

Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Caerphilly

Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

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.

1. Executive summary

Caerphilly met all of the 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 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. The service has noted changes in user habits, such as 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 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. 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.

- User training is highly rated; 99% of attendees said that the training had helped them achieve their goals (Q15).
- Library events are popular with users; Caerphilly is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendances at events per capita (Q16).
- The library service is well-supported within local communities; Caerphilly is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for visits per capita (Q18).
- Children's issues have risen notably and are above the median per capita (Q18).
- There is a good level of IT provision; the service is above the median for number of computers per capita (Q11).

2. Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against these areas. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is provided in Section 3.

2.1. Core entitlements

Caerphilly reported meeting all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment, providing detailed and helpful commentary within the return on each area covered. The independent assessor agreed with the self-assessment.

2.2. Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which 10 have constituent targets. Of these, Caerphilly is achieving 7 in full and 1 in part. Two targets were not met.

Quality Indicator	Met?	
QI 3 Support for individual development:		Met in full
a) ICT support	√	
b) Information literacy and skills training	√	
c) E-government support	√	
d) Reader development	√	
QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being		Met in full
i) Book Prescription Wales scheme	√	
ii) Better with Books/Reading Well scheme	√	
iii) Designated health & well-being collection	√	
iv) Information about healthy lifestyles and behaviours	√	
v) Signposting to health & well-being services	√	
QI 6 all static service points offer events/activities for users with special requirements	√	Met in full
QI 7 Location of service points	√	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
<u>or</u> Spend on Welsh per capita	-	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	√	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	√	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Not met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x	
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Partially met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	√	
iv) CPD percentage	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

2.3. Impact measures

The framework includes three indicators aimed at assessing the impact of library use on people’s lives. These indicators do not have targets, and authorities were only required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the original three-year period of the framework (2017-20). The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 return. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. However, it is important to bear in mind that some authorities have conducted surveys since 2020, whilst others report survey data from before the Covid pandemic. Some responses therefore reflect the situation several years ago, whilst others may have been affected by disruption during the pandemic period. As a result, there are limitations on the extent to which these data might be considered comparable.

Caerphilly completed its adult user survey in May 2019. Due to the COVID pandemic, the adult survey due to take place during May 2021 was postponed and will now run in October/November 2023. A children’s user survey was completed in November 2022.

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:	58%	16/16	58%	90%	98%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	41%	=15/16	41%	86.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	99%	=5/17	82%	96%	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 emphasising the value derived from intergenerational activities that take place at Newbridge Library. Elderly customers, including those with dementia and their carers, are invited to participate in Toddler Time sessions interacting with Toddler Group members and library staff. They benefit by being in a safe inclusive space; taking part in stimulating and pleasurable activities; having social contact; and an increased sense of optimism. One customer remarked *“we love coming downstairs to the library. It helps us feel part of daily local life and definitely puts a smile on our face and a spring in our step....”*

2.4. Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor and benchmark their performance over time, in comparison with other authorities. The following table summarises Caerphilly’s position for 2022-23. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where relevant data was not available from some authorities. 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	25%	15/16	24%	69.5%	90%
c) health and well-being	38%	15/16	35%	66.5%	94%
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%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	91%	=3/16	65%	86%	99%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/17	94%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.5	=5/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 5 User training					
a) attendances per capita	10	12/22	1	10.5	222
c) informal training per capita	33	16/19	5	131	424
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	274	4/22	13	165	559
QI 8 Library use					
a) visits per capita	2,640	3/21	781	2,106	4,814
b) virtual visits per capita	451	15/22	124	537.5	7,979
c) active borrowers per capita	107	=10/22	43	106.5	167
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	41	=17/22	13	53	864
QI 11 Online access					
a) Computers per 10,000	8.69	10/22	3.32	7.99	16.99
b) % of available time used by the public	9%	=13/19	7%	11%	77%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications ¹					
(v) a) total volunteers	4	-	0	8	256
b) volunteer hours	178	-	0	583.5	14,014
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£15,557	4/21	£6,726	£11,476	£27,330
b) % on staff,	57%	19/21	46%	64%	78%
% on information resources	10%	15/21	5%	12%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	29%	1/21	1%	3%	29%
% on other operational costs;	3%	20/21	1%	15%	35%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=12/21	-£479	£145	£2,865
QI 15 Net cost per visit ²	£0.41	1/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22
QI 16 Opening hours ³					
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.58%	21/22	0%	0.05%	0.95%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0%	=1/20	0%	0%	3.74%

¹ Following discussion with the peer review group it was decided not to include rankings for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.

² Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.

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3. Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators can be divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance under these areas.

3.1. Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Caerphilly libraries have a strong focus on supporting mental health and wellbeing; library service supports many partners, including a Specialist Eating Disorder Group, Integrated Autism Groups and a Baby Massage group (QI4). All 18 libraries offered hot drinks and refreshments as part of the Warm Spaces campaign and the service secured grant funding to open Llanbradach Library for an extra day for a 10-week period to help residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis. Hub libraries at Bargoed, Blackwood, Caerphilly and Risca facilitate Meet, Greet & Signposting sessions for the Polish and Ukrainian Family Liaison Officers. 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 (QI3).

In partnership with a number of organisations, the library delivers '1-2-1' support in digital literacy through First Click, Digital Friday and Community Education sessions. Attendance at pre-arranged user training is around the median, and 99% of attendees said that the training had helped them achieve their goals (QI5). Informal training attendance is below the median and the challenges of offering intense IT support in single-staffed locations and the reductions in partner digital course provision are both noted.

The service performs well in terms of Customer Satisfaction (QI2) in the most recent survey, but performance for Making a Difference (QI1) was below the median for the majority of measures. It is important that Caerphilly conducts an adult user survey in 2023 as planned – and if necessary engages in further customer consultation - to explore potential reasons for this discrepancy.

3.2. Access and use (QI 6-8)

Caerphilly ran over 5,000 events over the year and is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for attendances at events per capita (QI6). Despite reporting a decline in library visitors this year, Caerphilly is in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities for visits per capita. The service reports an increase in the number of active borrowers, and this is close to the median (QI8). Children's issues have risen notably and are above the median per capita. Whilst it has witnessed a rise in use, Caerphilly is below the median for virtual visits (QI8). However, the library reports that many residents now turn to apps such as Pori and Borrowbox instead of visiting the library webpages to gain access.

3.3. Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Caerphilly does not meet the target for acquisition of reading materials (QI9). 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. Although Caerphilly meets the target for proportion of spend on Welsh language resources, Welsh language issues per capita are below the median (QI10). The service reports that children's Welsh titles account for the majority of expenditure and loans.

The service is above the median for number of computers per capita (Q11), although the number has reduced as the library service was required to update all its PCs. Greater use of wi-fi and a decrease in static PC use suggest that more customers are using their own devices in libraries. Caerphilly has not met the standard for supply of requests (Q12). This was possibly impacted by library refurbishments and temporary library closures.

3.4. Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-16)

Caerphilly does not meet the target for staff or qualified posts per capita (Q13). During 2019/2020, due to budget reductions, the library service undertook a second staff realignment process. A further six library service points became single staffed, making a total of 11 out of 18. Three professional posts were deleted from the structure and one professional post added, with the post holder currently undertaking professional librarianship study. In addition, the service is carrying a number of fixed-term posts due to an anticipated budget reduction. The percentage of the operational expenditure allocated to staff is below the median (Q15). Whilst the level of library staff is not expected to increase, the service anticipates that the move to a Community Hub model will help to ease staffing difficulties. Caerphilly has not experienced disruption to home delivery services, but the percentage of unplanned closure of static services is above the median due to an arson attack at Llanbradach Library and a water supply issue at New Tredegar Library (Q16).

4. Strategic context

As part of the return, authorities are asked to report on how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. Caerphilly draws attention to the library service's contribution to the following strategies:

- **'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 / Iechyd 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.

5. Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Caerphilly refers to the 2020 – 2022 Caerphilly Library Service Strategy and Action Plan, which designates the library service as a 'community

anchor' and frontline service working to ensure economic, educational and digital recovery post Covid. This strategy sets out the following 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.

The library service is governed by the Local Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-2023. No library service saving proposals were identified during 2021/22 or 2022/23, but the service acknowledges that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and other financial restrictions may affect library services moving forward and further financial constraints are possible up to March 2025.

6. Conclusion

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. The service has noted changes in user habits, such as 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 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. 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.