

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

Annual Assessment Report 2018/19

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 continues to meet 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 did not achieve 2.

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and Trust's service delivery plans. The service continues to achieve a significant amount for its local communities, given its capacity and resources, with performance in 2018/19 largely maintained and improvements in some key areas; as in previous years, provision is well-supported by pro-active and strong partnership-working. While there has been a welcome increase in service investment in this year, staff and resourcing levels are still at critically low levels. Professional staffing, with just a single qualified librarian in post following the compulsory redundancy of the only other qualified postholder, is a particular concern for the resilience and performance of the service. The forthcoming review of provision under the Trust offers the opportunity to consider the direction and resourcing of the library service, to ensure it is equipped to address strategic priorities and continue to meet the needs of its local communities.

- Four case studies offer a compelling demonstration of the positive impact of the service on its users and local communities. Improvements in training provision and attendance are also evident, with a particular focus on digital and information literacy.
- Book issues have increased in some areas, reflecting positively on increased investment in book stock, although performance here remains amongst the lowest per capita in Wales.
- There has been a welcome increase in expenditure on resources in 2018/19, although the targets here (QI 9 and 10) are still not met by some margin. Levels of investment in the materials budget remain the lowest in Wales, and this continues to be an area which the Trust and local authority should consider carefully.
- Staffing levels have increased slightly, but remain amongst the lowest per capita in Wales, with the service heavily reliant on staff from other areas of the Trust, council and partner organisations to help deliver services. Professional staffing is an area of particular concern for the resilience of service leadership and planning.
- A review of all services delivered by Aneurin Leisure Trust is due to be completed in autumn 2019, to establish a clear strategic direction for the Trust moving forward. The findings of this review will be key to ensuring the future sustainability of the library service, and its capacity to respond to local needs.

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 continues to meet all 12 core entitlements in full, providing detailed and helpful commentary within the return on each area covered. Work with homeless people and other socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups remains a strong feature of service delivery, with a stated customer service ethos of 'going the extra mile'. There is dedicated marketing support to promote library services and activities, and use is made of social media to reach new audiences. Support for Welsh language provision has continued to develop, with Welsh reading groups now actively involved in stock selection.

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 does not 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

Blaenau Gwent has maintained its performance in this second year of the sixth framework, with no significant change on 2017/18.

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 2017/18 or 2018/19. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Blaenau Gwent did not conduct a user survey during 2018/19, with surveys planned for the Autumn of 2019.

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	60%	94%	97%	
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	n/a	38%	88%	95%	
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	97%	=10/20	80%	97%	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:

- Community Support – working with local partners, the library has expanded its services in Cwm, a community which has seen a reduction in local service provision. Four new key initiatives – exercise and well-being sessions, a Carers Group, a reading group, and a Post Office outreach service – have placed the library at the heart of the community, with noted health and well-being benefits for older people in particular.
- Adult Learning – a single parent and regular library user has been supported by her local library to study with the Open University. The library provides the IT facilities and information resources to enable her to undertake her studies, with learning and moral support from library staff. Her family also participate in activities at the library, providing her with time to study. The library has played a key role in supporting her learning aspirations, and facilitating a unique learning environment.

- Job Club – the service has widened its range of activities, to meet an increasing demand for digital support, in accessing information about benefits, jobs, and other areas of need online. Working with partner organisation and trained volunteers, all libraries deliver job clubs and digital drop-ins on a regular basis. The library service plays a particularly key role in helping people with little knowledge of IT navigate Universal Credit requirements, in a supportive and informal environment.
- Home Delivery Service – providing specialist services to housebound customers and the visually impaired, helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation. Feedback from users demonstrates the importance of these services to individuals and their families.

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 2018/19. 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. Figures from the first year of the sixth framework or relevant previous surveys have also been included for comparison. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator	Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2017/18	
QI 1 Making a difference					[Framework 5]	
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	n/a	24%	82%	96%	90%	
c) health and well-being	n/a	33%	62%	94%	94%	
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	n/a	90%	97%	100%	98%	
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					[Framework 5]	
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a	81%	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	65%	91%	95%		
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	9.3	9.5	9.4	
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	22	19/22	13	30	208	17
c) informal training per capita	269	9/22	15	199	433	259
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	299	11/22	91	295	689	275
QI 8 Library use ¹						
a) visits per capita	4,234	7/22	2,596	3,969	7,170*	4,123
b) virtual visits per capita	353	21/22	345	885	2,205	311
c) active borrowers per capita	80	21/22	58	150	251	100
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita ²	95	22/22	95	602	1,424	73
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita ³	9	12/22	5	10	14	9
c) % of available time used by the public	33%	=4/22	14%	25%	63%	37%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	23	15/21	3	30	214	29
b) total volunteer hours	2,111	6/21	90	1,477	9,806	2,406

QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,610	20/22	£7,181	£12,145	£19,449	£8,228
b) % on staff,	73%	6/22	47%	62%	78%	75%
% on information resources	8%	21/22	8%	13%	21%	4%
% on equipment and buildings	8%	5/22	0.4%	4%	25%	4%
% on other operational costs	11%	15/22	0.3%	16%	37%	18%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=17/22	£0	£467	£8,829	£0
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.25	21/22	£1.18	£1.82	£2.52	£1.27
QI 16 Opening hours ⁴						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	0.00%	0.25%	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.00%	=1/20	0.00%	0.28%	7.99%	0.00%

¹ figures for co-located services are marked with an asterisk; performances for these services are likely to reflect higher footfall, and will not therefore be directly comparable with stand-alone library provision

² per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population; figures from 2017/18 reports corrected following a calculation error

³ per 10,000 resident population

⁴ 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 with the first year of the sixth framework (2017/18).

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; these are planned for Autumn 2019. The service continues to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, although shared reading groups and book clubs are no longer provided at all libraries. Attendance at pre-arranged training sessions and informal training has also improved, with a particular focus on digital and information literacy.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Blaenau Gwent continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers an extended range of activities and events, including provision for users with special requirements. Attendances in this area (QI 6) have increased, as have overall visitor levels, for both physical and virtual visits. Library membership has also been maintained at a similar level to 2017/18. The number of active borrowers has however fallen, although it is noted that the figures here do not include PC users or users that only access electronic resources. While book issues for adults have increased, reflecting well on improved investment in book stock, children's borrowing has continued to fall, and by some margin. Overall, Blaenau Gwent's performance in relation to book issues remains amongst the lowest per capita in Wales. A strong increase in audio-visual issues is noted, reflecting a growing demand for talking books through the home delivery service, with performance here well above the median level. The service also now provides access to resources through Borrowbox, and is actively promoting use in this area.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)ⁱ

While the service still falls short of the targets for overall acquisitions and Welsh language resources there has been a welcome increase in investment in the book fund in 2018/19. Levels of investment in the materials budget are still however the lowest in Wales, the effects of which can be seen in the low performance against book issues, and this remains an area which the Trust and local authority should consider carefully. Performance in relation to online access is maintained close to the median level, with recorded ICT usage among the highest for Wales, although the service notes that usage has fallen in line with an increased demand for Wi-Fi provision in libraries. The service continues to achieve the targets for supply of requests.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Staffing levels have increased slightly, but remain amongst the lowest per capita in Wales. As a result the service is heavily reliant on the contribution of staff from other areas of the Trust, council and partner organisations to help deliver services. Professional staffing is an area of particular concern, with now only one professionally qualified member of staff (the Library Services Manager) following the compulsory redundancy of the other qualified postholder; raising concerns for the resilience of service leadership and planning. The service continues to meet the target for the proportion of staff time spent in professional / personal development, and to benefit from the work of its volunteers; with 23 individuals each giving an average of 92 hours of their time.

Total revenue expenditure has increased slightly on 2017/18, but expenditure per capita is still amongst 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 reports well on a range of services relevant to the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, citing a proactive approach to partnership working as key in ensuring that the service can continue to deliver for the local community. The partnership with NatWest Bank has continued, and new partners include the Post Office, delivering weekly mobile outreach sessions that maintain a community service, contributing to the achievement of a more resilient Wales. Other services support health and well-being agendas, equality of opportunity, digital inclusion, and Welsh language and cultural activity.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Blaenau Gwent notes how the service remains at the heart of both the local authority and Trust's service delivery plans. There remains a commitment to explore the potential for further co-location of services, building on the successful, sustainable models that operate in Tredegar and Brynmawr. During 2019 the local authority will undertake a review of all services delivered by Aneurin Leisure Trust to establish a clear strategic direction for the Trust moving forward. This review is due to be completed in autumn 2019; its findings will be key to ensuring the future sustainability of the service, and its capacity to respond to local needs.

6 Conclusion

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority, and are noted as a key component in both the local authority and Trust's service delivery plans. The service continues to achieve a significant amount for its local communities, given its capacity and resources, with performance in 2018/19 largely maintained and improvements in some key areas; as in previous years, provision is well-supported by pro-active and strong partnership-working. While there has been a welcome increase in service investment in this year, staff and resourcing levels are still at critically low levels. Professional staffing, with just a single qualified librarian in post following the compulsory redundancy of the only other qualified postholder, is a particular concern for the resilience and performance of the service. The forthcoming review of provision under the Trust offers the opportunity to consider the direction and resourcing of the library service, to ensure it is equipped to address strategic priorities and continue to meet the needs of its local communities.

ⁱ E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been excluded from acquisitions figures for Q1 9 in 2018/19 to ensure that the standard accurately reflects individual authority strategy, investment and performance. In some cases this has impacted on achievement against the standard in comparison with 2017/18. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.