



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WELSH LIBRARIES REPORT 2020-2021

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Foreword

During the pandemic, public libraries in Wales continued to provide an invaluable service to local communities. With the closure of physical buildings in March 2020, library services were quick to develop and promote on-line services and continued to find innovative ways to mitigate the loneliness and isolation experienced by many throughout the various phases of lockdown. The contribution of public libraries to the well-being of people throughout this period cannot be underestimated.

The closure of public libraries and the disruption to services due to the pandemic made it impractical to continue with the usual annual reporting exercise against the Welsh Public Library Standards for 2020 - 21. However, as the Minister responsible for public libraries, I feel it is important to record and acknowledge the contribution of library services to our communities during the difficult days of the pandemic.

This report therefore represents a revised data collection exercise, with a greater emphasis on capturing qualitative information and the experience of library customers. It does not compare the response of individual services to the pandemic, recognising that the local position of each service differed in, for example, the ability to access shared buildings, or the number of staff deployed to support other aspects of the pandemic response.

Once again, whatever their circumstances, public libraries demonstrated that they are a vital component of local communities, and the commitment, resilience, and compassion shown by library staff during the pandemic is inspiring. The dedication of staff to their customers and the value that these customers place on their library service is evident in the moving case studies included in this report.

The pandemic served to accelerate the pace of change in public libraries, particularly in relation to digital services and on-line activities. The Welsh Government will support libraries to maintain and develop these services where they have been successful. However, we know that many customers still value the opportunity to visit their local library to attend activities, to seek help or advice from library staff, or as a quiet space to read, study or work. We will continue also to support services as they encourage individuals to return in person, and to resume the excellent work that they do to support well-being, health, skills, learning, education, and the simple pleasure of reading.

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Minister for Finance and Local Government

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Introduction

It was originally intended to extend *Connected and Ambitious Libraries: The sixth quality framework of Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020* for an additional year whilst a new standards framework was developed. However, the closure of libraries during the pandemic meant that it was impractical to require local authorities to report against the full framework for 2020-21. Instead, with the co-operation of the Society of Chief Librarians, a more focused exercise to collect key data and to capture how library services adapted and responded to the needs of customers during the pandemic was implemented. This report reflects information submitted by all twenty-two library authorities.

For 2020-21, each service

- summarised their provision against the 12 core entitlements of the WPLS¹
- recorded their achievements against 6 quality indicators (instead of 16) of the WPLS
- provided a narrative report on strategic direction
- provided up to six case studies demonstrating the impact of the library service on people

The report on the performance of each individual service is largely based on the narrative provided against the core entitlements, and on case studies, rather than through statistical information provided via the quality indicators. The information provided by the quality indicators does though provide valuable information on membership, online usage and issue figures, alongside staffing levels, and operational expenditure. Some overall headline figures are provided below:

In 2020 - 21:

- 1,492,452 books were issued. Despite the closure of physical buildings library books continued to be made available, largely through the 'click and collect' services, established across Wales.
- 173,235 collections and deliveries conducted through 'click and collect' schemes.
- 4,528,337 people visited library websites. This represents a 49% increase in the number of visits to websites in 2019/20.
- 2,897,491 e-resources were downloaded, a dramatic increase from the 1,200,491 downloaded in 2019/20.

¹ [Measuring the public library service: our standards | GOV.WALES](#)

- The number of new library joiners to Borrowbox across Wales on 19 March 2020 was 648% higher than it was on 5 March 2021².
- Local authorities spent £37.5 million (net) on libraries, just over 21.2 pence per week per person.
- There are 1,184,426 members of libraries in Wales which is 37% of the population.³

The substantial impact that libraries have on their communities, evidenced within the report, clearly represents value for money. The statistics outlined above illustrate the importance of public libraries to their members. During the pandemic, libraries were essential in bringing communities together online through for example Lego clubs, online reading groups and story-time sessions.

Libraries as local hubs play a key role in ensuring that information and culture is accessible to all. The importance of culture in promoting positive well-being and physical health has been re-enforced by the pandemic. Access to cultural and heritage online activities provided a respite for people across Wales during uncertain times and emphasised the broad and deep reach public libraries have in their provision of access to all types of information⁴.

To deliver a service during the pandemic, libraries had to adapt their offer rapidly. Services reacted proactively to ensure that the needs of all customers were met during exceedingly difficult circumstances. New measures introduced included:

- allowing automatic loan renewals across all library services in Wales.
- going fine free, either permanently or temporarily.
- expanding the availability of online resources. The increase in demand was supported by an additional £500k of Welsh Government funding to purchase resources.
- creating new digital content and reaching new online audiences through story time and rhyme time sessions. These sessions provided an outlet for children isolated and unable to go to school, and their parents.
- Welsh language sessions were delivered online by many authorities. Sessions for children included a story, conversation (with the facilitator and puppets) singing traditional and newer rhymes, through the medium of Welsh. Positive feedback was received from parents who appreciated the opportunity to participate with their children in live rather than pre-recorded sessions.

² [BorrowBox – Your library in one app](#)

³ [National level population estimates by year, age and UK country \(gov.wales\)](#)

⁴ [CCV Covid Report A4 AW \(culturehive.co.uk\)](#)

- offering online reminiscence sessions to care home residents. The content included stories, photographs, and other images to encourage conversations and reminiscing. These sessions inspired the residents to talk to their carers and one another, and to library staff and the sessions had a positive impact on the mental health of those involved.
- many staff went beyond the usual expectations to maintain contact with more vulnerable customers, making befriending phone calls to vulnerable customers who were shielding.
- introducing self-service digital click & collect lockers in some services to enable customers to reserve items and collect from the locker at a time convenient to them.
- offering Bookstart Dechrau Da and Baby and Early Years packs to families of babies and young children through the library service whilst health visitors face to face services were suspended.
- libraries were unable to offer the Summer Reading Challenge (SRC) in the usual way. As a result, staff in libraries collaborated with local schools, holiday clubs and partners to engage with children and encourage them to join the Silly Squad. To make it easy and safe for children to take part SRC Challenge bags were prepacked and distributed via the library network, summer play schemes and holiday clubs.
- addressing period poverty with free sanitary products, not only from branches, but as an option on the click & collect/home delivery service, including reusable eco-friendly products.
- a number of library staff were redeployed throughout 2020/21 and provided support to shielding families through the delivery of food and prescriptions. Providing reliable and accurate information is central to library work, and these skills, alongside effective communication and listening skills were essential in this environment. Librarians as trusted professionals were able to effectively support their customers.
- as buildings opened, services provided online virtual tours of library buildings so potential customers could see access arrangements and the facilities available, such as toilets.

The positive impact of these innovations is clearly demonstrated through the following feedback from library customers:

“What a lifeline the service is, thank you for all your support in these terrible times.”

“The library has kept me sane; I rely totally on my library books.”

“The call and collect service has been a lifeline. My hearing has rapidly deteriorated so all I have is my books.”

“Receiving a phone call from the library has been the best news since the lockdown, it was so lovely to hear a friendly voice. They even helped me access some e-books on my i-pad. A wonderful thing. I cannot wait to get back in my library though.”

“Reading has kept me sane during these difficult times. I was overjoyed to hear when the library were able to offer the [order and collect] service.”

“The children love their weekly trip to the library for their packs and are excited to see what’s been selected, they have so little to look forward to at the moment.”

Additional funding of more than £1.5m provided by Welsh Government during 2020/21 from the Welsh Government’s Cultural Resilience Fund and the Cultural Service Fund for Local Government, enabled public libraries in Wales to introduce new initiatives and to support staff to acquire new skills. The Estyn Allan project, funded by Welsh Government, provided a training programme across the public library sector to support staff to develop the knowledge, and confidence to deliver bi-lingual digital activities. The training covered a wide range of topics to enable staff to engage with communities’ online, filming and recording events and activities online and in person, recording and broadcasting podcasts and using social media to engage audiences. A staff member from Denbighshire noted:

“Being part of the Estyn Allan project has been an excellent experience which has benefitted both my personal and professional development. Through participation in online sessions with industry professionals I have been able to gain specialist skills and knowledge relating to the use of digital equipment for marketing and content creation. As a result, my digital confidence levels have increased significantly, and I have applied this new learning through the creation of new online media content for Denbighshire Libraries as well as working to enhance the social media presence of the same. Working as part of the Estyn Allan team has opened up new links between Denbighshire Libraries and others across Wales and allowed the sharing of ideas and resources on a scale which would otherwise not have been possible. Going forward, I hope to share my learning with my colleagues in Denbighshire and strive towards further enhancing my digital skills “.

The initiative also resulted in the launch of new digital bilingual and specific Welsh language services. The success of Estyn Allan was recognised with the award of Library Team of the Year by CILIP Cymru Wales for 2021.

Many services purchased tablets to loan to customers without access to a home device. These tablets could be pre-loaded with content, or with library apps to enable access to e-books, e-audio books, e- magazines and newspapers, and could be Wi-Fi enabled for those without internet access at home. This was particularly valued at a time when children were being home-schooled by parents. Services also moved book groups and other activities online, using a variety of innovative methods to maintain enthusiasm and engagement in the virtual environment.

The information provided by individual library services across Wales clearly demonstrates the importance of library staff. The case studies provided clearly outline how staff, whilst experiencing the impacts of the pandemic themselves, went above and beyond to support their customers. Staff demonstrated resilience, adaptability and compassion and worked effectively with a variety of colleagues to support the most isolated members of their communities. Friendly, hardworking, and enthusiastic staff are at the heart of all services across Wales, and they clearly understand their customers. Some individuals commented that when they asked staff to choose their books for them during the pandemic, they found the selection better than when they browsed themselves. A customer in Merthyr Tydfil succinctly expressed the value that customers place on their library staff:

“Library staff are resilient, kind, caring, adaptable and almost in the realms of superhero.”

Individual Service Reports

The individual service reports below should be read in the context of the broader pandemic impact and the specific restrictions on library services.

Library services across Wales continued to maintain their statutory duties during 2020/21. With the closure of physical buildings, all services obviously witnessed a dramatic decrease in footfall and physical book issues. On average the decrease in book issues was around 80%. Some services also lost library members. However, the decline in physical use was counter-balanced by the provision of digital resources, such as e-books and e-magazines which saw a huge increase in demand.

As far as possible, activities which would normally have been delivered in library buildings were also moved on-line. However, it must be recognised that the capacity of library services to respond to the pandemic was variable and dependent, for example, on the extent to which staff were redeployed to support the pandemic response, and on the nature of library buildings. For example, not all service points were able to re-open or function due to physical constraints and the consequent inability to implement social distancing.

BRIDGEND (AWEN CULTURAL TRUST)

Library services in Bridgend are delivered by Awen Cultural Trust on behalf of the local authority. The service includes 11 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 99% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Awen library service provided detailed evidence to show that it continues to meet all the core entitlements.

Digital downloads increased by 38% since 2019/20. Bridgend is one of only seven local authority areas to see an increase in library membership during 2020-21.

The materials budget decreased by 30% in 2020/21. However, the service noted that many book suppliers were closed or unable to deliver for large parts of 2020/21 and the materials spend was focused on specific areas, such as the children's collection. Nevertheless, there has been an overall reduction of 35% since 2017/18. Usage of materials tends to be around the median for Wales although the materials budget per 1000 population is in the bottom quartile. Expenditure on Welsh materials has remained static at 3%.

There have been no significant changes to staffing, and the total number of staff identified as holding recognised library qualifications remains the same and is the highest in Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The merger of the Booklink and Mobile Library Services in early 2020 to create 'Books on Wheels' allowed Awen to react very quickly to ensure that deliveries were conducted to the most vulnerable and isolated customers.
- Bridgend has used social media effectively to deliver a variety of online sessions, including 'bounce and rhyme' and 'dungeons and dragons' sessions. This helped to continue to engage existing members. Awen will continue to focus on supporting individuals who lack the digital skills to engage with these activities.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the refurbishment of Porthcawl library. This resulted in a more flexible space and enabled the service to offer activities and events safely as buildings opened up
- A key development also included a new website. An innovative virtual tour was created for 8 libraries which means that customers can tour the libraries before visiting. The addition of 'how-to' videos and an events calendar provides a welcoming introduction to the local community.

Future plans

The case studies (examples below) demonstrate the impact the library service has on individuals and communities, particularly with health and wellbeing and digital skills.

In the immediate future, the service intends to complete the Maesteg Town Hall development and to position the library as a focal point for community engagement. Alongside this, the development of a new library strategy will ensure the events and activities offered by the library continue to remain relevant to the local community.

Summary

Awen's pro-active and engaged staff have enabled the service to remain focused through a difficult year. Careful planning has ensured the service has remained consistent and stable. The service has established a solid foundation to build on successes, regain former customers, and reach new ones.

Case Study 1

The restrictions imposed on the library service had a significant impact on customers in Bridgend. The service has an excellent relationship with library customers to ensure their needs are met. The pandemic increased the waiting time for requested books, due to the suspension of Books4U, Inter Library loans and deliveries from suppliers.

One customer uses the library for her local and family history research and experienced this problem after requesting a specialist item from the service. Just before the first Lockdown in March 2020, the individual started to research her family history. The item requested was '*Family Histories and Community Life in North Carmarthenshire*' by David T R Lewis. As this book was on a local history subject that was specific to Carmarthenshire, Awen did not hold a copy.

We found that Carmarthenshire Library Service held a few copies and were willing to lend them. However, due to the restrictions it proved difficult for us to obtain a copy. We updated the customer and explained that we would obtain the title of the book as soon as possible.

In March 2021 Carmarthenshire Library Service joined the Books4U scheme. We requested the book, and it was the very first book received through Books4U from Carmarthenshire.

The customer is now looking forward to reading the book and gathering the information that she needs to continue her family history research. The customer was very happy with the outcome. She was so happy that she asked us to take a photograph of her with the book in the library, so she could send it to family.

The restrictions imposed on the library service have had a significant impact on our patrons at Awen Libraries. We have an excellent relationship with our patrons and always make the very best efforts to help them achieve their needs, whether that need is entertainment, information, or a friendly chat.

Case Study 2

The pandemic paused in-person outreach activities, including visits to day centres and care homes. Library staff contacted care homes in the area to offer storytelling and reminiscence sessions via Zoom. A number of care homes accepted.

Sessions were held for residents using Zoom and content included stories, photographs and other images to inspire conversations and reminiscing. This provided a change to routine for residents, a time to come together and to participate in a new activity and to see new faces. Library staff introduced the residents to new stories and poems and using family history resources to share photographs and other media that made the sessions interactive.

A member of staff at the Care Home said

“Thank you for the session today. I have spoken with some of the service users that were present and they expressed that they enjoyed. We talked more about gardening and herbs, they agreed that they would like to do some more activities related to this and it has been inspired by the stories you’ve told today. I have found that these sessions are also beneficial for relaxation as they concentrate on listening and it helps them feel calm. I know you hadn’t asked for feedback but I just wanted to let you know the positive impact the stories are having and that we appreciate you taking the time to do these with us.”

BLAENAU GWENT (Aneurin Leisure Trust)

Library services in Blaenau Gwent are delivered by the Aneurin Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority. The service includes 6 branches and 2 home-delivery vehicles, with 98% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library. The community hub model of delivery continues to be a success, enabling the library service to develop strong links with partners to deliver a range of services for the benefit of the community.

Library service performance

Aneurin Leisure library service reported that it continues to meet all the core entitlements.

It is encouraging to see that the materials budget has increased by 18% since 2019/20, with a 65% increase since 2017/18. There have been no changes to staffing levels during 2020/21 which remain low and affect the ability of the service to do more. The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications is the lowest in Wales. Blaenau Gwent is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Staff made 640 welfare calls to vulnerable customers in the first two weeks of lockdown.
- The home delivery service had an incredibly positive impact on the local community, delivering additional stock to local hospitals and community centres supporting isolated and vulnerable people.
- The new 'call and collect' scheme was hugely popular.
- The service was able to ensure continuity of access to digital resources and facilitated on-line membership from the start of pandemic, with more flexible joining procedures.
- Digital downloads increased by 79% compared to the previous year.
- The service went fine-free, thus making the service more attractive to customers.
- The service delivered digital events that helped people feel connected to their local communities. Working with a range of partners, courses offered included creative writing and budgeting support for local communities.
- Staff recognised that there was an increase in enquires relating to family and local history and worked with volunteers in this area to provide support over the phone for detailed enquiries and signposted individuals to digital resources, such as home access to Ancestry and FindMyPast.
- The partnership with Cymraeg i Blant continued with online baby yoga and baby massage sessions.

Future plans

Aneurin Leisure library service demonstrated the impact it has on individuals through the case studies submitted (example below) including the benefit to people's health

and wellbeing, confidence, reducing feelings of isolation, and supporting digital skills development. The partnership work with key organisations remains a strength of the service and has been a key factor in enabling Aneurin Leisure to support the needs within communities and deliver appropriate activities.

The long-term commitment of Blaenau Gwent Council and Aneurin Leisure Trust to establishing a community hub model in each library across the authority remains in place. The service will continue to work with the local authority to ensure libraries form an essential part of local Covid recovery plans. The relocation of Abertillery library into the town centre, co-locating with Adult Community Learning and a local arts organisation remains a priority. These changes will enable the library service to achieve its vision of “improving people’s life opportunities, inspiring and enriching lives by providing high quality library services that are relevant and accessible to all.”

Summary

Recent increases in investment levels are welcomed. The pro-active staff and partnerships bring considerable benefits to a wide range of individuals and communities and with additional resources even more could be achieved for the benefit of the local community in future years.

Case Study

A customer from Ebbw Vale is grateful for the support she received from her local library in helping her set up her own business. The customer approached the library in October 2020 to request some specialist non-fiction titles. The library was able to source all the books requested and purchased titles for the customer to ensure she had the support needed. The customer also used the library for PC use, photocopying, scanning and Wi-Fi printing. The customer said:

“The library has been a great help with setting up my own business. I am setting up an indoor play centre, I have been able to borrow books on health and safety, ideas for activities, childcare, and accounting, it has saved me so much money. Using all the IT facilities and having a space to study, was so helpful to me, when I have a young family at home. It was great to be able to book a study space and have some peace and quiet, when there are five of us, at home. I also feel really safe in the library, knowing that all the equipment is cleaned, and the books quarantined etc.”

CAERPHILLY

Library services in Caerphilly are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 18 branches and 2 home delivery vehicles, with 98% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library. As reported in 2019/20, 11 of 18 libraries are now single staffed service points.

Library service performance

Caerphilly reported that it met all the core entitlements.

As with other library services, it saw an inevitable decrease in active borrowers and library membership totals, although the latter resulted from the migration of customer records to the new all-Wales library management system and a data cleanse.

The materials budget decreased by 8% in 2021. It is noted by the service, that the purchase of stock was affected by Covid, and that the needs of the community were met through careful management of the budget and the purchase of extra copies of popular titles to meet demand. The service remains committed to prioritising children and 21% of the total materials budget is for children. However, there has been an overall decrease in the material budget of 37% since 2017/18.

There have been no significant changes to staffing, with the overall total of staff per 10,000 people remaining at the median level in Wales. The service experienced several challenges during 2020-21 with the loss of a valued senior manager and the impact of staff redeployment.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The service has remained resilient, with the promotion of digital services, such as Lego clubs and story time sessions for children.
- The LibraryLink home delivery service was a valuable service for many, resulting in improved customer wellbeing.
- Library staff were redeployed to help support critical services. These included the delivery of free school meals, Test Trace Protect (TTP), the Customer Services Contact Centre and the team providing befriending services.
- Caerphilly implemented an 'order and collect' scheme, where staff expertise in choosing appropriate resources for customers inspired many to explore new genres.
- The library purchased materials from the Reading Agency Empathy collection to support the health and wellbeing of children and young adults.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the purchase of four laptops to extend and build upon the digital offer to residents who have no access to the internet or digital devices. Staff have identified opportunities through working with others which will enable library members to benefit from virtual advice and support from key council partners.
- The service saw a 68% increase in electronic issues since 2019/20.

Future plans

The case studies (examples below) demonstrate the impact the library service has on individuals and communities, particularly with children's learning, health and wellbeing and digital skills.

Caerphilly Library Services continues to provide a broad appeal to customers and non-customers as evidenced in the January 2021 'The Caerphilly Conversation' Consultation Report. Results show that 55% of responders were aware of the alternative services libraries provided during COVID and respondents listed libraries as an important key frontline service the Council needs to focus on as communities recover from the pandemic. In the immediate future, the service will continue to focus on opportunities to provide alternative methods of service delivery to residents.

Summary

Caerphilly has a pro-active approach to service delivery, working with a variety of partners to bring benefits to its customers. If investment levels can be maintained this will support the service to increase its reach and re-engage with customers who did not use the service during the pandemic.

Case Study 1

Due to the impact of the pandemic, the Summer Reading Challenge moved online during 2020. This is a vital scheme and encourages children to read library books throughout the summer holidays.

A family including 2 young boys are regular visitors to Caerphilly Library. The family noted that the activity they missed the most was their regular visits to the library. The library was closed due to Covid-19 restrictions. Both boys had taken part in the Summer Reading Challenge for many years, and it had become an important part of their summer routine. The boy's mum advised that she was a qualified teacher and understood the importance of reading and enabling the children to choose their own books.

The library informed the customer that even though the Summer Reading Challenge was only being delivered virtually. The family completed the online registration and provided the following feedback:

"Whilst the boys enjoyed taking part and liked the little games, they did miss the prizes the library would give them, so I bought my own little treats to reward them instead. Unfortunately, we did not have access to actual library books for the challenge, but we signed up to Borrowbox and the children downloaded a range of e-books. My son was used to using his iPad to read as he had been using it for home-schooling. As my other son preferred interactive lift-the flap type books at the time, Borrowbox was not quite as popular with him, so he was thrilled when we learned that he would be eligible for the home delivery service. We filled out the application form with his preferences and the wonderful staff chose a collection of books and delivered them to the door. We all made use of

the Order & Collect service when it started in September – the staff continued to choose a selection of books for the children whilst myself and my other son enjoyed browsing the library catalogue and ordering for ourselves. We had some lovely library freebies when we picked up our books, including a free pen for myself and bags for each of the boys. We were also able to book browsing appointments in the library. Although regular users before the pandemic, both boys had forgotten what the library was like, and the first appointment was filled with exploring the children’s area and getting familiar with the surroundings again. We are so lucky to have such a fantastic facility in our town and we always receive a warm welcome from the staff. We cannot wait to resume our regular visits and look forward to finding some amazing books to read for the Summer Reading Challenge this year.”

Case Study 2

The team Caerphilly buddying service was implemented in Caerphilly. This ensured vulnerable residents were supported. A library assistant was moved into this team to support seven vulnerable households. The member of staff soon adjusted to their new role, as a number of skills were transferable. This included communication and listening skills through regular phone calls to residents, organisational skills to shop for seven families and those of compassion and understanding.

Feedback from a supported customer included:

“I spend days and days not seeing a soul and then you came into my life, and it was like a ray of sunshine.”

The staff member has remained in weekly contact with the individual and now often shares a chip shop meal.

CARDIFF

Library services in Cardiff are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 21 branches, 1 mobile and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 99% of residents living within 2 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Cardiff reported that it met all the core entitlements.

With the shift to online services, Cardiff saw a sharp rise in website visits of 65% since 2019/20 and a significant increase in e-resource usage. Cardiff is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic.

There have been no significant changes to the materials budget, with expenditure per 1000 population remaining slightly above the median level in Wales. A revision of stock priorities was also made early in the year, with resources diverted into digital provision in response to customer demand. The service continues to invest strongly in children's resources, and in Welsh language materials. Expenditure on Welsh resources remains above the median level in Wales.

Cardiff Hubs & Libraries service continue to operate as an integrated team. There have been no significant changes to staffing. Cardiff has continued to invest in staff training and development through virtual sessions via an online academy.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- There was an incredible 464% increase in digital downloads in 2020-21 compared to the previous year.
- A click and collect service was introduced and items were delivered to those unable to visit a hub to collect or return their books. The service was described as a 'lifeline' by many users.
- Cardiff Hubs & Libraries set up a food bank distribution centre to support the wider foodbank provision in Cardiff.
- The service has provided a wide range of digital activities throughout 2020/21, including, a social hour, low impact functional training sessions, community cooking, gardening hour and Knit and Natter.
- Cardiff has offered a weekly bilingual adult 'read aloud' session live on Facebook and promoted Welsh authors and publications where possible.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled Cardiff to create 5 mini studios. Twenty-seven staff received training in operating the digital equipment purchased and this team has been able to produce professional digital content. The service will focus on delivering a hybrid events programme.

Future plans

Cardiff provided case studies (example below) showing the positive impact the digital and outreach services had on people's health and wellbeing, skills, and sense of community.

The service notes that in the immediate future, libraries will continue to work collaboratively with health colleagues to improve public health issues. This partnership will continue to develop as age friendly and child friendly outcomes are prioritised. New initiatives will include a new wellbeing support service to support adults who feel socially isolated and need help to manage their personal wellbeing.

A major audit of stock holdings will also be taking place to ensure stock continues to meet the needs of communities.

The continued redevelopment of library Hubs will also be prioritised to fulfil commitments outlined within the library strategy and to help people stay connected and improve their overall wellbeing.

Summary

Cardiff's focus on health and wellbeing has opened new partnerships and opportunities. The service has been widely praised for the support provided to vulnerable customers. The implementation of a digital activity programme enabled the service to reach out to a new audience and proved beneficial for many users. If investment levels can be maintained, the service can build further on an already strong foundation.

Case Study

From 8 June 2020 the Outreach Service operating model changed from a structured, timetabled, and regional based service that was focused on customers of the mobile library van and household delivery service to a wide ranging and inclusive Click and Collect/Delivery model that covered all library customers across the Cardiff area.

Working in close collaboration with the newly created Click and Collect and advice Line service, for 4 days/week Outreach staff delivered books to the homes of anyone who was unable to visit a hub to collect or return books in person. Outreach staff also delivered Personal Protection Equipment to care organisations, schools, and vulnerable individuals.

Initially the service covered the four core library hubs that opened during the pandemic but as COVID restrictions relaxed the service was extended to 8 hubs that covered all regions in the County of Cardiff. Since the start of the service Outreach staff have made deliveries to 4,991 library customers. The Click Collect service has been widely praised and appreciated by the vulnerable people it serves.

CARMARTHENSHIRE

Library services in Carmarthenshire are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 15 branches, 3 mobiles and 4 home delivery vehicles, with 95% of residents living within 3 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Carmarthenshire reported that it met all the core entitlements.

In line with other library services, active borrower numbers fell, but online usage increased with a 128% increase in digital downloads.

The materials budget decreased marginally since 2019/20 and has seen a 12% decrease since 2017/18. However, the service continues to invest strongly in children's resources. Expenditure on Welsh resources has increased since 2019/20, with figures for Welsh language issues remaining well above the median in Wales. The service held regular Welsh language story time and craft session online throughout 2020/21.

There have been no significant changes to staffing and figures remain above the median level in Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Carmarthenshire libraries developed a schools selection service during 2020/21. Teachers were able to request boxes of books to loan that supported the national curriculum and reading for pleasure requirements of the pupils within their schools.
- During the pandemic, Carmarthenshire continued to collaborate closely with local partners, promoting popular electronic resources, such as home access to Ancestry and PressReader, with large increases in usage.
- Digital activities offered during lockdown included family history, storytelling, craft, online makerspace sessions to gathering stories from the community about their experience of Covid and the lockdown.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the service to purchase remote lockers, which has enabled Carmarthenshire to trial a 24/7 digital vending solution. The service notes that in the immediate future that the digital lockers will support residents in accessing stock locally and safely. Customers will be able to reserve items using the library catalogue and pick up the item from a locker at their local library at a time convenient to themselves. This will also facilitate longer opening hours in rural areas and increase the reach of libraries in Carmarthenshire.
- A 'click and deliver' scheme was introduced to support customers, providing a vital link for some vulnerable residents.

Future plans

The service submitted case studies (example below) which showed the impact of the housebound service in developing community engagement and meeting the needs of vulnerable people within the local community. The 'box of books' delivery service to local Schools enabled local children to benefit from up-to-date reading materials from the library. Digital activities were offered in conjunction with this offer, impacting positively on the health and wellbeing of local children.

Carmarthenshire are planning to extend services further at regional Libraries through the implementation of an Open+ pilot at Carmarthen Library which allows the library to open beyond normal staffed hours. Plans to develop the successful Makerspace initiative also remain in place.

Summary

Carmarthenshire have been pro-active in several areas including services for children and schools, and digital opportunities. The service has continued to perform well. The maintenance of investment levels will ensure the service can continue to develop innovative solutions and new services.

Case Study

Carmarthenshire Libraries played a supporting role to our school hubs during the pandemic. As a result of school closures, Carmarthenshire Libraries contacted all local school hubs to promote their box of books delivery service. This service was available to support all children and teachers attending the hubs.

The service usually supports all local schools in the provision of books. These books are connected to classroom themes and group/individual reading material. During the initial phase of the pandemic Carmarthenshire Libraries set out to provide this service for all hubs. By providing this service to vulnerable and key worker children, the library was able to connect communities and improving wellbeing. Ysgol Felinfoel benefited from this service hugely with over 300 books being issued to the Hub to support their children.

CEREDIGION

Library services in Ceredigion are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 5 branches and 3 mobiles, with 81% of residents living within 3 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Ceredigion met 10 of the 12 core entitlements in full and did not achieve 2 (on customer surveys and availability of library strategy).

As with other library services, it saw an inevitable decrease in active borrowers and library membership totals, although the latter resulted from the migration of customer records to the new all-Wales library management system and a data cleanse.

The materials budget has decreased and is slightly below the 2017/18 figure. Nonetheless, the materials expenditure per 1000 population is in the top quartile in Wales. The service maintained its investment in children's resources. Expenditure on Welsh resources has decreased by just under 79% since 2019/20 and can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic.

Staffing levels have been maintained since 2019/20, with the total number of qualified staff remaining above the median level in Wales.

Ceredigion also became the 20th service in Wales to join the all-Wales Library Management System (LMS) in 2020/21. The implementation of the LMS is a significant achievement at a time of reduced staffing levels and should help the service to respond effectively to customer needs as national projects are developed.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services

- Ceredigion saw an increase in digital downloads of 42% compared with 2019-20 and is in the top third for digital loans per 1000 population.
- The service has provided a wide range of digital activities throughout 2020/21, including interviews with authors, story times and reading groups. This was, in part, due to the Estyn Allan project. Library staff across all local authorities in Wales benefited from this digital training programme during 2020/21, resulting in an improved digital offer from Ceredigion.
- The library service includes three mobile libraries and they have continued to deliver resources to vulnerable and housebound customers throughout 2020/21 although the delivery model was adjusted due to the pandemic.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the library to purchase wireless printers. Contactless technologies have proved invaluable in libraries during the pandemic, impacting positively on the safety of customers.

Future plans

Ceredigion submitted two brief case studies (example below), including promoting online services to elderly customers and the home delivery service, both of which highlighted health and wellbeing benefits of the library services.

As with all local authorities in Wales, the service notes that in the immediate future, the priority will be to encourage individuals to return to the library, although the financial impact of the pandemic on the service is unclear. The development of a strategy is planned, but the priorities for the strategy are still under development.

Summary

Ceredigion has worked hard to maintain a library service in 2020-21. Prioritising the development of a library strategy and engaging with existing customer and non/lapsed customers through a variety of means to inform the strategy will help the service plan for a successful future.

Case Study

Ceredigion Libraries provided a click and deliver system throughout 2020-21. Individuals who were unable to visit the library for a variety of reason, including illness and family commitments were able to order resources and have them delivered to their home address. Feedback on the service was positive and it made a significant impact on how people were able to cope with lockdown, shielding and customer safety.

CONWY

Library services in Conwy are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 10 branches (5 of which are community supported libraries) and 1 mobile, with 89% of residents living within 3 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Conwy provided detailed evidence to show that it met all the core entitlements.

Conwy saw a significant increase in website visits and a 184% increase in e-resource usage compared to the previous year, placing it near the top in Wales for digital downloads per 1000 population. Conwy is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. The service has seen a small decrease since 2017/18.

The materials budget has seen a 24% decrease since 2017/18 although the service remains in the top quartile for material spend per 1000 population. However, it has been noted by the service that a significant part of the budget is based on the capital business case that is submitted each year. This funding is not guaranteed, and the service undertakes a bidding process annually to obtain this funding. Most indicators of usage such as adult and children's loans, digital issues, active borrower levels, place Conwy around the median for Wales. Total expenditure on Welsh resources remains above the median level in Wales and issues for Welsh stock per 1000 Welsh language speakers place Conwy in the top third of library services across Wales.

The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same and is slightly above the median level in Wales. There has been a decrease in the total number of staff due to budget cuts.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- A successful bid for Child Development Funding in December 2020 enabled the service to work closely with local Family Centres to provide virtual bi-lingual storytime sessions for pre-school children experiencing developmental delay because of Covid restrictions.
- The service also continues to support Welsh language reading groups. The Welsh learners' conversation group started at Conwy Library continued to meet digitally throughout the pandemic.
- The virtual offer was expanded to include crafts and cooking sessions. The physical offer was also developed with library staff putting together an individual and tailored selection of books for customers for delivery or collection. Library members welcomed this.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the creation of a dedicated portal for libraries and for Culture. This has improved the promotion of services and will continue to improve engagement with local communities.

- The service implemented a click and collect service, which has been maintained and provides many benefits to customers.

Future plans

A number of case studies (examples below) were provided showing the impact a range of services made to individuals including health and wellbeing, digital services, families, and impact on staff.

A public consultation on the draft Library and Information Strategy 2021-26 has been completed. The main focus for the strategy will be the development of Libraries as Community Hubs. There will be a focus on raising awareness of the libraries as a place where residents can access a variety of council services. There will also be a continued focus on raising the profile of the Reading Well Books on Prescription scheme for mental health. Funding received from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has helped support Conwy and Denbighshire Libraries' partnership to engage Community Navigators to raise the profile of Reading Well and to directly prescribe the books to their service customers. Health and wellbeing will remain a priority.

Summary

Conwy library service continues to deliver a strong service with priorities on health and wellbeing, children, and bilingual provision. However, staffing levels are essential to the maintenance and development of these priorities. Staffing has been reduced by almost a quarter (22%) since the conclusion of the fifth WPLS framework (2017) and could impact on the ability of the service to deliver in the future.

Case Study 1

During lockdown, library staff were re-deployed to call handling, brokerage (who arranged for prescriptions and shopping to be collected) and shielding support teams, giving local support to everyone who needed it. Library staff provided day to day practical and emotional support for people who were frightened, confused and in need of help.

Chemists and supermarkets struggled initially to manage demand for home deliveries, and this had a huge impact on those most at risk. Library staff made sure that the most vulnerable members of the community did not go without food and medicine. One member of staff noted that:

“I had many pleasant chats about how we were all coping during those strange times. One thing that stood out for me was the true community spirit. People who initially received parcels, but then managed to get food slots, cancelling their parcels so that they could be offered to others in more need of them being only one example.”

“The collaborative work we did with existing food banks, and those set up by local community groups was heartening. Their support and immediate response to requests for help were invaluable to us in resolving difficult situations”.

Case Study 2

The Conwy Community Navigator service provides support for people in the community to improve their mental and physical well-being. A partnership with the library resulted in a referral for an individual who was struggling with loneliness and decreased mobility. The library team made contact to find out more about hobbies and interests. This resulted in a delivery of books to the customer's home from the "Books on prescription" scheme⁵. Providing this customer with a multi-agency of services has given them a new sense of purpose in life and at the same time improved their mental health and wellbeing.

⁵ [Reading Well | Reading Agency](#)

DENBIGHSHIRE

Library services in Denbighshire are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 8 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 88% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Denbighshire provided detailed evidence to show that it met all the core entitlements.

Denbighshire notes a very substantial increase of 166% in digital loans. The service increased the range of digital downloadable eBooks and eAudiobooks with additional investment and provision e.g., Press Reader for online newspapers. Additional training and a focus on using social media also resulted in greater engagement with communities across Denbighshire.

As with other library services, Denbighshire saw an inevitable decrease in active borrowers and library membership totals, although the latter resulted from a data cleanse of user records in line with GDPR requirement. Denbighshire is one of fifteen authorities to have seen a decrease in membership in 2020/21 because of the pandemic.

The materials budget remains slightly above the 2017/18 figure. Denbighshire has the highest level of Welsh issues per Welsh speaking population and have maintained their high investment in Welsh materials. Two Welsh reading groups were hosted digitally during 2020/21.

The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same, but there has been a slight decrease in the total number of staff. Vacancies have not been filled due to budget cuts over several years. Only 50% of the actual staffing levels staff are reported as other staff spend 50% of their time on customer service roles.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The Bookstart provision continued online throughout 2020/21, alongside the provision of two Welsh language reading groups.
- An order and collect service was introduced to the benefit of customers.
- The Home Library Service expanded its delivery service and supported 79 new customers.
- Library staff formed the core for the Proactive Calls service for shielding people during the lockdown and worked closely with a range of council and third sector partners to provide information and advice.
- A memory bags collection for people living with dementia was launched during the year.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the service to create new solo digital spaces. These rooms offer private spaces and are bookable and enable individuals to undertake private appointments

online. These rooms offer services to individuals who may otherwise be excluded.

Future plans

Denbighshire provided a range of case studies (examples below) which demonstrated its impact on customers and communities, particularly through its new memory bags for dementia, digital opportunities for staff and public, and for children and families through the popular online bilingual rhymetime with Makaton signing.

Denbighshire's vision remains as "libraries are the beating hearts of the communities they serve - trusted neutral places where everyone is welcome regardless of their age, background or financial circumstances". In the immediate future, the focus will continue to be on further developing the health and wellbeing offer, the delivery of digital services, a review of the home delivery service and adapting library facilities to enable individuals to engage with each other safely. As noted by other local authorities, ongoing budget pressures will impact on future developments.

Summary

The service led on the Wales wide digital skills programme for staff Estyn Allan. This was a notable achievement, as it enabled greater collaboration across public libraries in Wales. Denbighshire library service has maintained its priorities on health and wellbeing, children and bilingual activities, and digital engagement. The service has a strong foundation to develop services in the future.

Case Study 1

The growth in the use of digital library resources (eBooks, eAudiobooks, and digital magazines and newspapers) has been seen for several years – but it was accelerated by the lockdown in March 2020 as people sought access to reading material when library buildings had to close.

Total downloads of digital material increased by 166% in 20-21, with Borrowbox loans (eBooks and eAudiobooks in English and Welsh) increasing by 94%, and e-zines by 55%. This was supported by Welsh Government's investment in additional content in Welsh Libraries' Borrowbox offer, and we also purchased some additional stock to meet demand for heavily requested titles. We enabled people to join online and access the resources without having to come into the library.

For one customer living with ME, using Borrowbox has made a positive impact on her life as she has access to downloadable eAudiobooks, and can also support her son's reading development:

"This is the most fantastic App! I have M.E. No longer able to read but I can listen to these books. So many choices of books too! Really simple to use, syncs well across tablet and phone and it is free with library. There's also super easy option to reserve a book and it will email when u can add it! I have listened to the book my son was reading at school so we could talk about it. Thank you for making a bookworm happy again!!"

With libraries unable to offer access to printed newspapers due to closure and safety concerns once re-opened, we purchased in Press Reader which provides access to over 7000 newspapers from across the world.

The following video illustrates the impact of this resource on one customer's life:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKH6YhTD0Ls>

“A great innovation for me. I can just get up in the morning, make a coffee, turn on and read whatever newspaper I like.”

Case Study 2

Denbighshire Bookstart moved its regular rhymetime activity online. The Bookstart team, working from home, produced a live bilingual Rhymetime on Facebook every week (average views 664), and recorded and published online rhyme and story videos (average views 1079).

The live sessions enabled families to continue to engage with the team and the library service – sending in requests for birthday greetings and favourite rhymes each week. Sessions were bilingual and make use of Makaton signing so that children and families could develop their Welsh and signing skills at the same time. The sessions brought a sense of normality and routine to many families.

The staff team had to learn new skills very quickly and demonstrated great flexibility, creativity and commitment in switching their provision to virtual at a time of great personal stress.

The team's work was recognised in 'Making a Difference: Libraries, Lockdown and Looking Ahead'⁶, a report by Carnegie Trust UK into UK public library services exploring their role supporting individuals and communities during lockdown and the barriers they faced during this time.

⁶ <https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/making-a-difference-libraries-lockdown-and-looking-ahead/>

FLINTSHIRE

Library services in Flintshire are delivered by Aura Leisure and Libraries Ltd. on behalf of the local authority. The service includes 7 branches, 1 mobile and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 83% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Aura library service reported that it met all the core entitlements.

Aura library service in line with the rest of Wales, saw an increase in its digital downloads of 83%.

As with other library services, Flintshire saw an inevitable decrease in active borrowers and library membership totals. The service has also witnessed a decrease since the fifth WPLS framework. This could be reviewed with a plan of engaging with lapsed and potential new customers. Flintshire is one of fifteen authorities to have seen a decrease in membership in 2020/21 because of the pandemic.

The materials budget has seen a 31% decrease since 2017/18. Expenditure on Welsh resources remains strong. This is an area the service may want to review perhaps in conjunction with neighbouring services, to get the most from their investment.

The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same whilst there has been a slight decrease in the total number of staff. Both total staffing and qualified staffing levels per 10,000 population are very low, and in the bottom quartile for Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Flintshire has offered online Welsh conversational classes as well as a Welsh book group throughout 2020/21.
- Flintshire offered a variety of pre-recorded and live content for library customers. This included pre-recorded weekly story times and rhyme times.
- The service used social media effectively to promote resources; this included a monthly author of the month and titles recommended by staff.
- A key service for members offered throughout this period was the home delivery service to vulnerable customers. To further support these individuals Flintshire launched the 'Aura Library Link' scheme. Individuals were able to register for this service and were then contacted by a member of the library team on a regular basis.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the creation of a new website. This has supported the resilience of the service, as the online presence has been transformed. The new platform has the potential to attract new audiences and to highlight digital resources.

Future plans

Aura library service submitted several case studies (example below) to demonstrate the impact the library had, particularly for children, older people, and direct engagement through its community calls and home library service. These had direct benefits on people's health and wellbeing, feelings of isolation, and digital skills.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, it is noted that the key aim for the future will be to reconnect with customers and encourage them to physically return to library buildings. As a result of the impact of the pandemic, there is a need to review plans to ensure that current priorities align with the needs of customers. There is a need to ensure any future changes attract new and lapsed borrowers. Health and wellbeing, digital inclusion and literacy will remain priorities.

Summary

Aura library service has implemented new schemes such as the wellbeing hub at Flint library and the digital equipment loans. The low staffing levels perhaps hinder the ability of the service to maximise its potential. However, staff demonstrated compassion and empathy through the delivery of Aura library link. This service helped reduce the sense of loneliness and isolation that some customers experienced in 2020/21.

Case Study

The home library service operates across Flintshire delivering bags of books to customers registered for the home library service every 5 weeks. Library assistants collate a bag of books at the library for each customer to meet their requirements. The resources are delivered directly to the customer.

The home library service continued throughout the pandemic and gained additional customers, including those who were isolating and unable to visit their local or mobile library. A bereaved customer noted the following:

"During the pandemic I joined the Home Library service provided by Aura, I look forward to my bag of books and always receive a variety of choice. I enjoy receiving books from different authors, other than my favourites and broadening my choice of reading. If I request a book, it is in my bag for the next visit and my reading helps take me to another world, at a time when I need to find a happy place."

GWYNEDD

Library services in Gwynedd are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 13 branches and 3 mobiles, with 80% of residents living within 3 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Gwynedd provided detailed evidence to show that it met all the core entitlements.

It is encouraging to see that the materials budget has increased by 19% since 2017/18, with a further increase in 2019/20, which has been invested in online resources. Gwynedd is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic.

Gwynedd is the leading authority for expenditure on materials per 1000 population. Its investment in and support of Welsh language materials has been maintained and Welsh issues per 1000 Welsh language speakers are the fourth highest in Wales. Gwynedd also leads on the provision of Welsh language audio books and e-books for all Welsh public libraries, and Welsh e-books for the Reading Well for children scheme, collaborating with partners including Ffolio (the new platform for Welsh e-books, led by the Books Council of Wales).

Due to vacancies the total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has slightly reduced although it is at the median level in Wales. The total number of staff remains stable. A review of the staffing structure has been undertaken, with the creation of a new digital and learning job role to reflect changing priorities.

- Gwynedd, led on a partnership with the Welsh Books Council in 2020/21 to provide the Goreuon o Gymru (Best of Wales) collection in libraries in 2020/21 which resulted in an increase in the availability of books for Welsh learners.
- A partnership with Gwynedd's early years' service, resulted in Gwynedd sharing packs and activities with parents in a selection in schools to improve literacy levels in local communities.
- Digital downloads increased by 72% compared to the previous year
- Gwynedd expanded the range of online resources available for customers, including Press Reader for newspapers and Find My Past in their offer.
- The service delivered a number of successful virtual story time sessions for children.
- The service was able to improve access to a range of information and services through the extension of information kiosks to three additional libraries.

Future plans

Gwynedd supplied a range of case studies (example below) showing the impact the service has had on people and communities during 2020-21, including a policy to remove fines permanently; digital engagement; and addressing period poverty through eco-friendly options distributed through its order and delivery service.

A new strategy is currently in development, and this will include a review of the mobile library service following the success of its tailored home delivery service in 2020-21.

The service highlighted that one of the key challenges will be to attract people back to the library following restrictions to core library services throughout 2020/21.

Summary

Gwynedd has strong partnerships in priority areas such as learning, health and wellbeing, and children and families. It has maintained its strong performance for Welsh provision, and the library appears well placed to build on its successes during the pandemic and attract more new and lapsed customers.

Case Study

For the sixth year running Gwynedd Libraries were commissioned by Communities First to run the Family Reading Scheme. Provision was offered to 7 schools with space for up to 6 families with children in the Nursery, Reception or Year 1 class to participate from each school. The aim of the scheme is to promote reading and improve the confidence of parents.

The scheme needed to be implemented in a slightly different way in 20/21 due to Covid-19 restrictions and the challenge was to plan the activities in a different way. The focus was on encouraging parents to share books with their children, and to have fun whilst discussing stories together.

A home delivery package was provided to each family by Gwynedd Libraries which included three storybooks and a picture to colour in, craft work inspired by one of the books, together with instructions and resources. There was also a YouTube link so that the family could watch a video of an actor reading one of the stories. The schools were responsible for identifying and inviting families.

All families were delighted to receive free book resources, and there was evidence to suggest that these books had considerable use in the home. The remainder of the money was used to purchase various craft resources so that the families could take part in the craft activity by following the instructions in the pack. 132 activity packs were distributed to families over the Autumn and Spring term and 57 children benefited from the scheme.

Comments included:

“Cynllun gwerthfawr dros ben sydd wedi parhau drwy gyfnod dyrys ac anodd iawn. Adborth wych a chefnogol iawn gan y rhieni a phawb yn ddiolchgar am yr adnoddau ffantastig. Wir yn gobeithio bydd y cynllun yn parhau ac y bydd y sesiynau teulu yn cychwyn yn ôl, pan fydd hi'n saff. Diolch anferth”

“Just nodyn i ddiolch yn fawr am y pecyn gyrhaeddodd fel rhan o'r cynlyn darllen. Mae'n wych, yn enwedig gan ei fod yn cynnwys gweithgaredd crefft hefyd. Newch chi plis basio fy niolch ymlaen i'r rheini sy'n gyfrifol? Wir yn gwerthfawrogi.”

ISLE OF ANGLESEY

Library services in the Isle of Anglesey are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 5 branches, 1 mobile, 1 home delivery vehicle, and 2 community supported libraries, with 89% of residents living within 3 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it met all core entitlements in full, 1 in part and did not achieve 1; availability of library strategy (in part) and consulting users (did not achieve).

Anglesey saw an increase of 142% for its digital downloads. It is now in the top quartile for digital downloads in Wales, through increased investment and promotion. There has been a small decrease in library membership since 2017/18. The Isle of Anglesey is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. The service notes that this may be from lack of opportunities to renew or join in person as branches were closed.

The service has witnessed a decrease of 18.1% in its materials budget since 2017/18, and it is now just above the median for Wales. The Isle of Anglesey notes that services to children were prioritised during the pandemic and its children's expenditure has been maintained.

Expenditure on Welsh resources has slightly increased, although the level of loans per 1000 Welsh speakers is in the bottom quartile. The service may wish to engage with neighbouring authorities for ways to maximise its Welsh materials investment.

There has been a slight decrease in total staffing levels since 2019/20 due to vacancies. The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Call and collect packs were promoted to children.
- The school's library service provided reading for pleasure boxes to primary schools.
- A popular Lego club was delivered online.
- The service supports Welsh language reading groups.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the service to purchase iPads and hublets, which has added value to existing digital resource provision and has facilitated access at home to online resources, such as newspapers and magazines.

Future plans

The Isle of Anglesey submitted several case studies (example below) showing the impact of specific services on individuals and communities, such as the new call & collect service; the reading for pleasure book boxes for schools; and online clubs for children and families.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the Isle of Anglesey continues to be committed to the aims outlined in the Isle of Anglesey County Council Library Service Strategy 2017-2022. The impact of the pandemic means that service will focus on further developing the health and wellbeing offer within Anglesey Libraries alongside enhancing the service's digital offer, continuing the professional development of staff, and ensuring buildings are as safe as possible. It will also be a priority for the service to fill vacant posts to ensure resilience.

Summary

The Isle of Anglesey has worked hard to enhance its digital offer and recognises that filling the vacant post will enable the service to achieve more as it recovers from the pandemic. The service may be able to capitalise on recent developments such as the new Holyhead library and maintain investment in electronic resources, alongside the development of social media strategies to promote this service.

Case Study

Pre Covid the library Service ran some very popular Lego Clubs in 4 libraries. This was one of the activities that the service successfully managed to transfer on-line. Weekly themes were established, and children (and the occasional adult) posted their creations on the library Facebook page. The service was able to celebrate each child's creativity by creating a gallery of that week's theme. This activity provided much enjoyment at a difficult time. Feedback included:

“Lego club was an absolute lifesaver for us - our child looked forward to coming to the library for the Lego club, but the online club came a close second. He would spend hours building and exploring the theme. The fact that the library was setting the theme caught his imagination in a way that me giving him ideas could not. The focus took away from Covid and all the restrictions, and he loved seeing his efforts on Facebook.”

MERTHYR TYDFIL

Library services in Merthyr Tydfil are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the local authority. The service includes 5 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 88% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it met all core entitlements in full.

Merthyr Tydfil experienced a pleasing 68.5% increase in digital loans compared with the previous year. There has been an increase in library membership since 2019/20 and a 7.5% increase since 2017/18. Merthyr is one of only 7 authorities who has witnessed an increase in membership during 2020/21.

The materials budget has decreased significantly since 2017/18 and is now 47% lower than 2017/18 levels. Merthyr Tydfil attribute the decrease in 2020-21 to the total budget and spend on Welsh language and children's resources to the pandemic and restrictions. Nonetheless, the service has continued to meet the standard set for WPLSQI 9.⁷ This standard requires libraries to achieve either a minimum of 243 items per 1,000 resident population or a minimum spend of £2,180 per 1,000 resident population annually. Merthyr acquired 249 items per 1,000 resident population in 2020/21. It should also be noted that in Merthyr, the furlough of staff was a contributory factor as staff were not available to purchase stock. The services affected by furlough and redeployment were not able to spend the budget allocated in some cases.

Staffing levels have remained static since 2017/18, with the total number of staff and the total number of professional staff below the median level in Wales. However, the service notes the continued positive praise and feedback received by customers regarding the staff.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Throughout 2020/21, Merthyr was able to deliver many sessions digitally that aimed to support learning, enjoyment and enable customers to obtain the maximum benefit from available resources, both physical and virtual. Staff worked with individuals and groups of all ages.
- The service saw an increase in visits to the website.
- A new Support Assistant role means that most activities are now delivered bilingually.
- A partnership with the local Welsh Centre also supports the service to ensure services through the medium of Welsh are maintained.
- The 'call and collect' scheme was hugely popular.

⁷ [connected-and-ambitious-libraries-the-sixth-quality-framework-of-welsh-public-library-standards-2017-to-2020.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)

Future plans

The service submitted two case studies to illustrate its impact during 2020/21 (example below). These were online videos showcasing local history photographs, and staff involvement in volunteering projects and coming together during the restrictions.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Merthyr notes that the key priority will be to reinstate the level of pre-pandemic work and activity in a safe way.

The priority will be a focus on children and health and wellbeing, with its role in this area recognised by the trust and council. The profile of the library has been raised as a result of the work in this area. The promotion and delivery of activities around health promotion is essential for the resilience of the service. In addition, the service will be developing work around the Welsh Language Strategy in partnership with the local authority.

Summary

Despite one of the lowest levels of expenditure per 1000 population, the service works hard to engage with all people and its various communities. One of its strengths is staff enthusiasm, and health and wellbeing. Any further investment would enable the service to re-engage with new and lapsed customers in the future.

Case Study

The first lockdown happened quickly. Staff reacted quickly and set up networks on various digital platforms to keep in touch and share news and to ensure no one was alone at such a difficult time.

The team actively searched out volunteering opportunities and many started by delivering free school meals to children in Merthyr. Staff also kept in touch with Homelink customers to ensure they were not isolated.

Some staff members became NHS supporters through the collection of food and toiletries to donate to the local hospitals where staff were under immense pressure.

When the news came that a staff member had lost their husband, the team again supported each other, sending messages of support, flowers and cards and wishes to the whole family. On the day of the funeral, despite lockdown restrictions and no physical contact, they made their way to the funeral home to stand outside in support of their colleague, something that will never be forgotten.

MONMOUTHSHIRE

Library services in Monmouthshire are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 6 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 73% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it meets all core entitlements in full.

Monmouthshire experienced an increase of 60% for its digital downloads. It is just below the top quartile for digital loans per 1000 population. Monmouthshire is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. There has been a small overall decrease in library membership since 2017/18.

The library service is integrated with the Community Hubs but for 2020/21 reporting has adjusted its financial and staffing reporting to reflect the library budget separately. This will make for easier comparisons across Wales but means trends over previous years are less useful. There has been a welcome increase in materials expenditure in 2020/21. For 2020/21 it is just below the top quartile for material expenditure per 1000 population. Expenditure on children and Welsh language materials are both lower than the proportion of these groups in the population, and the Welsh language spend in 2020-21 was extremely low at 1%, when the Welsh-speaking population in Monmouthshire is 7.9%.

Due to a change in the calculation of library staff hours to separate library work from the merged Community Hubs, there has been a significant decrease in the total number of staff and the total number of staff per 10,000 population is the lowest in Wales. The number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications has remained the same and is in the bottom quartile for Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The service delivered online poetry readings throughout 2020/21 and used social media accounts to promote electronic resources.
- The service continued to purchase additional e-resources such as Which? and FindMyPast.
- A popular 'request and collect/deliver' service was implemented and will be retained in the future.
- Inclusion in the council's weekly virtual staff sessions and newsletters helped promote of services throughout the year.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the purchase of iPads and digital equipment which helped to improve the delivery of virtual services. Monmouthshire was able to offer a greater variety of digital sessions, leading to an improvement in community engagement and participation.

Future plans

The service submitted case studies (example below) which showed the impact the request and collect service had on individuals, improving their health and wellbeing, and reducing feelings of isolation. Home access to online family history services enabled a local women's history project to continue, bringing benefits to those involved.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Monmouthshire continues to report that the community hub model works well. Community learning remains a priority with classes offered to support people with literacy, numeracy and job seeking. Digital services will continue to be promoted and further investment in electronic resources will improve the resilience of the service.

The service plans to continue to collaborate with partner agencies in the future to identify more people in need of the housebound delivery service and to encourage people to return to the physical hubs.

Summary

Monmouthshire has strengthened its digital provision and usage and continues to support digital inclusion and health and wellbeing in the authority effectively. The service plans to re-engage with lapsed and new customers and build on the community hub model. The service will need to be supported with appropriate levels of revenue funding to achieve this.

Case Study

Through Bookstart we aim to provide every family in Monmouthshire with free books, resources, and guidance when their children are in their first year of life and again when they are toddlers. During 2020/2021, it was difficult to distribute Bookstart packs in the usual way but, working with Booktrust, we were able to arrange deliveries to Flying Start and a delivery to Health Visitors in the north and south of the county.

Sharing stories and rhymes from an early age supports a range of outcomes, including positive early language, oracy and communication skills development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy. During 2020/2021, we were able to hold weekly story time sessions and occasional Baby Rhyme Times via social media.

NEATH PORT TALBOT

Library services in Neath Port Talbot are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 8 branches, 1 mobile and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 90% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library. The library service also supports 7 community managed libraries (CMLs) with resources (including staffing and stock) but follows the 2014 Welsh Government guidance by not including CML activity in their WPLS return. As a result, the service 'loses out' on loans by CML customers which are not reported here, whilst the reported expenditure covers *all* libraries.

Library service performance

The service reports that it meets all core entitlements in full.

Neath Port Talbot is one of the few services to see a slight increase growth library membership in 2019/20 and they attribute this to the enhanced online offer with people able to join online. The service has seen a 6% decrease in the resource budget since 2017/18, which although small, may have impacted usage. However, an increase in expenditure on children's resources was undertaken in 2020/21 to assist with home learning requirements during Covid. The service ranks just above the median for children's loans per 1000 population in 2020/21.

Although there has been a slight decrease on expenditure on Welsh language resources, Neath Port Talbot have noted that this was partly due to lack of availability of suitable materials, and a changing of supplier. The service expects this area to improve in future years. Expenditure on materials remains at the median level across services in Wales, and it also is at the median for Welsh language issues per 1000 Welsh language speakers.

Staffing levels have remained static since 2018/19, with the total number of professional staff above the median level in Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The service offered a variety of digital activities including, song and rhyme, creative arts, children's activities, reading groups, alongside events that have promoted literacy and adult learning.
- The service committed to a weekly programme of online events for 12 months which created a positive sense of community for everyone who joined in.
- The digital downloads in Neath Port Talbot library service increased by 78%. Expanding their digital offer to include newspapers through PressReader played a role in the increase.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the purchase of tablets which enabled the service to introduce a tablet lending scheme, which impacted positively on the promotion of digital services.
- The library service established a pilot project to loan MP3 players, with e-audio books of their choice to visually impaired people.

- The service enhanced its delivery service to include a kerbside collection and a call and collect service.

The service also temporarily removed fines during the pandemic, and then made it a policy to permanently not charge fines for late returns.

Future plans

Case studies on the impact of the home delivery service, online reading groups, online Sunday Storytime, and online art and wellbeing groups, show the impact the service and staff have made to people's health and wellbeing, skills, sense of community and confidence (examples below).

The service reports that the proposed outcomes of the 2019 review of its library service have been achieved, despite the pandemic. This included an enhanced, more adaptable Mobile Library Service and a revamped Mobile Delivery Service, with one new vehicle in place and one further electric vehicle expected. The proposed development of a new library in Neath's town centre is also in progress. The Library Service remains focused on delivering services and resources in the areas of digital inclusion, health and wellbeing, children's literacy, and lifelong learning. The success of the kerbside collection and call and collect services means that these will be retained in the future.

The service anticipates that once a clear view of corporate priorities emerges after the pandemic, a new Library Strategy for Neath Port Talbot will be produced during 2022.

Summary

The value of a well-managed and resilient service is evident as the service adapted quickly and maintained its community engagement, even increasing membership levels. Active borrowers fell by a smaller percentage than in many authorities during 2020/21. Further investment will enable the service to build on its recent successes.

Case Study 1

Neath Port Talbot Libraries have had a strong reading group community for many years. This group provides an invaluable opportunity for people to get together to share their thoughts about books and to meet people in their community. In a year of constant challenges, another that presented itself was how to keep reading groups active and ensure that people can still contribute and share their opinions during a time when face to face contact was not possible.

At Baglan Library the staff there understood the value of the reading group which had been running for many years and established various means of communication, such as email, WhatsApp, and Facebook to maintain contact within the group. The library staff ensured that group members could contact them using a variety of methods. Once libraries were able to offer a Call and Collect service the staff worked to provide the group members with regular books and opportunities to discuss and share

thoughts. They were even able to overcome the challenge of one group member being stranded in New Zealand for much of the year.

The efforts of the library staff ensured that this group continued to meet throughout the pandemic, by moving to online monthly meetings. For the group members this meant different things. For one member it was very important for their mental health and well-being to be able to read together as a group and for other members it enabled them to normalise their day in a time of much disruption. To many the group is akin to family and by keeping together it helped create a sense of belonging when they were isolated in their homes. This would not have happened without the support of the library staff.

The word lifeline has been often used with regard to the provision of services during the pandemic and for the members of the reading group it is very appropriate. It has been essential to their health and well-being.

Case Study 2

When libraries were unable to offer physical, in-person services, Neath Port Talbot moved many services online. A Facebook group, 'NPT Bookstart and Song and Rhyme' was set up.

The library delivered many recorded song and rhyme sessions and towards the end of 2020 live sessions were offered two to three times during some weeks.

Feedback was very positive with many expressing thanks that the group continued to deliver song and rhyme events:

"I would have been lost without song and rhyme every week. I love to have that time with my son sharing songs and stories together. It's been hard but it's helped me a lot, especially talking to others."

The Bookstart Song and Rhyme group has continued to flourish. It is now a fundamental part of the digital services offer and has attracted new customers.

NEWPORT

Library services in Newport are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 9 branches and a home delivery service, with 97% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it meets 11 of the core entitlements in full, and one partially, as its strategy is due for renewal and will be produced in line with the new corporate strategy in 2022.

Newport is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. There has been a decrease in library membership since 2017/18 and although the 2020/21 decline is to be expected, the longer-term trend could be investigated to determine how to reach new and lapsed customers.

There has been a small decrease of 6.6% in the materials budget since 2017/18, although the service remains about the median for Wales per 1000 population for this indicator. It would be beneficial for the service to consider the acquisition of materials and the potential link between the selection of materials and the levels of active borrowers per 1000 population.

The service has retained its expenditure on Welsh language materials and works with a number of partners to maximise use of the collection. Newport works in partnership with Mudiad Meithrin to offer Welsh Language storytimes and baby massage sessions at libraries and these sessions help to promote the use of Welsh junior stock.

There have been no changes to staffing levels since 2019/20 and the total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications remains above the median level across Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Newport's digital downloads increased by 71%.
- The service moved many activities online during 2020/21, and increased investment in e-resources.
- The service implemented a new call & collect scheme.
- Newport prioritised children's resources and services during the pandemic to help support young people's learning.
- The library staff contacted vulnerable household clients on a regular basis to check on their health and wellbeing.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the purchase of four desktop self-service kiosks which allowed the service to re-open library site visits at an earlier stage than would have been possible without this equipment. Self-service kiosks are now available at all library sites in Newport.

Future plans

The service provided case studies (example below) illustrating the beneficial impact of its home delivery service to housebound customers; the health and wellbeing benefits of a creative online group; and the health and wellbeing benefits of the Shared Reading group meeting up online during the pandemic – a practice they have continued since then.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Newport, notes the integration of the library service with the new Neighbourhood Hub model of multi-disciplinary teams. Library services will be based within the 4 main hub locations and branch libraries will function as spokes with members of the wider hub team delivering services. The first Hub opened in January 2020 with the library operating at the centre of its provision. Unfortunately, the pandemic has meant an assessment of the performance of the site has not been possible, but prior to closure there was evidence that the library service was a core element of this building. A new library strategy will be developed during 2021/22.

Summary

Newport has strong engagement with partners particularly in community learning, digital engagement, and health and wellbeing, but relatively low investment in some areas. The future strategy should help the service capitalise on its resources to attract more customers and use of the libraries.

Case Study

Due to the pandemic, the shared reading group moved online. The migration happened within the first weeks of the lockdown. The majority of the Shared Reading Group continued to meet between 11am and 12:30pm every Wednesday throughout 2020/21.

The Shared Reading group has been vital to the mental health and wellbeing of the group members as during the lockdown this was for many the only form of contact, albeit virtual, that they had outside their immediate family.

During the pandemic, the 10 to 15 minutes of chat at the beginning of the sessions was extended as it quickly proved to be a vital part of the sessions, providing the opportunity to swap news and concerns and to check up on each other's physical and mental wellbeing.

Each session concluded with the Area Librarian reading a short story and/or a poem and to keep interest up from week to week and to provide additional talking points monthly themes were used. Themes included "Murder Most Foul," "Twisted Tales", Ghost Stories, Speculative Fiction and "Fairy Tales: Classic and Modern." The most popular themes, considering the restrictions was our "World Tour," which carried on for three months where the Area Librarian chose Folk Tales and short stories from Classic and modern authors from different countries around the world.

All stories and poems provided a great inspiration for the sharing of personal stories, opinions, and recommendations for further reading. Customer feedback included:

“During the last year, the Shared Reading Group has been a little taste of normality in a very strange world. We have a very happy group, with a wide range of interests and tastes in literature and we have become very good friends meeting every week in our WhatsApp group...at 11am [to] spend a very interesting hour and a half with our short stories and personal news. This service has impacted on me greatly as I live alone, and it is something to look forward to on a Wednesday. To feel a little more cultured and knowledgeable and less lonely by the end of our session.”

PEMBROKESHIRE

Library services in Pembrokeshire are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 12 branches and 1 mobile, with 83% of residents living within 3 miles of a library or within ¼ mile of a mobile library stop.

Library service performance

Pembrokeshire met 10 of the 12 core entitlements in full, and 2 in part (library strategy and lending books for free). A reservation fee for items not in the customer's branch but available in other Pembrokeshire branches, was temporarily suspended during COVID-19 restrictions, but such reservations were limited to 2 per customer. Pembrokeshire remains the only service in Wales to make this charge. However, it should be noted that the reasons are predominantly geographical.

The service witnessed a marginal increase in library membership, one of only 7 authorities where this happened in 2020-21. However, longer term there has been a decrease since 2017-18. In 2020-21 expenditure on children's resources was below the average spend across Wales at 14%. There has been a decrease of 9% on expenditure on stock for children since 2019/20. However, prior to the pandemic, junior issues had increased annually since 2017/18. Furthermore, the proportion of the total materials budget spent on children's resources has increased by 2% since 2018/19.

Along with temporary reductions to the materials budget due to the pandemic, a permanent cut was made, and the materials budget has declined by 37% since 2017/18. Pembrokeshire is now in the bottom quartile in this area in Wales.

Expenditure on Welsh language materials per 1000 Welsh speaking population has reduced and it would be beneficial to consider further investment in this area in the future, in particular, in relation to targeted marketing and promotion of stock. However, the ability to speak Welsh is now a mandatory requirement for new front-line posts and the service provides time and funding for staff to learn Welsh, which should help in the longer term.

There has been a slight decrease in the total number of staff since 2019/20 although this is due to a seconded person returning and the replacement temporary staff leaving. The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications per 10,000 population remains above the median level across Wales.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Digital loans increased by a substantial 66%.
- The service delivered some activities online, such as baby rhyme time using Facebook.
- Pembrokeshire continued to be involved in the Summer Reading challenge, ensuring resources were available to children via the order and collect service.
- An order and collect service was implemented.
- The majority of library staff undertook online courses during the pandemic, which has impacted positively on their personal development.

- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the service to deliver an effective marketing and communication plan. Marketing of services was undertaken through newspaper editorials/adverts with some infographics, both in print and on social media. Merchandise was purchased to promote events and activities in the library.

Future plans

The service provided a case study (example below) on the beneficial impact of the order and collect service, particularly for health and wellbeing, children, and families; and on the impact on a member of staff undertaking the Estyn Allan training.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Pembrokeshire notes that the 2021-2023 library strategy is in the last stages of development. Key priorities will be health and wellbeing and tackling poverty, along with the partnership with the National Library of Wales for Glan yr Afon library which will be one of only three locations in the UK to benefit from the National Gallery [London] Masterpiece tour in 2022.

Pembrokeshire continues to invest in the development of library services, with projects to introduce self-service facilities already underway at Pembroke Dock Library in 2022; new builds at both Narberth and Pembroke, which are due to complete respectively in 2023 and 2024. Narberth is dependent on the success of a grant application. Both will provide self-service and enhanced opening hour access and involve partnerships with the local community and volunteers.

Summary

Pembrokeshire has invested in its library estate in recent years with plans for further capital investment with some exciting projects delivered. It is important that the level of revenue funding is sufficient to ensure that the benefits of the capital investment are realised.

However, it may be beneficial to review the level of revenue investment, because the weaker performance areas of the service appear to be directly related to reductions in investment [e.g., book stock]. This is important to make the most of the service and to encourage people back to libraries. The lack of sufficient new and appropriate stock can result in a decrease in new members and a reduction in usage levels.

Case Study

A staff member from Pembrokeshire describes her experience of participating in the Estyn Allan project. The aim of the project was to deliver a training programme to enable staff to develop the digital activities on offer to library customers.

The training covered a variety of topics in the three-month period during which time staff learnt a great deal about the delivery of digital content. The skills and knowledge acquired included:

- The selection and purchase of equipment and software to create content.
- The use of camera equipment and video editing software.
- The delivery of content in different formats, such as podcasts and blogs.
- The use of social media to promote libraries and to engage with library audiences.

The member of staff also undertook three Opening the Book reader development modules. These offered lots of practical information about stock promotion both in the library and digitally.

Training was shared with other members of staff. In total staff took part in 134 hours 15 minutes of training. This resulted in the generation of ideas and enthusiasm for online activities.

Trainees across Wales were able to share ideas, knowledge and good practice and offer support to each other. The staff member noted:

“Going forward I feel much more confident about the provision on online content. I now have an understanding of our social media audience (currently just Facebook) and can tailor the content accordingly. The next step in the long term (depending on staff capacity) is to produce a Social Media Plan to promote wider participation.”

POWYS

Library services in Powys are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 16 branches and 2 mobiles, with 76% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it meets 10 of the 12 core entitlements in full, 1 in part and did not meet 1 (lending books; in part and library strategy; did not meet)).

Powys is one of only seven services to see an increase in library membership during 2020-21. The materials budget decreased in 2020-21. As noted by other authorities, the ability to purchase materials was affected by the redeployment of staff and the availability of materials. Nevertheless, there has been a 33% decrease since 2017/18 in the materials budget.

Although the materials budget is now one of the lowest in Wales per 1000 population, the loans for adult and children are in the second quartile. This suggests that the service is maximising its expenditure and choosing appropriate stock for its customers. Welsh language resource expenditure has been maintained and the service works well with local partners to actively promote its Welsh collection and Welsh learning. The member of staff responsible for stock selection is an active member of the Showcase Wales panel, which creates an annual list of the best Welsh writing in English as a checklist for library authorities.

There has been a 10% decrease in the total number of staff since 2019/20. The total number of staff identified as holding recognised qualifications remains at the median level across Wales, with several staff being supported to achieve qualifications.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The service Powys notes an impressive 77% increase in digital downloads since 2019/20.
- Activities such as rhymetime and storytime sessions have been well supported and promoted.
- The programme of online events delivered included financial help workshops.
- Powys has continued to be involved in the Bookstart scheme, delivered by BookTrust. This initiative, alongside the Summer Reading Challenge, continued despite restrictions.
- The service implemented an online programme of events for children and adults throughout the pandemic.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the service to purchase Wi-Fi printers, which enabled printing within community hubs, while limiting public contact with equipment.
- A click and collect service was implemented.

Future plans

The service provided several case studies (example below) showing the benefits of its digital projects including the loaned devices, the staffed digital helpline; its click and collect service; and a programme of online events.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, rebuilding services and encouraging members to return to physical library buildings will remain a priority. A new strategy is currently in development which will place health and wellbeing at its heart. The service has developed a Digital Strategy with support from the Welsh Government and this will inform the future direction of the service. A priority will be a staff training programme to enhance digital skills within the service. An income generation strategy is also being developed to ensure the sustainability of the service.

The service noted that Llanwrtyd Library has remained closed since the start of the pandemic, and staff redeployed. Pre-covid consultation concerning the future of this library determined that it would transition to a community library with services delivered by volunteers.

Summary

The service has maximised its strong communications and digital expertise to continue to provide a library service during the pandemic. Although staffing and resource investments remain low compared to other services, its usage levels are positive. The service is planning to build on these strengths as we move away from the pandemic.

Case Study

In partnership with Money Saviour, Powys Libraries held a series of online training sessions about money management. These sessions covered Universal Credit, energy providers and budgeting, and participants had the opportunity to learn and ask questions. Participants learned a lot about grant-funding, benefit pitfalls and ways to make their money go further. The feedback was very positive:

"I am really excited about making a spreadsheet for my budgeting now – Sorcha is really knowledgeable and has actually made me enthusiastic to plan what I do with my money, rather than just spend it and panic. These sessions have helped a lot."

"That was very informative. There were quite a few things that I did not know about Universal Credit, such as Council Tax Reduction being separate from Universal Credit – that is useful to know, and I will be passing that on."

"I did not know quite how many grants were available to help with energy costs. It all seems a bit of a minefield, trying to figure out how to do everything, but this session clarified a lot and I know what my next steps will be."

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

Library services in Rhondda Cynon Taf are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 13 branches and 2 mobiles, with 93% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The library service meets 12 core entitlements in full.

RCT saw a 23% increase in active borrowers, which is attributed to individuals being able to join online and the digital library offer. It is now 4th in Wales for the number of active borrowers per 1000 population. However, it is one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic

The materials budget has decreased marginally in 2020-21 with a 14% decrease since 2017/18. As noted by other authorities, the ability to purchase materials was affected by the redeployment of staff and the disruption to the supply chain. The service maintained its expenditure on children's and Welsh language resources.

Staffing levels have remained static since 2019/20, with the total number of professional staff per 10,000 population above the median level in Wales, and some staff being supported to gain library qualifications.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- RCT notes a substantial increase of 83% in digital downloads since 2019/20.
- The library provided reading packs to schools through the school's library service, and this effectively contributed to the promotion of resources in this area.
- The service delivered bilingual storytimes online along with other online events for children and events during the pandemic. The service intends to continue with this as an effective way of reaching new audiences.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled RCT to purchase seven self-service kiosks, improving the environment for customers and staff. This provided added safeguards, reducing the need for face-to-face interaction, an important consideration during the pandemic. The service expects that up to 20% of returns and loans will be undertaken using self-service in the future, freeing up staff time for customer engagement in other areas.

Future plans

The service provided a range of case studies (example below) highlighting, the positive impact the click and collect service had on people's health and wellbeing, along with the impact of the digital loans of devices and the online events.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, priorities include the development of community hubs, including the

creation of a cultural hub at Treorchy library. The service plans to continue to work with partner agencies in to develop the neighbourhood network model further.

The service notes the need to consider the growth in the delivery of online services and the need to balance this provision with face-to-face services. This will include the promotion of events and activities to encourage members to return to their local library. There are plans to purchase more tablets for the provision of a 'home' library service to those members unable to access mobile library services. Alongside other local authorities, a key consideration will be improving customer confidence.

Summary

Rhondda Cynon Taf has demonstrated strengths in its online provision and engagement during the pandemic and adapted to serve its communities in different ways. The service should consider maximising the opportunities found during this time to encourage more customers back in the future. Clear corporate support for the community hub and neighbourhood network models suggests the potential for further improvements in performance are likely in the future.

Case Study 1

As RCT libraries were unable to provide story time and craft sessions in libraries, the decision was made to move these sessions online and provide them through the Library Service's Facebook page. The staff in the Children's and Schools department filmed themselves reading stories in both English and Welsh and then designed a craft related to the theme of the story. A film of how to make the craft was produced and customers had the option of printing and using their own craft materials or picking up a basic 'craft kit' from their local library. The feedback was positive:

"The stories on Facebook are great. We sit and watch them on my phone. When I was picking my son up one day, I saw that the library had craft packs, so we picked one of them up and had a go at making a witch's cauldron. It was great to have these things to do as it was hard to explain to Blake why he could not go into the library."

Case Study 2

RCT libraries provide an 'At home' service to library customers who are unable, through disability or who live more than two miles from a library and are unable to access mobile library services. This service enables individuals to access audio or physical books chosen for them by library staff using a pre-agreed selection criteria. To expand the service and to increase usage, a tablet loan scheme has been introduced. A tablet preloaded with eBooks or eAudiobooks is provided to a customer. This service has the potential to benefit many individuals and can be run in parallel with the loan of physical books.

SWANSEA

Library services in Swansea are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 17 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 96% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reports that it met all 12 core entitlements.

Swansea has the second highest number of active library borrowers per 1000 population. Swansea was one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. Some of the decrease in library membership is due to data cleansing within the LMS.

Swansea experienced a 25% decrease in expenditure between April to June when libraries were closed, and physical books were not being loaned. However, the strengths demonstrated by Swansea library service in community engagement and promotion mean that it is currently median for physical book issues per 1000 population. The service has maintained its commitment to children's and Welsh language materials. There is a clear correlation between children's issues and expenditure in this area.

Staffing levels have remained static since 2019/20, and the service remains in the bottom quartile for qualified staff per 10,000 population. As with all local authorities across Wales, staff improved digital skills during the pandemic through the successful Estyn Allan project.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Swansea noted a 63% increase in the use of electronic resources.
- Welsh titles were included in all children's click and collect book bags along with Welsh language activities for learners. The service notes that purchases made reflected the need to support the mental health of communities impacted due to the pandemic.
- Swansea implemented a successful click and collect service, supported by a marketing campaign to increase usage of the service, as well as extending its home delivery service.
- The service capitalised on its growing social media presence by delivering some events and activities online and creating new content via digital means.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled the purchase of four privacy booths were purchased, alongside digital equipment for customers to use within libraries in Swansea. This supported staff in their communication with local schools and families to support a variety of digital activities, including the Empathy Lab.

Future plans

Swansea library service supplied powerful case studies (examples below) which show the impact various library services have had on families and communities. These include people accessing the home delivery service, support for a family from abroad, and bookbags for children at a local primary school to help with home learning.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the service has implemented a new plan. The revised vision statement is:

“Provision of an agile, inclusive and sustainable library service that enables citizens and communities to engage meaningfully with culture, reading, technology and learning within their local community.”

A key part of this vision will be a new central library. The new library will form part of a city centre hub and will enable a more collaborative approach with other council services. Further priorities in the immediate future, include reading and literacy, health and wellbeing and digital inclusion.

Summary

Swansea library service has strong community links and partnerships and has maintained a solid level of provision and use despite the pandemic. The service is in advanced planning stages to capitalise on the planned new central library to increase reach to new customers, as well as continue to build on its digital opportunities.

Case Study 1

A mother and her 3 children moved to Swansea from Spain about 5 years ago and her local library is St Thomas' Library, which is situated in a very close-knit community in East Swansea. The mother experienced a language barrier when it came to communicating and this made her very reluctant to ask for help. However, she had developed a relationship with the library staff, whom she trusted. The family were experiencing a variety of difficulties including financial concerns, poor accommodation and living conditions and bullying of the children. The lady was in considerable distress and sought the support of the library. She needed advice regarding applying for jobs.

The library responded by introducing her to employability agencies who work closely with library, and she secured a work at a local hotel. She was also advised to contact 'Family Partnership.' Library staff also liaised with the local primary school regarding the bullying issues and the situation improved as a result of this intervention. The library also worked with the Local Area Coordinator (Social Services), local vicar, the AMs office, and the school to ensure the customer received the necessary information and support needed to improve her living conditions and ultimately move on from private rental to council accommodation.

The outcome for the family is that the mother has a job that she loves, and the family feel safe and secure. They are planning their move to their new home shortly and she has feedback that the impact on her own and her children's wellbeing is immeasurable.

The fact that they are able to stay in the same area with their friends and school close by, is of immense comfort to them all and means they have a much more positive outlook for the future.

Case Study 2

Penlan Library is situated on a Council estate just north of the city centre of Swansea in one of the most deprived wards in the County. The Library Manager works with Flying Start settings in the area to support the promotion of literacy to local families, including support to join and use the local library.

The library set up a book sharing scheme in two of the local Flying Start childcare settings, including a Welsh language setting. Working together with the team the Library staff introduced library books and bookbags, alongside promotional material to encourage parents to access their local library and support to use the Swansea Library digital platforms to access, books, stories, craft ideas and information. For many families having access to free, curated and bilingual collections to support their child's learning has made a positive difference.

Many of the families involved have joined and continue to visit their local library. The bilingual, basic Welsh picture books have been popular with both the children and helped the parents to learn the language also.

TORFAEN

Library services in Torfaen are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 3 branches and 1 home delivery vehicle, with 97% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

The service reported that it met all core entitlements.

Torfaen service was one of only seven local authorities to see an increase in library membership in 2020-21. The service attributes this to the popularity of the 'request and collect' service and enhanced digital offer.

There was a slight decrease in the spend on books during 2020, although the book budget remained consistent. Expenditure on children's resources and Welsh materials has been maintained. Torfaen's material expenditure is below average per 1000 population, but issues are closer to median ranking. This is despite a decrease in the number of active borrowers per 1000 population since 2019/20. This suggests that stock selection is appropriate and well balanced and effectively meets the information needs of its community.

Staffing levels have remained static since 2019/20 although 1.5 posts remain vacant. As with all local authorities, 2020 was a challenging year with many staff redeployed to undertake other Council activities.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- Torfaen saw an increase of 61% of its digital issues.
- Torfaen was able to promote its children's resources and engage with families through the delivery of 'home-schooling' book bundles, chosen by staff for children in local communities.
- The move to online events including story time and a popular reading club was welcomed by members.
- The service continued to promote the Welsh language through virtual activities this year and participated in the online Big Welsh Rhymetime.
- Staff established a temporary Library@Home Befriending Service. This service was welcomed and helped the library to support vulnerable residents in their homes at a time when the impact of loneliness for many was severe.

Future plans

The service provided several case studies (example below) which showed the beneficial impact the library had on its customers such as the Library@Home Befriending Service, the request & collect service; online rhyme and story times; and an online reading group which is mostly people over 70 who not only felt more connected, with improved wellbeing but also learnt new digital skills.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the service will continue to use the Library and Information Strategy 2018-23 to focus activities.

The service is collaborating with partner organisations to deliver promotional and outreach opportunities in the community and the development of joint projects to help deliver services (for example, the Health Blaenavon Project, Dementia Friendly partnership working and Fusion arts/cultural activities).

The service intends to take a blended approach to service development, particularly building on the digital skills developed through the Estyn Allan project and reintroducing physical activities in libraries. The successful request and collect service will become part of its core offer.

Summary

Through its wide range of partnerships and enthusiastic staff Torfaen has managed to maintain a library service which brings many benefits to new and existing customers. Despite historically low levels of investment, it has used staff skills and communication effectively. It would be beneficial for Torfaen to consider a strategy to attract former customers back to the service.

Case Study

A virtual book club was established in March 2020. The main issue to overcome during the early days of lockdown was the fact that the library was closed and access to the physical book stock was not possible. It was decided to use the Borrowbox service at this time because of the availability of "multiple use" titles which would be ideal for an online reading group.

A Library Professional engaged with the book group members beforehand to encourage participation and to facilitate the move to Microsoft Teams and Borrowbox. The first meeting took place in April 2020 and 12 members were present. This was a significant achievement as the majority of the group were in their 70's and 80's, lived alone and had not used any form of virtual meeting room before. There were minor difficulties with sound and camera, but they quickly adapted to the new situation.

As well as helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness amongst the group members, the online reading groups helped to give people confidence in using technology.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN

Library services in the Vale of Glamorgan are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 4 branches and 5 community supported libraries, with 94% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library. The community supported libraries are included in the WPLS reporting figures.

Library service performance

The service met 11 of the 12 core entitlements in full and did not meet 1 (library strategy).

The Vale was one of fifteen authorities which saw library membership decline in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20 because of the pandemic. Expenditure on materials remained broadly the same as the previous year, including the proportion spent on children's and Welsh language materials. Currently the service is just below the top quartile for the materials budget per 1000 population, but loans are below the median. This suggests that it may be useful to review what items are bought and borrowed to try to maximise use of the collections.

The service's relatively high rankings for spend per 1000 Welsh language speakers and issues of Welsh materials per 1000 Welsh language speakers are more evenly matched. The service appointed a Welsh speaking Children's Librarian at the end of 2019/2020. This improved communication and collaboration with local schools and helped provide a range of bilingual activities.

Staffing levels have remained stable and there have been no significant changes since 2017. The service actively encouraged staff to undertake as much training as possible during 2020-21 to capitalise on online training opportunities and is well resourced for qualified staff. A focus on the digital skills of staff was a priority during 2020-21, to support members, many of whom were using online services for the first time.

The service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The Vale of Glamorgan library service witnessed a 55% increase in the download of electronic resources.
- To help members during the year the service increased loan times and temporarily removed fines and other charges.
- The home delivery and click and collect services were prioritised. These services helped staff build relationships with customers across the Vale.
- The library also built on its social media presence and increased online content for children and adults with a variety of virtual events, activities, and clubs.
- The service continues to support the Welsh language, particularly focusing on Welsh language books for children and learners.
- Staff were also supported to learn Welsh, and all social media posts were bilingual, along with several of the online events.
- The digital libraries officer created an online booking system for customers to collect books, which enabled the safe re-opening of branches.

- The service continues to be the host lead for the all-Wales LMS project and future developments on this.

Future plans

The Vale of Glamorgan provided several case studies (example below) which demonstrated how different library customers benefited from the service during the pandemic, including the expanded home delivery service, the online click and collect service, and a teenager's online skills and digital opportunities developing out of a library-run club.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, the service notes that a capital transformation grant was provided by Welsh Government during 2020-2021 to upgrade the ground floor at Penarth library. The Penarth library refit included installation of Open+. This will enable the service to add at least 20 additional opening hours to its current opening hours.

A key concern for the service will also be to encourage members to return to physical library spaces. There is also a need to consider how to integrate physical and digital services. Supporting the health and wellbeing of local communities is a key priority for the service. Services such as 'click and collect' proved extremely popular during the pandemic and it is likely that these services will be continued to continue to meet the needs of members in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Summary

The Vale of Glamorgan library service has used its strengths effectively during the pandemic to support its customers. The service should be able to build on its achievements to attract members and physical customers back to its libraries and capitalise on new investments such as the Open+ facilities.

Case Study

Libraries inspire people. The following example exemplifies how libraries can kick start an idea that leads to something special.

For a number of years, a library assistant based at Llantwit Major library, has been conducting Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) workshops for children and young people. These proved popular in several libraries across the Vale with groups meeting regularly to continue their specially prepared campaigns. Although sadly these sessions had to be put on hold due to COVID restrictions, we have received some wonderful updates from one of the parents about her child's progress this year that has come about as a direct result of the D&D sessions.

The mother tells us that her child was bitterly disappointed that these sessions had to end in March 2020 but having observed the staff member as dungeon master in the D&D sessions, she began to organise her own online sessions with her friends. She spent hours each week writing new campaigns and her mother tells us that it has really fuelled her creativity as a young writer and storyteller.

Most recently the child applied for a place on an RPG development project run jointly between a Welsh and German arts project for children, "The Trickster's Net." This was limited to 16 places for Welsh students and 16 for German students and was a very competitive process. We were delighted to hear that her experience in running and organising D&D sessions successfully earned her a place in this project.

Her mother says:

"What started as a small fortnightly club in the library has offered my children a sense of belonging, fun, well-being, creativity and confidence."

The child says:

"[D&D] has improved my mental wellbeing and can improve social skills. It has also given me a creative outlet and brings out the creativity in my friends."

WREXHAM

Library services in Wrexham are delivered by the local authority. The service includes 10 branches, 1 mobile, 1 home delivery vehicle, and 1 community managed library not included in the return, with 92% of residents living within 2 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Wrexham met 9 of the 12 core entitlements in full, partially met 2 (Wi-Fi access and consulting users) and did not meet 1 (availability of library strategy).

The service is currently performing in the top quartile for adult and children's loans per 1000 population, although the current revenue budget places the service in the bottom quartile across Wales. The materials budget has continued to decrease and has reduced by 26% since 2020. Unfortunately, no commentary has been provided so it is unclear if this is due to the pandemic or is a permanent reduction in budget.

There has been a substantial decrease of 50% to the Welsh language budget, however, the expenditure per 1000 Welsh language speakers remains just above the median, and issues per 1000 Welsh language speakers is very high when compared to other library services. It is likely that the stock selection by well-informed librarians ensures that the content accurately reflects the needs of the local community. Furthermore, the service actively promotes the Welsh language stock through existing partnerships, such as, Tim Cymraeg, Owain Cyfeliog and NENE publication. Cefn Mawr library continued to collaborate closely with a local Welsh language medium school and was able to provide materials for classes within the school throughout the lockdown.

The staffing complement was reduced in 2019/20 and this has decreased further in 2020/21 and staffing levels are now 14% lower than in 2017. It is in the bottom quartile for both total staffing and qualified staffing per 10,000 population. It appears that the service continues to be affected by an austere and uncertain environment.

However, the service responded positively during the periods of lockdown, by adapting and developing new services.

- The service witnessed an increase in electronic downloads of 88% in 2020-21. In particular, the service notes the popularity of Ancestry during 2020.
- The service has also pre-recorded story times for children which have been shared on social media.
- Services and resources for children have been a key priority for the service. Wrexham delivered 55 'Read Aloud' sessions on zoom throughout the year, which were well attended, but found engagement with live storytime session patchy throughout 2020-21.
- The service produced a bilingual video promoting Wrexham Library Service books, which was positively received.
- Support from the Welsh Government's Cultural resilience fund in 2020 enabled Wrexham to purchase handheld tablets, protective cases and charging cabinets. Customers can use the tablets to access the library catalogue to

browse for an item and place a request, or to read an e-book or e-zine. This has helped Wrexham libraries improve their digital offer for members.

Future plans

Wrexham library service provided several case studies (example below) to show the benefit of the libraries during 2020-21. This included enhanced provision to schools which stimulated an interest in reading among the children, the home delivery service, and the loans of digital devices to isolated individuals.

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Wrexham notes the requirement to cut a further £100,000 for the budget in 2021/22. It is difficult to envisage the successful planning and delivery of the service to its existing customers with this level of continuous reduction. There are plans to review the service to meet the needs of people who currently have no access to library services in Wrexham. Priorities include the delivery of services for vulnerable families, the need to support education for children, Welsh language and culture and combat the negative impact of poverty.

Summary

Wrexham library service continues to face annual budget reductions which hinder its ability to reach individuals and communities which would benefit from its services. Ongoing reviews of some elements of the service may offer greater stability so the service can concentrate on its priorities of children, isolated communities, Welsh provision and health and wellbeing. Prioritising the development of a library strategy will help the service plan more effectively in an uncertain environment

Case Study

Library staff are now working in partnership with staff from the adult social care team to help deliver a new project to isolated and vulnerable members of Wrexham County Borough.

Several iPads were purchased using funding from the Community Inclusion Grant (established to help vulnerable members of the community) to support those who were identified as being at risk of isolation. The iPads provided a lifeline for these individuals who were able to contact friends and family using this technology.

Thanks to the grant, libraries in Wrexham were also able to provide 5 4G iPads to people in the community. This enabled these individuals to access free audio books from the library service and connect with others.

Appendix 1: Libraries in the pandemic

Although there were some variations after the initial lockdown, due to varying levels of infection or physical location of buildings, public libraries in Wales were able to operate broadly as follows:

Stage 1

Between March and June 2020, all library buildings closed and offered digital/remote services only. On 8 May, the First Minister announced an adjustment to the Covid regulation “enabling local authorities to begin the process of planning how to safely re-open libraries”. In the first instance, many services developed and implemented a ‘Click and Collect’ loans service. Library customers were able to reserve items via the online library catalogue, or by phoning the library and booking a slot to collect and return items. This enabled customers who were able to travel to a library site to collect and return their books in safety. Welsh Government funding of £5,000 for each service supported libraries to put in place appropriate safety measures to safeguard staff and customers.

Stage 2

Between June/July and October 2020, a phased re-opening of buildings within some services was implemented, but with appropriate measures in place, such as restricting the number of individuals allowed in the building at a given time. Some libraries were affected by local lockdowns in September. Between October and November, there was a ‘firebreak’ in Wales which resulted in the closure of some library buildings and the offer of digital/remote services once again. Libraries reopened between November and December 2021.

Stage 3

Library buildings closed at Christmas due to Welsh Government regulations and libraries offered remote services only. From late March, a phased re-opening of most branches in Wales continued. Individual local authorities managed the process of restoring services according to their capacity to manage and deliver a service. This varied considerably across Wales.

Because of the changing regulations, public libraries in Wales were able to open their physical buildings for up to around six months out of 12 (June – December 2020). Many services opened only with pre-booked appointments, and some small branch libraries did not open at all due to an inability to ensure adequate physical distancing between customers and/or staff. Some libraries also opened on reduced hours, and some were unable to offer access to the full range of facilities including access to IT facilities.