Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Flintshire (Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd.)

Annual Assessment Report 2018/19

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

1   Executive summary

Flintshire met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Flintshire achieved 9 in full, and 1 in part, and is one of only four authorities to achieve at this level.

Library services in Flintshire are delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. The service has broadly consolidated its position under its new operating model in 2018/19, with notable improvements arising from the targeted development of its events and activities programme. Challenges of low staffing levels and financial constraints remain, with budget reductions this year absorbed by Flintshire's traditionally strong investment in its bookfund and careful strategic planning. A further reduction in the overall budget allocation is expected in 2019/20, in line with the Aura's funding agreement with Flintshire County Council, but it is noted that funding levels should stabilise from April 2020.

- All service points continue to provide good support for individual development, and for health and well-being. 97% of adults rate the library as 'very good' or 'good' overall.
- Take-up of formal and informal training opportunities has risen, after a notable decline in performance in 2017/18, although per capita levels are below the median for Wales.
- The number of events / activities on offer has increased significantly in 2018/19, with development here targeted across all libraries; as a result attendance levels have more than doubled, with per capita performance now above the median level.
- Overall usage has broadly been sustained, with small increases in some areas, and declines in others; performance generally remains at or below the median level.
- Budget constraints have seen a reduction in the materials budget in 2018/19, although performance here remains among the highest in Wales, and the targets for overall and Welsh language acquisitions are still both met.
- Overall and professional staffing levels have broadly been maintained, although per capita remain among the lowest in Wales, well below the stipulated targets.
- Total revenue expenditure had decreased, with budgets planned to reduce further in 2019/20, in line with Aura's funding agreement with Flintshire County Council.

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

Flintshire library service continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full, working to the strategic objectives of its parent body Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. Key initiatives in 2018/19 include the development and launch of a service communication plan, supporting the core offer across all libraries. Aura has also invested in planned remedial work to its libraries, and is in the process of completing a strategic asset review to inform long term planning for its building stock. The service continues to engage widely with its users, using feedback from user surveys and comments to inform service delivery and development.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Flintshire is achieving 9 in full, and one in part.

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		Met in full
Acquisitions per capita	✔	
or Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	✔	
or Spend on Welsh per capita	✔	
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 a minor change in Flintshire's performance compared to 2017/18, with the materials spend target for QI 9 no longer met, although the standard is still achieved on the basis of acquisitions per capita. The service also now meets both the proportional and per capita spending targets for QI 10 (Welsh language resources).

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 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.

Flintshire completed its user surveys of adults and children in November 2018, with improved feedback on skills development and support for health and well-being. The service is however still unable to report figures for user evaluation of its training offer.

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:	90%	*=9/13*	60%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	86%	*=10/15*	38%	88%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	n/a		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. Flintshire provided three such case studies:

- Intergenerational Sessions – working with a neighbouring care facility for the elderly to deliver the Christmas Rhymetime sessions on their premises. Families found this beneficial, giving children the opportunity to interact with older people, and residents particularly enjoyed engaging with the children. The visits are now happening throughout the year with residents also attending sessions at the library.

- Employability and Skills – the impact of a supported library work placement on one volunteer with learning disabilities. Through regular volunteering he has developed confidence in delivering a range of tasks, improved his independence, and has become a valued part of the team.

- Health and Well-being – delivery of a programme of events / activities supporting health and well-being, designed to be easily accessible to users with special requirements, including people living with dementia. Activities are simple and low cost – jigsaw clubs, knit and natter, board game clubs – but have had a huge impact, providing social interaction and enjoyment for independent participants and carers.

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 Flintshire'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	83%	=6/15	24%	82%	96%	*64%*
c) health and well-being	79%	5/15	33%	62%	94%	*46%*
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	=2/15	90%	97%	100%	*94%*
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						*[Framework 5]*
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	=6/14	81%	91%	98%	*89%*
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=3/14	93%	99%	100%	*96%*
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	91%	=4/13	65%	91%	95%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=7/14	93%	97%	99%	*99%*
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.3	=6/13	8.5	9.3	9.5	*10.0*
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	28	=13/22	13	30	208	*14*
c) informal training per capita	171	13/22	15	199	433	*118*
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	309	9/22	91	295	689	*140*
QI 8 Library use[1]						
a) visits per capita	3,992	11/22	2,596	3,969	7,170*	*3,998*
b) virtual visits per capita	393	19/22	345	885	2,205	*334*
c) active borrowers per capita	116	17/22	58	150	251	*139*
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita[2]	504	14/22	95	602	1,424	*757*
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita[3]	7	20/22	5	10	14	*7*
c) % of available time used by the public	14%	22/22	14%	25%	63%	*14%*
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	64	6/21	3	30	214	*61*
b) total volunteer hours	1,607	10/21	90	1,477	9,806	*1,057*
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£9,142	19/22	£7,181	£12,145	£19,449	*£9,319*
b) % on staff,	60%	13/22	47%	62%	78%	*57%*
% on information resources	21%	1/22	8%	13%	21%	*25%*
% on equipment and buildings	10%	4/22	0.4%	4%	25%	*11%*
% on other operational costs	9%	16/22	0.3%	16%	37%	*6%*
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=17/22	£0	£467	£8,829	*£0*
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.59	=14/22	£1.18	£1.82	£2.52	*£1.69*
QI 16 Opening hours[4]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.06%	19/22	0.00%	0.00%	0.25%	*0.02%*
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.56%	11/20	0.00%	0.28%	7.99%	*3.02%*

[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)

Flintshire completed its user surveys of adults and children in November 2018, with the findings reflecting well on how the service is meeting customer needs. All static libraries continue to provide the full range of support for individual development, with health and well-being also well-supported. Attendance at pre-arranged user training sessions have risen, after a significant drop in 2017/18, and numbers helped by means of informal training have also improved by some margin, although in both cases performance is still below the median for Wales. Some reflection on the factors at work here would be a useful addition to the return.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Flintshire continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events and activities for users with special requirements at all static libraries. The service tasked all libraries with extending the variety of events delivered in 2018/19; a total of 2,614 events were held (up from 829 in the last reporting year) meeting a range of user needs. As a result attendance levels reported for QI 6 have more than doubled on 2017/18, with per capita performance now above the median level. Usage in other areas has broadly been sustained, with small increases in overall visits and library membership, and greater improvements in visits to the service website and electronic downloads (a trend that can be seen across Wales). Book issues (adult and children) have fallen however, and in most areas of usage performance is at or below the median level.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)[i]

Budget reductions have impacted on the bookfund in 2018/19, although per capita performance remains among the highest in Wales, with Flintshire one of only five authorities to meet the target for number of items acquired (QI 9). The service has also continued to invest strongly in Welsh language resources and both targets here (QI 10) are achieved. The requirements in relation to supply of requests, reporting on requests satisfied within county, are also met and at an improved level. PC provision has been maintained at 2017/18 levels, although with overall usage still the lowest in Wales. It is noted that the service has upgraded its Wi-Fi offer in 2018/19, and is one of the few services offering Wi-Fi printing; ICT remains a priority area for development.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall and professional staffing levels have again broadly been maintained, although per capita service staffing remains among the lowest in Wales, and neither staffing target is met. Managerial posts are required to attain a professionally recognised library qualification, and the service continues to recruit into vacant posts, with a second apprentice position added to the staff complement in 2018/19. Qualified leadership is in place, and the service continues to meet the requirements in relation to time allocated for professional development. The contribution from volunteers has increased, with 64 individuals each contributing an average of 25 hours to the service.

Total revenue expenditure had fallen, in line with Aura's funding agreement with the council, with service budgets among the lowest in Wales. It is noted that the budget reduction was primarily applied to the bookfund, where spending has traditionally been strong, and that further reductions are not anticipated beyond April 2020. Aggregate annual opening hours have fallen on 2017/18; although the target here is still met Flintshire records one of the highest levels of unstaffed opening hours as a result of the co-location of some branches with leisure facilities, where self-service provision is available outside core hours.

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. Flintshire library service continues to report on how it supports and contributes to local, national and regional priorities, and notes the introduction of its communication plan for the service, which is based around these strategic goals and the Universal Offers for libraries. Examples are given of delivery through partnership working, supporting learning and development, and community cohesion and resilience. The role of collections and services in promoting health and well-being, cultural engagement, and support for the Welsh language, is also highlighted.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Aura highlights the continuing financial challenges facing the service. A further 10% reduction in the resources budget is set for 2019/20, in keeping with Aura's funding agreement from the council, although such reductions are not planned to continue beyond April 2020. The service is nevertheless seeking to extend its reach and usage, with stretch performance targets, and a 'back to basics' approach to reader development and stock promotion in 2019. Responding to customer feedback on its online and ICT services, development in these areas will also continue to be a priority. A Social Impact Strategy has been commissioned for the organisation, to provide better evidence of the difference libraries make to people lives, and as a model for moving the service forward.

6   Conclusion

Library services in Flintshire are delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. The service has broadly consolidated its position under its new operating model in 2018/19, with notable improvements arising from the targeted development of its events and activities programme. Challenges of low staffing levels and financial constraints remain, with budget reductions this year absorbed by Flintshire's traditionally strong investment in its bookfund and careful strategic planning. A further reduction in the overall budget allocation is expected in 2019/20, in line with the Aura's funding agreement with Flintshire County Council, but it is noted that funding levels should stabilise from April 2020.

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[i] E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been excluded from acquisitions figures for QI 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.