

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Conwy County Borough Council

Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Conwy's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Culture and Sport Division of the Welsh Government.

1 Executive summary

Conwy met 12 of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Conwy achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1.

Conwy has performed well throughout the three years of the current framework and remains above the median in a number of areas. The strong commitment to health and wellbeing is evident along with many beneficial external partnerships. Conwy has seen a slight decline in service use, possibly as a result of Covid-19, despite a slight increase in membership. The challenges of a significant reduction in staffing are however noted. The revision to the staffing structure noted in 2018/19 have now taken place and have resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of professional staff. Conwy has performed well throughout the three years of the current framework and remain above the median in a number of areas. The plan to focus on libraries as community hubs should ensure the resilience of Conwy libraries. Libraries are playing an increasingly important role as community hubs and this is a trend seen across Wales. However, adequate staffing is key to ensuring success. Overall, the service has done well to maintain performance levels over the three years despite reductions in budgets.

- Conwy completed its user surveys of adults and children in November 2018, in the second year of the sixth framework with positive results.
- Usage in the number of adult and children's book issues has declined. However, the number of adult book issues remains well above the median in Wales.
- The spend per capita is above the median in Wales and 2019/20 saw the completion of the large capital project of the new Conwy Culture Centre which has been well received.
- Proportionate spending on material for children, and Welsh language resources has been maintained and the total number of Welsh language issues is above the median in Wales.
- There has been a substantial reduction of 31% in professional staffing levels since 2017/18. The staffing targets (QI 13) are no longer met. Qualified leadership remains in place.

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. The assessment has been limited to some degree by the fact that

local authorities were only asked to comment on any changes to the previous year's return, alongside additional commentary on of partially/not met core entitlements.

2.1 Core entitlements

Conwy is meeting 12 of the 12 core entitlements in full. The service notes that libraries will be developed as community hubs as part of Conwy's Communications and Engagement strategy. A draft Library and Information Strategy for 2020-25 had been produced and was due to progress through the Council's committees in March, however this was postponed owing to the pandemic. 2019/20 saw the completion of the final phase of the Modernising Library Strategy with the opening of the new Conwy Culture Centre .

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Due to the impact of Covid-19, three quality indicators have been removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, five, six and fifteen, of which number six had a constituent target. Of the **nine** remaining targets for 2019-20, Conwy achieved 7 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1 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 7 Location of service points	√ Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material	Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x
<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	√

Quality Indicator	Met?	
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	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

Conwy has broadly maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework, the main change since 2018/19 is the qualified staffing target is no longer met.

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. However, this measure has been affected by Covid-19 and some authority plans to undertake a survey in the first quarter of 2020 were cancelled. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during framework 6. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Conwy completed its user surveys of adults and children in November 2018, demonstrating continuing high levels of satisfaction with the service, with positive indicators of the impact the service has on people's lives,

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%	=11/19	60%	90%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	87%	11/19	41%	85%	99%

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. Conwy provided four such case studies.

- Youth Obligation programme – a collaboration with the local job centre. This is a successful collaboration with the local job centre which supports young adults in using library resources to improve their skills. This programme has had a positive effect on the skills and confidence on those young people involved.
- Welsh Learners Group, Conwy Culture Centre – a new Welsh learners group in Conwy Library. This is a collaboration between Menter Iaith and the library. Welsh learners and first language speakers meet to practice and use Welsh language skills. This helps to highlight Welsh resources in the library. One individual notes that this group has helped to improve her confidence in using Welsh in a relaxed and informal setting.
- Higher Apprenticeship – Two library staff have been supported to complete a higher level apprenticeship at Coleg Llandrillo Menai. The experience was a positive one for the staff, resulting in an opportunity to build on experiences in the workplace and to

reflect on practices and processes, whilst strengthening working relationships through the experience of joint learning.

- Chatting Corners, Colwyn Bay – A community group for the bereaved and lonely. This is a collaborative venture with Cruse Bereavement Care and Co-op Funeral Care. This group provided an opportunity for members of the local community to talk about bereavement, often a taboo and difficult subject for many. The non-judgemental and friendly space within the library resulted in new friends and a confidential ear for those who attended.

2.4 Quality indicators and benchmarks

Whilst Covid-19 restrictions remain challenging to all library services in Wales, staff resilience, professionalism and care for the community they serve has been outstanding. Although digital services have increased, we know from evidence provided that customers are missing their library services. They are missing the staff, browsing the shelves, IT provision, community spaces and groups such as knit and natter. The importance of the library as a physical place and the impact on the wellbeing of their customers through interaction with library staff cannot be underestimated.

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 Conwy's position for 2019/20. 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 second 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	2018/19
QI 1 Making a difference						[Framework 6]
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	82%	10/18	25%	75%	94%	n/a
c) health and well-being	74%	8/19	38%	69%	96%	n/a
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	97%	=7/19	90%	96%	100%	n/a
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						[Framework 6]
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	=7/18	78%	91%	99%	n/a
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=10/18	88%	97%	100%	n/a
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	95%	=2/17	65%	85%	99%	n/a
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	97%	=10/18	85%	96%	100%	n/a
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.0	=15/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	n/a
QI 8 Library use ¹						
a) visits per capita*	3,270	18/22	2429	3987	6874	3,300
b) virtual visits per capita	1,384	4/22	239	909	2131	1,562
c) active borrowers per capita	159	7/22	78	145	244	163
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita ²	853	6/22	311	680	1468	857
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	11	5/22	4	9	14	11
c) % of available time used by the public	33%	5/22	14%	30%	64%	35%
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£13,688	7/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	£13,655
b) % on staff,	73%	3/22	48%	61%	76%	72%
% on information resources	12%	=11/22	5%	13%	22%	11%
% on equipment and buildings	1%	=20/22	0%	8%	28%	1%
% on other operational costs	14%	14/22	1%	18%	35%	16%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£10,556	2/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	£5,529
QI 16 Opening hours ³						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.09%	20/22	0.00%	0.23%	3.96%	0.25%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.31%	13/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	0.59%

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 ²per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population

³Rankings 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 and second year of the sixth framework (2017/18 and 2018/19).

3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)¹

Conwy completed its user surveys of adults and children in November 2018, in the second year of the sixth framework with positive results. The service also completed a public consultation on the home and mobile library service in the first quarter of 2019, which has resulted in an amalgamated service during 2019/20. Conwy also demonstrates continued customer engagement through an annual 'Learning outcomes' survey, alongside consultation regarding the new Culture Centre in Conwy. All static libraries provide the full

range of support for individual development, with health and wellbeing also well-supported. Collaborative working with a number of health organisations, including Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has been undertaken to increase awareness of the Reading Well for Mental Health (Books on Prescription) Scheme.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)ⁱⁱ

Conwy continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, with 10 branches (five of which are supported by the community) all open for 10 or more hours per week. Although there has been a small decrease in the total number of visits, the service has highlighted that the annual visits were indicating an increase prior to closure due to Covid-19. Conwy library in particular has seen an increase following re-location to the new culture centre. Usage in the number of adult and children's book issues has unfortunately declined a small amount over the course of the framework, in line with much of Wales. However, the number of adult book issues remains well above the median in Wales. Visits to the website have decreased, but the service notes that there were 3,000 more unique visitors to the website in 2019/20 in comparison to 2018/19. This is likely to be from the ability to join the library via the library catalogue page and to borrow electronic items immediately. Conwy has led on this initiative across Wales. There has been a notable increase in the number of electronic downloads, reflective of the majority of services in Wales.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)ⁱⁱⁱ

Although the quality indicators for stock acquisition/expenditure (QI 9) have not been met, this is in alignment with the majority of services in Wales. Conwy is one of seventeen authorities who have not met the acquisitions target (QI 9) in 2019/20. However, the expenditure per capita is above the median in Wales. Proportionate spending on material for children and Welsh language resources has been maintained and the total number of Welsh language issues per Welsh speaking population is above the median in Wales. The target for QI 10 (Welsh language materials) continues to be met. Performance in relation to the supply of requests (QI 12) continues to be met. PC provision has been maintained throughout the three years of the framework, whilst usage has decreased slightly since 2018/19.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)^{iv}

Due to the staffing restructure, there has been a reduction in the total number of staff of 15% since the first reporting year of the framework. There has also been a substantial reduction of 31% in professional staffing levels since 2017/18. The staffing targets (QI 13) are no longer met. Qualified leadership remains in place. Total revenue expenditure has decreased slightly since 2017/18. However, investment in the service continues to remain above the median level. Aggregate annual opening hours have been maintained, with the target here still met and in line with the median in Wales.

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. Conwy outlines how the library contributes to a number of national strategies relating to literacy; health and

wellbeing; older people, digital inclusion and prevention of poverty. A number of partnerships are highlighted with a variety of organisations, such as Public Health Wales and Age Connects. Events throughout the year have focused on health and wellbeing and Conwy contributes to two priority areas in the Conwy & Denbighshire Public Services Board Well-being Plan 2018-23: people and community.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Conwy references the completion of the final phase of work on its Modernising Libraries Strategy. The final element for delivering the Modernising Libraries Strategy, the area library for Conwy, Deganwy and Llandudno Junction area, was realised in December 2019 following a number of years of work, with the opening of the new Conwy Culture Centre. The review of the mobile and home library services has now been completed and these services have been amalgamated in 2019/20, with revised routes in 2019/20. A new staffing structure has been implemented to ensure that the Service is able to respond positively to Conwy's Corporate Plan priorities. The new posts will focus on the areas of reading and information. The new strategy to be implemented in 2021, will focus on the priority of Libraries as Community Hubs.

6 Conclusion

Conwy has performed well throughout the three years of the current framework and remains above the median in a number of areas. The strong commitment to health and wellbeing is evident along with many beneficial external partnerships. Conwy has seen a slight decline in service use, possibly as a result of Covid-19, despite a slight increase in membership. The challenges of a significant reduction in staffing are however noted. The revisions to the staffing structure noted in 2018/19 have now taken place and have resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of professional staff. Conwy has performed well throughout the three years of the current framework and remain above the median in a number of areas. The plan to focus on libraries as community hubs should ensure the resilience of Conwy libraries. Libraries are playing an increasingly important role as community hubs and this is a trend seen across Wales. However, adequate staffing is key to ensuring success in this area. Overall, the service has done well to maintain performance levels over the three years despite reductions in budgets.

ⁱ Due to Covid-19, local authorities were only asked to report any change in provision since the last reporting year for QI 3&4.

ⁱⁱ Due to Covid-19, QI 5&6 were removed for the 2019/20 reporting year.

ⁱⁱⁱ E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been included in the acquisitions figures for QI 9 in 2019/20. Each authority has added 201 to their total acquisitions from centrally funded subscriptions. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.

^{iv} Due to Covid-19, QI 15 was removed for the 2019/20 reporting year, alongside training and volunteer hours.