

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Merthyr Tydfil (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust)

Annual Assessment Report 2018/19

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

1 Executive summary

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

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

Library services are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has continued to perform well in 2018/19, recording improved levels of use in a number of areas, and high levels of customer satisfaction. Capacity issues have however affected some aspects of provision, notably events and activities programmes. Expenditure on materials has increased in 2018/19, and the service continues to meet the stipulated acquisition targets, one of the few authorities to do so. Focused investment on Welsh language stock, with appropriate marketing, should also impact positively on Welsh issues in 2019/20. Improvement to the resourcing of the service has enabled it to consolidate performances, although low staffing levels remain a limiting factor. The continued commitment of the Trust and local authority to supporting library services should acknowledge the positive impact for users of sustaining an appropriate level of investment in staff, resources and facilities.

- User surveys (reissued annually) show continued high levels of customer satisfaction, and are used to shape service development.
- Support for health and well-being remains strong with Merthyr Tydfil one of only two authorities regularly offering the full range of services under QI 4 across all branches. Formal training sessions continue to record the highest level of attendance per capita in Wales, although take-up has fallen in 2018/19.
- Capacity issues have impacted on events / activities programming, with attendance levels falling as a result. Library use in other areas has either been maintained or improved, although children's loans remain among the lowest per capita in Wales.
- Spending on materials has increased, with a particular focus on investment in Welsh language resources; acquisition targets for both QI 9 and QI 10 are met.
- Overall staffing levels have been maintained, but the service was carrying one professional vacancy in 2018/19 which has limited capacity further; in neither case are the stipulated target levels met.
- Total revenue expenditure has recovered somewhat, after a substantial reduction in 2017/18, although per capita it remains among the lowest in Wales, and this will be a factor limiting performances in some areas.

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

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet all of the 12 core entitlements in full, reaching out to all sections of the community. Library services are tailored to local needs, using social and demographic information, and annual survey consultations, to shape the service offer. Local links and partnerships remain central to the promotion and delivery of these services, as is cross-working within the Trust, through marketing work, and the opportunity to reach more people using other Trust facilities.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Merthyr Tydfil 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	✓	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	✓	
<u>or</u> 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 slight improvement to Merthyr Tydfil's performance in 2018/19 with the service meeting both the acquisition targets for QI 10.

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.

Merthyr Tydfil undertakes user surveys of both adults and children once each year; figures are therefore updated annually.

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:	95%	=5/13	60%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	94%	3/15	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. Merthyr Tydfil provided three such case studies, although greater evidence of the impact on participants would have strengthened coverage, and helped inform next steps:

- International Women's Day – an event at the Central Library aimed at empowering young women, by celebrating the achievements of women in Merthyr Tydfil, as role models. A series of talks / presentations preceded the unveiling of a purple plaque to the feminist historian Ursula Masson. Attendees found the day 'inspirational'.
- Trevithick Day – a joint project to use the annual Trevithick Day commemoration to promote local heritage and civic pride, and through a writing competition for local schools support the development of written and communication skills. The competition was promoted through a series of free workshops with schools, with over 120 children participating. A film of the prize winner's event, which featured readings of the winning stories by a well-known local actor, was made and released on Facebook.
- Earth Hour – the library service organised a Family Fun Day, working with partner organisations, to inform and inspire people of all ages to make lifestyle changes to improve the environment. A range of outdoor activities were offered, using books / artefacts to develop new knowledge and skills. In advance of the Day itself 'Planet Pledge' session were also held with local community groups. Over 300 people attended the Fun Day and took part in activities.

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 Merthyr Tydfil'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						
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	94%	2/15	24%	82%	96%	94%
c) health and well-being	88%	2/15	33%	62%	94%	88%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	1/15	90%	97%	100%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	98%	1/14	81%	91%	98%	98%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	100%	=1/14	93%	99%	100%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	94%	2/13	65%	91%	95%	94%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	99%	=1/14	93%	97%	99%	99%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.0	=11/13	8.5	9.3	9.5	9.0
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	208	1/22	13	30	208	238
c) informal training per capita	366	3/22	15	199	433	329
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	250	14/22	91	295	689	288
QI 8 Library use¹						
a) visits per capita	3,820	13/22	2,596	3,969	7,170	3,825
b) virtual visits per capita	948	10/22	345	885	2,205	865
c) active borrowers per capita	149	12/22	58	150	251	148
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita²	417	17/22	95	602	1,424	379
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita ³	10	9/22	5	10	14	10
c) % of available time used by the public	63%	1/22	14%	25%	63%	62%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	46	7/21	3	30	214	51
b) total volunteer hours	632	19/21	90	1,477	9,806	800
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,820	21/22	£7,181	£12,145	£19,449	£7,799
b) % on staff,	52%	18/22	47%	62%	78%	63%
% on information resources	20%	3/22	8%	13%	21%	20%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	13/22	0.4%	4%	25%	5%
% on other operational costs	25%	7/22	0.3%	16%	37%	13%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=17/22	£0	£467	£8,829	£0
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.18	22/22	£1.18	£1.82	£2.52	£1.29
QI 16 Opening hours⁴						
(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)

Merthyr Tydfil refreshed its user surveys (adult and children) in March 2019 as part of its annual cycle of survey consultations, with high performances sustained in all areas. All static libraries continue to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Merthyr Tydfil now one of only two authorities providing the full range of identified services and activities across all its service points. Attendance at formal training has fallen again in 2017/18, but remains the highest per capita in Wales. Numbers helped by means of informal training have however risen with an increased demand for informal support alongside access to infrastructure to navigate a widening range of online services.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events / activities for users with special requirements at all static libraries. Overall attendance in this area has continued to fall in 2018/19, with capacity issues impacting on the number of events held; performance is still above the median level however, and the service notes that a high number of its events and activities are oversubscribed. Library use in other areas has either been maintained or improved, with adult book issues now above the median level, although children's loans remain among the lowest in Wales.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)ⁱ

Spending on acquisitions has increased in 2018/19, following a reduction in 2017/18, and Merthyr is now one of only five authorities meeting the requirements for QI 9. The service has also improved its expenditure on Welsh language materials (targeting spending here after a heavy investment in children's stock in 2017/18), and now meets both expenditure targets for QI 10, although Welsh issues per capita remain among the lowest in Wales. It is noted that the investment here came late in the year, and that the improvement in stock, with appropriate marketing, will hopefully see a positive impact on issues in 2019/20. PC provision has been maintained, and usage has again increased, with the service now recording the highest usage levels in Wales. The value of IT services to communities where other public services have been cut, especially with the growing pressure to access services digitally, is a noted factor at work here. Performance in relation to supply of requests has fallen again, but both targets are still achieved.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall staffing levels have been maintained, although with the service carrying a vacancy for a qualified librarian, there has been a drop in the number of professional staff in this reporting year. While recruitment to this post should see professional staff levels recover, the service would still not meet either of the staffing targets, and it is noted that there is no likelihood of increases in staff numbers, nor plans to effect reductions. Qualified leadership is in place, and the service is meeting the requirements for staff training / professional development at an improved level. The number of volunteers has reduced

slightly in 2018/19, with 46 volunteers each contributing around 14 hours to the service. It is noted that the vacant post, and generally low levels of staffing, have resulted in less capacity to actively work with, recruit and train volunteers.

Total revenue expenditure has recovered somewhat, after a substantial reduction in 2017/18, although per capita it remains among the lowest in Wales. Aggregate annual opening hours have been maintained, with an emphasis on ensuring equality of access across all service points, and there were no unplanned closures or interruptions to service.

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. As in 2017/18 the service reports on its contribution to the priority outcomes of Merthyr Tydfil's Local Well-being plan, which itself contributes to the wider Well-being Goals for Wales. While a full range of activities and contributions are highlighted, some further reflection within the commentary on how specific developments and delivery in 2018/19 supported these areas would have been appropriate.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Merthyr Tydfil notes the continuing constraints of staffing levels and budgets, but with a commitment from the Trust and local authority to continue to support and develop the library service. The main focus of activity for the next year is noted as a refocusing of delivery plans and strategy to more clearly embed Ways of Working and Well-being goals into service delivery, working with partners to demonstrate the value of the service for social prescribing in particular. Ongoing initiatives include the delivery of a school-based community library, run by volunteers but supported by staff and stock from the main library service, which it is hoped will become fully operational within the year. Cross-sector work, to support developments around the heritage and local history of the area, and in promoting reading and children's services is also referenced.

6 Conclusion

Library services are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has continued to perform well in 2018/19, recording improved levels of use in a number of areas, and high levels of customer satisfaction. Capacity issues have however affected some aspects of provision, notably events and activities programmes. Expenditure on materials has increased in 2018/19, and the service continues to meet the stipulated acquisition targets, one of the few authorities to do so. Focused investment on Welsh language stock, with appropriate marketing, should also impact positively on Welsh issues in 2019/20. Improvement to the resourcing of the service has enabled it to consolidate performances, although low staffing levels remain a limiting factor. The continued commitment of the Trust and local authority to supporting library services should acknowledge the positive impact for users of sustaining an appropriate level of investment in staff, resources and facilities.

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.