



Report of the Cabinet Member for Culture, Human Rights and Equalities

Service Improvement, Regeneration and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel
17 Oct 2023

Report on Welsh Public Library Standards, Welsh Government assessment for Swansea Libraries for 2021-22 and the library service submission for 22-23

Purpose	To brief/update the Scrutiny Committee on the Delayed feedback from the Welsh Government on Swansea Council Libraries performance in relation to the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) 2021 – 2022 and their WPLS performance submission for 2022-23
Content	This report presents an overview of the Welsh Public Libraries Framework and feedback for the periods 21-22 and submission for 22-23
Councillors are being asked to	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor	Elliott King
Lead Officer	Karen Gibbins
Legal Officer	Debbie Smith
Finance Officer	Peter Keys
Access to Services Officer	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 makes it a statutory duty of all local authorities to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.
- 1.2 To help define the terms “comprehensive and efficient,” and to encourage and facilitate a development strategy for Welsh public libraries, the Welsh Government embarked on a series of assessment frameworks. This report is a response to the sixth quality framework, “Connected and Ambitious Libraries 2017-2020. (Appendix E). This Framework has been extended by the Welsh Government until 2023 - 2024 period to give time to develop a new post Covid Framework.

- 1.3 There was a delay in the assessment of the 2021 - 2022 performance framework by Welsh Government and the final report was received on 2 August 2023. (Appendix A)

2 Briefing

2.1 2021-22 Performance Reporting

Local Authorities were asked to report on:

- Twelve core entitlements listed in the Framework.
- Report progress against **six** quality indicators instead of sixteen but not tested or ranked.
- Provide a report of their strategic narrative and future direction.
- Provide case studies showing the impact of the library service.
- Invited to provide digital data about online activity demonstrating impact.

- 2.2 The annual report from the Welsh Government Minister for Finance and Local Government Rebecca Evans (Appendix A) details a summary of the response public libraries made during this reporting period and comments on Swansea Library Service performance.

- 2.3 The report mentions that across Wales active borrower numbers have fallen since pre-pandemic, but figures are increasing again. Swansea reported a 30% increase on previous year.

- 2.4 Adult and children book borrowing increased across Wales and Swansea reported a strong 600% increase on adult titles for the previous year and 1470% increase on children's titles respectively.

- 2.5 Wider themes and highlights mentioned in the ministers report include the increase in hub models and co-locating other services for which the impact is to be monitored this is alongside an increase in open plus models of service that allow for library usage when staff are not present. National initiatives supporting wellbeing are widely implemented. The removal of library book fines was also a theme across Wales.

- 2.6 The Welsh Government commented that highlights for Swansea Libraries in 2021/22 were:

- Work with the Good Things Foundation "Everyone Connected" initiative, which distributed devices and data to those in data poverty.
- "Reading Well" for mental health schemes and participation in the "EPP Service" supporting those living with long term mental health.
- Work on diversity in its library collections
- Temporary cessation of book fines in 21/22 and 22/23.

- 2.7 The report also comments on major relocation project to move the City Centre Library to the City Centre Hub as part of Transforming Towns and UK Government levelling up Funding.

2.8 Case Studies provided included use of libraries by Kurdish All Wales Association volunteers and Penlan library activity with local Welsh school. Appendix B

2.9 **2022 -23 Performance Submission**

Appendix C is a copy of the recent submission for the period 22/23 which is currently being assessed. The final report from the Welsh Government is not yet available. This submission is being presented to you as it provides the most recent and most up to date information about the library service current performance against the same WPLS performance framework 6.

2.10 Based on the advice and definitions provided, the service expects to have met all the Core Entitlements within the framework.

2.11 During this period, we reported on all the Quality Indicators as in pre-covid periods and conducted an updated customer survey across all sites to ensure customer satisfaction data recorded was up to date. A sample of quality indicator data provided can be seen below.

WPLSQI 1 Making a difference	Framework 6
Percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	69%
Percentage of adults who have found helpful information for health and well-being at the library	65%
Percentage of adults who experience the library as an enjoyable safe and inclusive place	93%
Percentage of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives	95%
<i>Survey dates (month & year)</i>	Nov-22
Percentage of children aged 7-16 who think that the library helps them learn and find things out	68%
<i>Survey dates (month & year)</i>	Nov-22

WPLSQI 8 Library use	2022-23	Per 1,000 pop'n
Total number of visits to library premises during the year	574,678	2,416
Please indicate the method used for calculation	Full year count	
Total number of external visits to the library's web site during the year	138,112	581
Total number of active borrowers during the year	39,781	167
Total number of library members	79,416	334
Total number of adult book issues	438,671	1,844
Total number of children's book issues	250,310	1,052
Total number of audio-visual issues	16,428	69
Total number of electronic downloads	269,153	1,132

2.12 Making a difference QI 1 is based on our November 22 Customer survey. Results from survey suggest that library customers enjoy using the safe spaces but that learning and skills are not a priority for everyone. QI2 demonstrates

that 99% of adult customers think the library service is “good or very good”. Active user data figures are approximately the same from previous year and this period gives us a new benchmark to track visits to library premises post-pandemic. Adult and children book issues have settled as post-pandemic 3 week borrowing rules were applied. This period saw the winding down of the removal of library fines temporarily funded from ERF funding.

- 2.13 The service spent £385,788 on reading materials, of which 21% was spent on children’s books. This equals £1,622 per 1000 population.
- 2.14 There were 38,807 hours of PC use across libraries by members of the public and 44,684 WIFI logins, this demonstrates how residents are changing their use of libraries and bringing their own devices but using the free broadband available.
- 2.15 Residents placed 71,423 reservations on items 72% of which were made available within 7 days of the request being placed.
- 2.16 Events and activities in libraries were attended by 55,214 residents across the service during 22/23.
- 2.17 Staffing will remain an area attracting comment from the Welsh Government as we have a low level of qualified library staff. Wherever possible, the service will seek to support the recruitment of professional and qualified library staff and if opportunities to make a job role require a library qualification, it will be investigated. Other options which will be investigated in the future are work based qualifications for front line staff, apprenticeships, and the potential to offer these within the capacity of the service.
- 2.18 This period WPLS submission required only one impact case study. Swansea chose an example of how libraries support people through bereavement. It demonstrates that the face to face service available at libraries provided a resident with a friendly ear to share their loss, advice about council bereavement services and an opportunity to log in to pc’s, find further advice and financial information allowing them to manage the burial service better themselves. (Appendix D)

3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 3.1 Both these submissions help demonstrate how Swansea Libraries is recovering from the Covid pandemic and how it continuing to support residents during the cost of living crisis. The 21/22 year saw the library returning to library visits and moving away from Click and Collect services. Libraries returned to normal opening hours and service delivery throughout the period.

22/23 saw the library service receive external funding via Poverty & Prevention to help libraries become Safe Spaces. This funding enabled the provision of warm drinks and family games and some new charging points in libraries. This period also included the roll out of a new service to enable customers to print from their own mobile devices in libraries. This service provided by a third party

company “Princh” was regularly requested and has been received well by customers.

Libraries continue to support the roll out of Period Poverty Products across all library venues and supported this with sewing/crafting events to teach residents to make reusable period products. This has helped support the attendance at events at libraries throughout the year.

Also during 22/23 library teams have worked towards applying for the library of sanctuary status for Central library which we are currently awaiting assessment. This has assisted us in creating new partnerships and new activities in the library.

Discussions to see how Central Library can relocate to the City Centre Hub continue and we look forward to understanding what new opportunities this will present. A Welsh Government grant has been awarded for £300k to help with the fit-out of library shelving and provide some transformational digital library service provision in the space.

4. Legal implications

4.1 None

5. Finance Implications

5.1 None

6. Integrated Assessment Implications

6.1 None.

Background papers: *None.*

Appendices:

Appendix A Welsh Government Report 21/22 Ministerial Forward

Welsh Government Report 21/22 Swansea Report

Appendix B Welsh Public Libraries Framework 21/22 case studies

Appendix C Welsh Public Libraries submission 22/23

Appendix D Welsh Public Libraries Framework 22/23 impact assessment

Appendix E Connected and Ambitious Libraries 2017-2020 (extended)