Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Flintshire County Council (Aura)

Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

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

1   Executive summary

Flintshire met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Flintshire achieved 8 in full, and 1 in part.

Library services in Flintshire are delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. The service has largely maintained its position in the three years of the framework and Flintshire is one of only three local authorities to achieve 8 of the quality indicators in full and 1 in part. Flintshire is also one of only five services to meet the acquisitions target (QI 9) and has the highest expenditure on information resources/materials across Wales. As a result, the decline is usage and visits is disappointing, especially given the strong customer engagement and community focus of the service. Although there have been no significant changes to staffing levels since 2017/18, the total number of qualified staff is in the bottom quartile in Wales. It is noted by the service that there is a commitment to retain services and staffing at their current levels.

- All static libraries continue to provide the full range of support for individual development, with health and well-being also well-supported. There has been a 75% increase in the number of reading groups in place since 2018/19.

- Since 2017/18, there has been a decrease in usage and physical visits, with adult book issues now in the bottom quartile in Wales. However, children's book issues remain above the median in Wales and increased in 2019/20.

- Flintshire remains one of only five authorities to meet the target for the number of items acquired (QI 9).

- Staffing levels have broadly been maintained throughout the framework, with targets in this area unmet, in line with all services in Wales.

- Aggregate annual opening hours have slightly decreased since 2018/19 and have decreased by 16% since the first reporting year of the framework; although the target here is still met.

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

Flintshire library service continues to meet all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full. Welsh Government funding was secured in 2019 to transform Flint Library into a more modern and flexible space. This was officially launched in March 2020. The service continues to base its core offer around health and wellbeing, reading, information and digital and culture and creativity. The ethos at the heart of the service is to develop libraries that are a mainstay of community life in Flintshire.

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 has a constituent target. Of the **nine** remaining targets for 2019-20, Flintshire achieved 8 in full, and 1 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 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	√	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	√	Met in full

Flintshire is one of only four local authorities to achieve 8 of the QIs in full and 1 in part. Flintshire has broadly maintained its performance in this third year of the sixth framework.

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.

Flintshire completed its adult and children's user surveys in November 2018 and commentary on performance was provided in the 2018/19 report.

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:	86%	=12/19	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. Flintshire provided four such case studies:

- Welsh conversation group – this group enables individuals to practice Welsh in a friendly and informal library setting. This is a supportive and relaxed learning environment for attendees, and has helped learners gain confidence in developing their Welsh language skills.

- Reading Friends – the impact of a 'reading friends' group called 'chatabout' set up in Flint Library. The benefits of shared reading are well known and one particular individual attended the group in order to build confidence in meeting people after a period off work. This group is a way of meeting new people and sharing stories and has a number of immeasurable benefits, including helping to reduce anxiety and improve wellbeing.

- Learn My Way – an online ICT skills course. An unemployed individual with caring responsibilities describes how the course provided him with the skills and confidence to access social media and search for job opportunities online. In addition, through attendance of the group, the individual was able to discover other social activities of benefit to himself and his family.

- Positive mental health – the positive impact on mental health through volunteering in the library. Through volunteering an individual has reconnected with a place where she began her working life. The experience has improved her mental health and enabled her to overcome a number of difficulties and had a huge benefit on her mental health, providing social interaction alongside a renewed interest in day to day life.

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 Flintshire'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	83%	=8/18	25%	75%	94%	*n/a*
c) health and well-being	79%	6/19	38%	69%	96%	*n/a*
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	99%	=2/19	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	99%	=3/18	88%	97%	100%	*n/a*
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	91%	=5/17	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	9.3	=7/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	*n/a*
QI 8 Library use[1]						
a) visits per capita	3,740	13/22	2429	3987	6874	*3,992*
b) virtual visits per capita	407	18/22	239	909	2131	*393*
c) active borrowers per capita	113	18/22	78	145	244	*116*
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita[2]	528	15/22	311	680	1468	*504*
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	7	19/22	4	9	14	*7*
c) % of available time used by the public	18%	19/22	14%	30%	64%	*14%*
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,394	19/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	*£9,142*
b) % on staff,	64%	9/22	48%	61%	76%	*60%*
% on information resources	22%	1/22	5%	13%	22%	*21%*
% on equipment and buildings	7%	=8/22	0%	8%	28%	*10%*
% on other operational costs	7%	18/22	1%	18%	35%	*9%*
c) capital expenditure per capita	£2,311	3/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	*£0*
QI 16 Opening hours[3]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	3.96%	22/22	0.00%	0.23%	3.96%	*0.06%*
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	1.42%	16/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	*0.56%*

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

3.1   Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)[i]

Flintshire completed its adult and children's user surveys in November 2018. All static libraries continue to provide the full range of support for individual development, with health and well-being also well-supported. There has been a 75% increase in the number of reading groups in place since 2018/19. ICT facilities and Wi-Fi have been updated and information and digital literacy skills are offered to customers through IT buddy sessions at all libraries. The service has a strong commitment to diversity provision with Dementia

Friendly and Autism awareness training for staff. All libraries took part in the Summer Reading Challenge, and Scams Awareness Month in August 2019.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)[ii]

Library usage has been impacted by the closure of all Libraries on March 20th 2020 due to Covid-19. Flintshire continues to meet the target for easy access to service points. Since 2017/18, there has been a decrease in usage and physical visits, with adult book issues now in the bottom quartile in Wales. However, children's book issues remain above the median in Wales and increased in 2019/20. Although there have been annual fluctuations to library membership, it has increased by 7.8% since 2017/18. As with the majority of services across Wales, there have been increases in visits to the service website and to the number of electronic downloads. The situation remains broadly the same as in 2018/19, apart from figures relating to adult book issues.

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

Flintshire has seen a 29% decrease in the materials budget since the first reporting year of the framework. However, Flintshire remains one of only five authorities to meet the target for the number of items acquired (QI 9), with the spend per capita above the median in Wales. The total expenditure on the materials for children is also above the median. The service continues to meet the targets for spending on Welsh language resources (QI 10), although the number of Welsh issues is below the median in Wales. The requirements in relation to supply of requests, reporting on requests satisfied within county, continue to be met, with standards increasing yearly since 2017/18. PC provision has been maintained at 2017/18 levels with an increase in usage. Although this places Flintshire in the bottom quartile in Wales, this is an improvement on 2017/18 and 2018/19 levels where usage was the lowest in Wales.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)[iv]

Staffing levels have broadly been maintained throughout the framework, with targets in this area unmet, in line with all services in Wales. Flintshire remains in the bottom quartile in Wales for both total and professional staffing levels. Qualified leadership remains in place and the maintenance of professional staffing levels since 2017/18 is positive.

Total revenue expenditure has fallen by 10% since 2017/18, but there are no further reductions anticipated. Aggregate annual opening hours have slightly decreased since 2018/19 and have decreased by 16% since the first reporting year of the framework; although the target here is still met, opening hours per capita are below the median in Wales. As noted previously, Flintshire continues to record a high level of unstaffed opening hours as a result of the co-location of some branches with leisure facilities.

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 provided a comprehensive report on how the service impacts on a number of key areas including health and well-being. Flintshire highlights collaborative working with colleagues in this area, such as MIND, which has had a positive impact on the health and well-being of

members of the local community. Priorities outlined in Aura's business plan also include improving skills for local people. This includes a community employability initiative called 'Step up your Skills with Aura', a programme aimed at engaging the community and providing opportunities for individuals to develop new skills and enhance their employment potential. The service also continues to focus on Resilient and Cohesive communities, alongside the promotion of a Vibrant Culture and thriving Welsh Language.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, it is noted that the wider vision for the service is laid out in the Aura Business Plan: 2018-2023. Covid-19 means that current priorities are to ensure services continue to be safely accessible to all. There will be a continued focus on the development of the digital offer, with the purchase of an additional e-Book platform. The service also notes a commitment to demonstrate the social impact of libraries to evidence the positive impact of libraries in Flintshire in people's lives. This is contextualised by financial challenges, which remain at the forefront for Aura.

6   Conclusion

Library services in Flintshire are delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. The service has largely maintained its position in the three years of the framework and Flintshire is one of only three local authorities to achieve 8 of the QIs in full and 1 in part. Flintshire is also one of only five services to meet the acquisitions target (QI 9) and has the highest expenditure on information resources/materials across Wales. As a result, the decline is usage and visits is disappointing, especially given the strong customer engagement and community focus of the service. Although there have been no significant changes to staffing levels since 2017/18, the total number of qualified staff are in the bottom quartile in Wales. It is noted by the service that there is a commitment to retain services and staffing at their current levels.

[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.*