

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Torfaen

Annual Assessment Report 2017-18

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

1 Executive summary

Torfaen met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Torfaen achieved 6 in full, 1 in part and failed to achieve 3.

Torfaen library service continues to offer good evidence of the strength of its provision in supporting the health and well-being agenda, and the work of its embedded Health and Well Being Information and Support Service is to be commended. However, continued low levels of staffing and investment inevitably impact on service capacity, and there has been an overall decline in usage, which has seen visitor numbers, book issues and active library membership all fall in 2017-18. The development of a five-year Strategy for the Library and Information Service is nevertheless welcome, and will help shape the development of the service in the coming years. Service resourcing, particularly the level of the materials budget, remains a concern however, and while some assurance is offered that there will be no further reductions to the budget after 2018-19, the planned savings of £200,000 in this year will undoubtedly impact on an already fragile service.

- Torfaen submitted three case studies demonstrating the positive impact the service makes. 90% of adults surveyed think the library has made a difference to their lives.
- Attendance at formal training sessions has increased slightly, with a larger increase in the number helped by informal training.
- There has been a decline overall in usage levels, including physical visits, book issues, library membership and in particular the number of active borrowers, with performance below the Welsh average in general.
- The materials budget has decreased further in 2017-18, and performance against the acquisitions targets remains among the lowest in Wales. The challenges of setting priorities in these circumstances are recognised, but without additional investment it is difficult to see how performance in this area can be improved.
- Staffing levels have been broadly maintained, but at a level well below the median for Wales. While the service continues to invest in professional staffing, and is one of the few authorities in Wales to meet the target in this area, the overall staffing position remains of concern.
- Total revenue expenditure has increased on the previous year, but the planned budget savings noted for 2018-19 are likely to further impact on service performance.

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

Torfaen meets all the of 12 core entitlements in full. The service has a strong partnership ethos, working both within the council, externally and with the third sector. It was a founding partner in the regional Books4U service, and participates proactively in resource sharing initiatives and in offering online resources to customers. A recent public consultation has fed in to the development of a five year Library and Information Service strategy, which is now available on the service website.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Torfaen is achieving 6 in full, 1 in part and is failing to achieve 3 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	✓	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	✓	
iv) CPD percentage	✓	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	x	Not Met

There has been no significant change in 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.

Torfaen carried out both its user surveys in January 2018 as part of a wider consultation exercise. The proportion of young people who think that the library helps them learn, at 73%, is somewhat lower than the 96% reported in the fifth framework, and may reflect the inclusion of the survey within a wider exercise, where there was no opportunity to engage directly with local schools.

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:	73%	6/6	73%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	90%	4/7	38%	90%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	98%	10/17	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. Torfaen provided three such case studies, although stronger evidence of impact on participants could have been included:

- Lego Club – a fortnightly club promoting library services to younger audiences. Each session is themed, helping children to develop logical mathematical thinking and problem solving alongside their language and vocabulary skills. The children make new friends, gain in confidence and have fun.
- Read to Me – volunteer reading companions visit weekly to read aloud to a person who through ill-health or disability cannot read for themselves. The service brings the therapeutic benefits and the pleasure of companionship to people in their own homes. Volunteers share their passion for reading, and families / carers also benefit.
- Engaging Libraries – an intergenerational project (funded by Carnegie / the Wellcome Trust) on the theme of independent living for older people, involving discussions of relevant health and social issues. Over three months a series of events were run in libraries, schools and residential homes, bringing together children and older people.

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 Torfaen'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:	83%	4/7	24%	83%	94%	77%
c) health and well-being	77%	3/7	33%	65%	95%	63%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	96%	6/7	90%	98%	100%	97%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	95%	2/7	88%	91%	98%	90%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	5/7	93%	99%	100%	96%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		74%	86%	94%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall;	98%	3/7	93%	97%	99%	96%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	8.5	6/6	8.5	9.1	9.2	9.3
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	32	11/22	10	32	238	31
c) informal training per capita	385	3/22	15	199	473	340
QI 6 attendances at events per capita						
	187	16/22	82	228	684	196
QI 8 Library use						
a) visits per capita	3,491	15/22	2,501	4,047	7,014	3,608
b) virtual visits per capita	700	14/22	243	866	2,211	792
c) active borrowers per capita	107	21/22	100	154	229	110
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita*						
	25	19/22	4	68	663	
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita [^]	8	15/22	5	9	14	8
c) % of available time used by the public	28%	11/22	14%	27%	67%	29%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	11	19/21	3	31	196	8
b) total volunteer hours	548	16/21	40	1,346	11,939	528
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£11,450	13/21	£7,047	£11,915	£17,771	£10,527
b) % on staff,	67%	8/21	44%	63%	75%	72%
% on information resources	11%	15/21	4%	13%	25%	13%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	15/21	0%	4%	20%	2%
% on other operational costs;	19%	10/21	0%	18%	37%	12%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	14/20	£0	£338	£17,432	£0

QI 15 Net cost per visit	£2.04	7/21	£1.24	£1.82	£2.41	£2.28
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)

Torfaen conducted both its user surveys in January 2018, although as part of a wider consultation exercise, which may have been influential on the findings. Overall there are several areas of improvement when compared with the surveys from the last framework, with 98% of adults rating the library as 'good' or 'very good'. Satisfaction levels among young people have however fallen; this is attributed to a change in survey methodology. All static libraries provide the required range of support for individual development, and a strong focus on health and wellbeing services is apparent. Attendance at formal training sessions has increased slightly, with a larger increase in the numbers helped by informal training, where attendance per capita is the third highest in Wales.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Torfaen continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events / activities for users with special requirements at all library branches. Attendance at library events and activities had decreased however, as has the number of overall physical visits and book issues, with performance generally below the median for Wales. It is noted that the co-location of the library with other services remains influential on visitor numbers. Library membership has also declined, following an increase in 2016-17, but performance here is still comparatively strong, especially when viewed against the further fall in the number of active borrowers, where, per capita, service performance is amongst the lowest in Wales. In contrast to this general picture of falling usage levels, there is however a notable increase in the area of audio-visual issues / electronic downloads.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

In common with many other services in Wales, Torfaen reduced its book fund in 2017-18, and both acquisitions and materials expenditure per capita fall well below the required levels. The proportion of the materials budget allocated to children's resources has also fallen, and there is a continuing decline in expenditure on Welsh language materials, with targets here also missed by some margin. The challenges of setting priorities when the overall book fund is at such a low base are acknowledged, with the low level of demand for Welsh language materials (where issues are among the lowest in Wales) noted as a factor. PC provision and usage has broadly been maintained, where the trend in many other authorities has seen a fall in take-up. Performance in relation to the supply of requests has also improved.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Staff levels are broadly similar to 2016-17, with overall staffing below the median for Wales, but where the authority continues to meet the target for qualified staff, one of only seven authorities to do so. Qualified leadership is in place, and performance against the target for staff training / professional development has improved slightly, with both these elements met. The contribution of volunteers has also increased, with the majority involved in delivery of the Read to Me scheme.

It is encouraging to see that the overall service budget has risen on 2016-17, although it is noted that this is mostly accounted for by a rise in operational costs outside staffing and the materials budget. There is also reference to the need to make budget savings of £200,000 in 2018-19, which is likely to further impact on service performance. While aggregate annual opening hours have been maintained at 2016-17 levels, Torfaen's offer here is the lowest per capita in Wales, and the service is one of only six not achieving the stipulated target.

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. Torfaen reported on its particular contribution to priorities around health and well-being through its embedded Health and Well Being Information and Support Service. Its focus on individual development, through support for educational attainment and digital and information literacy was also noted. In responding to Torfaen's corporate priorities the services also focuses on support for vulnerable groups.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Torfaen noted the work that had been completed during 2017-18 to develop a five year Strategy for the Library and Information Service. It is noted that this Strategy has had to take into account the Council's requirements for budget savings in 2018-19, but that further reductions beyond this are not anticipated. Adoption of this Strategy will shape the development of the service in the coming year.

6 Conclusion

Torfaen library service continues to offer good evidence of the strength of its provision in supporting the health and well-being agenda, and the work of its embedded Health and Well Being Information and Support Service is to be commended. However, continued low levels of staffing and investment inevitably impact on service capacity, and there has been an overall decline in usage, which has seen visitor numbers, book issues and active library membership all fall in 2017-18. The development of a five-year Strategy for the Library and Information Service is nevertheless welcome, and will help shape the development of the service in the coming years. Service resourcing, particularly the level of the materials budget, remains a concern however, and while some assurance is offered that there will be no further reductions to the budget after 2018-19, the planned savings of £200,000 in this year will undoubtedly impact on an already fragile service.