

# Welsh Public Library Standards: Annual Reports 2023-24

## Contents

<b>Blaenau Gwent Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	11
Executive summary .....	11
Performance against the standards.....	12
Core Entitlements .....	12
Quality indicators with targets .....	12
Impact measures .....	12
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	13
Analysis of performance.....	14
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	14
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	15
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	15
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	16
Strategic context .....	16
Future direction .....	17
Conclusion .....	17
<b>Bridgend (Awen Cultural Trust) Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	18
Executive summary .....	18
Performance against the standards.....	19
Core Entitlements .....	19
Quality indicators with targets.....	20
Impact measures .....	20
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	21
Analysis of performance.....	22
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	22
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	23
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	23
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	24
Strategic context .....	24
Future direction .....	25

Conclusion .....	26
<b>Caerphilly Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Executive summary .....	27
Performance against the standards.....	28
Core Entitlements .....	28
Quality indicators with targets.....	30
Impact measures .....	30
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	31
Analysis of performance.....	32
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	33
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	33
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	34
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	34
Strategic context .....	34
Future direction .....	35
Conclusion .....	35
<b>Cardiff Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Executive summary.....	36
Performance against the standards.....	37
Core Entitlements .....	37
Quality indicators with targets.....	37
Impact measures .....	37
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	38
Analysis of performance.....	39
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	39
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	40
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	40
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	41
Strategic context .....	41
Future direction .....	41
Conclusion .....	42
<b>Carmarthenshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>43</b>
Executive summary.....	43
Performance against the standards.....	43
Core Entitlements .....	44

Quality indicators with targets .....	44
Impact measures .....	44
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	45
Analysis of performance.....	46
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	46
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	47
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	47
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	48
Strategic context .....	48
Future direction .....	48
Conclusion .....	49
<b>Ceredigion Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>50</b>
Executive summary .....	50
Performance against the standards.....	50
Core Entitlements .....	51
Quality indicators with targets.....	51
Impact measures .....	51
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	52
Analysis of performance.....	53
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	54
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	54
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	54
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	54
Strategic context .....	55
Future direction .....	55
Conclusion .....	56
<b>Conwy Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>57</b>
Executive summary .....	57
Performance against the standards.....	57
Core Entitlements .....	57
Quality indicators with targets.....	58
Impact measures .....	58
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	59
Analysis of performance.....	60
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	60

Access and use (QI 6-8) .....	61
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	61
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16) .....	62
Strategic context .....	62
Future direction .....	62
Conclusion .....	63
<b>Denbighshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>64</b>
Executive summary .....	64
Performance against the standards.....	64
Core Entitlements .....	64
Quality indicators with targets .....	67
Impact measures .....	67
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	68
Analysis of performance.....	69
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	69
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	70
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	70
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	71
Strategic context .....	71
Future direction .....	71
Conclusion .....	72
<b>Flintshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>73</b>
Executive summary .....	73
Performance against the standards.....	73
Core Entitlements .....	73
Quality indicators with targets.....	74
Impact measures .....	74
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	75
Analysis of performance.....	76
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	76
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	77
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	77
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	77
Strategic context .....	78
Future direction .....	78

Conclusion .....	78
<b>Gwynedd Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Executive summary .....	80
Performance against the standards.....	80
Core Entitlements .....	81
Quality indicators with targets.....	81
Impact measures .....	81
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	82
Analysis of performance.....	83
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	84
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	84
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	84
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	84
Strategic context .....	85
Future direction .....	85
Conclusion .....	86
<b>Isle of Anglesey Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Executive summary .....	87
Performance against the standards.....	87
Core Entitlements .....	88
Quality indicators with targets.....	88
Impact measures .....	89
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	89
Analysis of performance.....	90
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	91
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	91
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	91
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	92
Strategic context .....	92
Future direction .....	93
Conclusion .....	93
<b>Merthyr Tydfil Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>94</b>
Executive summary .....	94
Performance against the standards.....	95
Core Entitlements .....	95

Quality indicators with targets .....	97
Impact measures .....	97
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	98
Analysis of performance.....	99
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	99
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	100
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	100
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	101
Strategic context .....	101
Future direction .....	102
Conclusion .....	102
<b>Monmouthshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>103</b>
Executive summary .....	103
Performance against the standards.....	104
Core Entitlements .....	104
Quality indicators with targets.....	106
Impact measures .....	106
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	107
Analysis of performance.....	108
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	108
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	108
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	109
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	109
Strategic context .....	110
Future direction .....	110
Conclusion .....	111
<b>Neath Port Talbot Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>112</b>
Executive summary .....	112
Performance against the standards.....	113
Core Entitlements .....	113
Quality indicators with targets.....	113
Impact measures .....	114
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	114
Analysis of performance.....	115
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	115

Access and use (QI 6-8) .....	116
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	116
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16) .....	117
Strategic context .....	117
Future direction .....	117
Conclusion .....	118
<b>Newport Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>119</b>
Executive summary .....	119
Performance against the standards.....	120
Core Entitlements .....	120
Quality indicators with targets .....	120
Impact measures .....	121
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	121
Analysis of performance.....	122
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	122
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	123
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	123
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	124
Strategic context .....	124
Future direction .....	125
Conclusion .....	125
<b>Pembrokeshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>126</b>
Executive summary .....	126
Performance against the standards.....	126
Core Entitlements .....	127
Quality indicators with targets.....	127
Impact measures .....	127
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	128
Analysis of performance.....	129
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	129
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	130
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	130
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	131
Strategic context .....	131
Future direction .....	132

Conclusion .....	133
<b>Powys Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>134</b>
Executive summary .....	134
Performance against the standards.....	135
Core Entitlements .....	135
Quality indicators with targets.....	137
Impact measures .....	137
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	138
Analysis of performance.....	139
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	139
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	140
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	140
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	141
Strategic context .....	141
Future direction .....	142
Conclusion .....	142
<b>Rhondda Cynon Taff Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>144</b>
Executive summary .....	144
Performance against the standards.....	144
Core Entitlements .....	145
Quality indicators with targets.....	145
Impact measures .....	145
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	146
Analysis of performance.....	147
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	147
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	148
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	148
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	149
Strategic context .....	149
Future direction .....	150
Conclusion .....	150
<b>Swansea Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Executive summary .....	151
Performance against the standards.....	151
Core Entitlements .....	151



Quality indicators with targets .....	152
Impact measures .....	152
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	153
Analysis of performance.....	154
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	155
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	155
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	155
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	156
Strategic context .....	156
Future direction .....	157
Conclusion .....	157
<b>Torfaen Annual Assessment Report 2023-24 .....</b>	<b>158</b>
Executive summary .....	158
Performance against the standards.....	158
Core Entitlements .....	159
Quality indicators with targets.....	159
Impact measures .....	159
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	160
Analysis of performance.....	161
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	161
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	162
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	162
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	163
Strategic context .....	163
Future direction .....	164
Conclusion .....	164
<b>Vale of Glamorgan Annual Assessment Report 2023-24.....</b>	<b>165</b>
Executive summary .....	165
Performance against the standards.....	166
Core Entitlements .....	166
Quality indicators with targets.....	166
Impact measures .....	166
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	167
Analysis of performance.....	168
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	168

Access and use (QI 6-8) .....	169
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	169
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16) .....	170
Strategic context .....	170
Future direction .....	171
Conclusion .....	172
<b>Wrexham Annual Assessment Report 2023-24</b> .....	<b>173</b>
Executive summary .....	173
Performance against the standards.....	173
Core Entitlements .....	174
Quality indicators with targets .....	176
Impact measures .....	176
Quality indicators and benchmarks.....	177
Analysis of performance.....	178
Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5).....	179
Access and use (QI 6-8).....	179
Facilities and services (QI 9-10) .....	179
Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16).....	179
Strategic context .....	180
Future direction .....	180
Conclusion .....	181

# Blaenau Gwent Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Blaenau Gwent's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Blaenau Gwent meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part, with the remaining target not being met.

Blaenau Gwent is performing well. It meets all of the Core Entitlements. Although it struggles to meet acquisitions or staffing QI targets, it performs around the median for most QI comparison measures. Attendance at events is a particular strength of this service, and Blaenau Gwent libraries offer an impressive range of activities to suit the needs of a wide range of customers. High ratings for Customer satisfaction (QI2) and Making a difference (QI1) indicate that Blaenau Gwent library service has a good understanding of its customer base and has developed strong relationships with users. It is also important to note that the service is taking measures to engage with members of the local community who are not currently library users through well-planned outreach provision. The level of materials spend was highlighted in the 2022-23 report and it is encouraging that, although Blaenau Gwent still does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita, there has been an increase in this figure for the current year.

- The service performs well with regard to Making a difference (QI1) and is above the median for most measures.
- Attendance at events and activities has notably increased over 2023-24, with the total number of attendees reported increasing by over 50%. Blaenau Gwent now performs above the median for this measure (QI6).
- The number of active borrowers has increased by 25% compared to 2022-23 and all areas of borrowing have increased over the year (QI8).
- Outreach Library Assistants appointed this year have helped the service promote libraries and increase usage.
- Despite the temporary closure of Blaina Library, the service is in the top quartile for opening hours per capita and meets this target in full (QI16).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Blaenau Gwent reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

### Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Blaenau Gwent is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The remaining QI is not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
- 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, **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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	94%	=6/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	96%	1/16	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:	99%	7/16	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.

Blaenau Gwent provided an impact statement which referred to the impact of the Families and Fur Intergenerational Wellbeing Sessions on a range of attendees. A series of six free sessions were delivered at Tredegar Library in partnership with a local organisation with Animal Interactive over the winter of 2023-24. The sessions involved interacting with live animals as well as library staff reading stores and promoting library stock and services.

The sessions provided families with an opportunity to spend enjoyable time together and provided a means to make more people aware of the range of services that are on offer. A single father of three who is new to the area commented *“having free events which is also on our doorstep has made a big difference to our lives....having something that we can feel part of has really helped us settle into the community”*. A mother who attended with her children who are home schooled commented *“the library activities are so beneficial for the family to mix with other children....each week we borrow a group loan of books to support their home schooling, the library is so important to us”*. A grandmother who attended with her grandson who has learning difficulties commented *“the library is a sanctuary for us. There are not many places that we feel so at ease and relaxed in”*.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Blaenau Gwent’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	70%	=8/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	44%	=15/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	=1/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	90%	11/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	85%	=9/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=9/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.0	=13/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	9	15/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	133	10/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	245	10/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	158	21/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	99	17/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	16%	15/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	18%	8/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	853	6/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>1</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	9	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	699	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£11,507	12/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	65%	=13/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=13/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	2%	=16/22	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 continued to perform well with regard to Making a difference (QI1) and, as was the case last year, Blaenau Gwent is around or above the median, with the exception of the health and well-being measure. The service also continues to be

<sup>1</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

around the median for Customer satisfaction (Q12), although it scores particularly well for customer care, being equal highest nationally for this measure. The service is aware of the need to increase awareness of library services throughout Blaenau Gwent and has concentrated outreach promotion in the more isolated communities within the borough. Two new posts, Outreach Library Assistants, have helped the service promote libraries and increase usage across all branches. Outreach staff have provided support for a number of schools and community organisations in the setting up of reading groups. Furthermore, the service has relaxed rules for people joining who are homeless and has engaged with the local Traveller community. Attendance per capita at formal training activities is below the median, but the service performs well for the percentage of attendees to feel they achieved their purpose in attending. Attendance at informal support continues to be close to the median (Q15).

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Attendance at events and activities has risen notably over 2023-24, with the total number of attendees reported increasing by over 50%. Blaenau Gwent now performs above the median for this measure (Q16). The service notes that the new outreach team has played an instrumental role in delivering new projects and attracting new audiences. There has been a number of new initiatives introduced, including Quiet Hour, Dementia Friendly Singalong, Friendship Fridays, Craft for Wellbeing, Libraries Vs Litter, food partnership schemes and reading groups for young adults. The service also offers a range of IT support to meet different needs, including basic introduction to using a PC; Tech Tuesdays; tablets and tea; job-seeker sessions; and intergenerational coding clubs.

Although the service remains below the median for active borrowers per capita and just 21% of reported library members are active borrowers, Blaenau Gwent has made considerable efforts to address this issue and the number of active borrowers has increased by 25% in 2023-24 (Q18). Similarly, whilst adult books, children's books and electronic download issues are below the median, these have all increased since the previous year: adult borrowing by 13%, children's by 45% and electronic downloads by 28%. AV loans are now above the median. Blaenau Gwent has the lowest number of virtual visits per capita nationally, and this figure has declined since 2022-23. It is noted in the return that there is a trend for greater social media engagement rather than website use. Visits to all social media platforms have increased over the year.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Although Blaenau Gwent has not met the target for acquisitions per capita (Q19) and is in the bottom quartile nationally for this measure, there has been an increase in this figure from the previous year. The proportion of the budget allocated to electronic resources is above the median. The service meets the target for percentage of budget spend on Welsh language materials (Q110). In addition, it supports Welsh language activities, in particular, for early years, including a series of Welsh Baby Rhyme Time sessions, Welsh Baby Yoga and a new Under 5s' Welsh

group, as well as an extension of group loans to Welsh toddler groups and Welsh Medium schools. Blaenau Gwent is above the median for Welsh language issues per capita and the total number of Welsh language issues has increased by 16% compared to the 2022-23 figure.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Blaenau Gwent partially meets the target for staffing levels and qualifications (QI13). The service meets the training and head of service qualification elements, but does not meet the total or qualified staff per capita targets. The service is below the median for Welsh library authorities for both total and qualified staff per capita. The total staffing remains unchanged from last year. However, this does not include two SPF-funded library outreach posts, the Digital Exclusion Officer or Community Education staff in shared buildings who provide reception desk duties and admin support.

Blaenau Gwent is close to the median for operational expenditure per capita (QI14); the figure represents a 14% increase compared to 2022-23. The service is in the top quartile for opening hours per capita and meets this target in full (QI16). However, opening hours have reduced slightly from last year (3.8%), due to the temporary closure of Blaina Library for essential building work, in order to comply with health and safety regulations<sup>2</sup>.

## 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. Blaenau Gwent provided a comprehensive assessment of how the service contributes to the seven well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Examples provided against each goal include:

- **A globally responsive Wales** e.g. being a litter picking hub and promoting initiatives which support green issues.
- **A prosperous Wales** e.g. working in partnership to increase footfall in town centres, providing support for job seekers and supporting informal learning.
- **A resilient Wales** e.g. hosting sessions for people in need of housing support and advice, maintaining an emphasis on free services, and being the 'go to place' for anyone in need.
- **A healthier Wales** e.g. providing welcoming spaces, promoting health campaigns including Dementia Friendly events, working closely with local public health teams, providing Reading Well collections and running a Sports Libraries scheme.
- **A more equal Wales** e.g. introducing a Quiet Hour following feedback from neurodivergent users, working with the local traveller community, promoting

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<sup>2</sup> The library service is a tenant of the building and the service point was closed for 18 weeks between 30th Nov 23 and 22nd April 24.



stock to raise awareness of equality, hosting the Children's Laureate and promoting the Summer Reading Challenge.

- **A Wales of cohesive communities** e.g. building relationships and community through running cultural events and workshops, providing Warm Spaces to help with the cost of living crisis and developing partnerships to provide an integrated approach to service delivery.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** e.g. working with Cymraeg I Blant to support families, promoting Welsh language audio books, providing a space for groups to provide cultural sessions and working closely with the Welsh Books Council.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the coming year, Blaenau Gwent notes that Aneurin Leisure Trust's contract with the local authority has two years left before renewal. The partnership is regarded as successful with the service being provided through community hubs. Despite financial challenges due to a significant increase in energy prices in 2023-24, the Trust has maintained services by utilizing reserves. While there are no planned cuts to services, it will be important for the service to collaborate closely with the local authority to ensure a resilient and sustainable provision of the library service within budget. A major development is the relocation of Abertillery Library to Trinity Chapel, set to open in September 2024, with work undertaken in partnership with the Regeneration Department of Blaenau Gwent to boost high street footfall. An additional staff member will be recruited to improve staffing targets. Shared Prosperity funding will continue to support the library service, with the outreach staff appointed in October 2023 being in post until March 2025. A focus on the health and well-being agenda will continue across the increasing range of services in line with the service delivery ethos of the Trust.

## Conclusion

Blaenau Gwent is performing well. It meets all of the Core Entitlements. Although it struggles to meet acquisitions or staffing QI targets, it performs around the median for most QI comparison measures. Attendance at events is a particular strength of this service, and Blaenau Gwent libraries offer an impressive range of activities to suit the needs of a wide range of customers. High ratings for Customer satisfaction (Q12) and Making a difference (Q11) indicate that Blaenau Gwent library service has a good understanding of its customer base and has developed strong relationships with users. It is also important to note that the service is taking measures to engage with members of the local community who are not currently library users through well-planned outreach provision. The level of materials spend was highlighted in the 2022-23 report and it is encouraging that, although Blaenau Gwent still does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita, there has been an increase in this figure for the current year.

# Bridgend (Awen Cultural Trust) Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

Bridgend library service is provided by Awen Cultural Trust. This report has been prepared based on information provided in Bridgend's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Bridgend meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Bridgend is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. One target was not met.

Overall, Bridgend Libraries are performing well. The library service has strong partnerships with a range of local organisations that enable it to offer an impressive range of activities and support for people with a wide range of needs and interests, in particular, those with additional learning needs. It also demonstrates a strong focus on children's provision. There has been a notable increase in electronic issues during 2023-24. So, whilst there has been a small decline in book issues, the total number of issues has risen. The service has also increased its number of active borrowers. However, whilst Bridgend is currently performing well, the projected reduction in the budget in 2024-25 is a concern as this is likely to have an impact on Bridgend's ability to meet WPLS targets in the coming years.

- All training attendees surveyed said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending (Q15).
- Event attendance has increased 11% compared to 2022-23 and Bridgend works with a range of partner organisations to enhance library use for customers with particular needs or interests (Q16).
- Website visits have increased by 55% compared to 2022-23 and electronic issues have increased by 41% (Q18).
- Bridgend is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for qualified staff per capita and also for the percentage of staff time devoted to 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

Bridgend reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the excellent detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Bridgend is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. One target was not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications, **partially met ■**
  - i) Staff per capita, **not met**
  - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **met**
  - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **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<sup>3</sup>. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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<sup>3</sup> March 2020 figures were submitted in the return for QI2 parts c) and d) as these questions as were missed from the October 2023 survey. March 2022 figures were submitted for the children's survey. In both cases, these have been excluded from this comparison table as the data are outside the standard reporting period.

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:	83%	=12/16	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:	100%	=1/16	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.

Bridgend provided an impact statement which referred to how the service supports young adults with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Three of the libraries have close links to day care services. An example was provided of a customer who tries to visit the library every day with his carer. These visits have helped him improve his mental health; given him something to look forward to; and reduced loneliness and social isolation. The library provides an important, calm and safe space which helps him meet his emotional needs. He comments “*The library is my second home, I love coming here*”. He has used the public PCs and printers in the library to create a book about his life, and the process has helped enhance his digital and literacy skills. In another example, the library provided support for a young woman who needed a work placement to complete a college course. Her local library offered her a 3-hour shift on Saturdays which boosted her confidence in the workplace and contributed to her successfully seeking employment. She commented “*It’s an amazing library with loads of lovely people*”.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Bridgend’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	64%	=12/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	48%	13/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=8/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	=9/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=9/16	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
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	19	12/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	57	13/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	620	1/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	743	11/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	123	=11/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	22%	5/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	8%	=16/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	663	10/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>4</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	50	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	2,465	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£10,456	13/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	74%	=4/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	11%	16/22	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)

Bridgend performs close to the median for Welsh library authorities for the majority of Customer satisfaction (QI2) measures, although it is below the median in relation to several of the Making a Difference measures (QI1). The service notes a drop in

<sup>4</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

some measures since the previous survey in 2020, but can identify no obvious reasons for this in the responses. Believing informal and formal user support have been under-counted in previous years, Bridgend changed its data collection methods in 2023-24, implementing a count week and ensuring that a range of activities were included, such as Baby Massage, creating YouTube videos and Coding. Attendances at both formal and informal training have increased since 2022-23; the per capita figure for formal training is close to the median and 100% of attendees surveyed said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending (Q15).

## Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Bridgend Libraries host a wide range of activities, some led by library staff, others by partner organisations, volunteers or group members. Examples of events include Bounce & Rhyme; reading groups; author and illustrator events; dance sessions; history talks; crafting; creative writing and Bridgend Children's Literacy Festival. Event attendance has increased 11% compared to 2022-23 and Bridgend has the highest per capita event attendance nationally (Q16). Bridgend works with a range of partner organisations to enhance library use for customers with particular needs or interests. This includes Employability Bridgend; SCOPE's Working on Wellbeing project for disabled adults; Valleys2Coast Housing Association; Menter Bro Ogwr (local Welsh language initiative); and the National Autistic Society volunteers who run a 'Quiet Lego' group.

Bridgend is at the median of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits and active borrowers per capita (Q18). Website visits have increased by 55% compared to 2022-23. The service also makes notable use of social media, with 12 accounts associated with Bridgend libraries. Active borrowers have risen by 16%. Whilst adult book issues are close to the median, issues of children's books are in the top quartile for Welsh library authorities. Electronic issues have increased by 41% compared to 2022-23, although they continue to be below the median nationally. Adult book issues are stable, whilst children's issues have fallen slightly (by 3.8%). The service is above the national median for AV issues.

## Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Acquisitions per capita have increased compared to 2022-23 and Bridgend now meets the target for acquisitions (Q19). However, the service anticipates that this will drop significantly in 2024-25 as it faces a £50,000 (approximately 28%) cut to the book fund. Bridgend is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities in terms of the percentage spend on children's resources.

The percentage of materials budget dedicated to Welsh language materials falls just below the target for this measure (3.7%), but has increased compared to 2022-23 (Q110). The number of Welsh language issues per capita is above the median. This year, Bridgend has established more Welsh language beginner discussion groups, as well as continuing to support advanced discussion groups. A grant-funded Outreach and Engagement Library Assistant (in post since Oct 2023) is able to offer all outreach sessions through the medium of Welsh, including digital drop-in

sessions, crafting sessions for adults and reminiscence work. Bridgend Children's Literacy Festival was focused on authors, illustrators and poets from Wales, living in Wales and Welsh speakers.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Bridgend partially meets the target for staffing levels and qualifications: qualified staff per capita, head of service qualification and CPD percentage were all met (Q113). Bridgend is the highest ranked Welsh library authority for qualified staff per capita and also for the percentage of staff time devoted to training. Whilst the service does not meet the target for total staff per capita, it is above the median for this measure. The return notes that there were several vacancies that were unfilled a little longer than usual, leading to a reduction in total staff working hours. However, these have now been filled. The service meets the target for opening hours per capita (Q116)<sup>5</sup>.

Bridgend is close to the median for total revenue expenditure per capita (Q114). It is in the top quartile for percentage of expenditure on staff. The service notes that Awen Cultural Trust became a Real Living Wage Employer during 2023-24 (accredited May 23), and as such the salaries for library staff increased in 2023-24.

## 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. Bridgend Library Services (Awen Cultural Trust) refers to its new Social Impact Objectives which include:

- To create better life chances by engaging with more people, improving literacy and digital literacy, supporting reading for pleasure, promoting independence and reducing social isolation.
- To create memorable and positive experiences by offering space to the community that meets their needs, offers flexibility, is welcoming and safe, and able to host different activities.
- To support social regeneration and improve well-being by improving access to health information, reducing social isolation and improving the well-being of participants.
- To increase life skills and opportunities through formal and informal training and have a positive impact on literacy and information literacy.
- To reduce energy consumption and reduce our impact on the environment.

The service notes that these strategic objectives align with a range of Welsh Government policies including: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015,

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<sup>5</sup> *Opening hours show a slight increase compared to 22/23 because, as noted in the return '...we did not include in the aggregate annual opening hours the number of hours any library was closed for refurbishment. Having re-read the Guidance we realise this was an error.'*



Prosperity For All, Digital Competence Framework, Ageing Well in Wales, Anti-Racist Wales and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the coming year, Bridgend is mid-way through the 2022-25 Library Plan and is making significant progress against the following objectives and deliverables.

- **Better Life Chances** including increasing activities, engagement and partnerships.
- **Community Spaces** including developing fit for purpose facilities, undertaking surveys and increasing partnership working.
- **Well-being** including developing strategic opportunities with health board and education.
- **Lifeskills** including digital literacy sessions, partnership and outreach.
- **Environment** including extending recycling and moving to electric vehicles.

However, a £360,000 budget cut for Cultural Services, agreed by Bridgend County Borough Council, presents a significant challenge for the coming year. The implications of this on the library service are currently being worked through with a £50,000 cut to the book fund expected and a decline in outreach sessions without grant funding of an outreach post.

## Conclusion

Overall, Bridgend Libraries are performing well. The library service has strong partnerships with a range of local organisations that enable it to offer an impressive range of activities and support for people with a wide range of needs and interests, in particular, those with additional learning needs. It also demonstrates a strong focus on children's provision. There has been a notable increase in electronic issues during 2023-24. So, whilst there has been a small decline in book issues, the total number of issues has risen. The service has also increased its number of active borrowers. However, whilst Bridgend is currently performing well, the projected reduction in the budget in 2024-25 is a concern as this is likely to have an impact on Bridgend's ability to meet WPLS targets in the coming years.

# Caerphilly Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Caerphilly's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Caerphilly reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. 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, Caerphilly is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The remaining target was not met.

Caerphilly Library Service is performing well in many areas. Staff are clearly proud of the service they offer and have taken great time and care to provide detailed information in the WPLS return. Partnership working is a strength of the library service as staff collaborate with a wide range of partner organisations to support customers, and in particular to ensure libraries are inclusive for those who may have particular needs. The 15% reduction in the acquisitions budget (and consequently per capita acquisitions) this year is a concern. It is, of course, essential that the library service has an adequate budget to allow it to offer current and high-quality stock. It is positive that the staffing situation is now more stable, although the anticipated return to fixed term posts in the medium term is obviously a concern. The high number of single-staffed service points clearly continues to limit the ability of staff to provide in-depth support for customers and, in this context, the level of informal support reported is impressive.

- Caerphilly performs well for Customer satisfaction (Q12), being above the median for all measures.
- Caerphilly remains in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for per capita attendance at events and attendance figures have increased by 43% compared to 2022-23 (Q16).
- Children's issues continue to be above the median for Welsh library authorities and are up 7% compared to last year (Q18).
- Caerphilly meets the target for proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language materials and the service ensures that Welsh language stock is suitable for a diverse range of readers by working with partners (Q10).
- Caerphilly ranks in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for opening hours per capita (Q116).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Caerphilly 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 in Wales 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 2022-25 service improvement plan is not translated from English to Welsh, or available online, at the time of submission (spring 2024).
- 13. Libraries in Wales provide support to help improve people's digital skills and confidence, including the use of electronic 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, Caerphilly is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The remaining target was not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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, **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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	89% <sup>6</sup>	12/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	31%	16/16	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:	99%	=7/16	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.

Caerphilly provided an impact statement which highlighted the impact Rhymney Library Hub made to a person's life at a time she felt vulnerable and lonely. LJ had moved from Jamaica to Rhymney and was feeling isolated as her family had remained behind. She was a semi-regular visitor to the library where she got support with ICT and finding books relating to her medical issues as well as help with personal issues. Library staff encouraged her to attend the CWTSH Café which is hosted in the Rhymney Library Hub. Initially LJ lacked the confidence to attend, but eventually she attended the cafe with the support of library staff. She later gained enough confidence to attend alone and subsequently attended every week and still continues to do so. This is an example of the holistic services that libraries can offer and the impact it can have on one person's life through providing a safe and welcoming environment, facilitating new connections, contributing to overcoming isolation, developing new skills and supporting mental well-being. LJ has reported that attending the cafe has totally changed her life and she has made new friends and engages in a range of group activities. She comments: *"Coming to the library was like a little safe haven for me....I'm glad that Val [a member of staff] sent me up that day so I could meet the people and feel a sense of community, love and care. Where else could I go to talk to someone than the library"*.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Caerphilly's 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.

<sup>6</sup> A figure of 58% was reported, but respondents were offered the options of 'a lot' and 'a little', so the responses for both have been combined in the comparison table.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	17%	16/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	1%	16/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	=4/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	95%	3/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	88%	6/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.5	=5/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	11	14/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	49	15/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	392	5/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	470	14/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	123	=11/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	21%	6/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	7%	18/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	510	17/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>7</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	24	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	433	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£15,952 <sup>8</sup>	4/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	61%	17/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	18/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	27%	1/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	3%	20/22	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.

<sup>7</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

<sup>8</sup> *Calculated based on last year's Central Recharge cost plus 5% to cover inflation costs as accurate figures are not available until August.*



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

Caerphilly performs well for Customer satisfaction (QI2), being above the median for all measures. However, survey responses for Making a difference (QI1) are more mixed. This would appear to be a result of it being the first year the library service has brought the survey process in-house. Some of the questions required for the WPLS were not asked as individual questions, but were included in a series of possible options. This means that it is difficult to make comparisons between the responses received by library customers in Caerphilly and those elsewhere.

Health service providers use library spaces as meeting places or exhibition spaces, including Disability Can Do, Cornerstone, MIND, Sight Cymru, ABUHB Healthy Eating sessions and NHS Smoking cessation sessions. Four hub libraries remain venues for Meet, Greet & Signposting sessions for the CCBC Polish and Ukrainian Family Liaison Officers, and libraries continue to offer hot drinks and refreshments as part of the Warm & Welcoming Spaces campaign. As well as a warm space and a drink, this initiative helps to signpost those who may require assistance from the Caerphilly Cares Team (QI4).

Caerphilly is below the median for attendances at both formal and informal training/support (QI5). However, figures for both have risen compared to 2022-23, with informal support figures increasing by 48%. This is impressive given that, as is pointed out in the return, 11 libraries are single staffed, so the offer of intensive IT support is often not possible. CCBC Community Education and Multiply Teams run IT sessions and the library service works with the Caerphilly Cares Volunteer programme to identify trained individuals who wish to help support others to learn IT skills.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

Caerphilly remains in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for per capita attendance at events (QI6). Attendance figures have increased by 43% compared to 2022-23. The Caerphilly Cares project offered financial support for a series of events for children and families during the summer holidays. Summer events included Louby Lou Storytelling, Afrosheep Animation, Owls and Birds with Falconry Wales and Indian Dance Workshops. To support customers with particular needs, the library service works with partners including Caerphilly MIND, Golden Oldies Cymru, Shelter and an Independent Living Group. The library service also offers space to commercial partners and is working closely with several banks to help them offer 'flexible banking services' to residents following branch closures.

The number of active borrowers has risen by 14% compared to 2022-23 and Caerphilly is at the median for Welsh library authorities (QI8). During the reporting year, the library service implemented an online membership scheme allowing customers online library membership. Although virtual visits per capita are below the median, this has increased slightly (4%) compared to the previous year and the library service notes that social media accounts are heavily used for publicity and promotion. Electronic issues and adult book issues are both below the median, but electronic issues have risen 36% compared to 2022-23. Adult book issues are stable

compared to the previous year. Children's issues continue to be above the median for Welsh library authorities and are up 7% compared to last year.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Caerphilly does not meet the acquisitions target (QI9). There was a 15% reduction in the book budget figures reported. Although the amount for overall acquisitions per capita is below the median, the proportion of the budget spent on children's resources, and per capita under 16 spending are above the median.

Caerphilly exceeds the target for proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language materials (QI10). The service ensures that Welsh language stock is suitable for a diverse range of readers by working with partners such as the Welsh Language Library Reading Groups, Mudiad Meithrin, North Wales Society for the Blind, Welsh medium schools, the CCBC Equalities Team and eResource suppliers to ensure stock is available in a variety of formats. Caerphilly is below the median for Welsh language issues per capita, although issues have increased 10% compared to 2022-23. The return notes that the main expenditure and loans are children's Welsh titles. More Welsh language resources will be purchased for the new development at Rhymney Library Hub and for Pengam Library which, after refurbishment, will co-locate with a newly created Welsh language Flying Start setting - Blodau Bach.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Caerphilly partially meets the staffing levels and qualifications target (QI13). Whilst the service does not meet the total staffing and qualified staff per capita targets, it is above the median for both measures and a recently appointed Community Librarian is part way through a master's qualification. Fixed-term posts reported in last year's return have been filled and all posts in the structure are now permanent. However, another lengthy period of fixed-term posts is anticipated over the next two to three years due to budgetary pressures.

Caerphilly ranks in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for opening hours per capita (QI16). Opening hours have increased by 12% compared to 2022-23 due to a recalculation of LibraryLink (Housebound) visits and Rhymney Library Hub being open an extra five hours per week whilst the Hub pilot is running. Deri Library is due to reopen to the public at its original location in June 2024 after operating from the Deri Community Centre following the damage inflicted by Storm Eunice in April 2022.

## 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. Caerphilly provides a comprehensive mapping of the targets for the service against Welsh Government strategic priorities particularly those of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015). Multiple examples of how the service supports these priorities were provided including:

- **Enabling our children to succeed in education** e.g. participation in Bookstart and Early Years Scheme, facilitating homework clubs and Reading Hacks, implementing a volunteer scheme for young adults, running the school engagement scheme, and providing resources targeted at young children and young adults.
- **Enabling our residents to thrive** e.g. supporting a diverse community, offering Welcome and Warm spaces, providing support for digital skills, and hosting employment tailored projects.
- **Enabling our communities to thrive** e.g. providing health and well-being resources and activities, supporting a range of health-related schemes such as Reading Well with Dementia, providing space for a range of health organisations, and providing a welcoming safe space for all.
- **Enabling our economy to grow** e.g. offering space for organisations providing business advice, providing support for customers requiring the EU Settlement Scheme, and offering state of the art training and meeting facilities at Rhymney library.
- **Enabling our environment to be greener** e.g. encouraging the borrowing of books and participating in initiatives encouraging recycling.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Caerphilly refers to working towards the goals set out in a range of national and local strategies and policies. In particular, the service refers to: working along other support services to assist schools; remaining relevant and respected within the local community; and working closely with Caerphilly County Borough Council and partners to ensure economic, educational and digital support. It is noted that the Borough Library Service has moved into the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation Review phase. At this stage it is uncertain what the outcomes of this project will be and what the implications for the library service will be going forward.

## Conclusion

Caerphilly Library Service is performing well in many areas. Staff are clearly proud of the service they offer and have taken great time and care to provide detailed information in the WPLS return. Partnership working is a strength of the library service as staff collaborate with a wide range of partner organisations to support customers, and in particular to ensure libraries are inclusive for those who may have particular needs. The 15% reduction in the acquisitions budget (and consequently per capita acquisitions) this year is a concern. It is, of course, essential that the library service has an adequate budget to allow it to offer current and high-quality stock. It is positive that the staffing situation is now more stable, although the anticipated return to fixed term posts in the medium term is obviously a concern. The high number of single-staffed service points clearly continues to limit the ability of staff to provide in-depth support for customers and, in this context, the level of informal support reported is impressive.

# Cardiff Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Cardiff's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Cardiff meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Cardiff is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Cardiff continues to perform well and offer a high-quality service to its customers. This is evidenced by the increase in customer satisfaction scores reported this year. User support and event attendance continue to be key strengths of the service and staff clearly make efforts to ensure these are inclusive for customers with a wide range of needs and interests. The library service works in partnership with a variety of organisations and services to ensure customers' needs are met effectively. Adult and children's issues have both increased this year, but, in contrast to a number of authorities, electronic issues have declined slightly. Like all library authorities, Cardiff will need to monitor these trends over the coming years. Whilst Cardiff is the only Welsh library authority to meet the total staffing target, it is concerning that the number of staff has decreased at a time when the area's population is rising. Again, this is something that should be monitored.

- Over 90% of customers surveyed in 2023 responded positively to each of the customer satisfaction measures, and there are year-on-year improvements for most elements (Q12).
- Cardiff is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for numbers helped via both formal and informal user support (Q15).
- Cardiff is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendance at events per capita and the total number of attendees has risen by 80% compared to 2022-23 (Q16).
- The service is in the top quartile in terms of both adult and children's issues: adult book issues have increased in 16% and children's issues by 5% compared to 2022-23 (Q18).
- Cardiff remains in the top quartile for Welsh language issues per capita (Q110).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Cardiff reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

### Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Cardiff 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, **met**
  - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **not met**
  - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	91%	9/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	86%	=10/16	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:	100%	=1/16	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.

Cardiff provided an impact statement which describes the support that the library service provided for a woman who had left her job due to poor mental health issues and was looking for opportunities to improve her well-being and confidence. She engaged with the Community Volunteer team and subsequently became a volunteer within a Hub/Library. She undertook training and began to deliver sessions for a group which supports people living with dementia. She reports that due to the support of the library service she feels ready to return to work having grown in confidence and made improvements in her mental health.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Cardiff's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	77%	5/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	82%	3/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	95%	=13/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	93%	=6/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=9/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	91%	=3/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	94%	=13/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.2	11/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	209	1/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	226	4/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	471	3/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	7,851	1/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	223	1/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	25%	=2/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	16%	=10/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	2,248	2/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>9</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	227	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	5,303	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£24,685	1/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	72%	6/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	5%	22/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	21%	2/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	2%	21/22	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 percentage of adults who think the library has made a difference to their lives has increased since 2022-23 (QI1) and Cardiff continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for the health and well-being element of this QI. Cardiff is

<sup>9</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

also performing very well in relation to customer satisfaction (Q12), with over 90% of customers surveyed in 2023 responding positively to each of the measures. There are year-on-year improvements for most elements, in particular in relation to IT provision which the service notes is likely a result of upgrades to facilities and increased accessibility achieved throughout the year. Satisfaction regarding the book stock has also increased notably.

Cardiff meets the target for health and well-being in full (Q14). Several new events and support groups have been developed including an HIV community support group and a cancer therapy support group run by City Hospice. The service continues to offer a 'Sports Library'. There are physical events that specifically target older people and this year has seen the introduction of a Falls Management Exercise Programme (FaME), developed in collaboration between Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and Elderfit. Cardiff is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for numbers helped via informal user support and has the highest per capita attendance rates at formal user training activities nationally (Q15). 100% of attendees surveyed said they had achieved their purpose in attending training.

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Cardiff is in the top quartile of library authorities for per capita attendance at events, and the total number of attendees has risen by 80% compared to 2022-23 (Q16). This year there has been additional focus on events that can contribute to helping citizens with the cost-of-living crisis, such as Back to School events providing access to donated uniform, free hair cuts and free stationery sets. Pride Cymru has been a key partner in the delivery of regular social groups, as well as providing insight into collection development. Fast Track Cardiff and the Vale have also been key in the development of a Peer Support Group for people living with HIV. Refugees are supported through targeted social programmes as well as resources in key languages.

Cardiff has the highest rates of virtual visits and active borrowers nationally (Q18). The number of active borrowers reported has more than doubled compared to 2022-23. The service is in the top quartile in terms of both adult and children's issues: adult book issues have increased in 16% and children's issues by 5% compared to 2022-23. Whilst electronic issues remain the highest per capita in Wales, numbers have decreased by 13% compared to 2022-23. This is interesting to note as it contrasts with patterns seen in many other services.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Cardiff meets the acquisitions target and is above the median for acquisitions per capita (Q19). The service is in the top quartile for percentage of budget spent on children's resources and around the median for percentage spent on electronic resources. The proportion of the budget allocated for Welsh language resources meets the target (Q10). Although the number of Welsh language issues has declined slightly compared to 2022-23 (4%), Cardiff remains in the top quartile for Welsh language issues per capita. Welsh language cultural events have included conversation clubs, Welsh language courses and Tai Chi in Welsh. The service



reports a new partnership with Welsh language bookshop 'Cant a mil' which will be explored more fully next year.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Again this year, Cardiff has the highest number of total staff per capita nationally and is the only Welsh library authority to meet this target (Q13). However, the number of staff has decreased by 15% since 2022-23, whilst the authority's population has risen. Cardiff Hubs & Libraries service operate as an integrated team, so staff can be expected to support customers with issues such as benefits and money advice, as well as more traditional library activities. The service does not meet the target for qualified staff per capita and has the lowest number of FTE qualified staff per capita nationally. Currently, less than 3% of total FTE staff are qualified; however, Cardiff is supporting a further member of staff to achieve qualified status. The service also has an extensive volunteer programme. Cardiff meets the target for opening hours and is around the median for this measure (Q16). The slight fall in opening hours per capita is due to increased population size. Cardiff has the highest revenue expenditure per capita nationally (Q14).

## 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. Cardiff refers to a range of government strategies, including Age Friendly Wales: our strategy for an ageing society Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015), Strategy for Unpaid Carers, and LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales. Examples of activities that support these strategies include: providing a space where older people can meet and maintain a sense of purpose; supporting unpaid carers in accessing help and advice; supporting people living with dementia as part of Dementia Friendly Cardiff; the development of Health Information Digital Screens throughout Hubs and libraries; and working with Pride Cymru to establish a Pride community group and extending book collections.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the delivery of positive health outcomes to Cardiff's community is a key focus. Cardiff Hubs and Libraries intends to continue its collaboration with the Health Board and its partners to realise these outcomes. Plans include: a Blood Pressure Monitor Scheme launching in all Hubs/Libraries with the support of GPs and the Public Health team; the provision of STD home testing kits to address barriers of digital inclusion and homelessness; and a project that will create neuro-affirming environments and digital content for neurodivergent customers. In addition, a new Hubs and Libraries Strategy will be developed which will continue to deliver free cultural experiences to citizens. The service will continue work to develop collections that are aligned to individual communities.

## Conclusion

Cardiff continues to perform well and offer a high quality service to its customers. This is evidenced by the increase in customer satisfaction scores reported this year. User support and event attendance continue to be key strengths of the service and staff clearly make efforts to ensure these are inclusive for customers with a wide range of needs and interests. The library service works in partnership with a variety of organisations and services to ensure customers' needs are met effectively. Adult and children's issues have both increased this year, but, in contrast to a number of authorities, electronic issues have declined slightly. Like all library authorities, Cardiff will need to monitor these trends over the coming years. Whilst Cardiff is the only Welsh library authority to meet the total staffing target, it is concerning that the number of staff has decreased at a time when the area's population is rising. Again, this is something that should be monitored.

# Carmarthenshire Annual Assessment Report

## 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Carmarthenshire's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

### Executive summary

Carmarthenshire meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Carmarthenshire is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The remaining target is not met.

Carmarthenshire's library service is clearly valued by customers, who rate their experiences highly. Carmarthenshire offers a range of activities and events, including health and well-being services; makerspace and technology provision; and Welsh language activities and resources. It has developed partnerships with a number of organisations to offer specialist services, such as health support and digital training. It is encouraging that adult, children's, Welsh language and electronic resource issues have all risen in comparison to 2022-23.

- Carmarthenshire performs strongly for Customer satisfaction, being in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for all measures (Q12).
- Attendance at formal training activities has increased by 81% compared to 2022-23, and all attendees surveyed said that they had achieved their purpose in attending (Q15).
- Carmarthenshire is in the top quartile nationally for issues of adult books, children's books and AV issues (Q18).
- The service is in the top quartile of library authorities for per capita issues of Welsh language materials (Q110).
- Carmarthenshire does not meet the target for opening hours and the total opening hours figure has decreased since 2022-23 as a result of the mobile library fleet being reduced and the ongoing closure of Cross Hands branch library (Q116).

### Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Carmarthenshire reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Carmarthenshire is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The remaining target is not met.

- 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, **met**
  - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **met**
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	95%	5/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	91%	8/16	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:	100%	1/16	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. Carmarthenshire provided an impact statement describing the value of two Makerspaces in growing interest and participation amongst pupils who were identified as non-engagers and at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training). Working in partnership with Carmarthenshire Communities for Work+ (C4W+), creative sessions (e.g. retro gaming and mug pressing) were organised at Makerspaces at Carmarthen and Llanelli libraries. The Makerspaces provide access to a range of digital tools and technologies and are staffed by hybrid Makerspace Library Assistants who combine traditional library tasks with delivery and development of innovative Makerspace sessions and events. The service reports that the sessions boosted participants' confidence and that one of the attendees said he was enquiring about apprenticeships in construction hoping that 3D design would be part of the course after experiencing the use of innovative technology during the Makerspace sessions. Feedback from the sessions included: *"The sessions in the library went well. The staff in both libraries were very helpful to the young people and were considerate of their needs"*.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Carmarthenshire's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	86%	3/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	71%	6/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	=1/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	97%	1/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	87%	=7/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	100%	=1/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.7	=1/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	20	11/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	199	5/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	238	11/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	1,043	4/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	96	18/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	17%	=10/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	20%	7/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	2,725	1/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>10</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	5	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	549	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£19,498	2/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	50%	22/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	4%	=9/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	34%	1/22	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)

Carmarthenshire performs strongly for Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), being in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for all measures, and the highest nationally in a number of cases. Carmarthenshire meets

<sup>10</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

the target for Health and well-being (Q14). The service has partnerships with organisations such as the NHS, Macmillan Cancer Support and Carers Trust. The library service works closely with young adult carers, providing specific book stock to support this audience. Formal user training includes digital training delivered in partnership with Coleg Sir Gar & Learn Direct; goals clubs for job applications and CV making; creative writing and poetry writing workshops; conversational Welsh and Learn Welsh sessions; and maker-space sessions. Attendance at formal training activities has risen by 81% compared to 2022-23 and 100% of the 3,865 attendees surveyed said that they had achieved their purpose in attending. Carmarthenshire is above the median for informal support per capita and the number of informal support sessions recorded increased by 32% compared to 2022-23 (Q15).

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Carmarthenshire is above the median of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita (Q16). The service held over 2,200 events and activities in 2023-24, including the launch of the Clip Corner; author visits and poetry workshop visits; art exhibitions; science workshops; Christmas Craft Fayre; Welsh Produce Fayre; Scalextric sessions; retro gaming; music sessions; watercolour painting; jewellery making; and crochet & knit. Throughout the winter months, the library service held the 'Warm Winter Welcome Club'. Event attendance increased by 44% compared to 2022-23.

Carmarthenshire is in the top quartile nationally for virtual visits, and this figure has risen by 10% compared to 2022-23 (Q18). Whilst Carmarthenshire remains in the bottom quartile for active borrowers per capita and only 14% of reported library members are active borrowers, it is promising that the total number of active borrowers has doubled compared to 2022-23. Carmarthenshire is in the top quartile nationally for issues of adult books, children's books and AV issues. It is above the median for electronic issues. Adult book issues have increased by 11% compared to the previous year, children's issues by 16% and electronic issues by 15%, all of which are above the average rises nationally.

### Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Carmarthenshire continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for acquisitions per capita and for per capita book budget (Q19). It is above the median for the percentage of budget spent on both children's resources and electronic resources. It is in the top quartile for per capita spending on under 16s.

Carmarthenshire has invested in innovative IT facilities in the form of Intelligent Holds Shelves, which use RFID technology to offer a paperless, self-service reservation pick-up offer in three libraries. The service continues to support Welsh language provision; it has the highest rate Welsh language issues nationally, and the number of Welsh language issues has risen slightly compared to the previous year (3%) (Q110). Carmarthenshire Libraries work in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin Cymru to provide Welsh Language story time sessions for babies and young children. Libraries ran a week of events in the Welsh Language to celebrate St.

David's Day and Llanelli Library held a Welsh Produce Craft Fayre. School visits through the medium of Welsh are offered to all schools in Carmarthenshire.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Carmarthenshire meets the target for qualified staff per capita and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q113). However, it does not meet the target for overall staffing per capita and is below the median for this measure. It is noted that recruitment of staff has been challenging this year due to a recruitment freeze by the County Council during Q3/Q4 of 2023-24. This meant that 11 vacant posts (6.5 FTE) were not filled during the reporting year. They are expected to be filled by July/August 2024. The service is in the top quartile for total revenue expenditure per capita (Q114).

Carmarthenshire does not meet the target for opening hours and the total opening hours figure has decreased by over 7% since 2022-23 as a result of the mobile library fleet being reduced from three vans to one (Q116). In addition, Cross Hands branch library has been closed for a number of years and the library service is working with the authority to relocate the library to another building in the area. Self-service library options are being fully utilised in Newcastle Emlyn Library, facilitating access to stock out of normal library staff working hours.

## 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.

Carmarthenshire presented examples of a number of areas where its work supported these priorities including:

- **Building strong resilient communities** e.g. hosting events and group meetings, providing a safe inclusive environment and supporting lifelong learners and job seekers.
- **Creating a healthier Wales** e.g. providing a space and activities which helps people connect and overcome isolation and supports mental well-being, and hosting community events such as those celebrating Doctor Who's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
- **Fostering digital innovation** e.g. providing a CLIP Corner at Carmarthen Library and undertaking the first mobile CLIP workshop at a library in Carmarthenshire.
- **Celebrating and preserving Welsh culture and language** e.g. offering a range of resources, activities and events through the medium of Welsh.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Carmarthenshire notes that changes in the political, funding and societal landscape will result in changes to how they deliver services going forward. In response to these changes, and to meet customers' needs, the service will adopt



a new library network which will result in the creation of four distinct library formats. The formats are: Full Service Regional Library; Digital Regional Libraries; Staffed and Non-Staffed Community / Branch Libraries; and Mobile Library. The service hopes that this will increase library efficiency, improve the customer experience and provide a sustainable service for the future.

## Conclusion

Carmarthenshire's library service is clearly valued by customers, who rate their experiences highly. Carmarthenshire offers a range of activities and events, including health and well-being services; Makerspace and technology provision; and Welsh language activities and resources. It has developed partnerships with a number of organisations to offer specialist services, such as health support and digital training. It is encouraging that adult, children's, Welsh language and electronic resource issues have all risen in comparison to 2022-23.

# Ceredigion Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Ceredigion's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Ceredigion meets 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and does not meet the remaining 2 Core Entitlements. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Ceredigion is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Ceredigion continues to perform well in a number of areas. Its issue figures are impressive, especially the increase in children's issues compared to 2022-23. It is noteworthy that both physical and electronic issues have risen notably compared to the previous reporting period. Whilst event attendance remains low compared to other authorities, the service is now meeting the target for QI6, which was identified as an area requiring attention last year.

The fact that Ceredigion continues to not meet Core Entitlements 11 and 12 is a concern. As stated previously, consultation with users and the development of a strategy will give the service a stronger sense of its future direction, which is particularly important in a time of increasing budget pressures.

- Adult book issues, children's issues and electronic issues are all in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and have increased compared to 2022-23 (QI8).
- Ceredigion is in the top quartile nationally for active borrowers per capita and number of active borrowers has increased by 9% since the previous return (QI8).
- Ceredigion is in the top quartile nationally for Welsh language issues per capita (QI10).
- The service is in the top quartile of library authorities for opening hours per capita (QI16).
- However, it is disappointing that Ceredigion no longer meets the targets for qualified staff per capita or the staff training hours (QI13).

## Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Ceredigion reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and not meeting the remaining 2 Core Entitlements through self-assessment. The independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment. However, it should be noted that Ceredigion has provided more limited information in the return than the majority of library authorities, making it more difficult for the independent assessor to make an accurate judgement. As was the case in 2022-23, Ceredigion does not meet CE12 as the service is continuing to look at developing the full range of library strategies. CE11 was also not met as the service has not consulted users during the Framework 6 (or Framework 6 Addendum) period. Both activities are in the service's 2024-25 business plan.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Ceredigion 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	Not provided	N/A	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	Not provided	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:	94%	13/16	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.

Ceredigion provided an impact statement which focussed on the experience of a customer who regularly came to the Cardigan branch library and chatted with staff. He reported that he had given up reading due to poor eyesight. A staff member informed him about the electronic resources that the library provides and offered to support him in accessing and using these resources. As a result, staff supported him in registering as a new member and helped him set up the free apps on his device and he was able to come into the library and download electronic audio resources and electronic books using the free Wi-Fi. The customer reported his joy at being able to read again and listen to stories and was appreciative of the support he received from staff.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Ceredigion's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	Not provided	N/A	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	Not provided	N/A	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	Not provided	N/A	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	Not provided	N/A	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	Not provided	N/A	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	Not provided	N/A	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	Not provided	N/A	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	Not provided	N/A	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	5	16/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	147	8/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	13	21/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	951	6/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	143	4/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	12%	=20/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	16%	=10/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	1,035	4/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>11</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	20	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	1,148	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£10,162	15/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	78%	1/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	21%	2/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	1% <sup>12</sup>	=19/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	0%	22/22	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.

<sup>11</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

<sup>12</sup> *Return states: 'Building material costs are managed separately under Property Section and therefore are not included within the figures quoted'*

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

Ceredigion has not consulted with users during 2023-24 (as was indicated would be the case in the previous year's submission). However, the 2023-24 return states that they are 'planning to consult next year, the provision of which is also in our business plan for 2024-25'. The service meets QI4 in full. Ceredigion is above the median for informal support per capita, although numbers are down slightly (5%) compared to 2022-23 (QI5). Attendance at formal training sessions is below the median, as is the percentage of attendees who said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

Virtual visits per capita are above the median and have increased by 18% compared to 2022-23 (QI8). Ceredigion is in the top quartile nationally for active borrowers per capita, and number of active borrowers has increased by 9% since the previous return. Adult book issues, children's issues and electronic issues are all in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and have increased at higher rates than the national average. Compared to 2022-23, adult issues have risen by 26%, children's issues by 47% and electronic issues by 42%. Even AV issues, which are declining in many authorities, remain stable. The service also loans sports equipment.

Ceredigion meets the target for location of service points (QI7). The service is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita, although this has increased slightly (5%) compared to 2022-23 (QI6). Limited information is provided about the types of events offered.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Ceredigion meets the target for acquisitions per capita and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (QI9). It is the joint lowest authority for proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources, although it is above the median for per capita spending on under 16s. The service exceeds the target for the proportion of budget spent on Welsh language materials and is in the top quartile for Welsh language issues per capita; Welsh language issues have increased by 41% compared to 2022-23 (QI10). Limited information is provided about Welsh language events or activities.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 & 16)

It is disappointing that Ceredigion no longer meets the target for qualified staff per capita (QI13). It is noted that one professional post has been carried as a vacancy for the year in order to cover a staff pay rise and meet income targets. The service also fails to meet the targets for total staffing per capita and time allocated for training. Total per capita staffing is below the median and it is noted that releasing staff for training is more difficult as numbers decline. Nevertheless, the service has the highest number of opening hours per capita nationally (QI16). Ceredigion is below the median of Welsh library authorities for total expenditure per capita and a large proportion of the budget is allocated to staffing (QI14).

## 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. Ceredigion focussed on how its Well-being goals contribute to Welsh Government strategic priorities. Examples included:

- **A prosperous Wales** e.g. supporting lifelong learning with book stock and IT, assisting people with finding employment through hosting job clubs, and developing the libraries' roles to provide support for Universal Credit.
- **A resilient Wales** e.g. providing access to information that encourages a more resilient lifestyle and supporting recycling initiatives.
- **A healthier Wales** e.g. providing resources to support well-being, participating in the all-Wales bibliotherapy scheme, developing support for people with dementia, and providing a mobile library service to assist housebound and isolated customers.
- **A more equal Wales** e.g. providing free access to books and IT, facilitating the loan of sports equipment, delivering digital skills sessions, and supporting schemes such as Bookstart and the summer reading scheme.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** e.g. providing a network of branch libraries and 3 mobile libraries that cover the whole county.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** e.g. promoting the Welsh language with a staff that is fully bilingual, holding a local history collection for Ceredigion and Wales more generally, organising regular events promoting the culture of Wales including an annual T. Llew Jones Lecture, and supporting reading groups in both languages.
- **A globally responsible Wales** e.g. working closely with the other Welsh library authorities including consortia-based purchasing and joining the All-Wales Library Management System, thus creating efficiencies.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Ceredigion reports that post-Covid loans and user numbers are rising, and it is hoped that trend will continue over the next year. The service hopes to increase the number of events held, but notes that this will be challenging with current staffing levels. 2024-25 is expected to be challenging as the service faces substantial budget cuts. Further fees and charges may be implemented to meet income targets. The library is working to the Ceredigion Well-Being strategy, which will consolidate Council Buildings and services, including libraries and leisure centres, into one Council Well-being hub. There will be a new Council Strategy and customer satisfaction will be assessed. The wider department is due to undergo a restructure next year and at this point the effect this will have on the service is unknown.

## Conclusion

Ceredigion continues to perform well in a number of areas. Its issue figures are impressive, especially the increase in children's issues compared to 2022-23. It is noteworthy that both physical and electronic issues have risen notably compared to the previous reporting period. Increases reported in issues exceed the national average for all types of resource. Whilst event attendance remains low compared to other authorities, the service is now meeting the target for Q16, which was identified as an area requiring attention last year.

More detail is provided in the commentary compared to last year's return, and this is helpful. However, the description offered is still quite limited compared to that provided by many authorities, and this limits the independent assessor's ability to highlight positive work being done within the service. Ceredigion may wish to look at returns submitted by colleagues in other authorities (obviously with their permission) to get a better idea of the level of commentary typically provided.

The fact that Ceredigion continues to not meet Core Entitlements 11 and 12 is a concern. As stated previously, consultation with users and the development of a strategy will give the service a stronger sense of its future direction, which is particularly important in a time of increasing budget pressures.



# Conwy Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Conwy's return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Conwy meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Conwy is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Conwy continues to perform well in many areas, including issues, Welsh language provision, virtual visits and formal training attendance. The continued investment in children's stock and the increase in children's issues are other positive features of the service. The service is working to better understand possible reasons for declining levels of customer satisfaction in some areas. However, Conwy has experienced a substantial reduction to the book fund this year and is facing staffing capacity challenges and the loss of members of the professional team. The situation seems unlikely to improve in the future as the service is facing budget cuts that will likely impact opening hours and other areas of service provision.

- Attendance at formal customer training is above the median for Welsh library authorities and has increased by 4% compared to 2022-23 (Q15).
- Conwy Libraries are above the national median for issues in all formats; compared to 2022-23, adult issues are up by 12%, children's issues by 19%, electronic issues by 61%, and AV issues (which are declining in many authorities) have increased almost sevenfold (Q18).
- Conwy is above the median for Welsh language issues per capita; issues of Welsh language materials have increased by 17% compared to the previous year (Q10).
- Whilst the service remains committed to staff training, there have been reductions in the number of qualified staff per capita (Q13).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Conwy reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Conwy 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, **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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	90%	=10/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	79%	14/16	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:	95%	12/16	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.

Conwy provided an impact statement which focussed on the value of the Shared Reading and Reading Friends model which is supported through the training of frontline staff. Case studies from Abergele and Llandudno libraries have been shared in the recent national Reading Agency's Reading Friends Evaluation Report. At Llanrwst library, the Reading Friends group focussing on death and dying related matters, was acknowledged in a national UK workshop to commence a bid for research into the impact of libraries in supporting people through the challenging issues of death and grief. The group has demonstrated the impact that sessions can have on attendees who can share in a safe and supportive environment. The group supports priorities such as well-being, learning and inclusion and contributes to a number of goals outlined in the CCBC Corporate Plan 2022-2027, Conwy Library and Information Strategy 2021-2026 and the *Well-being of Future Generations Act* (2015) .

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Conwy's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	64%	=12/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	49%	12/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	95%	=13/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	88%	13/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	96%	15/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	64%	14/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=9/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.1	12/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	33	5/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	227	3/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	183	15/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	5,433	2/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	141	6/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	23%	4/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	25%	6/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	727	8/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>13</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	36	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	1,548	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£15,419	6/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	75%	3/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=13/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	1%	=19/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	15%	13/22	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)

Conwy conducted customer surveys in November 2023. These saw a decline in positive responses in a number of areas and Conwy is below the median of Welsh library authorities for all Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2)

<sup>13</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

measures. Whilst responses from children and young people have remained more or less consistent, levels of satisfaction reported in the adult survey have fallen, particularly with regard to IT provision; finding helpful information for health and well-being; and new skills development. In response, the service is working at local library level to gather greater insight into the customer perspective to better understand the reasons for these changes.

The service meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4) in full. Additional Shared Reading sessions are offered in partnership between the library team, Mind and the council Social Care team. Attendance per capita at formal training is above the median for Welsh library authorities and has increased by 4% compared to 2022-23 (QI5). Informal support sessions per capita are in the top quartile nationally. However, the number of reported sessions has decreased by 27% compared to the previous year.

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Whilst event attendance remains below the median, it has increased by 29% compared to the previous year (QI6). Activities include storytimes; reading groups, Shared Reading and Reading Friends; seasonally-themed craft and story sessions; activities with local groups such as Scouts and Merched y Wawr; digital help sessions; Dementia Listening campaign awareness; Story Squad; Criw Celf; Baby Brahms; author visits; and Warm Welcome provision. Conwy is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits per capita and the total number of virtual visits has increased by 24% compared to 2022-23 (QI8). The service notes that there was a marked increase in Jan-March 2024. Active borrowers per capita is above the median and active borrower numbers are up 10% compared to the previous year. A high percentage of reported library members are active borrowers (71%). Issue figures in Conwy Libraries are above the national median for all formats and have risen compared to 2022-23: adult issues are up by 12%, children's issues by 19%, electronic issues by 61%, and AV issues (which are declining in many authorities) have increased almost sevenfold.

### Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Although acquisitions per capita are lower than in 2022-23, as the reported book budget has reduced by 17%, Conwy meets the target for acquisitions per capita and is above the national median for this measure (QI9). Whilst the children's budget has also reduced this year (by 25%), the service continues to be in the top quartile nationally for the proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources and for the spend per head for under 16s. It is also above the median for the proportion of the budget allocated to electronic resources. Conwy is above the median for Welsh language issues per capita; issues of Welsh language materials have increased by 17% compared to the previous year (QI10). The service exceeds the target for the proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language materials. Conwy Libraries support a number of Welsh medium reading groups; a 'Reading Friends' programme for Welsh learners; and story times e.g. Cymraeg i Blant. There have also been one-off events with Merched y Wawr, historical societies and school visits. This year saw

the launch of Cornel Clip at Llanrwst Library and Conwy Archive Service at Conwy Culture Centre, a collection of digitised film, video and audio from Wales Broadcast Archive and the National Library of Wales' Screen and Sound Archive. Two libraries have Welsh learner volunteers to host the Warm Welcome weekly offer.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Although Conwy is above the median for Welsh library authorities for total staff and qualified staff per capita, it does not meet the targets for these measures (Q113). A staffing restructure is near completion, which will provide more staffing capacity at frontline manager level. However, posts are being removed from the structure in April 2024 to meet budget requirements; this includes staff redundancies at professional level. The service remains committed to staff training, for example, supporting Foundation Degree courses for four frontline staff. The service is above the median for revenue expenditure per capita (Q114). A significant capital investment and grant awards have secured improvements to Colwyn Bay Library, including a new roof and greater energy efficiency. Conwy meets the target for opening hours, which are little changed from 2022-23 (Q116). The service offers one unstaffed library session at a community library on a Saturday.

## 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. Conwy identified a variety of ways in which it contributes to all seven goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) through the delivery of its Library and Information Strategy 2021-2026. The development of Libraries as Community Hubs remains a key focus of delivery, supporting national priorities around poverty, literacy, older people, digital access and loneliness and isolation. All libraries are designated Safe Spaces and the service supports the Warm Welcome initiative. Libraries work in partnership to support digital skills, digital inclusion and employability and the service is a participant in Digital Communities Wales which uses technology to improve access to council services. The service supports the aims of the Conwy Culture Strategy to deliver innovative activities in library spaces and collaborates with partners to deliver projects which support the Anti-racist Wales and LGBTQ+ action plans. Conwy works with health and social care partners to support mental health and well-being, as well as supporting learning and reading through programmes such as Reading Well and Shared Reading.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Conwy notes that financial challenges continue to be a serious concern. A budget reduction has led to a public consultation about reducing library opening hours by an average of 25%. The results have not been made available yet and will inevitably affect the priorities and delivery of the service. The service reports having to cut staffing levels due to budget pressures with the loss of three

professional roles and notes that this will reduce the capacity and development opportunities for the service. Conwy Libraries are committed to progress the Libraries as Community Hubs model, building on the success of shared locations at Conwy and Llanrwst and hope to attract grant money and further partnership developments to fund this. The service reports maintaining its focus on libraries in supporting health and well-being and taking on the authority-wide function of Age Friendly Communities, which enables the service to resource the review, development and embedding of Age Friendly working.

## Conclusion

Conwy continues to perform well in many areas, including issues, Welsh language provision, virtual visits and formal training attendance. The continued investment in children's stock and the increase in children's issues are other positive features of the service. The service is working to better understand possible reasons for declining levels of customer satisfaction in some areas. However, Conwy has experienced a substantial reduction to the book fund this year and is facing staffing capacity challenges and the loss of members of the professional team. The situation seems unlikely to improve in the future as the service is facing budget cuts that will likely impact opening hours and other areas of service provision.

# 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.

## 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 returns<sup>14</sup>. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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<sup>14</sup> 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	N/A	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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
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%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
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
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	23	10/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	329	2/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	287	7/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	354	17/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	164	2/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	20%	7/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	9%	15/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	1,246	3/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>15</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	4	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	644	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
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

<sup>15</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

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 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 (Q1 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.



# Flintshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

Flintshire library service is provided by Aura Wales. This report has been prepared based on information provided in Flintshire's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Flintshire meets 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 1 in part. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Flintshire is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Flintshire performs well in many areas and its recent survey data demonstrate that the service is valued by customers who believe it makes a difference to their lives. The service has strong health and well-being provision. In addition, training, events and activities are all well-supported. Issues and use figures are increasing, with rises in electronic issues and virtual visits being particularly impressive. However, as was reported last year, staffing levels in Flintshire are a concern, particularly when combined with the decrease seen in staff time devoted to training this year.

- Flintshire performs well for Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), being above the median for all measures.
- The service has continued to develop its provision to support health and well-being (QI4) and its efforts in this area are reflected in its impact on health and well-being ranking (QI1c).
- Flintshire is above the median of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita and the total number of attendees is 28% higher than in 2022-23 (QI6).
- Children's issues and electronic issues are both above the median. Children's issues have increased by 12% and electronic issues have almost doubled compared to 2022-23 (QI8).
- Flintshire is slightly above the median for Welsh language issues per capita and the number of Welsh language issues has increased by 16% compared to 2022-23 (QI10).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Flintshire reported meeting 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and meeting the remaining 1 Core Entitlement in part through self-assessment. Based on the detailed

commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment. The service partially meets CE12 as Aura's new 10-year business plan, which includes strategic direction and vision for library services, is not yet published as final contract negotiations with Flintshire County Council are currently ongoing.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Flintshire 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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%	4/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	94%	4/16	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	N/A	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. Flintshire provided an impact statement which referred to the services it provides to customers who have visually impairments. It describes how members of a social club for people with visual impairments were invited in to meet the Library and Museum team. Members were shown some tactile objects and took part in a workshop, and library staff explained the range of resources that were available. All became library members, and the group now schedules quarterly visits to the library. One person also joined the Home Library Service and receives regular deliveries of audio books. Two others joined the Digital Loan Scheme, with one having transport provided to visit the library each week for digital buddy training and the other purchasing a tablet through the 'buy back' offer to download electronic books and audio books at home.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Flintshire's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	74%	7/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	90%	1/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	4/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	94%	=4/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	93%	2/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	99%	=3/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.5	=5/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	31	=6/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	155	7/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	269	9/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	714	12/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	106	15/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	15%	=16/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	30%	2/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	641	11/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>16</sup></b>					
v) a) total volunteers	158	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	957	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,495	20/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	68%	=9/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	22%	1/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	7%	18/22	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)

Flintshire performs very well for Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), being above the median of Welsh library authorities for all measures. It ranks highest nationally for customer care and impact on health and well-being. The

<sup>16</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

service meets the targets for health and well-being in full (Q14) and offers a programme of activities and events designed to support people's overall health and well-being. These include jigsaw clubs; craft and chat groups; mindfulness art sessions; quizzes; a 'Singing for the Brain' group, attended by people living with dementia and their carers; and two reminiscence groups: 'Sporting Memories' and 'Mold Memories'. A communication plan provides staff with clear guidelines and ensures a consistent offer is made across all branches. Branches continue to operate as Warm Welcome hubs and are also part of Aura's 'Fit, Fed and Read' holiday scheme to support health and well-being; promote literacy skills; and tackle food poverty. Flintshire is above the national median for per capita attendance at both formal training sessions and informal customer support (Q15). Attendances at formal sessions has risen more than threefold compared to 2022-23 and informal support attendances are up 24%.

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Flintshire is above the median of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita and the total number of attendees is 28% higher than in 2022-23 (Q16). Events and activities during this reporting period included author visits, Baby Babble speech and literacy sessions; Cymraeg i Blant family sessions; children's writing clubs; autism service drop-in sessions; Babies and Books family group session; Lego clubs; interactive STEM sessions; and story and dance sessions.

As was the case last year, Flintshire is slightly below the national median for virtual visits per capita, but the number of visits has increased by 45% compared to the previous year (Q18). Although the service is below the median for active borrowers per capita, the active borrower figure has increased by 8% compared to 2022-23 and 95% of reported members are active borrowers. Children's issues and electronic issues are both above the median. Children's issues have increased by 12% and electronic issues have almost doubled compared to 2022-23. The number of adult issues is below the median, but has increased by 9% year-on-year.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Flintshire meets the target for acquisitions and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q19). The service is also in the top quartile for the proportion of the budget spend on electronic resources. Flintshire meets the target for proportion of the budget spent on Welsh language materials (Q110). It is slightly above the median for Welsh language issues per capita and the number of Welsh language issues has increased by 16% since the previous year.

### Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 & 16)

Flintshire does not meet the targets for total staff and qualified staff per capita and it is below the median of Welsh library authorities for both measures (Q113). The percentage of staff time devoted to training has declined since 2022-23 and Flintshire no longer meets this target. No contextual information is provided in the return, so it is not possible for the independent assessor to comment further about possible reasons for this. The number of volunteers has more than doubled since

2022-23. Flintshire is below the national median for total expenditure per capita (Q114). The service meets the target for opening hours per capita and is close to the median for this measure (Q116). It also provides access to some services during unstaffed hours.

## 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 identified areas in which its activities support a range of strategic priorities including those of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The service provides welcoming meeting spaces, as well as a range of activities and events which help to engage with some of the most vulnerable members of the community. Engagement with the Summer Reading Challenge helped reach many children and their families, and other events have facilitated access to cultural and creative experiences. Flintshire's Adult Community Learning programme provides learning opportunities delivered from libraries, including Mental Health First Aid, Mindfulness and Employability Skills. The service contributes to tackling digital poverty through its digital loan scheme and ensures that the diversity of its community is reflected in its collections. As part of the Green Libraries Network, the service is committed to supporting ecological initiatives.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Flintshire reports that it will continue to focus on supporting health and well-being; tackling social isolation; promoting reading for pleasure and wellness; and promoting the benefits the service can have to babies and young people. Reflecting the changing needs of customers, the service will be developing its overall digital offer, including how resources are accessed and how support is provided.

## Conclusion

Flintshire performs well in many areas and its recent survey data demonstrate that the service is valued by customers who believe it makes a difference to their lives. The service has strong health and well-being provision. In addition, training, events and activities are all well-supported. Issues and usage figures are increasing, with rises in electronic issues and virtual visits being particularly impressive. However, as was reported last year, staffing levels in Flintshire are a concern, particularly when combined with the decrease seen in staff time devoted to training this year.

Whilst Flintshire provided detailed, helpful commentary with regard to the Core Entitlements, there are places where more context would have been useful within the Quality indicators summary, in particular to provide commentary where figures have changed notably compared to the previous submission. This limited the independent assessor's ability to reflect potential reasons for some changes described in this report.

# Gwynedd Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Gwynedd's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Gwynedd meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Gwynedd is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Gwynedd continues to perform well in many areas, including issues, acquisitions, Welsh language provision and customer satisfaction. Formal training sessions have expanded considerably this year and feedback demonstrates that they are well-received. Event attendance is also recovering strongly, and the service offers a wide range of activities. However, given the comparatively low rating given by children and young people (Q12e) and the fact that the Summer Reading Challenge is being cut from 2024, it may be worthwhile for the service to review its provision for young people, including consulting with this user group over the coming year to ensure the service is meeting their needs.

- Gwynedd performs well for Making a difference, being above the median for most survey measures (Q11).
- Customer training is well received, with all attendees surveyed saying they had achieved their purpose in attending (Q15).
- Per capita event attendance has increased more than threefold compared to 2022-23 and is now a little below the median for Welsh library authorities (Q16).
- Gwynedd is in the top quartile of library authorities for the proportion of the budget spent on Welsh language resources and for the number of Welsh language issues per capita (Q10).
- Despite a cut in service hours during 2023-24, Gwynedd remains in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q16).

## Performance against the standards

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



## Core Entitlements

Gwynedd reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Gwynedd 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 provided**
- 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	94%	=6/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	88%	9/16	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:	100%	=1/16	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. Gwynedd provided an impact statement which referred to partnership work funded through grants provided by providers aimed at attracting local residents to learning and training. Lack of confidence and poor mental health have been identified as barriers to people taking formal courses that will lead to further qualifications and work. As a result, Gwynedd Libraries is working with Grŵp Llandrillo Menai to offer informal courses as a step towards more formal learning. One example is the ten-week mindfulness courses that have been running at Caernarfon Library. The library provides a convenient, welcoming central location and the courses have proven popular and contributed to attendees' well-being. One attendee commented: *"I enjoyed all the sessions. The whole course made me feel better within myself."*

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Gwynedd's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	90%	=1/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	76%	4/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	98%	=6/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	93%	=6/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	94%	1/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	100%	=1/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	8.0	15/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	4	17/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	Not provided	N/A	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	197	13/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	867	9/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	140	7/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	17%	=10/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	4%	22/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	996	5/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>17</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	0	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	0	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£18,904	3/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	51%	21/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	15%	5/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	31%	=2/22	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.

<sup>17</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

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

Gwynedd performs well for Making a difference (QI1), being above the median for most survey measures. The service also performs well with regard to Customer satisfaction (QI2), being above the median for all measures, with the exception of the rating out of 10 by children and young people. Given this is lower than might be expected given the rest of the responses, it is something the service may want to look at in more detail in future surveys. Although per capita attendance at formal training sessions is below the median for Welsh library authorities, the number of attendances has risen by 153% compared to 2022-23 and it is noted that third party provision is not included in the total. Training is well-received, with 100% of attendees surveyed saying they had achieved their purpose in attending. Gwynedd does not currently record informal support provision.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

Per capita event attendance has increased by more than threefold compared to 2022-23 and is now a little below the median for Welsh library authorities (QI6). Events include Lego BricQ sessions; Clwb Creu; men's chess sessions; Warm Welcome; rhyme and song sessions; and Coffee and Chat sessions to introduce literary works to those learning Welsh. In 2023-24, Gwynedd Libraries ran a range of holiday activities as part of the Summer Reading Challenge, so it is unfortunate that the Summer Reading Challenge will be cut as part of the Council's savings plan from 2024, as approved by Cabinet. The removal of funding for the Summer Reading Challenge is likely to impact on visitor and borrowing figures over the summer and this is something that the library service should monitor.

Virtual visits and active borrowers per capita are both above the median for Welsh library authorities and have changed very little since last year (QI8). Adult and children's book issues are above the median and have also changed little compared to 2022-23. Electronic issues are also above the median, but unlike physical issues, these are increasing, having risen by 31% compared to 2022-23.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Gwynedd meets the target for rate of acquisitions and is above the median for this measure. Whilst the proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources is around the median, Gwynedd has the highest spending per head for under 16s. However, the service is the lowest in Wales for the percentage of budget allocated to electronic resources (QI9). Gwynedd is in the top quartile of library authorities for the proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources and for the number of Welsh language issues per capita (QI10). Welsh language issues have increased by 23% compared to 2022-23. The library service collaborates with North Wales Society for the Blind, to provide Welsh language audiobooks for adults and children. Over 90% of library activities are predominantly Welsh or bilingual.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 & 16)

Gwynedd does not meet the targets for total staff or qualified staff per capita. The total staffing figure has declined by 0.9 FTE this year and the service reports facing

further cuts which will affect staffing hours. However, it is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for total staff and qualified staff per capita (Q113). Gwynedd reports having no formal way of recording staff hours spent in training or personal development. The service is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for total expenditure per capita (Q114). Gwynedd meets the target for opening hours per capita and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure. It also has a small proportion of unstaffed opening hours (Q116). Total service hours have reduced by 3% this year. In addition, the opening hours of Nefyn and Bangor Libraries have been revised following consultation with users.

## 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. Gwynedd identified a number of ways it contributes to government priorities in particular those of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Gwynedd's network of libraries offer access to materials and events that support the reading for pleasure requirements of adults and children in both English and Welsh. The service also supports users' health and well-being information needs through its Read Better collections. Gwynedd is committed to working in an environmentally friendly way, including reducing plastic jackets on adult books. Digital support sessions are offered to help boost digital skills and reduce digital poverty. To help tackle poverty, the library service has been working with Cyngor Gwynedd's Inclusion and Tackling Poverty Unit and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to issue free SIM cards to clients, and food packages have been distributed by the food bank through Dolgellau and Porthmadog libraries. The service provides a range of materials and activities to support learning and the promotion of the Welsh language and culture, and works in partnership to support the provision of adult education in its communities. As lead on the All Wales LMS project, Gwynedd is undertaking collaboration at a national level supporting a goal of the Digital Strategy of Wales.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Gwynedd reports that it has set out its vision in the Library Plan-Living Libraries which covers 2023-28. The service notes that the period is a challenging one in which it will focus on the Reading, Health and Well-being, Welsh Language and Culture and Information and Digital areas. Gwynedd is the Lead Authority for the delivery of the LMS Wales Consortium and reports that the year ahead will have a focus on managing that. In line with the Council's savings plan, a service assessment will be undertaken. At this stage, the outcome and implications are unknown, but the service anticipates technological solutions as one option for service delivery.

## Conclusion

Gwynedd continues to perform well in many areas, including issues, acquisitions, Welsh language provision and customer satisfaction. Formal training sessions have expanded considerably this year and feedback demonstrates that they are well-received. Event attendance is also recovering strongly, and the service offers a wide range of activities. However, given the comparatively low rating given by children and young people (Q12e) and the fact that the Summer Reading Challenge is being cut from 2024, it may be worthwhile for the service to review its provision for young people, including consulting with this user group over the coming year to ensure the service is meeting their needs.

It is positive that Gwynedd has provided a fuller data set this year, allowing the independent assessor to make a more comprehensive assessment. However, it would be helpful if the service could introduce systems to capture missing data, in particular, staff training and informal support, as noted above.

# Isle of Anglesey Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Isle of Anglesey's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Isle of Anglesey meets 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Isle of Anglesey is achieving 6 in full and 1 in part.

Anglesey continues to perform well in several areas, including the level of acquisitions, virtual visits and Welsh language provision. Staff in Anglesey have clearly put a great deal of effort into events and activities this year. In light of this, it is important to reflect on possible reasons for the decline in attendance. To help answer this question, it is important that Anglesey prioritises conducting user surveys during 2024-25 as it is now a number of years since these were last carried out. The independent assessor acknowledges that the service has struggled in some areas this year due to staffing pressures, in particular, the fact that the service is carrying a number of vacant posts. Whilst this is a concern, it is encouraging that one professional post is now being recruited and the service remains committed to staff development.

- Anglesey is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for acquisitions per capita, and this figure shows an increase compared to 2022-23 (QI9).
- The service has seen a 38% increase in electronic issues compared to the previous year (QI9).
- Issues of Welsh language resources have increased by 10% compared to 2022-23 (QI10).
- Despite staffing challenges this year, Anglesey remains committed to staff development, being in the top quartile of services nationally for the proportion of staff time devoted to training (QI13)
- Attendances at events and training are comparatively low and do not appear to be recovering post-Covid to extent that they are in most library authorities (QI5&6).

## Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Isle of Anglesey reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and meeting the remaining 2 Core Entitlements in part through self-assessment. The service provided detailed and helpful commentary within the return. Based on this, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

Anglesey has not conducted a user survey in recent years and plans for one to take place in 2023-24 have not come to fruition. The service reports that this is mainly due to staffing issues. CE11 is reported as partially met as consultation does inform service provision, for example, changes to mobile services. With regard to CE12, Anglesey reports that the Library Service Strategy and Policies have been reviewed and updated during 2023-24, but these are not yet available online.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Isle of Anglesey 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, **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 Q11 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
Q1 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	Not provided	N/A	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	Not provided	N/A	31%	89.5%	96%
Q1 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending:	86%	16/16	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. The Isle of Anglesey provided an impact statement highlighting the value of the monthly craft clubs in Holyhead and Llangefni libraries. The clubs help the library to promote its services and help participants in fostering creativity, enhancing social interaction, supporting mental well-being and boosting community engagement. The clubs have highlighted the role of libraries as community venues which go beyond lending books. Individual participants have reported improvements such as reduced stress levels and enhanced mood after attending the clubs. The clubs have helped strengthen community ties, as well as increasing footfall and engagement with the library.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Isle of Anglesey’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	Not provided	N/A	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	Not provided	N/A	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	Not provided	N/A	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	Not provided	N/A	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	Not provided	N/A	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	Not provided	N/A	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	Not provided	N/A	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	Not provided	N/A	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	2	=18/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	12	18/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	101	19/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	2,470	3/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	116	14/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	26%	1/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	27%	3/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	611	14/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>18</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	0	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	0	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£12,701	10/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	67%	=11/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	19%	9/22	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.

<sup>18</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

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

The service meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4) in full, reporting that significant staff time and resources is spent in this area. However, Anglesey does not perform strongly in relation to user support measures (QI5); it is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendance at formal training, although it is acknowledged that attendances have increased by 13% compared to 2022-23. In the return, Anglesey reports that pre-arranged user training sessions have significantly decreased compared to pre-pandemic years, due to a lack of demand and also a shift to more focus on events and activities. Anglesey is also in the bottom quartile for the percentage of users who achieved their purpose in attending training sessions. Staff report that demand for informal help, particularly with completing online forms scanning documents and job searching, continues to increase. Although informal support attendance has increased by 10% compared to 2022-23, Anglesey has the lowest informal support per capita figure nationally. Anglesey has not conducted a user survey (QI1 & QI2) in recent years and plans for one to take place in 2023-24 have not come to fruition due to staffing shortages.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

The library website is well used and Anglesey is in the top quartile nationally for virtual visits per capita (QI8). The service also reports that Facebook has been focused on during this period with an increase in posts and, subsequently, engagement figures. Active borrower figures have increased by 9% compared to 2022-23, although Anglesey is slightly below the median for active borrowers per capita. Issues of adult books have fallen by 5%, although Anglesey is close to the median for this measure. Children's book issues are also close to the median and are stable compared to the previous year. However, the service has seen a notable increase in electronic issues as these are up by 38% compared to the 2022-23. The service attributes this, in part, to the purchase of additional copies outside of the All Wales Procurement consortium, in an attempt to reduce waiting times. E-zines have seen a 76% increase in loans.

Event attendance has decreased by 16% compared to 2022-23, bucking the national trend, and Anglesey is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita. This is despite the service reporting that events and activities have been a priority this year. Events and activities have included: Health Visitor sessions, Paned a Sgwrs sessions, Rhyme Time, Brownies, creative writing workshops, craft sessions and a large World Book Day event.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Anglesey is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for acquisitions per capita, and this figure shows an increase compared to 2022-23 (QI9). The service also has the highest proportion nationally allocated to children's resources and it is in the top quartile nationally in terms of the percentage of the budget allocated to electronic resources. The service is the joint highest authority nationally for the percentage of the budget allocated to Welsh language materials and easily meets this target. As a library service with a large Welsh speaking resident population, Anglesey purchases

multiple copies of all available titles. In addition, issues of Welsh language resources have increased by 10% compared to 2022-23 (Q110).

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Anglesey Library Service remains below the total staffing level standard (even with the vacant posts included). It is also below the target for qualified staff per capita, although it is encouraging that the vacant FTE professional post is being recruited during May/June 2024. It is also positive that, despite staffing challenges this year, Anglesey remains committed to staff development, being in the top quartile of services nationally for the proportion of staff time devoted to training (Q113). However, the service was not able to offer volunteer opportunities this year due to staffing constraints. Anglesey is close to the median for revenue expenditure per capita (Q114). The service continues to meet the opening hours target and is above the national median for this measure (Q116). Mobile library routes have been revised according to community and customer needs, but the number of opening/contact hours has remained the same.

## 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. Isle of Anglesey identified a range of areas in which it contributes to these priorities, examples include:

- **Learning** e.g. Adult Community Education and the school's library service sit within the service and support both informal and formal learning throughout all life stages.
- **Reading and literacy** e.g. providing access to a wide range of resources for children, young people and adults; sessions in basic skills help adults with low literacy levels.
- **Community well-being** e.g. offering a neutral space in the community, in physical and virtual form and assisting Third Sector organisations and other partners to promote their services to the public.
- **Skills and economic regeneration** e.g. providing opportunities for skills and workforce development, providing business information, contributing to encouraging footfall in the local area and supporting skills development particularly in digital inclusion and digital literacy.
- **Digital inclusion and participation** e.g. offering a range of digital resources, free internet access, in person, by phone and e-mail support, online IT courses and one to one sessions.
- **Health and well-being** e.g. working with health professionals to deliver Reading Well; providing a wide range of health and well-being information including special collections aimed at people living with dementia; facilitating therapeutic reading groups and reading aloud reading groups; and providing a Housebound Library Service.
- **Cultural identity** e.g. providing an extensive local history collection, providing Welsh language resources and facilitating Welsh language and Welsh learners' reading groups.

- **Poverty** e.g. providing free access to resources, IT, the internet, digital skills courses and offering a Warm Space through the winter months.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the Isle of Anglesey notes that this is a period of uncertainty with increasing demand for essential council services. Going forward, the service reports it aims to support the Isle of Anglesey council with its priorities including: Welsh language; social care and well-being; education; housing; economy; and climate change.

## Conclusion

Anglesey continues to perform well in several areas, including the level of acquisitions, virtual visits and Welsh language provision. Staff in Anglesey have clearly put a great deal of effort into events and activities this year. In light of this, it is important to reflect on possible reasons for the decline in attendance. To help answer this question, it is important that Anglesey prioritises conducting user surveys during 2024-25 as it is now a number of years since these are last carried out. The independent assessor acknowledges that the service has struggled in some areas this year due to staffing pressures, in particular, the fact that the service is carrying a number of vacant posts. Whilst this is a concern, it is encouraging that one professional post is now being recruited and the service remains committed to staff development.

# Merthyr Tydfil Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

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

## Executive summary

Merthyr Tydfil reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part through self-assessment. However, the independent assessor considers that the service has met 10 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part, with 1 Core Entitlement not being met. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Merthyr Tydfil is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part, with the remaining 2 indicators not being met.

The situation in Merthyr Tydfil Libraries is a source of serious concern. The importance of the library service to local communities and the value of the support library staff offer to their customers have been noted, and praised, in previous years. However, the reduction in funding this year, and change in governance, has inevitably had severe impacts on staffing, opening hours and resource provision. The fact that the service only partially meets Core Entitlements 2 and 5 is particularly concerning. Staff are undoubtedly doing their best in a challenging situation, but a 30% reduction in staffing and opening hours, along with a drastic cut in the number of resources purchased per capita, will inevitably result in a deterioration of the service offered to local communities. Little detail is provided in the return about plans for the future direction of the service. However, if customer satisfaction and support for the library service decline as a result of these cuts, it may take many years to recover.

- During the last year, the service lost several experienced and knowledgeable staff, including one of the two qualified librarians. From an already low baseline in 2022-2023 total staffing has decreased by almost one-third and Merthyr Tydfil therefore fails to meet targets for total staff per capita and qualified staff per capita (Q13).
- The reduction in available staff led to a 30% reduction in library opening times and the target for opening times per capita is no longer met (Q16).
- Merthyr Libraries no longer meets the target for Up-to-date and appropriate reading material and is now in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q19).
- Event attendance (previously a strength of Merthyr Tydfil) has also been severely reduced as staffing has reduced dramatically (Q16).

- The service continues to make efforts to support Welsh language provision. Merthyr Tydfil meets the target for percentage of the material budget spent on Welsh language resources (Q110).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Merthyr Tydfil reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and meeting the remaining 2 Core Entitlements in part 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 10 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part. The remaining Core Entitlement is not met.

- 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: Partially met  
Independent Assessor: **Partially met ■**  
This is due to the reduction in both qualified staff and total staff.
- 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: **Partially met ■**  
This is due to the drastic reduction in opening hours reported.

- 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: Partially met.  
Independent Assessor: **Not met ●**  
This is because the strategy is under review and the service does not currently have a functioning website to make documents publicly available.
- 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, Merthyr Tydfil is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 2 QIs with targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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, **not met ●**

## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	Not provided	N/A	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	50%	15/16	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	N/A	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. Merthyr Tydfil provided an impact statement which focussed on the Dowlais Visual Art Group which enables members to connect socially and overcome isolation through exploring art. After the group had its funding withdrawn, Dowlais Library offered the group a place to meet where staff provided support with several creative art projects and the Valleys Re-Told project. The Valleys Re-Told project is a collaboration between Amgueddfa Cymru and Cyfarthfa Museum. It involved exploring various painting and artworks with relevance to the local area, and culminated in the group holding an open day in Dowlais Library as part of Local History Month. Following the Valleys Re-Told project, the group have established their own People's Collection Wales page and posted a history of the group with pictures of members' work. Artwork produced by the group has been added to the collection at Amgueddfa Cymru where the group has contributed to a major exhibition. Having grown in confidence, the Dowlais Visual Art Group is now becoming a legally constituted group which can apply for funding on their own behalf.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Merthyr Tydfil's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	50%	15/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	52%	11/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	90%	16/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	56%	16/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	86%	16/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	47%	15/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	74%	15/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	Not provided	N/A	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	Not provided	N/A	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	Not provided	N/A	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	3	22/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	Not provided	N/A	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	57	22/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	13%	19/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	17%	9/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	161	22/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>19</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	3	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	50	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,524	18/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	60%	18/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	16%	4/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	2%	=16/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	22%	8/22	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)

During this reporting year, financial problems of the library service's lead organisation, WellbeingMerthyr, have affected library purchasing, impacting on the

<sup>19</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

number and range of books purchased. Lack of funding also meant that ageing IT equipment is overdue for replacement. Furthermore, following the reduction in staffing in September 2023, a significant number of trained and experienced staff left the library service. In these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Merthyr Tydfil is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library services for all Customer satisfaction (Q12) and the majority of Making a difference (Q11) measures. The service does perform close to the median for the health and well-being element (Q11c), reflecting its strength in supporting community well-being noted in the 2022-23 Annual Assessment Report. Merthyr Tydfil trialled an online customer survey during 2024 as a way of reaching non-library users. However, this had a disappointing response. The service therefore plans to re-run the survey in 2025, combining digital and traditional survey formats. The survey with children and young people will also be carried out in 2025.

Merthyr Tydfil meets the targets for Support for health and well-being (Q14) in full. No data are reported for Q15 and the service notes that the reduction in library staffing has adversely affected staff time in organising, promoting and running formal training sessions, meaning it is increasingly dependent on partners like Adult Education, ValleySteps and DeCymru to provide training.

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

All Merthyr Libraries organise and run regular reading groups, story times (in English and bilingually with English and Welsh) and Knit & Natter sessions. There are also creative writing and art groups in specific libraries. Mindfulness training and well-being sessions, and Welsh Language lessons are offered by partner organisations in some libraries. During school holidays, there are story and craft sessions and special events to promote the Summer Reading Challenge. However, the reduction in opening hours has led to a decrease in events from last year and has particularly affected school holiday sessions. Merthyr Libraries now has the lowest per capita attendance at events nationally, and the total event attendance is less than 2% of the figure reported in the previous reporting year. Nevertheless, the service does meet the target for Q16 by offering events/activities for users with special requirements at all branches.

Merthyr Libraries meets the target for Location of service points (Q17). However, the service has the lowest number of active borrowers per capita nationally, and this has decreased by 15% compared to 2022-23 (Q18). Adult, children's and electronic book issues are all within the bottom quartile in comparison to other authorities, although AV issues are above the median. Adult book issues have decreased by 53% compared to 2022-23, whilst children's issues have declined by 46%. Electronic issues have remained stable. Virtual visits are not reported as the service does not currently have a functioning website.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Merthyr Libraries no longer meets the target for Up-to-date and appropriate reading material (Q19) and is now in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure. The service reports that WellbeingMerthyr experienced severe financial pressures during 2023-24, and library management was instructed to suspend

purchasing at various times throughout the year. When purchasing was allowed, the instruction was to purchase only 'required' materials. The percentage of spending on electronic resources is above the median, but the percentage of materials spend on children's resources has declined from 20% to 13%.

Merthyr Libraries meets the target for percentage of the material budget spent on Welsh language resources (Q110). The service continues to make efforts to support Welsh language provision. Some Welsh speaking staff deliver activities, and the service has invested in a new Support Assistant role to enable the majority of activities to be delivered bilingually. The library service also has a close partnership with the local Welsh Centre. Nevertheless, Welsh language issues per capita continue to struggle; they are the lowest nationally and have declined by 7% since 2022-23.

### Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

As WellbeingMerthyr is in receivership, responsibility for the library service is being transferred back to the county borough council. The financial difficulties during the year led to a staff restructuring across the organisation, which meant that the library service lost several experienced and knowledgeable staff. This included one of the two qualified librarians, meaning the service currently lacks the qualified staff necessary within a library service to provide leadership and guidance to support frontline staff. Total staffing has decreased by almost one-third as library staff either retired or left the service for more secure employment. Merthyr Libraries therefore fails to meet targets for total staff per capita and qualified staff per capita (Q113). It is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for both measures. It is also in the bottom quartile for Operational expenditure per capita (Q114).

Merthyr Libraries does not meet the target for percentage of staff time spent on training (Q113). Because of uncertainty about changes in library staffing structure, the service reports that library staff have been unwilling to undertake training, and library managers have been concerned about training staff who might not be retained. The reduction in staffing also meant that it is extremely difficult to release staff for training and maintain adequate cover at service points.

Naturally, the reduction in available staff led to a reduction in library opening times. The 30% reduction in opening hours means that the target for opening times per capita is no longer met (Q116). Although the findings of the customer survey on new opening hours is not available for this return, it is likely that this level of reduction will impact negatively on customers. For example, now they are solo staffed, branch libraries close for a lunch break each day and only one library is now open on Saturday.

## 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. Merthyr Tydfil identified activity in relation to a number of objectives, including:

- **Offering welcoming and inclusive proactive outreach and public engagement activities** in economically deprived and socially excluded communities.
- **Contributing to developing a skilled and well-educated population** by providing access to lifelong learning through relevant books and online information. Providing free IT equipment, broadband and WIFI which supports education, small businesses and job-seeking.
- **Supporting individuals with health and well-being needs** by offering the Book Prescription Wales scheme and Reading Well and continuing to work with partners to direct library users to appropriate agencies.
- **Promoting and protecting Welsh Culture and language** through providing a good range of stock in Welsh and providing cultural events and activities.
- **Reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainability** through the borrowing of books.
- **Supporting communities to provide warm spaces** through the winter to help with the cost of staying warm.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Merthyr Tydfil notes that it has been a year of uncertainty and change. The dissolution of the Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust has resulted in the library service being returned to administration by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough. As a result, the service has faced adverse reductions in service levels and performance. The service reports that 'a level of stability has been achieved' in this uncertain environment. It is planning to review some of the changes made during 2023-24 and consider ways to minimise the adverse impacts on the communities it serves while looking at how to improve access to services. The future focus will be around IT literacy and access and work in the strategic direction set through WPLS and its own local priorities, however very little detail has been provided about the future direction of the service, which is concerning.

## Conclusion

The situation in Merthyr Tydfil Libraries is a source of serious concern. The importance of the library service to local communities and the value of the support library staff offer to their customers have been noted, and praised, in previous years. However, the reduction in funding this year has inevitably had severe impacts on staffing, opening hours and resource provision. The fact that the service only partially meets Core Entitlements 2 and 5 is particularly concerning. Staff are undoubtedly doing their best in a challenging situation, but a 30% reduction in staffing and opening hours, along with a drastic cut in the number of resources purchased per capita, will inevitably result a deterioration of the service offered to local communities. Little detail is provided in the return about plans for the future direction of the service. However, if customer satisfaction and support for the library service decline as a result of these cuts, it may take many years to recover.

# Monmouthshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Monmouthshire's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Monmouthshire 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, Monmouthshire is achieving 2 in full. Five targets were not met.

There are serious concerns about Monmouthshire Libraries. The impacts of budget cuts on staffing and resources are becoming increasingly acute. Although the service does continue to meet 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements, it is only meeting two of the QIs with targets and there are challenges around the fundamental aspects of the library service, namely, staffing, availability of service points and the provision of materials. Monmouthshire does perform well in some areas, in particular, in terms of issues and active borrowers, and staff are undoubtedly doing their best in challenging circumstances. However, if library staff do not have access to training or up-to-date resources for customers, they will not be able to offer a high-quality service.

- The continued reduction of the acquisitions budget is a serious concern. This halved in 2023-24, and Monmouthshire's per capita book budget is the lowest nationally (Q19)
- The service does not meet the target for opening hours per capita and is below the median for this measure (Q16).
- The decrease in staffing, and the continuing lack of qualified staff are concerning, especially as Monmouthshire does not meet the targets for these measures, or for opening hours per capita (QIs13 & 16).
- Monmouthshire has the lowest spend on Welsh language materials as a percentage of the overall budget nationally and the total budget is less than one-fifth of that for 2022-23. (Q10).
- Monmouthshire is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for active borrowers per capita and the number of active borrowers has risen by 5% compared to the previous year (Q18).
- The service is also in the top quartile for electronic issues, which have increased by 53% compared to 2022-23 (Q18).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Monmouthshire 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 online strategy/action plan is for 2019-22. It does not cover the current period and does not have measures of success for the relevant time period.
- 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, Monmouthshire is achieving 2 in full. Five targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
- QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material Acquisitions per capita, **not met ●**
- QI 10 Welsh Language Resources  
% of material budget spent on Welsh, **not met ●**
- QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications, **not met ●**
  - i) Staff per capita, **not met**
  - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **not met**
  - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **not met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **not met**
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	82%	=13/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	83%	=12/16	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:	92%	14/16	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. Monmouthshire provided a statement relating to its Lend-A-Laptop scheme, a partnership between Community Education and the Strategic Library Service, which started in September 2023 and officially launched in April 2024. The scheme allows library members to borrow a laptop with the same ease as borrowing a book. This seeks to address digital poverty and inequality in the county, cope with increased demand for remote learning tools and enhance community services. Fifty Chromebooks have been integrated into the library catalogue and are available at five community hubs and a community library for library members to borrow. Initial anecdotal feedback has been positive with an example provided of a library member who was grateful for the ability to update their CV and undertake a job search.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Monmouthshire's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	53%	14/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	46%	14/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=8/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	87%	14/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=9/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	70%	13/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	96%	12/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.3	10/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	2	=18/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	Not provided	N/A	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	191	14/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	400	15/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	142	5/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	17%	=10/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	24%	5/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	618	13/22	161	631.5	2,725

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications <sup>20</sup>					
(v) a) total volunteers	21	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	365	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,4041	21/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	70%	=7/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	6%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	10%	3/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	14%	14/22	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)

Although the number of formal training attendances has more than doubled compared to 2022-23, Monmouthshire is below the median for this measure (QI5). No data are available for informal support. With more recent data from other services to compare to this year, Monmouthshire is below the median for all Customer satisfaction (QI2) measures. One of the advantages of offering a range of services from Community Hubs is that Monmouthshire Libraries are visited by residents who may not regularly use library services. However, this does mean there is a caveat on the QI1 and QI2 results, in that, it is possible that this wider customer base may have different expectations or respond in slightly different ways to a more traditional library user demographic.

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Monmouthshire is below the median for event attendance per capita, but attendances are rising, being up 17% compared to 2022-23 (QI6). For children, events include Baby Rhyme Times; story times for the under-fives; and stories and craft sessions during the school holidays. For adults, activities include reading groups; family history; Shared Reading; and Knit and Natter groups. In collaboration with Friends groups, library branches organise activities such as local author readings, book launches, quiz nights, choral evenings and festive celebrations.

Monmouthshire does not meet the target for Location of service points (QI7). The service notes changes in local demographics, for example an ageing population profile, which will impact on service delivery. In this context, it is exploring various initiatives to reach the target, including potential expansion of Home Delivery routes and enhanced partnerships with community organisations.

<sup>20</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

Monmouthshire is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for active borrowers per capita and the number of active borrowers has risen by 5% compared to the previous year (Q18). The service is also in the top quartile for electronic issues, which have increased by 53% compared to 2022-23. To add to electronic resource provision, Monmouthshire Libraries introduced electronic newspapers in October 2023. Although adult book issues have decreased by 11%, and children's issues have decreased by 8% compared to 2022-23, Monmouthshire remains above the median for both measures. Monmouthshire is below the median for virtual visits per capita, but website visits have increased by 10% compared to 2022-23.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

In the 2023-24 budget round, the acquisitions budget was halved to £45,000. This is a serious concern, coming in addition to the 10% reduction reported last year. Monmouthshire does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita and is the lowest ranked Welsh library authority for this measure (Q19). Monmouthshire has the lowest per capita book budget (overall and for under 16s) nationally. Monmouthshire also does not meet the target for spending on Welsh language resources. It has the lowest spend on Welsh language materials as a percentage of the overall budget nationally and the total budget is less than one-fifth of that for 2022-23 (Q110). As the number of Welsh speakers in Monmouthshire is not large, the library focuses on resources for Welsh learners. Welsh classes are held in some service points and the service works with Cymraeg i Blant to offer yoga, Story & Rhyme, baby massage sessions and Welsh Baby Rhyme Times. The service is below the median for Welsh language issues per capita, although these have risen by 5% compared to 2022-23.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 & 16)

The fact that Monmouthshire does not meet any elements of the Staffing levels and qualifications target is concerning (Q113). Service points experienced a notable reduction in staffing due to voluntary redundancies. Entering 2023-24, the service lost the equivalent of 3 FTE employees<sup>21</sup>. It is below the median of Welsh library authorities for qualified staff per capita and is in the bottom quartile for total staff per capita. Monmouthshire has the lowest percentage of staff time devoted to training nationally and staff training hours have more than halved compared to the previous year. The service makes use of volunteers, but due to staffing and budgetary pressures, it is changing its approach to collaborate with Monmouthshire's Volunteering Co-ordinator to recruit volunteers. Although the number of volunteers has decreased compared to 2022-23, it is important that, as [CILIP's policy](#) states, volunteers are not used to replace core functions of paid staff in the face of staffing challenges. Monmouthshire is in the bottom quartile nationally for per capita expenditure (Q114). The service does not meet the target for opening hours per capita and is below the median for this measure (Q116).

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that previously Monmouthshire has attempted to estimate how much time hub staff spent supporting the library service. However, since the cuts, they have opted to include all staff within the calculation as their time is spent supporting not only the library function, but also customer support via Hub and Community Education services.

## 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.

Monmouthshire identified five key areas in which the range of programmes and initiatives it delivers align with the strategic goals and priorities set by the Welsh Government.

- **Promoting lifelong learning and skills development** e.g. providing free access to a variety of learning resources and programmes and hosting regular workshops in partnership with Community Education.
- **Supporting health and well-being** e.g. providing access to health information, support groups, and wellness activities; partnering with local health organisations to run awareness campaigns and health check-up events; and providing an inclusive, welcoming and safe environment.
- **Enhancing social inclusion and community cohesion** e.g. offering spaces for people from diverse backgrounds to come together, hosting cultural events, language classes, and intergenerational programs and offering ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and support for refugees and asylum seekers.
- **Promoting digital inclusion and innovation** e.g. free internet access, computer usage, and digital skills training.
- **Preserving cultural heritage and promoting the Welsh language** e.g. access to collections of Welsh literature, historical archives, and genealogy resources, offering bilingual story times for children and working closely with schools.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Monmouthshire notes that its strategic direction emphasises measured growth in membership and issue figures which reflects a commitment to increasing engagement and access to resources. The service reports being hopeful for future investment to enhance services and facilities, but does not provide details of how this will be achieved. Future plans mentioned include: expanding digital services to a broader audience; developing targeted programmes for diverse groups, and supporting eco-friendly initiatives. Despite these ambitions, operating within the context of budget cuts and staffing levels, raises concerns about what the service will be able to achieve going forward.

## Conclusion

There are serious concerns about Monmouthshire Libraries. The impacts of budget cuts on staffing and resources are becoming increasingly acute. Although the service does continue to meet 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements, it is only meeting two of the QIs with targets and there are challenges around the fundamental aspects of the library service, namely, staffing, availability of service points and the provision of materials. Monmouthshire does perform well in some areas, in particular, in terms of issues and active borrowers, and staff are undoubtedly doing their best in challenging circumstances. However, if library staff do not have access to training or up-to-date resources for customers, they will not be able to offer a high-quality service.

# Neath Port Talbot Annual Assessment Report

## 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Neath Port Talbot's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

### Executive summary

Neath Port Talbot meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

Neath Port Talbot performs well in many areas. The library service is clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate it highly. Attendances at events, training and informal support are all well above the median for Welsh library authorities. The service offers a wide range of activities, with a high uptake, many in partnership with other organisations. 2023-24 has seen increased expenditure on Welsh language materials, and loans of Welsh language resources have risen notably. It is also positive that the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased this year. However, concerns about level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours remain, in particular, the decrease in the acquisitions rate and the reduction in qualified staff per capita this year.

- Neath Port Talbot is above the median of Welsh library authorities in relation to Making a difference (Q11) and Customer satisfaction (Q12); it performs particularly well for customer care; percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills; and rating by users aged 16 and under.
- Formal training and informal support attendance per capita continue to be above the national median and have increased since 2022-23 (Q15).
- Per capita event attendance continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and has increased by 12% compared to 2022-23 (Q16).
- Neath Port Talbot is above the national median for active borrowers per capita, and the number has increased by 18% since the previous year (Q18).
- The proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased notably since 2022-23 and the service is now above the median for Welsh library authorities (Q13).



## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Neath Port Talbot reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

### Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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, **met**
  
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

## 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 Q1 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
Q1 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	97%	3/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	=5/16	31%	89.5%	96%
Q1 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending:	96%	11/16	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. Neath Port Talbot provided an impact statement focussing on the way the library supported a man who was reclusive and had difficulties making friends and socialising. He was introduced to the library through a local men’s mental health group and has since become a frequent library user and a regular part of the library community. His engagement with the library has enabled him to make new friends and become actively involved with library projects which support the local community. He has also become a regular reader. His engagement with the library has supported his mental and social well-being and helped him benefit and contribute to the community.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Neath Port Talbot’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	90%	=1/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	84%	2/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	98%	=6/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	96%	2/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	90%	=3/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.7	=1/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	41	4/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	449	1/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	400	4/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	221	18/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	133	9/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	14%	18/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	5%	21/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	579	16/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>22</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	15	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	180	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£12,893	9/22	£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	1%	=19/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	28%	4/22	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)

Neath Port Talbot performs well in relation to Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2); it is above the median of Welsh library authorities for all measures and is equal highest nationally for customer care; percentage of adults

<sup>22</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills; and rating by users aged 16 and under. Neath Port Talbot meets the target for Health and well-being (Q14); the service works with a number of agencies including Social Services and Macmillan and has taken part in the Alive and Kicking 'Borrow a Football' scheme promoting a healthy lifestyle to children. Formal training attendances have risen by 5% compared to 2022-23 and continue to be above the national median. Informal support attendances are up by 8% and are the highest per capita nationally (Q15).

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Per capita event attendance continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and has increased by 12% compared to 2022-23 as the service continues to recover from the pandemic (Q16). Neath Port Talbot offers a wide range of events including baby yoga; baby massage; Lego clubs; art workshops; craft clubs; adult colouring; homework clubs; Workways employment group; Age Connect IT; author events; knitting and crochet; archaeology and history groups; IT Help; writers' groups; language courses; reading groups; film shows; choir events; and storytelling. In addition, the service provides events at other locations such as schools, playgroups and community groups. Events for users with particular needs include Sightlife for the visually impaired; coffee mornings for Ukrainian refugees; and Chai and Chat.

Neath Port Talbot is above the national median for active borrowers per capita, and the number of borrowers has increased by 18% since the previous year (Q18). However, only 18% of library members are active borrowers. The number of virtual visits is below the median for Welsh library authorities. However, this has increased by 50% compared to 2022-23. In addition, the service reports that the total number of website visits recorded does not include visits via the portal. Neath Port Talbot is below the median for both adult and children's issues. However, whilst adult issues have declined by 21% compared to 2022-23, children's issues have increased by 9%. The service is above the median for electronic issues per capita and electronic issues have risen by 16% compared to the previous year.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita (Q19) and the number of items acquired has decreased this year as the book budget was underspent by 12%. The service decided not to renew its subscription to PressReader for 2024 following the introduction of newspapers on Borrowbox. Neath Port Talbot is below the median for the percentage of the budget allocated to both children's and electronic resources. The children's book budget was underspent by 26% compared to 2022-23 and the authority is in the bottom quartile nationally for spending per capita on under 16s' resources.

The proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources has increased compared to 2022-23 (Q10) and Neath Port Talbot has an established relationship with a local supplier to improve its Welsh language book offer. Although per capita Welsh language issues are below the national median, issues have increased by

44% since the previous year. The service notes that this is mainly as a result of an increase in the number of children's loans. The library service runs Welsh language activities, including reading groups and Sesiwn Ganu events - Welsh language song and rhyme sessions in partnership with Menter Iaith.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the targets for total staff or qualified staff per capita, although it is around the national median for both (Q113). The total number of FTE staff increased slightly as a result of two new temporary posts, filling gaps that had been left since 2020. However, staff changes due to retirement mean that the total number of staff holding recognised qualifications has decreased. It is encouraging the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased notably since 2022-23 and the service is now above the median for Welsh library authorities. Total revenue expenditure decreased slightly in 2023-24 as there were no significant grants (Q114). Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for opening hours per capita (Q116). However, it is noted that the opening hours for community-managed libraries are not included in the return.

## 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. Neath Port Talbot takes its lead from Neath Port Talbot's Corporate Plan and the goals stated in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Wales Programme for Government. A range of examples of how the service contribute to these goals were provided and include partnering with health organisations to support physical and mental well-being; establishing the Reading Well for Teens collection; delivering formal training sessions to aid job seeking and skills improvement; delivering a programme of adult learning activities; working with schools to deliver sessions for parents wishing to support their children's learning; increasing spend on Welsh books and developing a programme of events in the Welsh language.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Neath Port Talbot notes that it is looking forward post pandemic and is aiming to deliver to a new five-year library strategy in 2024-25. The service reports that central to the strategy will be embedding new objectives and actions that focus on sustainability; inclusivity and diversity; well-being; and ensuring that libraries are seen as safe, welcoming places for all. The service intends to develop its staff training programme to meet the needs of the new strategy. 2024-25 will also see the service focussing on the implementation of the new library management system, which will be at the forefront of its short-term planning.

## Conclusion

Neath Port Talbot performs well in many areas. The library service is clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate it highly. Attendances at events, training and informal support are all well above the median for Welsh library authorities. The service offers a wide range of activities, with a high uptake, many in partnership with other organisations. 2023-24 has seen increased expenditure on Welsh language materials, and loans of Welsh language resources have risen notably. The service continues to invest in Welsh language resources. It is also positive that the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased this year. However, concerns about level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours remain, in particular the decrease in the acquisitions rate and the reduction in qualified staff per capita this year.

# Newport Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Newport's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Newport meets 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. It does not meet 1 Core Entitlement. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Newport is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

Newport performs well in some areas, in particular. formal training provision and virtual visits. The service appears to be recovering from the Covid pandemic as issues and events attendances are rising. Customers clearly value the library service and it is close to, or above, the median of Welsh library authorities for the majority of Making a difference and Customer satisfaction measures. It is also positive that staff training provision has increased. However, as was stated last year, staffing levels and opening hours at Newport Libraries are a concern. The fact that staffing levels and opening hours have both continued to decline this year, and the service reports that opening hours are likely to reduce further still, is worrying. In light of the challenging future facing Newport Libraries, the fact that the service does not have a current strategy or action plan is concerning. In addition, levels of engagement, whilst increasing, remain low in comparison to national averages; the service should monitor its community-led libraries approach to determine whether this helps to increase event attendance, active borrower and issue figures.

- The service continues to be above the median for Welsh library authorities for formal training attendances per capita, and the number of attendances recorded has increased by 9% compares to 2022-23 (Q15).
- Newport is, again, above the national median for virtual visits, which have increased by 15% compared to 2022-23 (Q18).
- Time allocated for staff training has improved considerably in comparison to the previous year, and Newport now meets this target (Q113)
- Acquisitions per capita have increased compared to 2022-23, although Newport still falls short of this target (Q19).
- Total staff, qualified staff and opening hours per capita are amongst the lowest nationally and have all declined this year; the service does not meet these targets (Q1s13 &16).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Newport reported meeting 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and not meeting the remaining 1 Core Entitlement through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment. CE 12 was not met as the service reports it has been unable to get the library strategy created.

### Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Newport is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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, **met**
  
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**



## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	93%	8/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	=5/16	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	N/A	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. Newport provided an impact statement which referred to support the library provided for a young girl and her family who had moved to Newport from Latvia prior to the COVID lockdown. Living beyond the catchment area for the local Flying Start nurseries, the Story Club at Bettws library provided a valuable opportunity for the girl and her siblings to interact and socialise with other children their own age. Attendance at the Story Club has helped the girl develop social skills as well as literacy, numeracy and motor skills. Engagement with the library service has also led to the family being signposted to other services, provided by partners such as the Community Development team and Flying Start. The family are now regular users of the Bettws library and the young girl’s confidence has grown and she is well prepared to start school nursery in September.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Newport’s 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	80%	4/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	74%	5/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=8/16	90%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	94%	=4/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=9/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	82%	=11/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=9/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.5	=5/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
QI 5 User support					
a) attendances per capita	31	=6/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	55	14/18	12	137	449
QI 6 Attendances at events per capita	86	20/22	3	224.5	620
QI 8 Library use					
b) virtual visits per capita	832	10/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	76	20/22	57	123	233
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material					
b) % material budget children's resources	18%	=8/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	13%	13/22	4%	15.5%	49%
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	399	21/22	161	631.5	2,725
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications <sup>23</sup>					
(v) a) total volunteers	2	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	72	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£6,046	22/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	65%	=13/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	20%	3/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	9%	=4/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	6%	19/22	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)

Newport is close to or above the median for all for Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), the only exception being the rating for IT facilities. The service is implementing a Community-led Libraries philosophy, which it describes as

<sup>23</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

library staff engaging “with marginalised communities to inform service provision” to ensure that “programmes, services and collections are designed with the service user at their heart”. Newport meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4) and in 2023-24, reports a number of new partnerships, including the Library Manager joining the Dementia Friendly Network in Newport and the Families Working Group. The service continues to be above the median for Welsh library authorities for formal training attendances per capita, and the number of attendances recorded has increased by 9% compared to 2022-23 (QI5). As was the case last year, the majority of formal user training sessions in 2023-24 were focussed on work with children, but they also included the Multiply programme. Informal training sessions continue to be below the national median and the numbers reported have changed little compared to the previous year.

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Newport remains in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita, although the number of attendances reported has risen by 8% compared to 2022-23 (QI6). Events in 2023-24 have included a joint session with the UK & Welsh Children's Laureates, Drag Queen Storytime, increased resources for reading groups, LGBTQ+ youth group, adults with dementia, and adults with additional learning needs.

Newport is, again, above the national median for virtual visits, which have increased by 15% compared to 2022-23 (QI8). Although the service is in the bottom quartile for active borrowers per capita, the number has increased by 78% compared to the previous year. Whilst Newport remains below the national median for borrowing of all types of resources, issues have increased compared to 2022-23, and more rapidly than the national average, for all categories: adult book issues are up by 25%, children's issues by 21%, AV issues by 30%, and electronic issues by 61% following increased investment in Borrowbox. The service perceives a change in the way that customers are accessing library collections, with more demand for quick access to physical materials through targeted displays and through reserving items online. More effective weeding of the collections is also credited with increasing interest in the stock.

### Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Acquisitions per capita have increased compared to 2022-23, but Newport still falls short of this target (QI9). Newport has increased expenditure on digital resources and the proportion of the budget allocated to this is close to the median for Welsh library authorities. Newport meets the target for proportion of spend allocated to Welsh language resources (QI10). Over 50% of the Welsh language budget is allocated to junior stock as this has greater use and the range of titles available is more in line with Newport customers' requirements. Although per capita Welsh language issues are still below the national median, they have increased by 21% compared to 2022-23.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Total and qualified staff per capita have both declined this year and Newport does not meet the target for either measure (Q113). The service has the lowest figure for total staff per capita amongst Welsh library authorities. A number of staffing changes were implemented this year, partly in response to budgetary pressures but also to re-align the structure to be more responsive to changing customer needs. Three vacant professional posts were deleted, and a more senior Library Manager role established. This will continue in 2024-25 with the recruitment of a senior librarian into the newly created Community Librarian role. Time allocated for staff training has improved considerably in comparison to the previous year, and Newport now meets this target. In 2024, Newport delivered the first annual 'All Staff' training in which all staff came together to build on and enhance their core training. The service has plans to expand its use of volunteers after this was reduced during the Covid pandemic; it is in the process of developing and implementing programmes that will rely on volunteers. In doing so, it will be essential to ensure the volunteers are used in line with [CILIP guidance](#).

Newport has the lowest per capita revenue spend of Welsh library authorities; in fact, the figure is more than £2,000 per capita less than the next lowest authority<sup>24</sup> (Q114). Total revenue expenditure has decreased by 9% compared to 2022-23. The service does not meet the target for opening hours per capita and is in the bottom quartile for this measure (Q116). During 2023-24, opening hours were reduced at two sites and staffing adjusted accordingly due to budgetary constraints. Pillgwenlly library's hours of operation were reduced to nine hours per week and Malpas library to 20. There is a further review of library opening hours during 2024-25, which, it is reported, will likely reduce hours further.

## 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 following provides some examples of activity supporting government priorities under high level themes identified by Newport.

- **Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people** e.g. providing a Home Delivery Service and Reading Friends programme to foster connection and inclusion, engaging with marginalised communities to inform service provision, developing new partnerships to improve access to library services and participating in national initiatives such as Reading Well.
- **Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise** e.g. ensuring support for literacy learners of all ages and supporting schools' local history research projects.
- **Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms** e.g. ensuring the needs of LGBTQ+ customers are met, working with the

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<sup>24</sup> Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population

Senior Equalities and Diversities Officer and BAME communities to ensure contributions to Newport's history are celebrated and refining the World language collections to ensure the appropriate levels of stock across the branch network.

- **Push forward towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive** e.g. meeting targets for spend on Welsh language materials with a focus on supplying suitable stock for learners and younger children.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Newport notes that in response to ongoing budgetary pressures in 2024-25 the number of branch libraries will be reduced from nine to seven. The service reports that decisions on implementation have been driven by changing user habits at each of the impacted locations. For example, combining St Julian's and Malpas libraries into one, at Malpas Court, was considered to allow better integration with Adult Community Learning, partnership with the Social Enterprise Café, and the opportunity to create an innovative and meaningful co-located service for an area of social deprivation. The service aims to appoint a Community-led Librarian as well as increasing investment in digital services and a roll out of Reader Development principles. It is hoped that this will increase membership and engagement and contribute to meeting the needs of the community.

## Conclusion

Newport performs well in some areas, in particular, formal training provision and virtual visits. The service appears to be recovering from the Covid pandemic as issues and events attendances are rising. Customers clearly value the library service and it is close to, or above, the median of Welsh library authorities for the majority of Making a difference and Customer satisfaction measures. It is also positive that staff training provision has increased. However, as was stated last year, staffing levels and opening hours at Newport Libraries are a concern. The fact that staffing levels and opening hours have both continued to decline this year, and the service reports that opening hours are likely to reduce further still, is worrying. In light of the challenging future facing Newport Libraries, the fact that the service does not have a current strategy or action plan is concerning. In addition, levels of engagement, whilst increasing, remain low in comparison to national averages; the service should monitor its community-led libraries approach to determine whether this helps to increase event attendance, active borrower and issue figures.

# Pembrokeshire Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Pembrokeshire's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Pembrokeshire meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Pembrokeshire is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The target for the remaining QI is not met.

Pembrokeshire libraries are appreciated by their customers, who feel that the service makes a difference to their lives. Although Pembrokeshire is below the median for event attendance per capita, this is increasing and the service offers a wide range of activities. It is also positive that Pembrokeshire now meets the target to offer activities for users with special requirements (QI6). Pembrokeshire is aware that the recording of informal support activities is an area for improvement and hopes to organise staff training on this during 2024. Electronic issues are rising rapidly and the service may well need to increase the proportion of the budget allocated to electronic resources in the future. This will, naturally, be challenging given that Pembrokeshire does not currently meet the acquisitions target and has needed to use reserve funds for resource purchasing this year.

- Pembrokeshire performs well with regard to Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), being around or above the median for all measures.
- The number of attendances at library events has increased by 40% compared to 2022-23 (QI6).
- The number of electronic issues has increased by 35% compared to the previous year (QI8).
- Pembrokeshire meets the target for Welsh language acquisitions per capita, and issues per capita Welsh speaker have risen by 7% compared to 2022-23 (QI10).

## Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Pembrokeshire reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Pembrokeshire is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. The target for the remaining QI is not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	98%	2/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	=5/16	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:	100%	=1/16	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. Pembrokeshire provided an impact statement focussed on the value of school class visits to Milford Haven library. Two accounts of recent visits were provided. The visits helped promote the library service and gain new members, as well as reigniting interest within those who had not visited for a while. The visits also provided an opportunity to engage with teachers, and examples were provided of how library staff helped visiting teaching staff, for example, by gathering books on a specific cross-curricular topic. The class visits enhanced links with schools and resulted in more ways to promote the library to children, some of whom go on to introduce other family members to the library. Feedback from children, parents and teaching staff has been reported as overwhelmingly positive. One parent commented that daughter, *“said her trip to the library was so much fun! She liked being read to and all the books there.”* A Learning Support Assistant commented *“I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you for being so welcoming and giving our children such a lovely experience and showing them what a wonderful, free resource that we have on our doorstep. I hope that the children continue to come back year on year with their families and eventually on their own.”*

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Pembrokeshire’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	75%	6/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	68%	8/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	=1/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	=9/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=9/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	87%	=7/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.7	=1/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	1	=20/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	94	11/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>	115	18/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	193	20/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	74	21/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	15%	=16/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	6%	20/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>	428	19/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>25</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	49	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	2,175	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£12,539	11/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	59%	=19/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	7%	19/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	31%	=2/22	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)

Pembrokeshire performs well with regard to Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2), being around or above the median for all measures. However, attendance at formal training sessions is in the bottom quartile for Welsh library

<sup>25</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

authorities and has declined by 72% compared to the previous year (Q15). Nevertheless, 100% of attendees who were surveyed said they had achieved their purpose in attending. Sessions have included Digital Drop-in, library tours, Gadget Drop-in and an IT session for the Macular Society. Staffing capacity means that the library service relies on third parties coming in to deliver the training, so has limited control over the number of sessions offered. Informal support per capita is also below the national median and this has also decreased year-on-year, being down by 27%.

Four Book Clubs meet in libraries and the service continues to support approximately 39 reading groups that meet elsewhere in the community. Libraries work in partnership with other organisations to provide health information such as NHS Speech & Language Therapy Unit, MIND, various counselling services, the Macular Society, Samaritans, Dyfed Drug & Alcohol Service, West Wales Integrated Autism Service and Versus Arthritis. All libraries are working towards dementia-friendly status and continue to support unpaid carers as part of the Investors in Carers Silver Award (Q14).

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

The number of attendances at library events has increased by 40% compared to 2022-23, although Pembrokeshire it still below the median of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q16). Examples of events and activities include Baby Rhyme Time, craft sessions, Lego clubs, Knit & Natter groups, Welsh conversation groups, National Library of Wales workshops, Poet Laureate visit, author talks and class visits. In addition, Pembrokeshire reports 766 attendances at support sessions provided by other groups in the library space, for example, counselling sessions. It is also positive that the service now meets the target for activities for users with special requirements (Q16). Examples include Reading Dog sessions for children with additional learning needs; Family Information Service craft event for carers; Lego club for adults with additional learning needs; and sensory library toy session for children and adults with additional learning needs.

Pembrokeshire is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits per capita, and the number of visits to the website has decreased by 10% compared to 2022-23 (Q18). However, the service reports that its Facebook follower numbers have increased by 12%. The number of active borrowers has risen slightly (up 5%) compared to the previous year, but Pembrokeshire remains in the bottom quartile for this measure. Adult and children's issues have changed little compared to the previous year. However, the number of electronic issues has increased by 35%. Included in this figure are electronic magazine loans, which the service reports that have increased considerably, by 62%.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Although the number of acquisitions per capita has increased slightly this year, Pembrokeshire does not meet the target for acquisitions (Q19). It is in the bottom quartile nationally for the per capita book budget. The service reports that around 35% of resource expenditure came from the authority's book fund reserve, which is

not sustainable over the medium to long-term. Pembrokeshire meets the target for Welsh language acquisitions per capita, and issues per capita Welsh speaker have risen by 7% compared to 2022-23 (Q10). The service works in partnership with Menter Iaith Sir Benfro and Cymraeg i Blant to provide Welsh language activities for both adults and children. There are four Welsh reading groups, and Welsh conversation groups meet in four libraries.

### Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Pembrokeshire does not meet the targets for total staff or qualified staff per capita, although it is above the national median for both measures (Q13). There has been a slight decline in the number of FTE due to staff members reducing their hours; leaving and not being fully replaced; and a reduction of paid staff hours as a branch became Community Managed. Although the proportion of staff time allocated for training has increased compared to 2022-23, Pembrokeshire falls slightly short of the revised target. The service reports that the training budget has been reduced and it does not have the capacity to release staff to undertake some courses. The number of volunteer hours reported has increased by 50% compared to the previous year; this is largely as a result of the establishment of a new group at Saundersfoot Library, which has become Community Managed. Pembrokeshire is close to the median for revenue expenditure per capita (Q14).

Pembrokeshire meets the target for staffed opening hours per capita; in addition, it has the greatest number of unstaffed hours per capita reported nationally (Q16). Pembrokeshire currently has only one library with unstaffed opening hours (Neyland Library), but Narberth Community Library is undergoing a relocation and will also have Open+ access when it opens later in 2024.

## 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.

Pembrokeshire highlight a range of strategy areas which align with Welsh Government priorities particularly in relation to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014) and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015).

- **A prosperous Wales** Supporting the efficient use of resources through encouraging book borrowing, providing free access to IT and electronic resources, offering community space, and supporting recycling. Through funding from the MALD Capital Transformation Grant Scheme libraries at Pembroke and Narberth will be relocated to new buildings as a more central part of the local community and with more environmentally friendly furniture and equipment. Three libraries have a specific role in providing tourist information and the service works closely with both the National Library of Wales and the Fishguard Invasion Centre Trust, which helps to promote tourism.
- **A healthier Wales** Supporting the prevention agenda, by working in partnership to help deliver national, regional and local priorities, such as the

'Dementia Action Plan for Wales'. Health and well-being book stock is available in all libraries. 'Life Hub' rooms are accessible for free in some libraries.

- **A more equal Wales** Working with the Hywel Dda University Health Board, to acquire the Silver Level for 'Investors in Carers', which promotes best practice in identifying and supporting unpaid carers of all ages, encouraging a love of reading in children by participating in national schemes, hosting Craft and Lego sessions and supporting class visits.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** Providing a Mobile Library service and Library at Home service which delivers to vulnerable and isolated people, providing warm, safe and inclusive spaces and hosting regular group activities.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** Providing bilingual signage and resources in both languages, funding Welsh lessons for new staff.
- **People** Providing mandatory safeguarding training for all staff and providing opportunities for volunteering within the library service.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Pembrokeshire refers to the challenge of maintaining a 'balanced budget' and reducing costs whilst minimising the impact on services to customers. One response to this has been to explore the potential sharing of spaces for services to physically co-exist. The service has also been engaged in an extensive multi stakeholder Library Needs Assessment to understand future customer needs and gather ideas on how to achieve budget reductions. In partnership with Social Care's Supported Employment unit, a pilot is being undertaken to employ people with a range of disabilities in the library service. It is hoped that this will contribute to supporting people who face barriers to employment whilst providing grant support to reduce staffing costs. The final report of the Library Needs Assessment, produced in September, will feed into the budget setting and savings process. In the autumn, a public consultation exercise will be undertaken to put forward the budget saving options identified by the Library Needs Assessment, with information from both informing the development of a new Library Strategy. A new library at Narberth is due to open soon and Pembroke is due to relocate in 2026.

## Conclusion

Pembrokeshire libraries are appreciated by their customers, who feel that the service makes a difference to their lives. Although Pembrokeshire is below the median for event attendance per capita, this is increasing and the service offers a wide range of activities. It is also positive that Pembrokeshire now meets the target to offer activities for users with special requirements (QI6). Pembrokeshire is aware that the recording of informal support activities is an area for improvement and hopes to organise staff training on this during 2024. Electronic issues are rising rapidly and the service may well need to increase the proportion of the budget allocated to electronic resources in the future. This will, naturally, be challenging given that Pembrokeshire does not currently meet the acquisitions target and has needed to use reserve funds for resource purchasing this year.

# Powys Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Powys's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Powys reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part 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, Powys is achieving 3 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 3 quality indicators with targets were not met.

Powys continues to perform well in a number of areas, including health and well-being support; formal training attendance; virtual visits; and active borrowers. There is evidence that the service is continuing to recover following the Covid pandemic as attendance figures are rising. Powys has carried out a customer survey this year, ensuring it now meets Core Entitlement 11. However, performance against QIs with targets is a concern, especially the fact that QI6 and QI9 targets, which were met in 2022-23, are no longer being met. Staffing issues at one location impacted on the service's ability to offer events and activities for users with special requirements, although these were available at remaining 13 locations and significant reductions to the book budget mean Powys no longer meets the target for acquisitions per capita. In addition, whilst the difficulties Powys experiences meeting the location of services target due to low population density are acknowledged, fewer than half of Powys households are now within the specified distance of a library service or mobile stop.

- Powys performs very well with regard to customer care; adults who think the library has made a difference to their lives; and young people who think the library helps them to learn (QIs1&2).
- Formal user training attendances have increased more than sevenfold compared to 2022-23 and Powys is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (QI5).
- The percentage of the population within the specified distance of a library service or mobile stop has decreased compared to 2022-23 (QI7).
- The number of active borrowers is above the median and has increased by 6% compared to 2022-23. Adult, children's and electronic issues have all increased compared to 2022-23, rising by 13%, 11% and 18% respectively (QI8).

- Following reductions to the book budget, Powys does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita and is in the bottom quartile of library authorities nationally for this measure (Q19).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Powys reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and meeting the remaining 2 Core Entitlements in part 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 will 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: Partially met  
Independent Assessor: **Partially met** ■  
This is due to the fact that that there is a charge for items outside the authority, but within Wales.
- 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: Partially met  
Independent Assessor: **Fully met** ▲  
The service conducted adult and children's surveys in March 2024. Although there had been a few years' gap since the previous surveys, Powys has now taken measures to meet this Core Entitlement.
- 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: **Fully met** ▲



### 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, Powys is achieving 3 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 3 quality indicators with targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
- QI 7 Location of service points, **not met ●**
- QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material  
Acquisitions per capita, **not met ●**
- 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 provided**
  - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **not met**
  - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **not provided**
- 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	99%	1/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	95%	=2/16	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	N/A	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. Powys provided an impact statement which referred to the value that one learner gained from engaging with the Number Up project within the library service. Number Up is a Multiply Shared Prosperity Levelling Up funded project that seeks to grow numeracy confidence in parents and carers so they can support their children's learning, improve their own employment opportunities and better manage household finances. The learner wanted to overcome their maths anxiety, whilst facing chronic illness, to achieve their dream of starting a business. They valued the flexible online nature of the course and reported that it had helped with their maths anxiety and boosted their confidence. They achieved an Essential Skills qualification and have started their own business. The confidence gained through Number Up has enabled them to pursue other learning opportunities with university providers that will continue to support the growth of their business.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Powys's 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	70%	=8/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	61%	10/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=8/16	90%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	86%	15/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	86%	=9/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	87%	14/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.4	=8/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
QI 5 User support					
a) attendances per capita	138	2/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	45	16/18	12	137	449
QI 6 Attendances at events per capita	163	16/22	3	224.5	620
QI 8 Library use					
b) virtual visits per capita	1,017	5/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	139	8/22	57	123	233
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material					
b) % material budget children's resources	17%	=10/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	8%	=16/22	4%	15.5%	49%
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	582	15/22	161	631.5	2,725
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications <sup>26</sup>					
(v) a) total volunteers	358	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	6068.25	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,068	19/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	67%	=11/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	10%	12/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	5%	=7/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	17%	11/22	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)

Health and well-being continues to be a key priority for Powys and the service has introduced some innovative services in this area, such as loaning blood pressure monitors and Rempods to support reminiscence activities with people living with

<sup>26</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

dementia. Another noteworthy activity is an intergenerational singing group where a local primary school and people living with dementia from the community and local care homes come together to sing and socialise (Q14). Formal user training attendances have increased more than sevenfold compared to 2022-23 as the service was able to increase its offering after the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. Powys is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (Q15). However, it is below the median for per capita attendances at informal support. The picture is mixed from the customer survey carried out this year, but Powys performs very well in some areas, including customer care; adults who think the library has made a difference to their lives; and young people who think the library helps them to learn (Q1s1&2).

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

The total number of attendances at events and activities organised by the library has increased by 68% during 2023-24, although it is still below the median as the service continues to work to re-build audiences following the pandemic (Q16). The programme of events includes Stori a Chân storytimes, reading groups, Number Up events, Adult Reading Challenge, poetry groups, Poetry on Prescription sessions, Lego Animation, cooking workshops and digital support sessions. However, the target has not been met for number of static service points providing events and activities for users with special requirements due to long term staffing issues. Powys reports that a Senior Library Assistant (Digital Support) post, funded by a Housing Support grant, focuses on digital inclusion, with a particular focus on people at risk of homelessness and isolation.

Powys does not meet the target for Location of services (Q17). The challenges of working in an area with a low population density are noted. However, the percentage of the population within the specified distance of a library service or mobile stop has decreased compared to 2022-23.

Powys continues to be above the median of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits, despite the fact the website visits are lower than in 2022-23 (Q18). The number of active borrowers per capita is also above the median, and the active borrower figures have increased by 6% compared to 2022-23. The service offers a 'Lite membership' whereby customers are able to join the library without having to show any proof of address or ID. Adult, children's and electronic issues have all increased compared to 2022-23, rising by 13%, 11% and 18% respectively. Powys continues to be above the national median for adult issues and close to the median for electronic issues.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Powys does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita and is in the bottom quartile nationally for this measure (Q19). Book budget figures reported declined by 19% for the period 2023-24, and the service reports that this situation is unlikely to improve going forward. Book budget per capita is in the bottom quartile nationally. However, the service does meet the target for the proportion of budget spent on Welsh language materials and obtains copies of most new publications in Welsh

(Q110). Powys reports a slight decrease in the number of Welsh books purchased this year as their Welsh language book supplier ceased to trade at the end of 2023, and the service therefore needed to carry out a procurement exercise to appoint a new supplier. Welsh language issues are up by 12% compared to the previous year. Powys works with Cymraeg i Blant to deliver Welsh rhyme and storytimes for children and some larger libraries also offer loga Babi. There are also several Welsh conversation groups.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Although figures for staff that directly report to library service managers were reported under Q113 in 2022-23, Powys has not reported figures for total staff per capita this year as staffing, budgets, buildings and other resources are shared and jointly managed by museums, libraries and archives (Cultural Services). There is currently a review of staffing across Cultural Services which will include a review of all job descriptions. Although Powys does not meet the target for qualified staff per capita, this figure is above the median for Welsh library authorities. The Principal Librarian has been seconded since November 2021 and two Senior Librarians were awarded honorariums to mitigate the impact of this from June 2023. The service has not reported staff hours spent in training and professional development this year. However, it has put a system in place to ensure that there is an accurate figure for 2024-25. Powys makes use of volunteers, with volunteer hours reported equating to around 3.5 FTE members of staff<sup>27</sup>. It is noted that this figure includes volunteers from across Cultural Services. However, it is important to ensure that volunteers are used in line with [CILIP guidance](#).

Powys is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for revenue expenditure per capita and this figure has decreased compared to 2022-23 (Q114). The service has received Shared Prosperity grant funding for Digital Community Hubs and Number Up, but this comes to an end in December 2024. In addition, total materials expenditure has decreased due to a significant cut to the book budget. Powys meets the target for opening hours per capita and, although this has declined slightly compared to the previous year, the service is above the national median for this measure (Q116). Some services are also offered through unstaffed hours.

## 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. Powys identified a range of ways in which it contributes to strategic goals in particular those of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- **A prosperous Wales** e.g. providing access to lifelong learning through print and electronic resources and free IT equipment and Wi-Fi.

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<sup>27</sup> The number of volunteers reported has increased six-fold compared to 2022-23. However, this includes volunteers at co-located facilities e.g. y Gaer - Library, Museum and Art Gallery (Brecon), which were excluded from the figure reported in 2022-23..

- **A healthier Wales** e.g. enabling access to high quality health information, participating in schemes such as Reading Well and Books on Prescription, offering loans of blood pressure monitors and combatting loneliness and isolation through providing connection and activities.
- **A more equal Wales** e.g. providing access to resources and services free at the point of delivery and offering a welcoming and inclusive service.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** e.g. delivering a service which is open to everyone who lives, works or is educated within Powys, offering equality of opportunity to all and providing a safe neutral space within the community.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** e.g. providing co-located facilities to support access to cultural activities and offering a wide range of Welsh language resources and activities.
- **A globally responsive Wales** e.g. encouraging recycling and the efficient use of resources, encouraging visitors to town centres, enabling people to be digitally connected and supporting volunteers in developing skills.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Powys notes that future budget cuts will present a challenge and the service will focus on developing a financially sustainable library service that responds and adapts to community needs. Plans are required to be delivered within the context of the corporate strategic direction - Sustainable Powys; however, this is currently in development so future plans and the precise direction for Cultural Services remains unclear. The service will continue to work collaboratively as an integrated Cultural Service grouping where many workstreams and projects are fully integrated and cross-cutting, and staffing, buildings, budgets and other resources are shared and jointly managed. The heavy reliance on external grant funding looks set to continue. The service reports staffing pressures looking set to continue at all levels particularly with frontline roles. A review of staffing across Cultural Services is currently underway and it is hoped that the new staffing structure will allow for better collaboration and sharing of resources, and appropriate distribution of strategic and operational responsibilities amongst all staff.

## Conclusion

Powys continues to perform well in a number of areas, including health and well-being support; formal training attendance; virtual visits; and active borrowers. There is evidence that the service is continuing to recover following the Covid pandemic as attendance figures are rising. Powys has carried out a customer survey this year, ensuring it now meets Core Entitlement 11. However, performance against QIs with targets is a concern, especially the fact that QI6 and QI9 targets, which were met in 2022-23, are no longer being met. Long term staffing issues have impacted on the service's ability to offer events and activities for users with special requirements and significant reductions to the book budget mean Powys no longer meets the target for acquisitions per capita. In addition, whilst the difficulties Powys experiences meeting the location of services target due to low population density are acknowledged, less

than half of Powys households are now within the specified distance of a library service or mobile stop.

It is difficult for the independent assessor to reflect fully on the impact of staffing challenges experienced in Powys as no figures for total staff are provided in the return. In future years, efforts should be made to provide a proportional figure (acknowledging that this will be a best estimate), not only to help provide more information about Powys library service, but also to allow for fuller picture of library provision nationally.

# Rhondda Cynon Taff Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Rhondda Cynon Taff's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Rhondda Cynon Taff meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taff is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. The targets for the remaining 2 quality indicators are not met.

Rhondda Cynon Taff displays strengths in a number of areas, including partnership working; training attendance; support for health and well-being; and provision for users with special requirements (which is now available at all service points). However, there are a number of areas of concern within this report. The decrease in the acquisitions budget is worrying. Whilst, thus far, the service has followed an approach to mitigate the impact of this on customers, as best it can, the further drastic reduction anticipated in 2024-25 is troubling as the service does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita currently and spending on children's resources is particularly low. The continued reductions in staffing and opening hours reported are also extremely concerning, given that the service does not meet either of these targets.

- Formal training attendance per capita is above the median for Welsh library authorities and has increased by 45% compared to 2022-23 (Q15).
- Total event attendance has increased by 65% compared to 2022-23 (Q16).
- The number of website visits has increased by 20% compared to the previous year (Q18).
- Acquisitions per capita have fallen compared to 2022-23 and a further budget cut is anticipated in 2024-25 (Q19).
- Rhondda Cynon Taff does not meet the target for opening hours and is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure. Total opening hours are down 9% compared to the previous year (Q16).

## Performance against the standards

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



## Core Entitlements

Rhondda Cynon Taff reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Rhondda Cynon Taff is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. The targets for the remaining 2 quality indicators are not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
- 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, **not met ●**

## 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 returns<sup>28</sup>. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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<sup>28</sup> Rhondda Cynon Taff did include data for adults in relation to QI1 and QI2 in the return, but these related to adult surveys conducted prior to April 2022, so are not included in the comparison table.

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:	90%	=10/15	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:	97%	10/16	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. Rhondda Cynon Taff provided an impact statement about the Inclusion Hub Y HWB. Commencing at the start of the 2023 academic year, in partnership with Ferndale Community School, the service has provided a space for pupils to use as an alternative to exclusion. Pupils are given the opportunity to spend a day in quiet study at Ferndale Hub. The time is spent with a support worker and pupils can focus on schoolwork and reflect on their behaviour. As a result of the initiative there has been a reported decrease in pupil exclusions from school and a reduction of lost learning time. The initiative has raised the profile of the library with young people and made them more aware of the range of services that the library provides. A library assistant at the Ferndale hub commented “*The inclusion Hwb has highlighted the services available to our young people and has helped to develop links with the younger generation.*” The Business and Facilities Manager of Ferndale Community School / CEO of The Fern Partnership highlighted a benefit of the partnership commenting “*This positive project has minimised the loss of learning time and has maintained placement in an educational environment.*”

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Rhondda Cynon Taff’s 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	9.4	=8/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
QI 5 User support					
a) attendances per capita	25	9/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	19	17/18	12	137	449
QI 6 Attendances at events per capita	211	12/22	3	224.5	620
QI 8 Library use					
b) virtual visits per capita	586	13/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	87	19/22	57	123	233
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material					
b) % material budget children's resources	12%	=20/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	22%	6/22	4%	15.5%	49%
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	436	18/22	161	631.5	2,725
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications <sup>29</sup>					
(v) a) total volunteers	16	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	1,390	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£10,015	16/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	74%	=4/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	2%	=16/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	12%	15/22	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)

Formal training attendance per capita is above the median for Welsh library authorities and has increased by 45% compared to 2022-23 (QI5). Training is provided by partners such as Adult Education, Communities for Work Plus, Digital

<sup>29</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

Fridays and People and Work. Although informal support per capita continues to be below the median, this has increased by 140% compared to the previous year. Rhondda Cynon Taff meets the target for Health and well-being (Q14) in full. Events aimed at well-being during this reporting period have included a 'Crafty Crochet' group and 'Lets get Digital' sessions, which include searching for Health and well-being information. Organisations making use of library facilities include Integrated Autism, Chair Tai Chi, New Horizons (Mental Health) and Foodwise (healthy eating). Rhondda Cynon Taff plans to conduct adult customer surveys later in 2024 (Q1s1&2).

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Although Rhondda Cynon Taff is below the median of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits, the number of website visits has increased by 20% compared to the previous year (Q18). The number of active borrowers is below the median but is increasing (up 6%). Rhondda Cynon Taff notes an increase in the number of active users despite a decrease in the total number of library members, as digital members are accessing digital collections on a more regular basis. Adult and children's book issues are in the bottom quartile nationally and almost unchanged compared to the previous year. Electronic issues, whilst still in the bottom quartile, have increased by 18% compared to 2022-23.

Following last year's report, when Rhondda Cynon Taff did not meet the target for Q16, the service ensured that the remaining two libraries that do not have community facilities have held some employment-based activities throughout the year. It therefore meets the target this year. Examples of events for customers with particular needs include Autistic Minds (for parents of autistic children); Essential Skills; Work Clubs; sessions on knife crime, anti-social behaviour, drug/alcohol abuse and sexual health delivered by the Youth Engagement and Participation Service; dementia group; Stroke Association; and a lung choir. Total event attendance has increased by 65% compared to 2022-23 and activities have included Knitting Nannas, U3A Gardening club, Sign Language, Aberdare Festival, Treorchy Food Festival and St David's Day market.

### Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Acquisitions per capita have fallen compared to 2022-23 (Q19). The reported materials expenditure has declined by 18% compared to 2022-23 and the service reports that the book budget will reduce by a further £56,000 in 2024-25. Thus far, Rhondda Cynon Taff has aimed to preserve the number of titles purchased, whilst purchasing fewer copies of each title. However, the further substantial decrease in budget forecast for 2024-25 is of course likely to have an even more drastic impact. The service is the joint lowest nationally for the proportion of the budget allocated to children's stock and is in the bottom quartile for spending per capita on under 16s. Rhondda Cynon Taff meets the target for proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language stock, although the level of expenditure has dropped in line with an overall reduction in the book budget (Q110). Welsh language issues have risen by 19% compared to the previous year, although Rhondda Cynon Taff is below the national

median for this measure. The service continues to run Welsh language activities as a part of the regular summer programme and participates in Welsh language events such as Shwmae Day. The appointment of a second Welsh language speaker to Children's Services means Rhondda Cynon Taff can increase the number of Welsh language events being offered.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Following a public consultation, a decision was made to retain the expanded 'At Home' service model adopted during the Covid pandemic and permanently remove the mobile library service in 2023. This resulted in the loss of two mobile library staff and one library assistant. The reduction was partially offset by the introduction of an apprentice and a project manager (NLHF-funded) but has resulted in a reduction in the number of staff overall. Rhondda Cynon Taff does not meet the targets for total staff or qualified staff per capita; it is around the national median for the former and below the median for the latter (QI13). However, one member of staff currently working towards a qualification is expected to graduate this year. Although staff time allocated to training has increased from last year, Rhondda Cynon Taff does not meet this target. However, the service anticipates that the employment of a temporary ICT Development Officer in 2024-25 will lead to an increase in staff training.

Rhondda Cynon Taff does not meet the target for opening hours and is in the bottom quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure (QI16). Total opening hours are down 9% compared to the previous year. However, the service does also operate an 'At Home' delivery service which is not included in the total hours. Rhondda Cynon Taff adopts a cluster model so that at least one branch library and an area library are open in each cluster for 6 days a week.

## 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. Rhondda Cynon Taff identified a range of ways in which it contributes to strategic goals, in particular, those of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- **A prosperous Wales** e.g. provision of free access to ICT and 24/7 access to digital resources, offering training and support for digital skills, essential skills and lifelong learning, working in partnership to support Job Clubs and back to work programmes and offering volunteering opportunities.
- **A resilient Wales** e.g. understanding the needs of the local community and offering an inclusive service open to everyone, providing a shared sense of space and community, developing local hubs to offer greater social support.
- **A healthier Wales** e.g. participating in health schemes such as Better with Books and Reading Well, delivering health and well-being events, providing spaces that promote social inclusion and providing an At Home Service.
- **A more equal Wales** e.g. offering services to all segments of the community, providing a safe space for vulnerable groups and celebrating and promoting events such as Pride Month and Black History Month.

- **A Wales of cohesive communities** e.g. providing a safe environment where connections are made and working in partnership to participate in programmes that foster good will and pride in the community.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** e.g. providing access to Welsh language resources, delivering a programme of bilingual and Welsh medium events and ensuring that Welsh speaking members of staff are easily identifiable.
- **A globally responsive Wales** e.g. providing trusted information on environmental matters and local initiatives and supporting recycling.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Rhondda Cynon Taff refers to the challenges of budgets cuts and the need to make further efficiency savings in 2024-25. These will include: the disestablishment of one Stock Control Assistant and three Senior Library Assistant roles; a reduction in the opening hours of each Area Library from 49 hours per week to a minimum of 44 hours per week and the harmonisation of the 'no lunchtime closure' across all Branch Libraries; and a 21% reduction in the book budget. The service will implement the new library management system and expects this will require significant preparation. The service will be piloting a resilience hub model with a Community Worker based at a library working in conjunction with library staff and One4all advisors to create a 'one door' approach to field a range of enquiries, including those relating to housing and mental health.

## Conclusion

Rhondda Cynon Taff displays strengths in a number of areas, including partnership working; training attendance; support for health and well-being; and provision for users with special requirements (which is now available at all service points). However, there are a number of areas of concern within this report. The decrease in the acquisitions budget is worrying. Whilst, thus far, the service has followed an approach to mitigate the impact of this on customers, as best it can, the further drastic reduction anticipated in 2024-25 is troubling as the service does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita currently and spending on children's resources is particularly low. The continued reductions in staffing and opening hours reported are also extremely concerning, given that the service does not meet either of these targets.

# Swansea Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Swansea's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Swansea meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Swansea is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 2 targets were not met.

Swansea continues to perform well in a number of areas, including virtual visits, active borrowers, issues, training attendance and event attendance. However, as was the case last year, acquisitions budgets and the lack of qualified staff, alongside limited time devoted to staff training, remain areas of concern.

- There has been a notable increase in user support attendance since 2022-23; Swansea is now above the median for both formal and informal training/support (Q15).
- Event attendance per capita is above the median for Welsh library services and total attendances have increased by 48% compared to the previous year (Q16).
- Adult, children's electronic and AV issues are all in the top quartile for Welsh library authorities and issues of all types have increased this year (Q18).
- The service is clearly making efforts to better understand and improve in areas where it performs less well (e.g. young people's use of the library for learning and reporting of staff training).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Swansea reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Swansea is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 2 targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- QI 10 Welsh Language Resources  
% of material budget spent on Welsh, **not met ●**
  
- 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.



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:	68%	15/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	95%	=2/16	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:	91%	15/16	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. Swansea provided an impact statement about a man who, on release from prison, found himself homeless and without any social connections. He had learned about library services during his time in prison where Swansea Council Libraries provides HMP Swansea with a library service. Whilst homeless, he had used the 'warm space' provision in the library as well as other services. The library provided a safe space and, while he was looking for housing, the library was able to support him with his research and signpost him to relevant services. He subsequently found accommodation and employment and has introduced a friend and her child to the library. He reported being appreciative of the support he received and the way in which library staff were kind and treated him with respect.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Swansea's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	69%	=10/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	65%	9/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	93%	15/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	92%	8/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	90%	=3/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	99%	=3/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.6	4/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	27	8/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	141	9/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	340	6/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	893	7/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	157	3/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	18%	=8/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	15%	14/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	621	12/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>30</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	15	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	934	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£13,850	8/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	77%	2/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	4%	=9/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	8%	17/22	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.

<sup>30</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

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

There has been a notable increase in user support attendance since 2022-23. Swansea is now above the median for both formal and informal training/support. Informal support attendance has increased by 26% and formal training attendance by 158% compared to the previous year (QI5). Sessions offered have included digital skills and electronic learning (including provision by other providers and the Council's Lifelong Learning service); Fusion programme and employability services; library tours; creative workshops; and literary-based activities.

Swansea performs well for customer care (QI2). However, in the last survey, conducted in late 2022, staff felt that the percentage of young people who think the library helps them to learn was disappointing (QI1). In response to this, the library service has worked with a local primary school to investigate how feedback from children might be better gathered - including possibly via school visits or digital means. The library service has responded to requests and stock suggestions from children and parents. Staff are promoting the online resources provided to children through visits to schools and INSET presentations and have worked with one school which shares the same site as the community library to get their views on available material. Swansea acknowledges that not all branches offer a full range of health and well-being related activities (QI4) but is collecting examples of best practice to help libraries that are not currently undertaking much activity in all these areas to consider what opportunities they may be able to provide.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

Event attendance per capita is above the median for Welsh library services and total attendances have increased by 48% compared to the previous year (QI6). The appointment of an Events Officer and additional funding via Coast and other sources has enabled more events to take place. Swansea reports that improved data collection methods have also contributed to this QI. The service was able to provide data on location of services this year and meets the target for QI7.

Swansea is above the median of Welsh library authorities for virtual visits per capita (QI8). The number of visits reported is 56% higher than 2022-23; however, this is due in part to a change in data collection methods to bring Swansea in line with other Welsh Authorities. Although active borrower numbers have fallen slightly (5%), the service is still in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure and 50% of library members are active borrowers. Adult, children's, electronic and AV issues are all in the top quartile for Welsh library authorities. Issues of all types have increased by more than the national average: adult books by 9%, children's by 16%, AV by 25% and electronic issues by 41%.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Swansea does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita, and this figure is lower than that reported last year (QI9) due to standstill budgets alongside rising costs of materials. The service is gradually moving to proportionally more online and digital purchasing to reflect demand from customers and publishing trends (e.g. in

children's non-fiction). Swansea does not meet the target for percentage of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources; this has remained unchanged since the previous year (Q110). Nevertheless, Welsh language issues have increased by 6% compared to 2022-23, although they are slightly below the median. The service has been successful in recruiting more Welsh speakers over this reporting period which has enabled more opportunity for Welsh language service delivery.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

As was the case last year, Swansea does not meet the target for total staff per capita, although it is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities. It is reported that the authority is struggling with recruitment management issues, leading to long delays appointing staff. Swansea is below the median for qualified staff per capita (Q113) and the service acknowledges that current funding pressures mean that this is unlikely to change. Although the service does not meet the target for staff time allocated to training, this figure has increased compared to 2022-23. Swansea attributes this to a new recording system and staff being required to refresh all mandatory training. Revenue expenditure per capita has increased slightly compared to 2022-23 (Q114). The service increased its expenditure on some community library buildings (e.g. painting, electrical work). Swansea meets the target for opening hours per capita, and total opening hours are unchanged on the previous year (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. Swansea identified a variety of ways in which it contributes to the priorities of the Welsh Government. These include:

- **Sustainable health care** e.g. supporting schemes such as Reading Well, delivering services to the most vulnerable via the home delivery service and delivering events to support well-being and tackle social isolation.
- **Vulnerable people** e.g. providing warm, welcoming safe spaces, delivering free events targeted at families and out of school activity, and distributing summer holiday snack bags to supplement those missing out on free school meal support out of school.
- **Sustainable economy, services and industries for the future** e.g. partnering with organisations such as Careers Wales.
- **Climate and nature emergency** e.g. supporting recycling initiatives and piloting tools to monitor and reduce energy usage.
- **Education and reducing inequalities** e.g. increasing collaboration with schools and libraries in relation to Cynefin and the new school curriculum, supporting children's literacy through class visits and participating in the Summer Reading Challenge.
- **Diversity and move to eliminate inequality** e.g. monitoring diversity in the collections, supporting national awareness campaigns such as Black History Month and Pride Month and providing a Library of Sanctuary.

- 
- **Welsh language and Welsh speakers** e.g. continued promotion of Welsh language materials.
- **Transforming towns** e.g. supporting Y Storfa, a city centre hub project and seeking further capital investment to improve library buildings and develop new services in communities.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Swansea reports developing a future model for council community hubs and building on the plans for Y Storfa City Centre Hub which is expected to be ready by Summer 2025. The service will be building on the action plan it developed in its successful bid for Library of Sanctuary status and will be running a targeted programme of events. Some actions from the previous year will be carried forward, including developing a code of conduct and staff training including investigating more qualification paths for existing staff. The service will look for ways to streamline administrative systems through the use of technology; improved telephony and modernised staff and public PCs; and create energy efficiencies. The service will implement the new library management system and expects this will require significant resource over the year. The service will continue to work with the Community Cultural coordinator who will work with libraries to engage more residents in culture in Swansea.

## Conclusion

Swansea continues to perform well in a number of areas, concluding virtual visits, active borrowers, issues, training attendance and event attendance. Swansea has improved some of its data collection and monitoring procedures this year, which have enabled the service to report more accurate data in relation to several QIs in this return. The service is also clearly making efforts to better understand and improve in areas where it performs less well (e.g. young people's use of the library for learning and reporting of staff training). The appointment of an Events Officer also appears to have had an impact on both the organisation and reporting of events and activities. However, as was the case last year, acquisitions budgets and the lack of qualified staff remain areas of concern.

# Torfaen Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Torfaen's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Torfaen meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Torfaen is achieving 3 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 3 targets were not met.

Torfaen continues to perform well in terms of attendance at, and impact of, user training, as well as health and well-being support. The service offers a wide range of support and activities for customers with a variety of needs and interests. There is evidence that engagement and issues at Torfaen Libraries are recovering following the Covid pandemic period. However, there continue to be a number of areas of concern. The permanent reduction in opening hours is particularly worrying, as opening hours per capita in Torfaen are the lowest nationally. It is noted that materials expenditure and Welsh language expenditure have increased slightly, but Torfaen still falls short of these targets. Staffing also continues to raise concerns as total staff per capita is amongst the lowest of Welsh library authorities and the staff training allocation remains below the target.

- Torfaen meets the target for health and well-being in full and has introduced a number of innovative well-being related activities (Q14).
- Torfaen is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for formal training attendance per capita. The number of attendances has increased by 96% compared to 2022-23 (Q15).
- Active borrowers per capita is close to the median and the number of borrowers has increased by 14% compared to 2022-23 (Q18).
- Torfaen is well below the target for opening hours per capita and the service the lowest nationally for this measure (Q16).

## Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Torfaen reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

## Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Torfaen is achieving 3 in full and 1 in part. The remaining 3 targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
- QI 10 Welsh Language Resources  
% of material budget spent on Welsh, **not met ●**
- 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, **not met ●**

## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	82%	=13/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	86%	=10/16	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:	100%	=1/16	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. Torfaen provided an impact statement that focused on the value of its first 'People's Library' event. The event involved bringing in people as 'human books' to talk about a range of personal experiences. The aim was to enable people to engage in meaningful conversations, challenge stereotypes and understand people from different walks of life. The library provided a neutral space where people could connect and talk openly. Participants provided positive feedback, which included feeling inspired and empowered as well as feeling comforted and encouraged to seek help with their own problems. Based on this success, the library plans to hold a second 'People's Library' activity in July 2024.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Torfaen's 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	69%	=10/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	69%	7/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=8/16	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	89%	12/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	97%	14/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	82%	=11/15	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	8.9	14/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	42	3/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	170	6/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	148	17/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	395	16/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	120	13/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	17%	=10/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	10%	14/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	405	20/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>31</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	0	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	0	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,598	17/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	68%	=9/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	12%	=6/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	1%	=19/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	18%	10/22	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)

Torfaen is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for formal training attendance per capita (QI5). The number of attendances has increased by 96% compared to 2022-23 as a result of expanded provision from the TCBC Employability

<sup>31</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

& Skills 'Communities for Work' group and a focussed programme of skills activities for schools to raise library awareness and drive library membership post-Covid. 100% of the attendees surveyed said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending. The service is also above the median for informal support per capita and reported attendances have risen by 28% compared to the previous year.

The Health & Well-being Professional has worked to develop a programme of activities, including community-based carers' events, and money-saving advice and support for vulnerable people during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis (Q14). Other examples of health and well-being related activities included collaborations with the ABUHB (Aneurin Bevan University Health Board) to deliver a new self-help group for survivors of brain injury and stroke; with Gwent Association for Voluntary Organisations to deliver a free fibromyalgia and chronic pain course; and with the Jacob Abraham Foundation to set up a new support group for those have experienced suicide in their family. .

### Access and use (Q1 6-8)

Although event attendance per capita is still below the median, attendances have risen by 37% compared to last year (Q16). Activities this year have included Warm Spaces; summer ukelele workshops; library tours and book sessions for students with Asperger Syndrome and physical disabilities; new baby rhyme time sessions specifically aimed at young dads; Forget Me Not Fridays dementia group; 'tea and tech' sessions for older people; story and books session for children from a local primary school Deaf Resource Base; family sports and physical activity sessions in collaboration with the Torfaen Play Service and TCBC Sports Development team; a butterfly picnic with Bron Afon Housing's 'Helping Working Families' team; and a bereavement craft group with the South East Wales Heads4Arts Team.

Active borrowers per capita is close to the median and the number of borrowers has increased by 14% compared to 2022-23 (Q18). Issues are now recovering post-Covid: adult issues are up 8%, children's issues 15% and electronic issues 42% compared to 2022-23, with e-zines issues being particularly strong. The service notes that, although adult issues have not yet returned to their pre-Covid levels, children's issues are now back to around 2019-20 levels. AV issues are stable and remain an important part of the Library@Home service. Virtual visits are below the median for Welsh library authorities and have fallen slightly (4%) compared to the previous year.

### Facilities and services (Q1 9-10)

Although the acquisitions rate has increased slightly compared to 2022-23, Torfaen is below the national median and does not meet the acquisitions target (Q19). Despite a 25% increase on the previous year in total Welsh language expenditure, Torfaen does not meet the target for percentage of book budget allocated to Welsh language materials (Q10). Issues of Welsh language materials decreased by 15% compared to 2022-23. This should be monitored over the next year, with consideration given to how to promote the collection. The service reports that children's Welsh language materials continued to issue better than adult stock,

accounting for almost three-quarters of issues. Library staff use incidental Welsh at all under-fives sessions and school visits to the library. The library regularly hosts a Welsh language and song session for a local Welsh medium playgroup and actively promotes the annual BookTrust Cymru 'Big Welsh Rhymetime'. In January 2024 Torfaen began running the National Centre for Learning Welsh and Mudiad Meithrin's 'Clwb Cwtsh' sessions.

## Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Torfaen does not meet the target for total staff or qualified staff per capita, and it is below the national median for both measures (Q13). Cwmbran Library staff now share the premises with other partner organisations and staff have been trained to assist the on-site TCBC Customer Services with basic Council enquiries. Although staff hours spent in training increased during 2023-24, Torfaen is still short of this target. The service did not use any volunteers during the year. Whilst revenue expenditure per capita in Torfaen rose slightly compared to the previous year, it is below the median for Welsh library services (Q14). Torfaen continues not to meet the target for opening hours per capita and the service is the lowest nationally for this measure, with opening hours equating to just 52% of the per capita target (Q16). The temporary reduction in opening hours across the service in 2022 was made permanent in 2023. Pontypool Library was most affected by this, with 13 hours of service lost across the week. Changes in physical visits recorded in different branches suggest that the changes have probably resulted in some customers switching use to the other libraries because of the more suitable opening hours.

## 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. Torfaen provided examples of how its activities contribute to four of the priority areas outlined by the Welsh Government in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- **A prosperous Wales** e.g. providing resources and facilities to support lifelong learning, providing digital support and activities to develop digital skills, working with partners to support people seeking employment and offering Communities Into Work sessions, and providing a range of digital products and iPad lending.
- **A healthier Wales** e.g. providing safe Warm Spaces, offering courses, signposting and well-being support for customers with physical and mental health issues and providing a Library at Home service.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** e.g. providing a joined-up service under one roof by partnering with organisations such as Torfaen Citizen Advice, working with partners to promote their services and offering a robust programme of activities to bring people together.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language** e.g. supporting Welsh language events such as the Big Welsh Rhyme Time, purchasing stock to support national Welsh book awards and arranging Clwb Cwtsh Welsh language sessions.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Torfaen refers to its aim to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the service in a time of continuing budget pressures. Future plans include: continuing to work with SLC Cymru to respond to national developments; working with the Welsh Government and library services across Wales to deliver a new Wales LMS; developing a new five year Library Strategy; and exploring ways to streamline administrative processes. Refurbishment of Cwmbran Library is planned and it is hoped that this will provide more opportunities to support local and national strategies by bringing together a range of services in one place.

## Conclusion

Torfaen continues to perform well in terms of attendance at, and impact of, user training, as well as health and well-being support. The service offers a wide range of support and activities for customers with a variety of needs and interests. There is evidence that engagement and issues at Torfaen Libraries are recovering following the Covid pandemic period. However, there continue to be a number of areas of concern. The permanent reduction in opening hours is particularly worrying, as opening hours per capita in Torfaen are the lowest nationally. It is noted that materials expenditure and Welsh language expenditure have increased slightly, but Torfaen still falls short of these targets. Staffing also continues to raise concerns as total staff per capita is amongst the lowest of Welsh library authorities and the staff training allocation remains below the target.

# Vale of Glamorgan Annual Assessment Report

## 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Vale of Glamorgan's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

### Executive summary

Vale of Glamorgan meets 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. The remaining 1 Core Entitlement was not met. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Vale of Glamorgan is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. One target was not met.

Vale of Glamorgan has continued to recover from the pandemic this year and usage has increased in many areas, including event attendance, formal training attendance, issues and website visits. The library service organises and hosts an impressive range of activities, including groups to support Welsh language and culture, and to cater for customers with particular needs. Whilst Vale of Glamorgan therefore performs well in many aspects, there are two areas of concern. Firstly, it is now more than 7 years since the last adult customer survey was conducted in Vale of Glamorgan. The service recognises that this is an issue and it has been added to the 2024-25 Team Plan ensuring this will be monitored at a Directorate level. The second concern is the decrease in the number of qualified staff in Vale of Glamorgan, especially as the service relies heavily on volunteers, who deserve to have a good level of professional support.

- Formal training attendance has increased more than threefold compared to the previous year and Vale of Glamorgan is now close to the national median per capita attendance (QI5).
- Vale of Glamorgan is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita and total attendances have risen by 62% compared to 2022-23 (QI6).
- Virtual visits have increased more than threefold compared to 2022-23 and the service is above the median of Welsh library authorities for this measure (QI8).
- Vale of Glamorgan is now above the median for Welsh language issues per capita Welsh speaker as issues have increased by 47% compared to the previous year (QI10).
- Vale of Glamorgan no longer meets the targets for qualified staff per capita or qualified head of service as staff have left and have not been replaced (QI13).

## Performance against the standards

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

### Core Entitlements

Vale of Glamorgan reported meeting 12 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full, with the remaining 1 Core Entitlement not being met through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment. Core Entitlement 11 is not met as it is more than 7 years since the last adult user survey was conducted.

### Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Vale of Glamorgan is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. One target was not met.

- 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, **not met**
  - iv) CPD percentage, **met**
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

### 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 returns<sup>32</sup>. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	98%	9/16	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. Vale of Glamorgan provided an impact statement about the value of Barry Library’s Makerspace in attracting new users into the library. Opened in April 2023, the Makerspace presents the service’s refreshed digital offer which offers access to exciting and innovative technology. A case study is presented of six young people on a Bridge Programme course at Cardiff and the Vale College who were in danger of becoming NEETS (not in education, employment or training). This course aims to enhance participants’ confidence and digital skills, and help them to re-engage with the learning process and progress onwards to undertake an accredited course. Part of the course involved attending sessions in the library’s Makerspace between January and March 2024, where the focus was on completing a digital design project using the software and equipment available and contributing to a final exhibition. The young people learned a range of digital skills and their tutor reported that they had increased their independence, confidence and creative skills. She commented: *“Seeing learners’ step beyond their comfort zones, engaging with external organisations has been truly inspiring.”* This example shows how the library service can attract new users to the library service, as well how Makerspace sessions can help develop skills and confidence and contribute towards future employability.

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Vale of Glamorgan’s 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.

<sup>32</sup> Vale of Glamorgan did include data for QI1 and QI2 in the return, but these related to surveys conducted prior to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, so are not included in the comparison table.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
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%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
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
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	18	13/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	79	12/18	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	537	2/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	872	8/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	128	10/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	12%	=20/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	7%	=18/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	762	7/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>33</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	247	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	20,176	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£15,487	5/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	59%	=19/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=13/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	7%	6/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	25%	5/22	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)

Vale of Glamorgan meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4) in full. Shared Reading groups started in April 2024. All libraries have run mental health awareness or well-being related promotions and activities throughout the year. No current

<sup>33</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*



information is available in relation to Making a difference (QI1) or Customer satisfaction (QI2). The last adult customer survey was conducted more than seven years ago.

Formal training attendance has increased more than threefold compared to the previous year and Vale of Glamorgan is now close to the national median per capita attendance (QI5). This has been achieved through partnerships with Communities for Work, Hafod and the Council's Adult Education Department. However, informal support sessions recorded have declined slightly (5%) and the service is below the median for this measure. By the end of the reporting period, all nine libraries offered Digital Drop-In Sessions, led by volunteers.

### Access and use (QI 6-8)

Vale of Glamorgan is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for event attendance per capita and total attendances have risen by 62% compared to 2022-23 (QI6). Barry and Dinas Powys Libraries have continued the Warm Welcome initiative offering free tea and coffee. Additions to adult activities this year include jigsaw, parenting, menopause, hand stitching, French conversation clubs and a "More In Common" book club. Barclays Bank and HSBC have held regular drop-in sessions due to local branch closures and BusinessWales.org held advice sessions. One-off cultural and well-being events have been delivered, including author events, exhibitions, talks, poetry workshops, a local history open day and an Easter fair. Other activities include an audiobook group for customers with visual impairments; activity sessions with Vale Plus (a support service for adults with additional learning needs); sensory storytimes; support groups for customers who are Deaf or have hearing loss; and support groups for customers with visual impairments and for people with Fibromyalgia. Pressure to generate income has meant that the service has started to charge for some craft-based children's activities, although reading and literacy-related activities remain free.

Virtual visits have increased more than threefold compared to 2022-23 and the service is above the median of Welsh library authorities for this measure (QI8). Active borrower numbers have increased by 9% and Vale of Glamorgan continues to be above the median for active borrowers per capita. Issues of adult, children's and electronic resources are all slightly below the median of Welsh library authorities. However, issues have increased compared to 2022-23, and at rates above the national average: adult book issues are up by 33%, children's book issues by 28% and electronic issues by 21%.

### Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Although the acquisitions rate has fallen compared to 2022-23, Vale of Glamorgan continues to meet this target (QI9). The percentage of the budget allocated to children's resources has decreased compared to the previous year and Vale of Glamorgan is the joint lowest library authority nationally for this measure. The service is investigating to understand the reasons for this unexpected decrease. The service is also below the median for the percentage of the budget allocated to electronic resources.

Vale of Glamorgan meets the target for Welsh language purchasing and is now above the median for Welsh language issues per capita of Welsh speakers (Q110). This represents an impressive 47% increase compared to the previous year. Vale of Glamorgan purchases the vast majority of the Welsh language books published each year for both adults and children. The service offers a range of Welsh language activities for children in partnership with Menter Iaith Bro Morgannwg and Cymraeg i Blant. These include Amser Stori, Baby massage sessions, Ti a Fi sessions, Babi Synhwyraidd, (Welsh language baby sensory class) and Mudiad Meithrin's Clwb Cwtsh (for parents and their pre-school children to learn and speak Welsh together).

### Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-14 &16)

Vale of Glamorgan no longer meets the targets for qualified staff per capita or qualified head of service as staff have left or retired during 2022-23 (Q113). The service reports that the Principal Librarian post will not be replaced. The service intends to support some staff to undertake CILIP chartership as part of continuing professional development. The figure for total staff per capita has also decreased compared to 2022-23 as several vacancies have remained unfilled for much of the year, including posts at the management level such as the Libraries and Cultural Manager and the Digital Officer. The library service is awaiting approval for posts to be advertised. More positively, staff time allocated to training has increased compared to the previous year and Vale of Glamorgan does meet this aspect of the staffing target. Volunteer numbers have increased by 50% over the course of the year and total volunteer hours worked equate to around 12 FTE staff. Volunteers support the community library provision and are supported by 2 peripatetic librarians within this provision, which the service reports are highly valued. Volunteers are invited to and do access relevant training and skill development opportunities. Given the reliance on volunteer roles at the same time as a number of vacant posts, it is important to ensure that volunteers are used according to CILIP guidance. Vale of Glamorgan is above the median for revenue expenditure per capita and is in the bottom quartile for the proportion of the budget allocated to staffing (Q114). The service reports that Llantwit Library's roof is in urgent need of repair, and they hope to secure capital funding to address this during the upcoming financial year. Although Vale of Glamorgan still does not meet the target for opening hours per capita, opening hours have increased by 7% this year as St Athan, Dinas and Rhoose branches extended their hours (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. Vale of Glamorgan identified a variety of ways in which it supported the priorities of the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other agendas such as the Digital Strategy for Wales.

- **Supporting health and well-being** e.g. providing Reading Well and Books on Prescription and other health related information, offering activities

including a Menopause Group at Rhoose Library and LIFT Exercise Sessions at Barry Library.

- **Supporting lifelong learning and employability** e.g. providing study space, free internet and Wi-Fi, learning resources and formal and informal learning opportunities, hosting courses provided by the Adult Education Department and developing Digital Champions within the library service.
- **Responding to the climate crisis** e.g. installing solar panels at Rhoose Library, holding environmental events such as the How Green Is Our Vale at Penarth library and supporting recycling initiatives.
- **Contributing to the development of cohesive communities** e.g. providing safe spaces for reading, studying and socialising, offering facilities for groups and organisations to meet and offering access to local and family history and resources.
- **Promoting the Welsh language** e.g. providing access to Welsh language materials supported by a programme of events such as Amser Stori sessions and running Welsh language children's activities.
- **Supporting children's literacy** e.g. providing a programme of literacy-related activities at all libraries including storytimes and author visits, and delivering schemes such as Bookstart and the Summer Reading Challenge.
- **Providing support for refugees** e.g. working closely with the Vale Learning Centre which delivers ESOL courses and supporting the Council's refugee service which holds two weekly drop-in support sessions in Barry.
- **Providing support for all customers** e.g. staff have undertaken mandatory training in topics such as Safeguarding for Children and Vulnerable People.
- **Contributing to cooperation between library services in Wales** e.g. participating in the new all-Welsh Library Management System and free interlibrary loans between Welsh authorities.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Vale of Glamorgan refers to budget cuts and the requirement to make up the shortfall with income generation and grants. Fines have been reintroduced and some services are being charged for. The majority of the shortfall was made up through unfulfilled vacancies which has impacted staffing capacity, particularly at management level. The service expects the shortfall in the budget to remain or possibly increase over the next year, which will increase the pressure to deliver services in a way that is cost neutral or income generating. It is hoped that the vacant senior management post of Libraries and Cultural Services Manager will be filled soon and this role can contribute to exploring income generating and commercial opportunities. The new Annual Team Plan recognises the urgent need to undertake new adult and children's surveys but currently the service lacks the staff capacity to do so. The following year will also see a focus on the installation of a new library management system and associated staff training.

## Conclusion

Vale of Glamorgan has continued to recover from the pandemic this year and usage has increased in many areas, including event attendance, formal training attendance, issues and website visits. The library service organises and hosts an impressive range of activities, including groups to support Welsh language and culture, and to cater for customers with particular needs. Whilst Vale of Glamorgan therefore performs well in many aspects, there are two areas of concern. Firstly, it is now more than 7 years since the last adult customer survey was conducted in Vale of Glamorgan. The service recognises that this is an issue and it has been added to the 2024-25 Team Plan ensuring this will be monitored at a Directorate level. The second concern is the decrease in the number of qualified staff in Vale of Glamorgan, especially as the service relies heavily on volunteers, who deserve to have a good level of professional support.

# Wrexham Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Wrexham's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

## Executive summary

Wrexham reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 1 in part, with the remaining Core Entitlement not being met, through self-assessment. However, the independent assessor considers that the service has met 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 2 in part. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Wrexham is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Two targets were not met.

Wrexham's performance has undoubtedly improved compared to 2022-23 in a number of areas. It now meets more of the Core Entitlements in full. Wrexham library staff are clearly making efforts to improve the service for customers and their success in terms of event attendance demonstrates a good understanding of local community needs. However, the budget reduction this year, and continuing budgetary pressures, are concerning. It means Wrexham no longer meets the target for acquisitions rate (QI9). Although the proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources and Welsh language provision have increased, this is within the context of an overall decline in the book budget and comes alongside declines in issue figures for adult, children's and Welsh language resources.

- Wrexham is above the median for event attendance per capita. Attendance numbers have increased by 22% compared to 2022-23 (QI6).
- Electronic issues are close to the median and have increased by 31% compared to 2022-23 (QI8).
- Wrexham no longer meets the target for acquisitions per capita (QI9).
- The proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources has increased compared to 2022-23 and Welsh language issues per capita remain above the median (QI10).
- The service remains committed to staff development and exceeds the targets for this measure (QI13).

## Performance against the standards

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

## Core Entitlements

Wrexham reported meeting 11 of the 13 Core Entitlements in full and 1 Core Entitlement in part, with the remaining Core Entitlement being not met, 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 11 Core Entitlements in full and 2 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: Partially met  
Independent Assessor: **Partially met ■**  
This is due to the lack of a programme of refurbishment or modernisation for the physical estate.
- 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: Not met  
Independent Assessor: **Partially met ■**  
This is because an adult survey (but no children's survey) was conducted in original Framework 6 timeframe. It is noted that surveys have been carried out in 2024-25 to be reported on next year.
- 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: **Fully met ▲**
- 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, Wrexham is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Two targets were not met.

- 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, **not met ●**
  
- 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, **met**
  
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

## 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 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.



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:	Not provided	N/A	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	Not provided	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	N/A	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. Wrexham described how the service now provides wireless printing where members of the public can send printing from home to their chosen library. At Cefn Mawr library staff report that its service is regularly used to support people with printing CVs. Staff assist customers with online job searches and feedback on the service has been positive. One member of staff reflecting on a customer who was grateful for the help received, which had led to him getting an interview, commented *“It’s moments like these when you know you’re making a difference to the community.”*

## Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Wrexham’s 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
<b>QI 1 Making a difference</b>					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	Not provided	N/A	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	Not provided	N/A	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	Not provided	N/A	90%	97%	100%
<b>QI 2 Customer satisfaction</b>					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	Not provided	N/A	56%	91.5%	97%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	Not provided	N/A	86%	98.5%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	Not provided	N/A	47%	87%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	Not provided	N/A	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	Not provided	N/A	8.0	9.4	9.7
<b>QI 5 User support</b>					
a) attendances per capita	1	=20/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	Not provided	N/A	12	137	449
<b>QI 6 Attendances at events per capita</b>					
	271	8/22	3	224.5	620
<b>QI 8 Library use</b>					
b) virtual visits per capita	220	19/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	104	16/22	57	123	233
<b>QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material</b>					
b) % material budget children's resources	25%	=2/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	49%	1/22	4%	15.5%	49%
<b>QI 10 Welsh issues per capita</b>					
	692	9/22	161	631.5	2,725
<b>QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications<sup>34</sup></b>					
(v) a) total volunteers	1	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	28	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
<b>QI 14 Operational expenditure</b>					
a) total expenditure per capita	£10,186	14/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	70%	=7/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	6%	=20/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	9%	=4/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	16%	12/22	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.

<sup>34</sup> *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

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

The service meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4) in full. Health and well-being related activities offered include book clubs, reminiscence groups, craft groups, friendship groups, and knit and natter groups. Attendance per capita at formal training is the joint lowest of Welsh library authorities and no figures are provided for informal support (QI5). In this reporting year, the service reports that it was difficult to find a partner to deliver IT training sessions at no cost to the service or the council. However, a partner was secured in Q4. No informal drop-in sessions have been offered due to a lack of staff capacity. Wrexham has not provided data for QI1 or QI2 this year, but has conducted a customer survey which will be reported on in 2024-25.

## Access and use (QI 6-8)

Wrexham is above the median for event attendance per capita (QI6). Attendance numbers have increased by 22% compared to 2022-23. Example of events and activities include dementia groups; an English language class for speakers of other languages; and tours and visits by children with additional learning needs and users of mental health services. The service meets the target for location of service points (QI7). Virtual visits are below the median, but have increased by 78% compared to 2022-23 (QI8). Active borrowers per capita are also below the median for Welsh library authorities, but the number of active borrowers has increased by 7% compared to the previous year and 70% of library members are active borrowers. Electronic issues are close to the median and have increased by 31% compared to 2022-23. However, book issues have declined compared to the previous year: adult issues are down by 7% and children's issues by 5%. The service is below the national median for both. AV issues are stable.

## Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Wrexham no longer meets the target for acquisitions per capita (QI9). The book budget has decreased by 54% compared to that reported in 2022-23. Wrexham is in the bottom quartile for per capita book budget. The proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources has increased this year, and the service is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for this measure. However, the reduction of the overall budget mean that Wrexham is in the bottom quartile for per capita spending on under 16s' resources. The service has the highest proportion of the budget allocated to electronic resources nationally. The proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources has increased compared to 2022-23 (QI10). Although Welsh language issues per capita remain above the median, the number of issues has decreased by 12% compared to the previous year.

## Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Wrexham does not meet the targets for total staff and qualified staff per capita and remains below the median of Welsh library authorities for both measures (QI13). However, the service remains committed to staff development and exceeds the target for this measure. Although Wrexham does not meet the target for opening

hours per capita, reported opening hours have increased by 11% compared to 2022-23 (Q116). Furthermore, the figure reported does not include the Pop-Up/Doorstep Delivery Library Service which fluctuates depending on the availability of community venues.

## 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 referred to contributing to a number of priority agendas including those of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The service is aiming to contribute to a more prosperous, equal and greener Wales and reports on two main themes.

- **Eliminating inequalities** In Winter 2023 and Spring 2024 Wrexham provided designated Warm Hubs to help with the cost of living crisis and the cost of energy crisis for residents, as well as providing an opportunity to read and take part in social activities. The service is also providing free Wi-Fi printing so people can use the service from home and collect the printing from a library to support digital connectivity and reduce barriers for those who cannot afford a printer.
- **Promoting the Welsh language and culture** Wrexham is committed to delivering a bilingual service to all. This includes providing Welsh and bilingual activities such as story and rhyme times, hosting Welsh language author events and facilitating Welsh language school visits to libraries.

## Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the coming year, Wrexham refers to continued pressure on council budgets alongside low staffing levels. In February 2023, Contact Wrexham relocated to Wrexham City Library and has resulted in new library memberships and it is hoped that the anticipated relocation of Wrexham Archives public search room will help strengthen the library offer to residents, visitors and communities. The service aims to investigate all opportunities for the potential relocation of other services, organisations and businesses into library buildings to enrich the core offer and customer experience. With budgetary pressures continuing, the service will be conducting a full review and public consultation of the service in 2024-25.

## Conclusion

Wrexham's performance has undoubtedly improved compared to 2022-23 in a number of areas. It now meets more of the Core Entitlements in full. Wrexham library staff are clearly making efforts to improve the service for customers and their success in terms of event attendance demonstrates a good understanding of local community needs. The level of information provided within the return is also considerably more detailed this year, providing the independent assessor with a fuller picture of library service activity. However, the budget reduction this year, and continuing budgetary pressures, are concerning. It means Wrexham no longer meets the target for acquisitions rate (Q19). Although the proportion of the budget allocated to children's resources and Welsh language provision have increased, this is within the context of an overall decline in the book budget and comes alongside declines in issue figures for adult, children's and Welsh language resources.