Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Wrexham

Annual Assessment Report 2018/19

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

1   Executive summary

Wrexham met 10 of the 12 core entitlements in full, partially met 1, and does not meet 1.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Wrexham achieved 5 in full, 2 in part and did not achieve 3.

Wrexham library service reports some mixed performances in the second year of the sixth framework, with capacity issues evidently still affecting provision in a number of areas. While visitor numbers have continued to improve, they remain the lowest in Wales, and other areas of library use have declined, with another very significant drop in take-up of the service's formal training offer. Some reflection from the service on the factors at work in these sometimes striking variations in year-on-year performance would be appropriate. While staffing levels have held steady in 2018/19, it is already noted that the staffing complement for 2019/20 will be reduced. With overall staffing already among the lowest in Wales, this will further impact on service capacity. The service is also entering another period of review, with a two-year full Library Service Review (2019-21) underway. Wrexham has already experienced a sustained period of reshaping and change, and continuing financial and structural uncertainties must impact on the delivery of services. The key role that libraries play in supporting Wrexham's communities should be central to the current review, in ensuring that the service is able to respond and develop to meet changing user needs.

- Provision for basic ICT support is now available across all main service points, and the service provides a good level of support for health and well-being.

- Attendance at formal training sessions has decreased again by close to half, and while numbers helped by informal training have improved they remain the lowest in Wales.

- Visitor numbers and attendance at library events and activities have both continued to increase, although overall visits remain among the lowest in Wales. Most other areas of library use have declined, with performances generally below the median level.

- Although the overall acquisitions targets have not been met, budgets have increased; Wrexham continues to meet the targets for acquisition of Welsh language resources.

- The service will be reviewing its ICT offer as part of a wider Library Service Review to target provision more effectively to reflect customer usage, although the roll-out of Wi-Fi to all service branches is yet to be completed.

- Performance in relation to supply of requests has fallen further, with neither target now met; reductions in staff capacity are noted as a factor here.

- Overall and professional staff levels have been maintained in 2018/19, although both are below the targets set, and there are already indications that these will reduce further in the coming year.

- Aggregate opening hours have also been maintained, although Wrexham's offer here remains among the lowest in Wales; access has been extended however through the provision of additional unstaffed hours at one branch library.

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

Wrexham is meeting 10 of the 12 core entitlements in full, partially meets one, and does not meet one. With Wi-Fi provision still not available across all library service points CE7 is partially met. A two-year Library Service Review is currently being conducted with the aim of investigating how the needs of current and future customers can best be met; the development of a public-facing strategy for the service will form part of this review process, until this is completed CE12 is not met.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Wrexham is achieving 5 in full, 2 in part and does not achieve 3 of the indicators.

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		Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x	
or Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	✔	
or Spend on Welsh per capita	x	

QI 11 Online access:		Partially met	
a) i) Public access to Internet	✔		
ii) Wi-Fi provision	x		
QI 12 Supply of requests		Not met	
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x		
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x		
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	x	Not Met	

There has been a small decline in Wrexham's performance compared with 2017/18, with a reduction in per capita spending under QI 10. The service is also now not meeting either of the targets for supply of requests (QI 12).

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 2017/18 or 2018/19. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Wrexham carried out an adult user survey in November 2017; completion of its children's survey has however been deferred during the current Service Review. While a figure is reported for QI 5 b) below, the sample surveyed did not meet the minimum required to be statistically accurate.

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		60%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	80%	13/15	38%	88%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	93%	=16/20	80%	97%	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. Wrexham provided two such case studies, although stronger evidence could have been included of the impact on individuals / groups:

- More than 'Just' a Jigsaw – how simple activities, such as putting out a jigsaw for customers to complete, impacts on users. The jigsaw has proved very popular, attracting young and old contributors. For one lady it has become a regular feature of her library use, something she enjoys and finds relaxing, adding to the role of the library as a 'companionable space'.

- Gwersyllt Library – how changes to the operational model at this library were implemented. Using new technology (including self-service kiosks), and with partnership support, the opening hours at the library were extended beyond the original 21 staffed hours to 40 hours per week. Customer feedback has been positive, although use of the self-service facilities is still a small proportion of overall usage.

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 Wrexham's position for 2018/19. 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. Figures from the first year of the sixth framework or relevant previous surveys have also been included for comparison. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		*Rank*	Lowest	Median	Highest	*2017/18*
QI 1 Making a difference						*[Framework 5]*
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	63%	*12/15*	24%	82%	96%	*n/a*
c) health and well-being	62%	*8/15*	33%	62%	94%	*n/a*
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	90%	*15/15*	90%	97%	100%	*n/a*
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						*[Framework 5]*
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	*=6/14*	81%	91%	98%	*n/a*
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	93%	*14/14*	93%	99%	100%	*n/a*
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	74%	*12/13*	65%	91%	95%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	93%	*14/14*	93%	97%	99%	*n/a*
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	n/a		8.5	9.3	9.5	*n/a*
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	32	*10/22*	13	30	208	*61*
c) informal training per capita	29	*22/22*	15	199	433	*15*
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	198	*16/22*	91	295	689	*200*
QI 8 Library use[1]						
a) visits per capita	2,722	*21/22*	2,596	3,969	7,170*	*2,690*
b) virtual visits per capita	355	*20/22*	345	885	2,205	*571*
c) active borrowers per capita	127	*14/22*	58	150	251	*131*
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita[2]	752	*10/22*	95	602	1,424	*701*
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita[3]	14	*2/22*	5	10	14	*14*
c) % of available time used by the public	17%	*=20/22*	14%	25%	63%	*17%*
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	n/a		3	30	214	*n/a*
b) total volunteer hours	n/a		90	1,477	9,806	*n/a*

[1] figures for co-located services are marked with an asterisk; performances for these services are likely to reflect higher footfall, and will not therefore be directly comparable with stand-alone library provision

[2] per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population; figures from 2017/18 reports corrected following a calculation error

[3] per 10,000 resident population

QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,967	*16/22*	£7,181	£12,145	£19,449	*£11,907*
b) % on staff,	64%	*10/22*	47%	62%	78%	*58%*
% on information resources	14%	*7/22*	8%	13%	21%	*11%*
% on equipment and buildings	4%	*12/22*	0.4%	4%	25%	*11%*
% on other operational costs	19%	*10/22*	0.3%	16%	37%	*20%*
c) capital expenditure per capita	£373	*13/22*	£0	£467	£8,829	*n/a*
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£2.17	*6/22*	£1.18	£1.82	£2.52	*£2.24*
QI 16 Opening hours[4]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	*=1/22*	0.00%	0.00%	0.25%	*1.28%*
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	2.42%	*17/20*	0.00%	0.28%	7.99%	*1.49%*

[4] *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 with the first year of the sixth framework (2017/18).

3.1   Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Wrexham conducted an adult user survey during November 2017, however its child user survey has been deferred during the current Service Review. Although four of the service's libraries are not Wi-Fi enabled, basic support for ICT use is provided, and QI 3 is now regarded as met. All libraries are noted as meeting the requirements in terms of health and well-being support, and QI 4 is still met in full. Reported attendance at pre-arranged training sessions has nearly halved on 2017/18 (which itself saw a 44% drop on the year before). Numbers helped by informal training have, in contrast, close to doubled, although performance here remains the lowest per capita in Wales. Some reflection on the factors at work in these striking variations in year-on-year performance would be appropriate.

3.2   Access and use (QI 6-8)

Wrexham continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and has seen further increases in physical visits to library premises, and attendance at library events and activities, although overall visitor numbers remain among the lowest in Wales. While library membership has also risen, most other areas of library use have declined, with performances generally below the median level. It is notable that Wrexham is one of very few library services in Wales not to see an increase in electronic downloads over the year. Again some consideration of the factors underlying changes in performance would have strengthened the return.

3.3   Facilities and services (QI 9-12)[i]

There has been a welcome increase in expenditure on materials in 2018/19, although performance remains below the target levels for QI 9. Expenditure on children's resources and items in the Welsh language has also increased, with Wrexham continuing to meet the targets for acquisition of Welsh language resources, and an associated rise in issues in this area. PC provision has been maintained, and remains at a notably high level, with

consequent low levels of usage. While Wi-Fi provision is noted as another factor affecting usage here, the service has still to complete its roll-out of Wi-Fi across all service points. It is noted that the service's ICT offer will be looked at as part of the wider Library Service Review to ensure that provision reflects customer usage. Performance in relation to supply of requests has fallen further, with neither target now met; reductions in staff capacity are noted as a factor here.

3.4   Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall staff levels and numbers of professional staff are broadly similar to 2017/18, following previous losses, but it is noted that the staffing complement for 2019/20 will be reduced further. Staff capacity is already an area of concern, with neither target in these areas met and overall staffing among the lowest in Wales. Qualified leadership is in place however, and the requirements for staff training / professional development are achieved. Wrexham remains the only authority in Wales where volunteers do not contribute to the work of the service.

Total revenue expenditure has fallen on 2017/18, and is now below the median level for Wales as a whole, although the service continues to invest in its library estate from its capital budgets. Aggregate annual opening hours have been maintained, but remain among the lowest in Wales. The service has extended access through the provision of unstaffed hours at one branch library, although this arrangement relies on partnership working with another council team to open the premises.

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. Wrexham reported on changes to the Wrexham Council Plan under which it works, with a focus on delivering in-year priorities in line with the Council's well-being objectives. The library service contribution to meeting these objectives, and the wider Well-being Goals for Wales are further detailed: supporting learning and skills development; building strong communities; helping tackle poverty; and reducing inequality.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Wrexham notes the challenge to the service of operating more efficiently and effectively with reduced budgets. The narrative provided focuses on the Library Service Review 2019-21 as the means to enable the service to operate more dynamically, with better links to its local communities. Key developments highlighted as part of this work include investigating ways to modernise the service, including new models of service delivery, to ensure it remains sustainable, viable and affordable. The operational context of diminishing resources, and likely significant future budget cuts, is however an evident driver for this work.

6   Conclusion

Wrexham library service reports some mixed performances in the second year of the sixth framework, with capacity issues evidently still affecting provision in a number of areas.

While visitor numbers have continued to improve, they remain the lowest in Wales, and other areas of library use have declined, with another very significant drop in take-up of the service's formal training offer. Some reflection from the service on the factors at work in these sometimes striking variations in year-on-year performance would be appropriate. While staffing levels have held steady in 2018/19, it is already noted that the staffing complement for 2019/20 will be reduced. With overall staffing already among the lowest in Wales, this will further impact on service capacity. The service is also entering another period of review, with a two-year full Library Service Review (2019-21) underway. Wrexham has already experienced a sustained period of reshaping and change, and continuing financial and structural uncertainties must impact on the delivery of services. The key role that libraries play in supporting Wrexham's communities should be central to the current review, in ensuring that the service is able to respond and develop to meet changing user needs.

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[i] E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been excluded from acquisitions figures for QI 9 in 2018/19 to ensure that the standard accurately reflects individual authority strategy, investment and performance. In some cases this has impacted on achievement against the standard in comparison with 2017/18. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.