

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Torfaen

Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

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

1 Executive summary

Torfaen met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Torfaen achieved 4 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 4.

Torfaen library service continues to offer a broad range of groups and activities, alongside support for health and wellbeing and should be commended for maintaining this provision with one of the lowest levels of staffing and revenue expenditure per capita in Wales. Torfaen have provided excellent examples, through their case studies of how libraries are essential to supporting the wellbeing of members of the community. Torfaen has continued to see a decline in most areas of usage with levels below the median in Wales in the majority of areas. However, some elements had been rising prior to Covid-19, and the digital resource usage has increased dramatically. The continuing low level of investment and budget reductions hinders the service from achieving more. The ability of the service to innovate and extend services will continue to be inhibited by these factors in the future.

- All static libraries continue to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Torfaen one of only four authorities providing the full range of identified services and activities (core and additional) across all its service points.
- There has been an increase in both active borrowers and electronic downloads. Borrowers have increased by 22% since 2017/18, whilst electronic downloads have witnessed a 79% increase.
- Materials expenditure per capita remains below the median level in Wales with a further decrease in the materials budget this year. The materials budget has decreased by 8.5% since 2017/18.
- There has been a significant increase in Welsh language issues, with figures in this area well above the median in Wales.
- The requirements in relation to the supply of requests (QI 12) have not been met for the first time in the sixth framework, although this was due to the transition to the new all-Wales library management system and six months of on-going issues relating to the switch.

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

Torfaen continues to meet all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full. Torfaen continues to work with a variety of partners to provide a broad range of valued services, including a volunteer led 'Read to Me' service. The introduction of self-service facilities across all libraries in April 2019 has also released staff to concentrate on activities that have the potential to add value to the service. The Torfaen library and information service strategy continues to inform the direction of the service but it is noted that this may be impacted by the economic and social challenges created by Covid-19.

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 Torfaen achieved 4 in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 4 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		Not met
% of material budget spent on Welsh	x	
<u>or</u> 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:	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	x Not met

There has been a decline in Torfaen's performance in 2019/20 with the target for supply of requests (QI 12) no longer met, although this was due to the transition to the new all-Wales library management system and six months of on-going issues relating to the switch.

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.

Torfaen carried out both its user surveys in January 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:	73%	18/19	60%	90%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	90%	=6/19	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. Torfaen provided three such case studies. However, one example (a home befriending service to help vulnerable and isolated customers during Covid-19 lockdown), relates to work undertaken from April 2020 onwards and thus does not fall into this reporting year and has not been included below as a result:

- Space Chase – activities delivered to support the 2019 Summer Reading challenge. This was a completely new venture for Torfaen and demonstrates an innovative approach to engaging children with their local library. The creativity shown by the staff in Torfaen libraries has helped children in the community to develop and improve a number of skills. These free sessions helped children to develop their digital skills, whilst highlighting library services in a supportive and encouraging environment.
- Chatterbox Groups – A group that brings together children with a shared interest in reading. The impact on one young individual is highlighted; the group has provided an opportunity for her to develop new skills as a wide variety of books are discussed by the group; it has led to an improvement in her role-playing skills and developed her passion for reading.

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 Torfaen'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%	83%
c) health and well-being	77%	7/19	38%	69%	96%	77%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	96%	=12/19	90%	96%	100%	96%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					[Framework 6]	
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	95%	4/18	78%	91%	99%	95%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	98%	=10/18	88%	97%	100%	98%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		65%	85%	99%	n/a
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/18	85%	96%	100%	98%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	8.5	=17/19	8.0	9.1	9.5	8.5
QI 8 Library use ¹						
a) visits per capita	3,333	17/22	2429	3987	6874	3,512
b) virtual visits per capita	239	22/22	239	909	2131	513
c) active borrowers per capita	128	14/22	78	145	244	101
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita ²	853	8/22	311	680	1468	323
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per 10,000	8	16/22	4	9	14	8
c) % of available time used by the public	24%	=12/22	14%	30%	64%	25%
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,028	20/22	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	£11,730
b) % on staff,	70%	=5/22	48%	61%	76%	78%
% on information resources	13%	=6/22	5%	13%	22%	10%
% on equipment and buildings	16%	4/22	0%	8%	28%	6%
% on other operational costs	1%	22/22	1%	18%	35%	6%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=22/22	£0	£1,567	£13,027	£546
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	0.00%	=1/22	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	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 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

Torfaen conducted both its user surveys in January 2018, as part of a wider consultation exercise, demonstrating high levels of customer satisfaction with the service. All static libraries continue to provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Torfaen one of only four authorities providing the full range of identified core and additional services and activities across all its service points. Torfaen has maintained its Dementia Friendly accreditation and offers a one to one shared reading service. Health and wellbeing provision remains an area of strength.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)ⁱⁱ

Torfaen continues to meet the target for easy access to service points. Usage has generally declined and this can partly be attributed to Covid-19. There has been a 2.6% decrease in visits to library premises since 2017/18, alongside a decrease in book issues and members. The decline in library members is due to a data cleanse undertaken in March 2019 when Torfaen moved to the all Wales LMS. There has been an increase in both active borrowers and electronic downloads. Borrowers have increased 22% since 2017/18, whilst electronic downloads have witnessed a 79% increase. This can be attributed to Covid-19, but also increased investment in BorrowBox and additional promotion through social media sites.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)ⁱⁱⁱ

Materials expenditure per capita remains below the median level in Wales with a further decrease in the materials budget this year. The materials budget has decreased by 8.5% since 2017/18. The figure for overall acquisitions has risen, although neither acquisitions (QI 9) target is met, in common with seventeen other services in Wales. The proportion of the budget allocated for children's materials has fallen slightly, but there has been a 69% increase in the expenditure on Welsh language resources since 2017/18, with the pleasing result of a significant increase in Welsh language issues, with figures in this area well above the median in Wales. However, despite the increased investment the target in this area is not met. There has been a slight decline in PC provision and usage, reflective of other services across Wales, as most individuals prefer to use their own devices, and a number of old devices which couldn't run the modern library apps, were removed from service. The requirements in relation to the supply of requests (QI 12) have not been met for the first time in the sixth framework. The service attributes this to technical issues related to the implementation of the all-Wales LMS.

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

Overall staff numbers have decreased slightly in 2019/20 and Torfaen continues to report one of the lowest levels of staffing per 10,000 in Wales. Professional staffing levels have been maintained after the restructure and loss of posts last year, and the targets in this area are not met. It is noted that there are currently vacant posts in the structure. Qualified leadership is in place.

Total revenue expenditure has decreased by a considerable 40% since 2017/18. Expenditure per capita remains below the median level. Aggregate annual opening hours have increased by 16% since 2018/19. The target (QI 16) has not been met and Torfaen's reports the lowest number of opening hours per capita in Wales, although it is noted that it has only three branches and has never met the opening hours target as a result. The Service reports that the home delivery service has been expanded and has resulted in additional capacity.

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. Torfaen's narrative demonstrates how the service contributes to the Welsh Government's priorities, Wellbeing

of Future Generations Act and Prosperity for All. This includes a variety of activities; including Lego clubs, craft sessions and 'Knit and Natter' (*Health and wellbeing*). The service also notes its contribution to a vibrant culture in Wales through a strong family history programme.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Torfaen notes that the priorities of the service continue to be framed by its library strategy (2018-2023). A staffing restructure in 2018/19 has changed the way in which services are delivered. There will be a focus on the development of the library assistant role and there will be opportunities for staff in these positions to support a variety of activities, including story and craft sessions, alongside IT skills sessions. There will also be an increased emphasis on support for Torfaen's most vulnerable customers. Further plans include the introduction of a Citizens Advice Bureau into Cwmbran library, which will potentially have a positive impact on usage of the service. In common with other services in Wales, online activities and Torfaen's digital presence will be reviewed.

6 Conclusion

Torfaen library service continues to offer a broad range of groups and activities, alongside support for health and wellbeing and should be commended for maintaining this provision with one of the lowest levels of staffing and revenue expenditure per capita in Wales. Torfaen have provided excellent examples, through their case studies of how libraries are essential to supporting the wellbeing of members of the community. Torfaen has continued to see a decline in most areas of usage with levels below the median in Wales in the majority of areas. However, some elements had been rising prior to Covid-19, and the digital resource usage has increased dramatically. The continuing low level of investment and budget reductions hinders the service from achieving more. The ability of the service to innovate and extend services will continue to be inhibited by these factors in the future.

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.