Referral Scheme staff to meet with clients, and adding value in terms of reading choices and health and well-being information. Clients benefited from access to resources, and wider library services.

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 Flintshire's position for 2017-18. 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 to some authorities. Where possible, figures from the last year of the fifth framework have

also been included for comparison; however, in some cases a change in definition or the introduction of additional measures makes comparisons impractical. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2016/17
QI 1 Making a difference						
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills:	n/a		24%	83%	94%	64%
c) health and well-being	n/a		33%	65%	95%	46%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	n/a		90%	98%	100%	94%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a		88%	91%	98%	89%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	n/a		93%	99%	100%	96%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		74%	86%	94%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall;	n/a		93%	97%	99%	99%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	n/a		8.5	9.1	9.2	10.0
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	14	18/22	10	32	238	29
c) informal training per capita	118	16/22	15	199	473	162
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	140	19/22	82	228	684	151
QI 8 Library use						
a) visits per capita	3,998	13/22	2,501	4,047	7,014	3,935
b) virtual visits per capita	334	19/22	243	866	2,211	453
c) active borrowers per capita	139	16/22	100	154	229	127
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita*	80	8/22	4	68	663	
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita^	7	20/22	5	9	14	9
c) % of available time used by the public	14%	22/22	14%	27%	67%	16%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	61	6/21	3	31	196	26
b) total volunteer hours	1,057	13/21	40	1,346	11,939	386
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,319	18/21	£7,047	£11,915	£17,771	£10,281
b) % on staff,	57%	15/21	44%	63%	75%	59%
% on information resources	25%	1/21	4%	13%	25%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	11%	4/21	0%	4%	20%	5%
% on other operational costs;	6%	20/21	0%	18%	37%	15%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	14/20	£0	£338	£17,432	£723
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.69	13/21	£1.24	£1.82	£2.41	£2.24
QI 16 Opening hours#						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.02%	11/21	0.00%	0.02%	1.28%	0.07%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	3.02%	17/20	0.00%	0.35%	11.24%	0.37%

per Welsh speaking resident population

^per 10,000 resident population

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

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, and compares this performance (where applicable) with the final year of the fifth framework (2016-17).

3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Flintshire has yet to complete its user surveys, which are planned for September 2018. All static libraries provide the full range of support for individual development, with health and well-being also well-supported and all staff trained as dementia friends. Attendance at pre-arranged user training sessions has however more than halved in comparison with 2016-17, and some reflection on the factors at work here would have been useful. Numbers helped by means of informal training have also reduced over the period, with the average per capita now below the median for Wales.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Flintshire continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events / activities for users with special requirements at all static libraries. The service has increased its offer in this area, with 829 events held (up on 652 in 2016-17). Overall attendance has however fallen, with per capita performance now among the lowest in Wales. Usage in other areas has increased, with Flintshire one of seven library services to record an increase in visits to library premises, and one of five reporting an increase in book issues (although adult books issues are still well below the median level). Virtual visits have fallen, but this reflects the transfer of online services to the new Aura website, and the service is planning for the promotion of these services over summer 2018. There has been an encouraging increase in the number of active borrowers, which it is noted includes IT users, although again performance remains below the median for Wales.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

The service continues to maintain its investment in information resources, with an increase in the materials budget, which proportionally is the highest in Wales. Both the overall acquisitions targets (QI 9) and the requirements for spending on Welsh language resources (QI 10) are therefore met in 2017-18. The service also continues to meet the requirements in relation to supply of requests, although performance has fallen slightly on the figures for 2016-17. It is noted that to ensure consistency with other North Wales authorities, these figures only include requests satisfied within the county, and not those met through arrangements to share stock across the six authorities. PC provision has fallen further in 2017-18, as have usage levels, where Flintshire has the lowest percentage take-up in Wales.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall staffing levels have broadly been maintained, although performance is still below the target level. While numbers of qualified staff have increased, and all identified professional posts are now filled, the requirements here are also not met, with Flintshire recording the lowest level of professional staff per capita in Wales. This has to be a concern for the future development of the service, although it is noted that a staff restructure has introduced a new supervisory tier which will allow for career progression and support succession planning. Qualified leadership is in place, and the service

continues to meet the requirements in relation to time allocated for professional development. The contribution from volunteers has increased further in 2017-18, with some 26 individuals each contributing an average of 17 hours to the service.

Total revenue expenditure has decreased on 2016-17, with investment levels among the lowest in Wales. It is noted elsewhere that Aura's funding agreement with the Council also includes a reduction of 10% over the initial three year period, and this will present some challenges for the service going forward. Aggregate annual opening hours have increased, reflecting the benefits of co-location, with the target here met. Flintshire does however record the highest level of unstaffed opening hours, and a relatively high number of mobile library stops were missed in 2017-18, either through vehicle failure or lack of staff capacity.

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. Flintshire reported on how the service supports and contributes to national, regional and organisational priorities, under the seven Well-being goals. Connecting services, through local partnerships; promoting Prosperous communities, through lifelong learning opportunities; supporting Resilient and Cohesive communities, by promoting well-being and facilitating social connections; enabling Healthier communities, through its health and well-being collections and partnerships; and promoting a Vibrant Culture and thriving Welsh Language, through provision of high quality resources and cultural activities.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Flintshire noted the successful transfer of the service to the new delivery and operating model, with a focus in the changeover year on informing staff and customers. A comprehensive customer survey is planned for September 2018, which will reflect on the first year of operation under Aura's management. Plans for 2018-19 include strengthening links with health partners, and investigating the possibilities for further co-location of services. There will also be a focus on enhancing the service's digital offer, with a review of the current ICT infrastructure. It is noted that financial challenges remain, with the funding agreement from the council reducing by 10% over the initial three year period of Aura's operation; plans to meet these requirements focus on growth initiatives as well as further efficiencies.

6   Conclusion

Library services in Flintshire are now delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. This has been a transition year for the service, as it moved across to the new delivery and operating model, and there is evidence that the service is performing well in a number of areas. There has been strong investment in the materials budget in particular, enabling the targets here to be met, and improving usage figures for visits, book issues, and numbers of active borrowers. There are also evident challenges however. The continuing low level of qualified staff has to be a concern for the professional development of the service, and financial constraints remain as the service seeks to deliver its plans within a reducing budget.