

APPENDIX 1 : CAERPHILLY ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Adroddiad Blynyddol Caerffili 2011-12 Caerphilly Annual Report 2011-12

Maintaining a Valued Service

The Fourth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards

The year under review is the first under the Welsh Government's Fourth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards. The Framework is operational for a three-year period from April 2011 to March 2014; its focus is on the maintenance of core library services in what is recognised as a challenging period for the public sector. The benchmarks and Standards set by this Framework therefore reflect a more limited approach than in the past, while continuing to seek reassurance that Welsh public library authorities are endeavouring to carry out their statutory responsibilities in the delivery of the core library service.¹

One of the objectives of the Framework is however to ensure that library services do not suffer disproportionate reductions in expenditure and service quality compared to other local authority statutory services.

The requirements

Welsh public library authorities are required to submit an Annual Return – reporting on performance against the Framework's 9 Welsh Public Library Standards and 8 Welsh Public Library Performance Indicators – in early summer each year. This is considered by a panel of assessors, including a peer review Reference Group, drawn from among senior service managers in the sector, assisted by independent external expertise.

The authority's Annual Return for 2011-12, was submitted by the authority in accordance with the stipulated requirements (although some data relating to Performance Indicators was submitted later than anticipated), and has now been considered by the assessors.

This report – issued by CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales, the division of the Welsh Government with responsibility for administering the Framework – represents the considered view of the assessors on the authority's performances in 2011-12.

The authority's scrutiny of performances and its response to the Government's previous assessment

Matters relating to the performance of the library service are scrutinised through the Education for Life Scrutiny Committee, and the Annual Return

¹ Further information on the Welsh Public Library Standards performance assessment framework is available in the Framework document, *Maintaining a Valued Service*, and its accompanying guide, *How good is your public library service*, which are available online at:
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/cultureandsport/museumsarchiveslibraries/cymal/libraries/wpls/wpls201114/?lang=en>

indicates the decisions taken by the authority following scrutiny of the Government's last assessment report. No specific action was considered necessary at the time because the authority has a Five Year Development Plan for the service that coincides with the period during which the Fourth assessment Framework will be in operation, and it is the intention to regularly review progress in respect of that Plan and to amend the strategy as necessary. This appears to be a robust approach to performance scrutiny.

Evidence of service planning

As noted above, the Five Year Development Plan for 2009-14 is in place, and the impact of work relating to its primary objectives – further developing the plans for the improvement of library buildings and placing greater emphasis on work with children and young people – is already apparent in several performance areas. Strategic decisions relating to Pontlottyn and Aberbargoed libraries are also carefully explained and justified. However, the Annual Return could have linked that Plan to overall corporate objectives more clearly. The tiered approach to developing the library service has been in place for some time and continues to guide current management of the service and its resources.

The Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS)

The authority's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards has been assessed as follows. The authority:

- Is achieving the requirements of 6 of the 9 Welsh Public Library Standards.

The authority continues to achieve a high level of performance in WPLS 1 (access to public library service points) even though two service points were closed during the year.

Services to special user groups and those with special requirements (WPLS 2) also continue to be extensive, and will be reviewed in relation to access matters and the range of equipment and support services provided to residents during 2013-14.

Even though total aggregate opening hours have fallen slightly as a consequence of closing two service points, the authority's performance more than meets the requirements in WPLS 3, and the delivery of scheduled services has improved since 2010 -11.

Annual acquisitions of materials for public use (WPLS 5) remain at satisfactory levels, and the slight realignment of resources allocated between adult and children's materials to the benefit of younger users is apparent here. Levels of performance in this area relate to the modernisation of service points, and as that programme comes to an end, the authority will face the challenge of maintaining current levels of book and materials purchasing.

The service also meets the requirements of levels of expenditure on acquiring materials for adults and young people, as well as the other requirements of WPLS 6, but it needs to consider the widening gap between performances between the two categories in the Standard.

The authority is achieving the requirements of WPLS 7 (delivery of requests) by a significant margin, but the technical issues relating to catering for pre-publication materials remains.

- Is partly achieving the requirements of 2 further Standards. Partial achievement is recognised, where an authority is not meeting the full Standard, if it has achieved at least half of the stipulated requirements for a given Standard.

In WPLS 4 (ICT services and facilities), the authority's reluctance in the past to install WiFi facilities in its libraries meant that the requirements of the Standard were not being met in full, and the position remains the same under the new Framework. A recent change in policy makes it likely that the authority will be able to meet all the requirements by March 2014, and this will bring it into line with most library authorities in Wales.

The position and prospects in relation to staffing (WPLS 8) are more complex. The authority employs a suitably qualified person to lead the service, and overall staffing levels more than meet the minimum stipulations. However, the percentage of professional staff expected by the Standard is not being met. It is noted that the impact of key service developments, as well as modernisation of service points, means that there is greater emphasis on increasing front line (non-professional) staffing. However, proposals to restructure the senior staffing tier, as noted in the Annual Return may further reduce the overall proportion of professionally qualified staff. The authority should consider whether this is a desirable and intended development.

- Is currently failing by a small margin to meet the requirements of the remaining Standard, namely WPLS 9 (capital expenditure and buildings). However, the assessors would wish to acknowledge the excellent and extensive work carried out by the authority in recent times on its library buildings, and the levels of investment provided by the authority which have resulted in a 20% improvement in performance against the Standard. The authority is also undertaking the required surveys and audits of its buildings as required by the Standard. It is accepted that this indicative Standard is a challenging one, and the authority has used it effectively to develop its buildings strategy in the past. When the authority has completed its proposed development at Caerphilly, it is possible that it will be able to meet this Standard.

For the purposes of comparing performance with that of the other Welsh public library authorities, the average number of Standards being met by all authorities in 2011-12 was 6, the highest number achieved was 8, the lowest 3. Caerphilly's performance is therefore comparable with other authorities in Wales.

The Welsh Public Library Performance Indicators (WPLPI)

The Framework also asked library authorities to report against 8 Performance Indicators; these are comparable with figures reported under the third Framework, and it is therefore possible to identify certain trends in service performances.

The following table lists the authority's reported performances alongside Welsh average performances. The authority should reflect on these comparisons, and on the assessors' comments below, in its intended regular review of service progress under its action plan. Performances against WPLPI 2, which requires surveys to be undertaken during the course of the Framework, will be assessed in the final year.

| WPLPI | | Authority Performance | Welsh Average |
|-------|---|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1 | No. of users (per 1,000 population) | 4652 | 5884 |
| 3 | % take-up of public access PCs | 24.0% | 43.7% |
| 4 | Annual issues (per 1,000 population) | 4026 | 4823 |
| 5 | % of total authority library expenditure spent on the purchase of library stock | 11.9% | 13.3% |
| 6 | % of total authority revenue expenditure spent on the public library service | 1.15% | 0.89% |
| 7 | % total authority capital allocations spent on public library facilities | 1.38% | 1.17% |
| 8 | Net expenditure on public library provision (per 1,000 population) | £19,915 | £16,142 |

The Annual Return offers detailed and helpful explanations of current performances and where there are different levels of performance compared to those of previous years. The manner in which the changes in performance are attributed to actions and initiatives in the commentary and self-assessment is commended.

The assessors noted that levels of use have improved (WPLPI 1) – undoubtedly due to the improvements achieved in the quality and attractiveness of the modernised library buildings and their stock and services. Issues have also improved significantly overall (WPLPI 4), with some outstanding improvements at certain service points, again reflecting the value and impact of recent investment at those sites.

Levels of computer use (WPLPI 3) remain at very similar levels to past performances, with some disappointing trends among younger users. The library service has already responded to this issue with a range of collaborative programmes, and has prioritised the need to increase use among young people.

The significant increases in capital expenditure on library building projects (WPLPI 7) and in net annual revenue expenditure on providing a library service (WPLPI 8), as well as the increased percentage of the authority's

revenue expenditure committed to the library service (WPLPI 6) during 2011-12, are commended. The relatively small decline in the percentage of the library service budget expended on books and materials (WPLPI 5) can be attributed in some measure to the impact of the overall increases in expenditure on the service, but this element of the budget needs to be safeguarded in future as noted elsewhere in this assessment report.

Conclusions

The assessors are of the opinion that the performances being achieved by the authority in many of the Standards and Performance Indicators are now reflecting the benefit of substantial investment in library buildings and service enhancements within them. They are also reflecting effective policy decisions and management action. However, levels of investment in materials need to be safeguarded in future if the service is to continue to achieve a higher number of Standards and enhance the efficiency of its activities.

There is also the prospect of future significant changes taking place within the staffing structure of the library service; the authority should consider the impact of these changes, and establish whether they are all entirely beneficial to performance both in respect of the Framework and to the library service provided.