



INFORMATION ITEM FOR EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 12TH MARCH 2024

**SUBJECT: CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH LIBRARY SERVICE -
ANNUAL WELSH GOVERNMENT PUBLIC LIBRARY
STANDARDS ASSESSMENT 2022-23**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND
CORPORATE SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform the Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee of the progress made by the County Borough Library Service in meeting the 6th Framework of Welsh Government's Public Library Standards, Core Entitlements and Quality Indicators during the reporting year 2022-23.

2. SUMMARY

2.1 The most recent Welsh Public Library Standards Report submitted to Education Scrutiny was for reporting year 2019/20. No report was submitted to Scrutiny during 2020/21 due to the COVID challenges. A Welsh Library Standards Return was submitted to Welsh Government for reporting year 2021/22. However, the final Assessment Report from Welsh Government was not received by CCBC until August 2023, therefore it was felt that this information would be outdated by the time of submission to Scrutiny and Welsh Government have apologised for this issue.

2.2 This is the final year library authorities in Wales will report against the current 6th Framework guidelines. A reconfiguration of both the Core Entitlements and Quality Indicators are in place for the next two reporting years (2023/24 and 2024/25), with the new Framework – WPLS7 ready for reporting years 2025-26.

2.3 The 2022/23 assessment sees a return to the collection of the full set of data providing:

- Full summary of the provision against the 12 Core Entitlements.
- Caerphilly's achievements against the 16 Quality Indicators; 10 of which have targets.
- A narrative report on future direction.
- A narrative report on the strategic context: how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals.
- A narrative statement with an example of the impact the service to individuals

or groups.

- 2.4 Caerphilly County Borough Library Service was assessed as meeting all 12 of the Welsh Government Core Entitlements.

Caerphilly County Borough Library Service was assessed as meeting in full, 7 and in part 1 of the 10 Quality Indicators for Wales that have assigned targets with 2 indicators not met.

The Case Study assessing the impact of library use on people's lives was evaluated and agreed by the Assessor: **Appendix 3**.

Detailed statements highlighting the synergy between library service activities and both the Council's Well-Being Objectives, and the goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations Act were evaluated and agreed by the Assessor.

For this report we are unable to provide a table comparing our Welsh Public Library Standards data against other Welsh authorities. This information will not be made available by Welsh Government until later this year.

A copy of the formal Welsh Government Assessment is included with this report as **Appendices 1 & 2**.

- 2.5 The Assessor identifies the following areas of strength in the authority's performance.

- Caerphilly Library Service meets all the 12 Core Entitlements in full.
- Caerphilly libraries are clearly busy and valued by the local community.
- Visitors per capita remains comparatively high and Caerphilly is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendances at library events per capita.
- The targeted spending on children's stock in the previous year appears to have had an impact; children's issues have risen notably and are above the median per capita.
- User training is highly rated; 99% of attendees said that the training had helped them achieve their goals.
- Despite reducing the number of PCs available to the public through a full PC renewal programme, there remains an excellent level of IT provision; the service remains above the median for the number of computers per capita.
- Caerphilly libraries have a strong focus on supporting mental health and wellbeing and the library service supports many partners. Despite 11 of the 18 libraries now being single staffed, the service has continued to provide reader development programmes and activities for both adults and children.
- The service performs well in terms of Customer Satisfaction and should be proud of its ability to continue to provide reader development programmes and keep all libraries open in cases of sickness and emergency leave.

- 2.6 The Assessor noted some concerns and areas of performance requiring attention by the authority to maintain its capability to deliver a strong performing service in the

future.

- “Although it is anticipated that the move to a potential Community Hub model will help to ease staffing difficulties, the staffing situation in Caerphilly is a concern. The large number of single staffed service points limit the service’s ability to offer a wide range of services in areas such as IT support. “ Currently, the authority has implemented the pilot Hub Library model at Rhymney Hub Library due for Corporate Management Team review later this year. Libraries offer a good level of IT support (Informal Training) to residents. However, in order to increase support, library services work closely with partner organisations - CCBC Community Education and Multiply teams to increase digital skills sessions at all library sites.
- It is important that Caerphilly returns to conducting regular user surveys, possibly alongside other forms of customer consultation, to ensure that services are meeting customer needs effectively. This has been addressed and the Adult Library User Survey ran between November 2023 to January 2024, the results of which will be used in the Welsh Public Library Standards return for 2023/24. Due to operational constraints faced using CIPFA to evaluate previous questionnaires, we are confident that the new questionnaire process implemented will achieve higher rankings to *Q1 – Making a Difference* and offer a true reflection of customer satisfaction.
- The authority has partly met the target for staff or qualified staff per capita (Q13).
- The authority has not met Q19: Up-to-Date and Appropriate Reading Material per capita. The indicator has is designed to ensure adequate investment and an appropriate balance of resources are acquired. This is a standard we have not met since 2018/2019, due to the decrease to the Library Resources budget. To meet this standard, the library service will be required to purchase an extra 17,263 titles of stock or increase its annual expenditure on resources by £114,000. Library User Survey results highlight 94% of customers believe library stock is ‘very good’ or ‘good.’ We believe the balance of stock we purchase is sufficient and that the correct balance of titles is being purchased to satisfy demand and relevance.
- The authority has not met Q12 - Supply of Requests: an indicator measuring the efficiency of the library service in responding to requests for material which is not immediately available. The library service has received no complaints from customers regarding wait times. This standard has only been met by 8/22 Welsh library authorities and will not feature in the revised Library Standards, and has been classed by Welsh Government as an indicator no longer feasible.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Education and Social Services Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the information contained in this report. A copy of the formal Welsh Government Assessment is included and can be found at **Appendices 1 and 2.**

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To inform Education & Social Services Scrutiny Committee of the progress achieved by the County Borough Library Service on meeting the requirement of the 6th Framework of the Welsh Government Public Library Standards, 2022/23.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 The Welsh Government Executive Summary Assessment of Caerphilly Borough Council's performance against the 6th Standards Framework for Public Libraries 2022/23 states,

“Caerphilly met all 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 10 Quality Indicators which have targets, Caerphilly is achieving 7 in full and 1 in part. Two targets were not met.

Caerphilly libraries are clearly very busy and valued by the local community. Visitors per capita remain comparatively high and Caerphilly is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendances at library events per capita. The targeted spending on children's stock in the previous year appears to have had an impact; children's issues have risen notably and are above the media per capita. The service has noted changes in user habits, such as the greater use of Wi-Fi and apps being preferred over the library website. Although it is anticipated that the move to a Community Hub model will ease staffing difficulties, the staffing situation in Caerphilly is a concern due to the large number of single staffed service points limit the service's ability to offer a wide range of services in areas such as IT support. In such circumstances, the service should be proud of its ability to continue to provide reader development programmes and keep all libraries open in cases of sickness and emergency leave. In the coming year, it is important that Caerphilly returns to conducting regular user surveys, possibly alongside other forms of customer consultation, to ensure that services are meeting customer needs effectively.”

- 5.2 Caerphilly County Borough Library Service is assessed as retaining 12/12 Core Entitlements. We are only one of 8/22 authorities to do so and is a significant achievement.
- 5.3 Caerphilly County Borough Library Service is assessed as meeting in full, 7 and in part 1 of the 10 Quality Indicators for Wales that have assigned targets with 2 indicators not met. No authorities meet all 10 Quality Indicators with targets.
- 5.4 The partially met QI is QI13: Staffing Levels and Qualifications. Please note that in the 2022/23 return, 20 Welsh authorities have also partly met this standard, with 1 authority failing.
- 5.5 Not met is QI9: Up-to-date and Appropriate Reading Material. This is a standard we have not met since 2018/2019, due to the decrease of the Library Resources budget. The 2022/23 Welsh data return highlights that only 12 of 22 authorities achieved this QI. It has been noted by Welsh Government that this standard is not achievable by many authorities due to the current budget pressures.
- 5.6 Not met is QI12: Supply of Requests. Again, this standard has only been met by 8 Welsh library authorities and will not feature in the revised Library Standards, and has been classed by Welsh Government as an indicator no longer feasible.
- 5.7 Detailed below are areas of the Assessment Framework that deserve specific

mention in respect of good performance achieved by the Borough Library service in 2022/23.

Performance Indicator	2022/23	Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference. d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	=4/16	93%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer Satisfaction a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	94%	4/16	80%	91%	99%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	2/17	92%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.5	5/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 8 Library Use a) visits per capita	2,640	3/21	781	2,106	4,814
QI 15 Net Cost per visit	£0.41	1/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22

Rankings- 1 is the lowest being the best performing authority

5.8 Detailed below are areas of below average performance, noted by Welsh Government

Performance Indicator	2022/23	Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	41	15/22	13	53	864
QI 14 Operational expenditure b) on staff per capita	57%	19/21	46%	64%	78%
on information resources per capita	10%	15/21	5%	12%	21%
QI 5 User Training c) informal training per capita	33	16/19	5	131	222

5.9 Making a Difference

Caerphilly Library Service retains its strong focus supporting the borough's residents. The analysis of the recently conducted Library Adult User questionnaire will offer updated customer satisfaction scores, and provide useful customer comments to help move the service forward. If agreed, an Information Report highlighting this data can be made available to the Education & Social Services Scrutiny Committee later this year.

Customer Satisfaction

As mentioned, the Adult User questionnaire will provide current data for customer satisfaction relating to the resources, customer care, IT facilities and the holistic library service offer. Early indicators suggest we will meet or exceed the current targets. During the 2022/23 CCBC Budget Consultation exercise, it was noted by a resident that the Council should prioritise libraries when planning services and budgets. The resident wrote,
 "I cannot reiterate how important I feel the library services are to the borough and our communities. We have a cost-of-living crisis and libraries provide warm spaces for residents to come and learn something new, interact with other people and acquire new skills. These absolutely must not be cut as libraries support many of the problems that we face as an organisation, including support for businesses, low

income families, Ukrainian refugees, and online provision. Please consider how the poorest and loneliest residents who are most affected by these problems in our communities will be affected if library services are reduced or cut”.

The Children and Young Adult User Survey run during 2022 saw the average overall rating out of ten by users aged 7-16, rise from 9.4 to 9.5. This improvement correlates with the excellent range and continued investment by the library service to purchase suitable reading materials. The survey also evidenced that children use the library not just to ‘find things out’, but use us for health, well-being, socialising, reading groups, accept we’re a safe and inclusive space, use free Wi-Fi, PC and free printing for homework support.

Support for Individual Development

The library service offers training venues and spaces to partner and community organisations. All libraries offer free public PC access and free Wi-Fi along with low-cost printing, scanning and photocopying. Whilst there are challenges at our single-staffed sites to offer the IT support residents need, library services are working closely with partner organisations to increase digital skills sessions at all library sites. In partnership with The Good Things Foundation, all libraries offer vulnerable residents free pre-loaded SIM cards.

Support for Health & Wellbeing

Libraries continue to offer health and wellbeing support to residents offering a wide range of support sessions facilitated by both library staff and partner organisations. These include Baby Massage to a Specialist Eating Disorder Group to Knit & Natter sessions. Our libraries are designated warm and safe spaces offering free, hot and cold drinks through the year. Hub libraries continue to offer community space for Ukrainian and Polish guest support.

The library service continues to support the *Reading Well* collections, this year supporting the ‘Reading Well for Teens’ book list. We were instrumental in distributing free LFT COVID testing kits to residents with 551 handed out over a 2-month period.

Working closely with CCBC Caerphilly Cares and receiving grant funding from the Community Support Fund, offered us the opportunity to continue the free hot and cold drinks offer to residents through the year, and by the 31st of March 2023, collated figures suggest over 19,000 hot and cold drinks had been consumed.

All libraries contribute to the Gwent Health Board MELO project, displaying and providing publications and promotional materials to the general public and health groups. We work in partnership with CCBC and the Welsh Government to help deliver the Period Dignity Scheme, offering free sanitary products in our public toilets and all 18 library sites and have been providing these free items since July 2019.

As part of the Caerphilly Library Service Dementia Action Plan 2018-2020, the library service continues to support the Dementia agenda. All libraries display the ‘Dementia Friend’ Accreditation. We continue to purchase stock and resources relating to the Dementia agenda and support a member of library staff in her role as a

Dementia Ambassador- training library staff, residents and local Councillors to become Dementia Friends.

User Training

Libraries offer as much IT support (Informal Training) as possible to residents. In order to increase support, library services are working closely with partner organisations to increase digital skills sessions at all library sites.

User Attendance at Library Events

In total, the library service ran or facilitated 5,231 events over the year ranging from the successful 'Welcome Back – Summer of Fun' scheme, author talks, Caerphilly Tabletop Gaming sessions and the Menopause Café, ensuring Caerphilly Library Service remained in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendances this year.

Location of Service Points

The Local Authority has maintained its present number and distribution of static libraries where 98% of households are within 2 miles of a static service point.

Library Use

Reporting a decline in visitor numbers to our sites this year and partly caused by a variety of factors out of our control, e.g. the deliberate arson attack at Llanbradach Library, we remain in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for visits per capita. We have an increase in the number of active borrowers, and children's stock issues have risen by 50% and are above the median per capita. Whilst we have witnessed a rise in use, Caerphilly is below the median for virtual visits. However, many library users of our digital services use the apps such as Borrowbox or Pori and no longer require the use of the CCBC library website pages.

Preliminary data from the recent Adult User Library Survey suggests a multitude of reasons for using the library. Library book lending is the main reason for use as well as:

Printing / photocopying / scanning

Looking for help or advice

Meeting friends / socialising

Study

Use of our free eBook, eAudiobook and eMagazine services continue to rise year on year:

eBooks / eAudiobooks– increase of 11%

eMagazines – increase of 27%

Up-to-date and Appropriate Reading Materials

The authority has not met this standard since the Welsh Public Library Standards return of 2019/20, however the materials spend per capita is above the median and the service is in the top quartile of library authorities for the proportion of expenditure on children's resources. It is important to note that 12/22 Welsh authorities have also

failed to meet this standard. This is one of a number of Standards that will be reviewed by Welsh Government prior to the publication of the 7th Framework.

MTFP budget constraints saw a reduction to the annual library resource budget. Pleasingly, expenditure on children and young people's resources increased this year by 2%. The service remains strongly committed to its strategic aims for children and young adults in order to support the work carried out by the Community Librarians on the School Engagement Programme, Summer Reading Challenge and other national promotions.

Welsh Language Resources

Despite budgetary restrictions, the library service continued its investment and support of the Welsh language, culture and heritage, with the majority of new purchased stock supporting children's Welsh titles.

Online Access

The service is above the median for number of computers per capita, a pleasant achievement made available by the financial support of CCBC to purchase and upgrade all library public PCs and licenses. It is interesting to note that static PC usage in our libraries, whilst still high, is decreasing. However greater demand is being made of Wi-Fi Spark with residents using this free service alongside their own digital devices.

Supply of Requests

This is the first year that Caerphilly Library Service has failed to meet this standard. However, the library service has received no written complaints from residents who believe they are waiting too long for their reserved items. This standard has only been met by 8 Welsh library authorities and will not feature in the revised Library 6th Standards Framework, having been classed by Welsh Government as an indicator no longer feasible.

Staffing Levels and Qualifications

Caerphilly Library Service partially meets this standard as Qualified leadership is in place in the library staffing structure. The overall target for the number of staff holding a recognised library related qualification and the number of staff per capita are not achieved. To note 20 Welsh authorities have also partly met this standard, with 1 authority failing.

Case Study

One case study highlighting the impact and value of the Borough Library Service was submitted and assessed by the Welsh Government. The case study clearly identifies how a local library has made an impact to a group of individuals from Newbridge. **Appendix 3.**

Strategic Context

A statement on the contribution the Borough Library Service makes to a number of Welsh Government priorities and wider goals was submitted as part of the return.

The assessment report draws attention to four strategies where Caerphilly Library contributes:

- Prosperity for All: the national strategy. Key theme 'Ambitious and Learning' – for example, a new school engagement programme around the key themes of Reading, Information and Learning to help support schools to empower and enhance pupils' performance in areas such as vocabulary, comprehension, problem solving, digital and information literacy awareness.
- Prosperity for All: the national strategy. Key theme 'Prosperous and Secure' – for example, the library service supports partners including Bridges into Work and Inspire into Work.
- Prosperity for All: the national strategy. Key theme 'Healthy and Active' – for example, the library service fully commits to the following health-related schemes: Books on Prescription Scheme / Reading Well with Dementia / Reading Well for Mental Health / Reading Well for Children / Reading Well for Teens / Empathy Lab / lechyd Da.
- Prosperity for All: the national strategy. Key theme 'United and Connected' – for example, the service actively supports Welsh Reading Groups and the Welsh Scrabble Club.

Future Direction

It is noted in the report that the library service uses the *2020-2022 Caerphilly Library Service Strategy and Action Plan* for strategic planning and direction. The Action Plan designates the library service as a 'community anchor', working hard to ensure its frontline service supports the economic, educational and digital recovery post COVID, through a number of targets:

1. Libraries continue to support children, young adults, and families.
2. Support the Caerphilly borough community through the Cost-of-Living crisis.
3. ICT / Digital support and upgrade for workforce and library service developments.
4. Library building developments.
5. Library Stock Resources & Collection Management.

5.10 **CONCLUSION**

- 5.11 The Caerphilly County Borough Library Service Annual Welsh Government Standards Assessment 2022/23 has been assessed by Welsh Government.
- 5.12 Caerphilly County Borough Library Service was assessed as meeting in full, 7 and in part 1 of the 10 Quality Indicators for Wales that have assigned targets with 2 indicators not met.
- 5.13 The case studies assessing the impact of library use on people's lives was evaluated and agreed by the Assessor.

- 5.14 A detailed statement highlighting the synergy between library service activities and both the Council's Well-Being Objectives, and the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act was evaluated and agreed by the Assessor.

6. ASSUMPTIONS

- 6.1 No assumptions have been made in this report.

7. SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An IIA is not required at this time. The issues covered in this report are for information purposes only, seeking to update Members with regard to the Authority's performance in respect of the Welsh Government Public Library Standards.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications linked to this report.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personnel implications linked to this report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 The report reflects the view of the consultees.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964.

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Richard Edmunds, Corporate Director of Education and Corporate Services.
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Keri Cole, Chief Education Officer.
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer.
Lynne Donovan, Head of People Services.
Steve Harris, Head of Financial Services and Section 151 Officer.
Steve Pugh, Corporate Communications Manager.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Caerphilly – Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

Appendix 2 Chweched Fframwaith Safonau Llyfrgelloedd Cyhoeddus Cymru: Caerffili - Adroddiad Asesu Blynyddol 2022/2023

Appendix 3 Case Study