

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Blaenau Gwent (Aneurin Leisure Trust)

Annual Assessment Report 2017-18

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Blaenau Gwent's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government.

1 Executive summary

Blaenau Gwent met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Blaenau Gwent achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and failed to achieve 2.

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority. Whilst this provides some flexibility the service still appears to be vulnerable to budget and service level changes, which particularly affect its ability to meet some of the resource-based indicators. Staff achieve a significant amount given capacity constraints and are to be commended, although the contribution of staff from related services should not be underestimated. While provision for 2017/18 has been maintained, the position going forward is less clear and there is the potential for further library service savings to be applied in the medium term. With staff and resourcing levels already at critically low levels, this raises substantial concerns for the resilience and performance of the service. The service will need to plan carefully to ensure that it can continue to deliver for its communities and contribute towards meeting wider local and national government priorities and strategic goals.

- Support for health and well-being is strong with Blaenau Gwent being one of the few authorities regularly offering the full range of services under QI 4 in each static service point.
- Book issues have decreased, and remain among the lowest per capita in Wales. The loss of the school library service is a factor here, but the effect of continuing low investment in the materials budget must also be considered.
- Expenditure on resources remains the lowest in Wales, and the targets for acquisitions and Welsh language material have again not been met despite no further cuts being made to the book fund this year. This exceptionally low level of investment remains a major concern, although it is noted that the Trust and local authority are continuing discussions on an appropriate level of funding, to match the needs of the community.
- Staffing levels remain among the lowest in Wales. This is mitigated by the appropriate use of staff directly employed by other agencies and authority departments, who make a major contribution to performance in key areas (notably QI 3, 4 and 11).
- Strategic planning for the Trust recognises the pivotal role of the library service in achieving its aims, but adequate levels of investment will be critical in allowing sufficient capacity to realise greater benefits for the local community.

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

Blaenau Gwent meets all 12 core entitlements in full. It takes a proactive approach to reaching socially and digitally disadvantaged people, including homeless people and the traveller community, as well as catering for housebound users with a home delivery service. A marketing strategy is in place, with a calendar of events promoting lifelong learning, personal well-being and development. Staff are trained with a strong customer care ethos, and hold relevant qualifications, such as ECDL and NVQs in Customer Care, Advice and Guidance or Library and Information Skills.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Blaenau Gwent is achieving 7 in full, 1 in part and is failing to achieve 2 of the indicators.

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 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	
or Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Not met
% of material budget spent on Welsh	x	
or Spend on Welsh per capita	x	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	✓	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	✓	

QI 12 Supply of requests		Met in full
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	✓	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	✓	
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

There has been no significant change in Blaenau Gwent's overall performance compared to the last year of the fifth framework for those quality indicators where direct comparisons are possible.

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 are only required to carry out user surveys for QI 1 once over the three-year period of the framework. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during this first year of the framework.

Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Blaenau Gwent did not conduct a user survey during 2017-18.

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		73%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	n/a		38%	90%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	98%	4/17	75%	98%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide up to four case studies describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year.

Blaenau Gwent provided four such case studies:

- Family Support – a young family who recently moved to the area used the library to find out more about their new community, discovering services such as the job-club, and using the homework club to help with IT access for school work. The library has become a place to meet friends, and has helped them discover a love of reading, improving literacy skills.
- Adventures in Wonderland – an innovative reading project, using an app to facilitate a virtual reading group, was key to helping an adult with Asperger syndrome to overcome her social anxiety. Encouraged by library staff she went on to attend a group discussion in the library, and now has the confidence to attend regularly, and engage with new people.

- Welsh Learners – working with a Welsh language learning group the service organised a Welsh Language Music Day in partnership with Mentrau Iaith for all language abilities. The event was broadcast live on local radio, and more people were encouraged to learn a little Welsh. A Welsh language reading group has been started.
- Health Recovery – a keen reader considers that the library has supported her recovery from a stroke, enabling her to regain her reading skills. Staff introduced her to audio books helping stimulate her memory for vocabulary, supported access to online advice on managing her condition and encouraged her to attend social activities in the library.

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 Blaenau Gwent's position for 2017-18. 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 to some authorities. Where possible, figures from the last year of the fifth framework have also been included for comparison; however, in some cases a change in definition or the introduction of additional measures makes comparisons impractical. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2016/17
QI 1 Making a difference						
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills:	n/a		24%	83%	94%	90%
c) health and well-being	n/a		33%	65%	95%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	n/a		90%	98%	100%	98%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a		88%	91%	98%	88%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	n/a		93%	99%	100%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		74%	86%	94%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall;	n/a		93%	97%	99%	98%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	n/a		8.5	9.1	9.2	9.4
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	17	17/22	10	32	238	16
c) informal training per capita	259	9/22	15	199	473	247
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	275	10/22	82	228	684	274
QI 8 Library use						
a) visits per capita	4,123	8/22	2,501	4,047	7,014	4,289
b) virtual visits per capita	311	21/22	243	866	2,211	362
c) active borrowers per capita	100	22/22	100	154	229	89
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita*	4	22/22	4	68	663	
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita^	9	13/22	5	9	14	9
c) % of available time used by the public	37%	5/22	14%	27%	67%	36%

QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	29	12/21	3	31	196	24
b) total volunteer hours	2,406	7/21	40	1,346	11,939	1,954
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,228	19/21	£7,047	£11,915	£17,771	£8,826
b) % on staff,	75%	1/21	44%	63%	75%	69%
% on information resources	4%	21/21	4%	13%	25%	4%
% on equipment and buildings	4%	13/21	0%	4%	20%	5%
% on other operational costs;	18%	11/21	0%	18%	37%	22%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	14/20	£0	£338	£17,432	£0
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.27	19/21	£1.24	£1.82	£2.41	£1.71
QI 16 Opening hours [#]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	1/21	0.00%	0.02%	1.28%	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.00%	1/20	0.00%	0.35%	11.24%	0.00%

* per Welsh speaking resident population

^per 10,000 resident population

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

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, and compares this performance (where applicable) with the final year of the fifth framework (2016-17).

3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Blaenau Gwent has yet to conduct its user surveys, which are due to be carried out at least once during the course of the framework. All static libraries provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Blaenau Gwent one of only three authorities providing the full range of identified services and activities across all its service points. Attendance at pre-arranged training sessions and informal training is slightly up on 2016-17, maintaining performance levels.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Blaenau Gwent continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events / activities for users with special requirements at all static libraries. The increase in visitor levels noted in 2016-17 has also been broadly maintained, with only a slight fall in overall physical visits, and further increases in the number of library members. Virtual visits have continued to fall, in common with many other library services across Wales, although it is noted that increased social media activity and engagement may be a factor here. The number of active borrowers has increased, but per capita is still among the lowest in Wales. The decrease in book issues over the period is largely attributed to the loss of the school library service, which has led to a reduction in children's borrowing.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Funding remains an issue for service investment, and as a result Blaenau Gwent still does not meet either target for overall acquisitions or Welsh language provision. It is noted that the allocated book fund was set at a similar level to 2016-17, but levels of investment in

the materials budget are still very low in comparison with other authorities, and this is likely to be a contributory factor to the low level of book issues per capita. It is nevertheless encouraging that the Trust and the local authority are engaged in discussions regarding an appropriate level of funding, and that the large decrease in the materials budget recorded in the last year of the fifth framework has not continued. It is also encouraging that expenditure on resources for children and Welsh language materials have increased significantly, with clear efforts being made to maximise use of the Welsh collections. Performance in relation to online access remains at or above the median, with recorded ICT usage among the highest for Wales, and the service continues to achieve the targets for supply of requests.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Staffing levels remain critically low, with a slight decrease in overall levels attributed to the closure of the school library service, although the main service staff hours and structure remained unchanged. This is mitigated by the appropriate use of staff directly employed by other agencies and authority departments, and the contribution of staff with cognate qualifications within the wider Trust. Both posts requiring a library qualification were appropriately filled during the year, but professional staffing remains among the very lowest per capita in Wales. There is a strong focus on staff training especially in customer care and health information, achieving the target for the proportion of staff time spent in professional/personal development. The service has seen a small increase in its use of volunteers, with 29 volunteers each giving an average of 83 hours of their time.

Total revenue expenditure has fallen slightly on 2016-17, with expenditure per capita is well below the median level. Spending on information resources remains the lowest in Wales. Aggregate annual opening hours are unchanged, and the target here achieved. Blaenau Gwent did not report any unstaffed opening hours, unplanned closures of static service points or missed home deliveries during 2017-18.

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. Blaenau Gwent reported on a range of services, identifying how these align with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. New initiatives include piloting financial literacy support in partnership with NatWest Bank. Other services focus on health improvement, energy and environmental issues, sustaining Welsh language and culture and providing access to council resources, with libraries the location for multi-service hubs. Outreach work to the young, and to socially disadvantaged groups is noted as contributing to achieving a more equal Wales. The service's contribution towards digital inclusion is also particularly strong.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Blaenau Gwent noted how following the January 2017 review of the service, the Trust and local authority had agreed that there should be no loss of provision in 2017/18. However, there remains the potential for future savings to be implemented as part of medium term financial planning. A set of high level principles covering improvements for the community, service modernisation, sustainability and cost efficiency have been agreed. There is also a commitment to further explore the co-location of

services, the opportunities offered by alternative models of delivery, and support for digital inclusion. Strategic planning for the Trust recognises the pivotal role of the library service in achieving its aims, but adequate levels of investment will be critical in allowing sufficient capacity to realise greater benefits for the local community.

6 Conclusion

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority. Whilst this provides some flexibility the service still appears to be vulnerable to budget and service level changes, which particularly affect its ability to meet some of the resource-based indicators. Staff achieve a significant amount given capacity constraints and are to be commended, although the contribution of staff from related services should not be underestimated. While provision for 2017/18 has been maintained, the position going forward is less clear and there is the potential for further library service savings to be applied in the medium term. With staff and resourcing levels already at critically low levels, this raises substantial concerns for the resilience and performance of the service. The service will need to plan carefully to ensure that it can continue to deliver for its communities and contribute towards meeting wider local and national government priorities and strategic goals.