Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Monmouthshire County Council

Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

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

1   Executive summary

Monmouthshire met 11 core entitlements in full and one in part.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Monmouthshire achieved 4 in full, and did not achieve 5.

Monmouthshire library service has undergone a large amount of change throughout the three years of the current framework. This has undoubtedly had an impact on some aspects of the service and is reflected in performance levels, in relation to other services in Wales. Professional staffing levels are disappointing and professional input as noted in 2017/18 continues to remain of importance. The community hub model is clearly a success with an increase in visitor figures. The increasing importance given to children's services and resources is also very positive. The opening of the new Abergavenny hub, alongside the publication of a Library Service Strategy are important developments and should contribute successfully to the sustainability of the service in the near future.

- Monmouthshire met 11 of the Core Entitlements in full and partially achieved one. The customer survey planned for March 2020 did not take place due to Covid-19.

- Libraries in Monmouthshire continue to contribute effectively to health and well-being in the community.

- Total visitor figures have increased by 4% since 2017/18. There has also been an increase in library members, placing Monmouthshire in the top quartile in Wales in these areas. However, other areas of usage have fallen.

- Monmouthshire fails to meet the Welsh language provision target, and also fails to meet any of the staffing targets.

- Monmouthshire is one of 7 services where the opening hours target (QI 16) is unmet. Aggregate opening hours have fallen by 9% since 2017/18.

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 partially/not met core entitlements.

2.1   Core entitlements

Monmouthshire met 11 of the Core Entitlements in full, and partially achieves one. For 2019/20 it failed to fully meet the requirement to conduct a full user survey once during the three year framework, as the second part of the adult customer survey was due to be held in March 2020 and was cancelled due to Covid-19. It had completed a children's user survey in 2018. It has however now met one other Core Entitlement as a Library Strategy is now in place and available on the Monmouthshire website. Commentary provided details how the community hub model in Monmouthshire enables libraries to connect with a variety of individuals and provide a range of services to meet differing needs.

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, Monmouthshire achieved 4 in full, and did not achieve 5 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	
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		Not met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x	

Quality Indicator		Met?
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Not met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	x	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	x	Not met

Monmouthshire's performance has declined throughout the framework for those quality indicators where direct comparisons are possible. Indicators affected in 2019/20 include the supply of requests (QI 12) which have now fallen below target level.

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 the plans of some authorities 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.

Monmouthshire partially completed its adult user survey in October, 2019. The second part of the adult survey was planned for March 2020 but was cancelled due to Covid-19. The last children's survey was undertaken in October 2018.

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:	78%	=16/19	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. Monmouthshire provided three such case studies:

- Mental wellbeing – impact of the library on a regular visitor. An individual describes the importance of Monmouthshire Community Hub on the local community and herself. The testimony provided highlights the importance of the wide variety of up-to-date resources available, alongside the social benefits provided by groups such as knit and natter. The positive impact on the mental wellbeing of the community is emphasised.

- Literacy – the importance of libraries' impact on the literacy of children and young people. Testimony from a number of individuals highlights the importance of children's groups such as baby rhyme times, Bookstart and story time sessions on literacy development. These groups enrich the lives of children in Monmouthshire.

- Heart of the Community – feedback from a number of individuals illustrates the importance of the libraries in their lives. This includes adult education classes, events, good facilities, and knowledgeable staff. These factors demonstrate how the library is a warm, welcoming central hub for the community.

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 Monmouthshire'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	59%	16/18	25%	75%	94%	n/a
c) health and well-being	59%	12/19	38%	69%	96%	n/a
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	93%	17/19	90%	96%	100%	n/a
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						[Framework 6]
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a		78%	91%	99%	n/a
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	n/a		88%	97%	100%	n/a
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		65%	85%	99%	n/a
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	n/a		85%	96%	100%	n/a
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.4	=3/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	9.4
QI 8 Library use[1]						
a) visits per capita	4,742*	4/22	2429	3987	6874	4,645
b) virtual visits per capita	484	16/22	239	909	2131	395
c) active borrowers per capita	126	15/22	78	145	244	150
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita[2]	333	21/22	311	680	1468	326
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	8	13/22	4	9	14	10
c) % of available time used by the public	21%	=16/22	14%	30%	64%	22%
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£23,333	1/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	£15,525
b) % on staff,	52%	19/22	48%	61%	76%	73%
% on information resources	5%	22/22	5%	13%	22%	11%
% on equipment and buildings	8%	5/22	0%	8%	28%	3%
% on other operational costs	35%	=1/22	1%	18%	35%	13%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£13,027	1/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	£43
QI 16 Opening hours[3]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	0.23%	3.96%	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	3.91%	20/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	4.38%

[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]

Monmouthshire completed the first part of its adult user survey in October 2019, with the second part of the survey cancelled due to the impact of Covid-19. The last children's survey was undertaken in October 2018. There has been an increase in the number of adults who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the library. All static libraries continued to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being. Furthermore in collaboration with Monmouthshire

Housing Association, a new weekly reading group has been established in a sheltered accommodation complex. Libraries in Monmouthshire continue to contribute effectively to health and well-being in the community.

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

Library usage has also been impacted by the closure of all libraries on March 20th 2020 due to Covid-19. Usage has increased in some areas. Total visitor figures have increased by 4% since 2017/18, and this can possibly be attributed to shared Community Hub facilities, and there has also been an increase in library members, placing Monmouthshire in the top quartile in Wales in these areas. However, there has been a decrease of 11% in adult book issues since 2017/18 with Monmouthshire reporting figures below the medium in Wales. In contrast, electronic downloads have increased by 141% since 2017/18, in-line with the general trend across most Welsh library services.

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

Monmouthshire is one of seventeen authorities who have not met the acquisitions target (QI 9) in 2019/20. There has been a decrease in materials expenditure since 2018/19 with spend per capita below the median in Wales. This is despite having the highest revenue expenditure per capita in Wales. Unfortunately, adult and children's book issues have fallen this year. Expenditure on Welsh language resources has decreased since 2018/19 and performance here remains the lowest in Wales. It is noted that Covid-19 affected purchase and addition of Welsh stock in March 2020. It is pleasing to see that Welsh language issues have increased by 118% since 2017/18. There has been a decrease in PC provision, although usage has broadly remained the same since 2018/19. The service now fails to meet the target for supply of requests, although again, the pandemic has been noted as a potential factor here.

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

Overall staffing levels have fallen considerably since 2017/18, with 43% less staff since the first year of the sixth framework. However, the total number of staff per capita remains slightly above the median in Wales. It should be noted that the service currently has a vacant position in place. There have been no changes to professional staffing levels since the last reporting year. Monmouthshire remains the only service in Wales where the Head of Service does not hold a relevant library qualification.

Monmouthshire's revenue expenditure per capita is now the highest in Wales, although the shared Community Hub model in place may be a contributing factor. However, despite expenditure per capita being the highest in Wales the expenditure on materials is the lowest in Wales. Monmouthshire is one of 7 services where the opening hours target (QI 16) is unmet. Aggregate opening hours have fallen by 9% since 2017/18. The number of missed home deliveries has improved compared with the previous year, with now just under 4% of home deliveries missed over the year due to mechanical issues. The purchase of a new vehicle in September 2019 should improve this figure in future returns.

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. Monmouthshire notes that priorities include literacy, health and wellbeing, digital inclusion and community cohesion. The narrative highlights services such as the Summer Reading Challenge, Reading Well for dementia and the home delivery service. Services such as these contribute to a cohesive community and align with well-being goals set out by the Welsh Government. Monmouthshire also continues to focus on encouraging creativity through culture. The community hub model provides a number of opportunities for partnership working in this area, thus contributing to a Wales where the culture is vibrant.

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 Library Service Strategy (2019-22) which has now been published. The areas of health and well-being, lifelong learning and culture and creativity remain at the heart of the offer from Monmouthshire. In light of Covid-19 immediate priorities as Monmouthshire move towards recovery will include promoting and developing digital services, a priority for all services in Wales, alongside realigning the home delivery Service to offer vulnerable older people a safe and flexible service. There will also be a focus on supporting staff to ensure they have the skills to meet new challenges. As with all services in Wales, there will be a need to revaluate and ensure that services offered continue to meet the needs of the community.

6   Conclusion

Monmouthshire library service has undergone a large amount of change throughout the three years of the current framework. This has undoubtedly had an impact on some aspects of the service and is reflected in performance levels, in relation to other services in Wales. Professional staffing levels are disappointing and professional input as noted in 2017/18 continues to remain of importance. The community hub model is clearly a success with an increase in visitor figures. The increasing importance given to children's services and resources is also very positive. The opening of the new Abergavenny hub, alongside the publication of a Library Service Strategy are important developments and should contribute successfully to the sustainability of the service in the near future.

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[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.*