Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Wrexham

Annual Assessment Report 2019/20

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

1   Executive summary

Wrexham met 9 of the 12 core entitlements in full, partially met 2, and did not meet 1.

Of the 9 quality indicators which have targets, Wrexham achieved 4 in full, 2 in part and did not achieve 3.

Wrexham's decline in performance throughout the framework can largely be attributed to the impact of budget cuts to the service and an on-going period of uncertainty and review. However, the increase in some usage levels and opening hours in 2019/20 are positive developments, as is the removal of fines pilot. The intention of the Wrexham library service review was to enable the service to operate more dynamically and better meet the needs of its communities. The budgetary savings that are now required will reduce the reach and impact of Wrexham library service. The service should be commended for increased usage levels during a period of change and financial uncertainty. Capacity issues to maintain current service levels remains a concern with the staffing complement further reduced in 2019/20. It is difficult to envisage how the library service will continue to be able to meet user needs in a continuing austere environment.

- Unfortunately Wrexham failed to undertake a children's user survey during the course of the framework, one of only three authorities not to achieve this.

- In common with other services, Wrexham has seen a 29% increase in the number of electronic downloads since 2017/18. It has also seen a pleasing increase in adult book issues, against the wider trend.

- Expenditure on Welsh language materials has increased by 52% since 2017/18, and targets in this area (QI 10) continue to be met. This has been matched by a welcome increase in Welsh language issues as a result.

- As noted in 2018/19, the staffing complement has been reduced further in 2019/20, with a decrease in the total number of staff, alongside a decrease in professional staffing levels. Neither staffing target is 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

Wrexham is meeting 9 of the 12 core entitlements in full, partially meets 2 and does not meet 1. With Wi-Fi provision still not available across all library service points, CE 7 remains partially met. The service also partially meets CE 11 on consulting users as it failed to undertake a children's survey. The service noted plans to develop and publish a library strategy in 2017/18, but this is not in place (CE 12).

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 Wrexham achieved 4 in full, 3 in part and did not achieve 2 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:		Partially met
a) i) Public access to Internet	√	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	x	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Not met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x	
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

Wrexham has maintained its performance throughout 2019/20, with no significant improvements.

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.

Wrexham carried out an adult user survey in November 2017. No children's user survey was carried out in the course of this framework, one of only three authorities not to achieve this.

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:	n/a	60%	90%	97%
e)	% of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	80% *15/19*	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. Wrexham provided one such case study:

- Time to remember – A project to help individuals with dementia and their carers. Ruabon library were successful in obtaining a grant to establish a special collection of books for items to create memory boxes. A group session is held in the library every two weeks, becoming a regular feature for some library members, helping them to combat social isolation and meet new people.

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 Wrexham'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	n/a	25%	75%	94%	*n/a*
c) health and well-being	62%	*11/19*	38%	69%	96%	*62%*
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	90%	*18/19*	90%	96%	100%	*90%*
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					*[Framework 6]*
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	91%	*=7/18*	78%	91%	99%	*91%*
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	93%	*17/18*	88%	97%	100%	*93%*
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	74%	*15/17*	65%	85%	99%	*74%*
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	93%	*17/18*	85%	96%	100%	*93%*
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	n/a	*n/a*	8.0	9.1	9.5	*n/a*
QI 8 Library use[1]					
a) visits per capita	2,498	*21/22*	2429	3987	6874	*2,722*
b) virtual visits per capita	247	*20/22*	239	913	2131	*355*
c) active borrowers per capita	122	*16/22*	78	145	244	*127*
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita[2]	862	*5/22*	311	680	1469	*752*
QI 11 Online access					
b) Computers per 10,000	10	*9/22*	4	9	14	*14*
c) % of available time used by the public	31%	*7/22*	14%	30%	64%	*17%*
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£11,188	*12/22*	£7,260	£12,448	£23,333	*£9,967*
b) % on staff,	49%	*=20/22*	48%	61%	76%	*64%*
% on information resources	13%	*=6/22*	5%	13%	22%	*14%*
% on equipment and buildings	21%	*=2/22*	0%	8%	28%	*4%*
% on other operational costs	17%	*10/22*	1%	18%	35%	*19%*
c) capital expenditure per capita	£350	*11/22*	£0	£1,567	£13,027	*£373*
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	4.33%	*21/22*	0.00%	1.07%	5.41%	*2.42%*

[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]

Wrexham conducted an adult user survey during November 2017, but a child user survey has not been carried out in framework six. Health and wellbeing continues to be fully supported, with libraries in Wrexham delivering events that promote emotional wellbeing. The target here (QI 4) is still met. However, Wrexham notes that there are no health information partnerships in place.

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

Wrexham continues to meet the target for easy access to service points (QI 7).   Visits to library premises have declined by 7.2% in Wrexham since 2018/19, a decline seen across Wales, but Wrexham has seen an increase in adult book issues. In common with other services, Wrexham has seen a 29% increase in the number of electronic downloads since 2017/18. However, performances are generally below the median level.

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

Wrexham is one of seventeen authorities who have not met the acquisitions target (QI 9) in 2019/20, although the figure for overall acquisitions has risen. The percentage of materials expenditure for children has reduced slightly, but expenditure on Welsh language materials has increased by 52% since 2017/18 with the target in this area (QI 10) continuing to be met. As a consequence, Wrexham's book issues and spend per capita are above the median level in Wales with regard to Welsh language materials and Welsh language book issues are in the top quartile per capita of Welsh speakers. 2019/20 saw a review of the ICT offer in Wrexham and as a result PC provision has been reduced to reflect customer usage. Wrexham's provision in this area is in common with other services in Wales. Wrexham is one of six services in Wales who do not meet the targets for the supply of requests (QI 12). Targets in this area have not been met since 2018/19 and levels have remained static since this time.

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

As noted in 2018/19, the staffing complement has been reduced further in 2019/20, with a decrease in the total number of staff, alongside a decrease in professional staffing levels. Throughout the framework, Wrexham has recorded staffing levels in the bottom quartile in Wales and the situation has continued to deteriorate in 2019/20. It is noted that staffing may be affected in 2020/21 due to budgetary pressures.

Total revenue expenditure has increased on 2018/19, and spend on staffing is amongst the lowest in Wales. Expenditure per capita remains below the median level. Aggregate annual opening hours have slightly increased, but the target (QI 16) is not met, in common with six other services in Wales. Service provision continues to be extended through the provision of unstaffed hours at one branch library.

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. Wrexham's narrative demonstrates how the service contributes to Welsh Government's programme, Taking Wales Forward 2016 – 2021. This includes a variety of health and wellbeing events at libraries, with staff being dementia friends (*Healthy and Active).* The service also offers a range of groups to support lifelong learning (*Prosperous and Secure).* Other areas noted included that of *Ambitious and learning with* Wrexham supporting the literacy of young children through a bilingual story group, and *United and connected with;* a Welsh language reading group.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Wrexham notes the need to reduce the budget by £100,000 in 2020/21, with a further budget cut for the library service of £100,000 in 2021/22. The challenges of operating in this environment will make any future planned development work very difficult. As a result of the impact of Covid-19, the service has piloted automated library membership, the automated renewal of library items, a 'click and collect' service and the removal of library fines. These services now form part of the standard offer for Wrexham and will undoubtedly improve engagement with local communities. Throughout 2020/21, the service will focus on improving the digital offer and providing services that are available 24/7.

6   Conclusion

Wrexham's decline in performance throughout the framework can largely be attributed to the impact of budget cuts to the service and an on-going period of uncertainty and review. However, the increase in usage levels and opening hours in 2019/20 are positive developments, as is the removal of fines pilot. The intention of the Wrexham library service review was to enable the Service to operate more dynamically and better meet the needs of its communities. The budgetary savings that are now required will reduce the reach and impact of Wrexham library service. The service should be commended for increased usage levels during a period of change and financial uncertainty. Capacity issues to maintain current service levels remains a concern with the staffing complement further reduced in 2019/20. It is difficult to envisage how the library service will continue to be able to meet user needs in a continuing austere environment.

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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.*