

# Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust

## Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Merthyr Tydfil's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Culture and Sport Division of the Welsh Government.

### 1 Executive summary

Merthyr Tydfil met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Merthyr Tydfil achieved 8 in full and 1 in part.

Library services in Merthyr Tydfil are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has performed well throughout the framework and is one of only five services to meet the acquisitions target. Regular consultation also ensures that customer satisfaction levels have remained high throughout the framework as Merthyr is able to anticipate the needs of its community and deliver services needed. Unlike many other library services in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil has seen an increase in most usage figures including adult and children issues and library membership. Staffing levels have been maintained at 2017/18 levels, but remain below the median for Wales. Despite this, the service notes that it feels it utilises the staffing to the best advantage of customers. The service engages with a wide variety of partners to deliver appropriate activities for its communities, and the challenge will be to maintain resource levels in order to continue to deliver a quality service.

- Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full.
- Merthyr Tydfil completed its adult and children's user surveys in March 2020. There are no changes since the last survey (adult and children) was undertaken in March 2019. Satisfaction levels remain very high and the service ranks as first or second in Wales for most of the indicators.
- Spending on acquisitions has increased once again in 2019/20, resulting in an 8.5% increase since 2017/18. The benefit is seen in increased adult and children book issues and membership levels, against the Wales (and UK) trend.
- Staffing targets (QI 13) remain unmet, with the total number of staff and the total number of professional staff below the median level in Wales.
- The service's ICT provision is well used with the second highest usage level for its computers in Wales.

### 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. The assessment has been limited to some degree by the fact that local authorities were only asked to comment on any changes to the previous year's return, alongside additional commentary on of partially/not met core entitlements.

## 2.1 Core entitlements

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full. Merthyr continues to consult with users on an annual basis, ensuring projects undertaken are informed by the community. There has been a continued focus on providing a range of new activities, events and programmes. As Merthyr Tydfil is an area of high deprivation, the potential positive benefits that the community derive from these sessions are hugely beneficial. The development of staff remains a priority and is evidenced through positive user feedback.

## 2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Due to the impact of Covid-19, three quality indicators have been removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, five, six and fifteen, of which number six has a constituent target. Of the **nine** remaining targets for 2019-20, Merthyr Tydfil achieved 8 in full, and 1 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 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	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
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	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

Merthyr Tydfil has maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, with no significant change on 2018/19. Merthyr is one of only four local authorities to achieve 8 of the QIs in full and 1 in part. Overall, performance has improved since the first year of the reporting framework.

## 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.

However, this measure has been affected by Covid-19 and some authority plans to undertake a survey in the first quarter of 2020 were cancelled. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during framework 6. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Merthyr Tydfil completed its latest adult and children's user surveys in March 2020.

Merthyr Tydfil undertakes user surveys of both adults and children once each year; figures are therefore updated annually.

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:	96%	=3/19	60%	90%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	94%	=4/19	41%	85%	99%

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.

Merthyr Tydfil provided two such case studies:

- Harri Webb – People's poet of Wales. Harri Webb was the librarian in Dowlais library in the 1950s/1960s. A number of activities were organised to celebrate the life of Harri Webb, but also to inspire a love of poetry in the young people of the area. Attendees felt that their involvement in the project had improved their understanding of local history and improved their confidence in writing.
- Bus pass renewal – library staff provided support to individuals renewing their bus passes. Without access to PCs in the library and support from library staff in the completion of the application for a new bus pass, many individuals would be without a bus pass. Help received from library staff was invaluable to many. By the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019, over 6090 individuals had been helped.

## 2.4 Quality indicators and benchmarks

Whilst Covid-19 restrictions remain challenging to all library services in Wales, staff resilience, professionalism and care for the community they serve has been outstanding. Although digital services have increased, we know from evidence provided that customers are missing their library services. They are missing the staff, browsing the shelves, IT provision, community spaces and groups such as knit and natter. The importance of the library as a physical place and the impact on the wellbeing of their customers through interaction with library staff cannot be underestimated.

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 Merthyr Tydfil's position for 2019/20. 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 second 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	2018/19
QI 1 Making a difference						[Framework 6]
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	94%	1/18	25%	75%	94%	94%
c) health and well-being	89%	3/19	38%	69%	96%	88%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	1/19	90%	96%	100%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						[Framework 6]
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	99%	=1/18	78%	91%	99%	98%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	100%	=1/18	88%	97%	100%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	95%	=2/17	65%	85%	99%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	99%	=2/18	85%	96%	100%	99%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.2	=13/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	9.0
QI 8 Library use <sup>1</sup>						
a) visits per capita	3,564	15/22	2429	3987	6874	3,820
b) virtual visits per capita	1,055	9/22	239	909	2131	948
c) active borrowers per capita	145	11/22	78	145	244	149
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita <sup>2</sup>	406	17/22	311	680	1468	417
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	10	7/22	4	9	14	10
c) % of available time used by the public	62%	2/22	14%	30%	64%	63%
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£7,798	21/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	£8,820
b) % on staff,	54%	17/22	48%	61%	76%	52%
% on information resources	21%	2/22	5%	13%	22%	20%
% on equipment and buildings	10%	5/22	0%	8%	28%	3%
% on other operational costs	15%	13/22	1%	18%	35%	25%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0.00	=22/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	£0
QI 16 Opening hours <sup>3</sup>						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	0.23%	3.96%	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	0.00%

<sup>1</sup> 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 <sup>2</sup>per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population

<sup>3</sup>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 and second year of the sixth framework (2017/18 and 2018/19).

#### **3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)<sup>i</sup>**

Merthyr Tydfil completed its adult and children's user surveys in March 2020. There have been no changes since the last survey (adult and children) was undertaken in March 2019. Satisfaction levels remain high, with Merthyr recording the highest levels of satisfaction levels in Wales with regard to the percentage of adults who feel that the library is a safe and inclusive place and the number of adults who feel that the library has helped them to develop new skills. High levels of customer satisfaction continue to be recorded. All static libraries continue to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Merthyr Tydfil now one of only four authorities providing the full range of identified services and activities across all its service points (core and additional).

#### **3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)<sup>ii</sup>**

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, with no change since 2017/18. Visitor levels have decreased since 2018/19, and remain below the median level in Wales. Many libraries were affected by Covid-19 and the decline in visits in February/March 2020. There has been an increase in the numbers of adult book issues, and performance in this area is above the median level per capita in Wales. Children's loans have increased by 60% since 2017/18, although comparatively performance here is in the bottom quartile in Wales. As with the majority of authorities across Wales, Merthyr has seen an increase in the number of electronic downloads. This has increased by 35% since 2017/18.

#### **3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)<sup>iii</sup>**

Spending on acquisitions has increased once again in 2019/20, resulting in an 8.5% increase since 2017/18. As a result Merthyr is now one of only five authorities meeting the requirements for QI 9, and is going against current trends by seeing an increase in both adult and children's book issues. Expenditure on Welsh language materials, alongside Welsh issues has decreased since 2018/19. The targets for QI 10 (Welsh) continue to be met but Welsh issues remain below median levels in Wales, which may reflect the area served. PC provision has been maintained throughout the framework and usage here has also been maintained with services recording the second highest usage levels in Wales. This is also against the Welsh trend of declining use. Performance in relation to supply of requests has also remained the same as 2018/19 levels and targets continue to be achieved.

#### **3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)<sup>iv</sup>**

Staffing levels have been maintained at 2017/18 levels. As reported in 2018/19, the service is still carrying a vacancy for a qualified librarian. As such, the professional staffing level has not changed. Staffing targets (QI 13) remain unmet, with the total number of

staff and the total number of professional staff below the median level in Wales. The service notes that there is no likelihood of increases in staff numbers, nor plans to reduce the staffing. However, the service feels it achieves the best from the current position. Qualified leadership remains in place.

Total revenue expenditure has decreased by a minimal amount since 2018/19. Total revenue expenditure per capita is in the bottom quartile in Wales. Aggregate annual opening hours have been maintained throughout the framework and are above the medium per capita in Wales. There were no reported unstaffed opening hours, unplanned service closures, or missed home deliveries.

## **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. The strategic vision of the Trust is: 'Libraries will inspire the people of Merthyr Tydfil to enjoy reading, enhance their knowledge and skills, to enrich their quality of life and empower them to realise their full potential'. This vision relates directly to the Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust vision statement. The role of the library service to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is also noted; in particular, the impact of the library service on health and well-being, the promotion of digital inclusion and the development of cultural priorities relating to the Welsh language.

## **5 Future direction**

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, it is noted that the short term priority for Merthyr library service will be to focus on recovery following Covid-19, in line with all library services in Wales. The wider vision for the service is articulated in the Merthyr Tydfil Strategy document (2019-21). In the immediate future, there will be a continued focus on the development of digital activities in collaboration with colleagues in the Museum service. The service notes that there remains a great deal of uncertainty regarding the service that libraries will need to provide in the near future and there will be a need to re-engage users and re-evaluate services offered prior to the pandemic. The challenges of low levels of staffing and budget constraints remain and future plans will be inhibited by these factors.

## **6 Conclusion**

Library services in Merthyr Tydfil are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has performed well throughout the framework and is one of only five services to meet the acquisitions target. Regular consultation also ensures that customer satisfaction levels have remained high throughout the framework as Merthyr is able to anticipate the needs of its community and deliver services needed. Unlike many other library services in Wales, Merthyr Tydfil has seen an increase in most usage figures including adult and children issues and library membership. Staffing levels have been maintained at 2017/18 levels, but remain below the median in Wales. Despite this, the service notes that it feels it utilises the staffing to the best advantage of customers. The service engages with a wide variety of partners to deliver appropriate activities for its communities, and the challenge will be to maintain resources levels in order to continue to deliver a quality service.

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<sup>i</sup> Due to Covid-19, local authorities were only asked to report any change in provision since the last reporting year for QI 3&4.

<sup>ii</sup> Due to Covid-19, QI 5&6 were removed for the 2019/20 reporting year.

<sup>iii</sup> E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been included in the acquisitions figures for QI 9 in 2019/20. Each authority has added 201 to their total acquisitions from centrally funded subscriptions. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.

<sup>iv</sup> Due to Covid-19, QI 15 was removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, alongside training and volunteer hours.