

APPENDIX 1



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Caerphilly Annual Report 2013-14

Maintaining a Valued Service: The Fourth Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards

The year under review is the third, and final, year under the Welsh Government's fourth framework of Welsh Public Library Standards. The framework was operational for the three-year period from April 2011 to March 2014; its focus was on the maintenance of core library services in what was recognised as a challenging period for the public sector. Although the benchmarks and Standards set reflected a more limited approach than in previous frameworks, as indicated in the reports for the first two years of this framework, the Welsh Government was still seeking reassurance that Welsh library authorities were endeavouring to carry out their statutory responsibilities in the delivery of the core library service.

The requirements

Under the fourth framework of library standards, Welsh public library authorities were 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. For the 2013-14 year, the authorities were asked to submit their returns by the end of May 2014, earlier than in previous years, in order to facilitate the work of the Public Libraries Review Panel established by the then Minister for Culture and Sport. The Welsh Government is grateful for the co-operation of Welsh library authorities in this regard. The Annual Returns were considered by a panel of assessors, including a peer review reference group, drawn from senior service managers in the sector, assisted by independent external expertise.

The authority's Annual Return for 2013-14, which was submitted by the authority in accordance with the stipulated requirements, 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 performance in 2013-14.

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

The Annual Return indicates how the Welsh Government's assessment of progress in 2012-13 was submitted to the Council's Education for Life Scrutiny Committee, highlighting the attention given to areas requiring action, such as declining issues and loans. It also notes how the authority responded to the need for specific additional investment in WiFi in order to enable the library service to meet one of the more urgent requirements of the final year of the Fourth Assessment Framework.

Evidence of service planning

Assessment reports in the past have commented favourably on the authority's coherent approach to the planning of its library service. The value of its Development Plan has been readily apparent during the fourth assessment framework, and it is now noted that the authority intends to develop a new three-year library strategy (for the period 2014-17) that will specifically address the requirements of the Welsh Government's fifth quality standards assessment framework for libraries, whilst at the same time addressing the authority's financial planning requirements for the same period and the service priority areas of 'reading together' and 'digital eservices'. By adopting such an approach the authority and library service should be able to face a challenging period with a greater degree of confidence, benefiting from the knowledge that such an approach has provided clear merits and successful outcomes in the past.

The Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS)

The authority's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards during 2013-14 has been assessed as follows. The authority:

- Is achieving 8 of the 9 Welsh Public Library Standards, compared to 6 in March 2013.

This is commendable progress of a significant and sustained nature, achieved through careful planning and the implementation of a development plan closely allied to the requirements of the Standards Framework.

In WPLS 1 (service points and access to them), the authority is performing well against the requirements. A recalculation of the proximity of occupied households to service points and the re-opening of one service point brought about a higher level of performance, and the development of links with local colleges targeted at young adult readers is also noted. In WPLS 2 (services to users with special needs), the authority also continues to perform well, emphasising the need to continually review ICT provision as well as delivering services within a DDA compliant environment. In WPLS 3 (opening hours) there has been a significant increase in total and aggregate opening hours as a direct consequence of re-opening one service point and opening the major new service point at Caerphilly and the new service point at Newbridge. By investing in the provision of WiFi at the larger service points the authority is also now achieving all the requirements of WPLS 4 (ICT services and facilities). The service has expanded significantly over the period of the assessment framework as new and modernised library service points have been opened, all with additional ICT provision.

The authority has also increased its investment in books and materials for its libraries and levels of performance achieved both over the three-year period and in the final year of the framework, are commended. In previous Annual Returns the authority indicated that it might not be able to sustain these satisfactory levels of investment, but by careful planning it has done so. As a result, the requirements of WPLS 5 (annual acquisitions) are met. In WPLS 6 (annual expenditure on stock) the levels of additional investment are reflected in very satisfactory levels of reported performance, and even though one target in respect of stock replenishment is missed by a very narrow margin, the assessors agreed to award the Standard in full following their consideration of the authority's explanation of the impact of a set of transient influences on that particular performance. The library service has also continued to make progress in WPLS 7 (delivery of requests) and has improved further in the year under review on levels of performance that were

already previously meeting the requirements of the Standard. The Return emphasises the value of resource sharing and inter-lending in this area, but the primary reason for the sustained levels of commendable performances is the consistent levels of investment in the materials fund achieved over the period 2011-14.

As a result of the successful implementation of its Development Plan, and the significant levels of associated capital investment, the authority is now also meeting the requirements of WPLS 9 (buildings and space). In this area the authority's progress and achievements have been remarkable and highly effective. They are therefore also to be highly commended.

- Is partly achieving the requirements of the one remaining Standard, namely WPLS 8 (staffing)

The performance in terms of overall staffing numbers is satisfactory in relation to the requirements of the Standard, but the percentage of professional staff employed falls short of the target set. It is noted that there are a number of unfilled professional posts at the present time, and the Return indicates that it is necessary to maintain that position in order to accommodate the possible effects of forthcoming spending reviews and staff restructuring. However, when those processes are complete, the authority should seek to ensure that its library service has sufficient professional expertise and competence to enable it to build on its achievements and to respond to opportunities for further initiatives that may present themselves.

Overall

These performances reflect careful and well-managed progress and achievements over the period since April 2011.

For the purpose of comparing performances with that of other Welsh public library authorities, the average number of Standards being met by all authorities in 2013-14 was 6.5, the highest number achieved was 9, and the lowest 4. Caerphilly's performance is therefore above average when compared with others in Wales.

The Welsh Public Library Performance Indicators (WPLPI)

The framework also asked library authorities to report against 8 Performance Indicators: many of these were comparable with figures reported under the third assessment framework (2008-11), and it was therefore possible for authorities 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 as it embarks on the work of drawing up its three-year plan for the development of its library service in the period 2014-17.

WPLPI	Authority Performance	Welsh average
1. Use (physical/virtual visits, attendance at events) of service (per 1,000 population)	5974	5635
2. User satisfaction levels (i) % of users who are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with	98%	96%

the library service		
(ii) % of adults who think the choice of books is 'very good', 'good', or 'adequate'	99%	96%
(iii) % of users under 16 who think the choice of books is 'very good', 'good', or 'adequate'	99%	98%
3. % take-up of public access PCs	25%	41%
4. Annual issues (per 1,000 population)	3606	4424
5. % of total authority library expenditure spent on the purchase of library stock	11.23%	12.90%
6. % of total authority revenue expenditure spent on the public library service	1.34%	0.90%
7. The % of total authority capital allocations expended on public library facilities in this year	5.39%	0.56%
8. Net expenditure on public library provision (per 1,000 population)	£23,188	£16,341

Most of the performances reported remain at satisfactory levels. Indeed, some reflect significant increases in performance. Physical visits (WPLPI 1) have increased dramatically in some locations, undoubtedly as a result of improving and modernising the facilities, as well as co-locating a wider range of local authority services with libraries. Loans (WPLPI 4) and the use of ICT (WPLPI 3) appear to be steady, but the overall headline figures tend not to fully convey the improved performances of a significant kind within these service areas, particularly at some of the newer libraries. Public satisfaction rates are high in WPLPI 2, and again the value derived from the work undertaken on buildings and from higher levels of investment in stock and services, is clearly apparent in the public's response.

All the key financial Welsh Public Library Performance Indicators show significant improvement in performances compared to 2012-13. The completion of the new build project at Caerphilly is reflected in the significant allocation from the authority's capital funding (WPLPI 7) and places the authority in a commendable position compared to others in Wales. Similarly the increase in the net annual expenditure on library provision (WPLPI 8) and in the percentage of authority revenue expenditure spent on the provision of a public library service during 2013-14 are both notable and very commendable achievements that reflect the authority's commitment to its library service, even in these challenging times.

Concluding remarks

The authority is to be commended on its substantial progress under the fourth assessment framework. Careful planning and appropriate levels of investment have all brought significant benefits to the service and the users. The residents of the authority have responded by expressing very high levels of satisfaction with the authority's library service. As noted earlier, the authority should approach the challenges of the next planning and performance assessment period (2014-17) with considerable confidence, knowing that the approaches adopted to service planning and managing service development hitherto have been the foundations on which it has built a record of considerable success.