

Swansea

Overview and location

Library services in Swansea were delivered by Swansea Council. The service included 17 branches and one home delivery vehicle, with 96% of residents living within 2.5 miles of a library.

Library service performance

Swansea provided evidence that it fully met all 12 core entitlements. The independent assessment agreed.

Core entitlement	Service self-assessment	Independent assessment
1 Libraries in Wales will be free to join and open to all.	Fully met	Fully met
2 Libraries in Wales will ensure friendly, knowledgeable and qualified staff are on hand to help.	Fully met	Fully met
3 Libraries in Wales will provide access to a range of services, activities and high quality resources in a range of formats to support learning, personal well-being and development, community participation, and culture and recreation.	Fully met	Fully met
4 Libraries in Wales will provide appropriate services, facilities and information resources for individuals and groups with special needs.	Fully met	Fully met
5 Libraries will provide appropriate safe, attractive and accessible physical spaces with suitable staffed opening hours.	Fully met	Fully met
6 Libraries in Wales will lend books for free and deliver free access to information, including online information resources available 24 hours a day.	Fully met	Fully met
7 Libraries in Wales will provide free use of the Internet and computers, including Wi-Fi.	Fully met	Fully met
8 Libraries in Wales will provide access to services, cultural activities and high quality resources in the Welsh language.	Fully met	Fully met
9 Libraries in Wales will work in partnership to share catalogues and facilitate access to the resources of all Welsh libraries.	Fully met	Fully met
10 Libraries in Wales will work with a range of partners to promote and deliver services to new and diverse audiences, enabling more people to benefit from their services.	Fully met	Fully met
11 Libraries in Wales will regularly consult users to gather their views on the service and information about their changing needs.	Fully met	Fully met
12 Libraries in Wales will provide access to the library service's strategy, policies, objectives and vision, in	Fully met	Fully met

print and online, in a range of languages appropriate for the community.		
Total – fully met	12	12
Total – partially met	0	0
Total – not met	0	0

Library use

Over the reporting year, the service had 167 active borrowers per 1,000 population, representing a 30% increase from the previous year. Adult book issues increased by 600% to 2,505 issues per 1,000 population, while children’s book issues increased by 1470% to 2,073 issues per 1,000 population.

Membership meanwhile reduced by over 4,500, though some of this can be attributed to heavy data cleansing. Overall, Swansea libraries saw a strong return of its physical offer with electronic downloads and ‘Click and Collect’ both reducing as physical issues increased impressively.

Highlights

Highlights for the year included:

- The service worked with the Good Things Foundation on the ‘Everyone Connected’ initiative to distribute free personal devices and data to those in data poverty.
- The service continued to support and promote the Reading Well for Mental Health schemes in all libraries and supported the Education Programmes for Patients (EPP) service, who provided a variety of free self-management courses for people living with long-term health conditions and for carers.
- The service worked towards the de-colonisation of its collections. This included the use of Collection HQ to monitor the diversity of stock and work on making the stock across the libraries represents Black, Asian and minority cultures as well as the LGBTQIA+ community.
- The service removed library fines temporarily – this will continue into 2022/23.

Materials, Welsh language and overall spend

The service’s material expenditure has returned to previous level after a 25% overall reduction in 2020/21. The service placed in the top quartile in terms of book budget and in the third quartile for materials spend per 1,000 population. 18% of materials spend was on children’s resources, the service placed in the median across Wales. The high number of both children and adult book issues suggest the current stock is popular and is based on a good selection of new materials.

The percentage of spend on Welsh language resources decreased, but the actual spend per 1,000 population increased, with the service in the third quartile nationally in terms of issues per Welsh speaker. The service used social media to promote their Welsh language content and continued to build relationships with Welsh language primary schools to help support pupils.

Despite some issues related to Covid-19 remaining, the service provided a range of events to both children and adults, with over 33,000 people attending. Events included regular rhyme times, coding clubs and carer afternoons as well as newer initiatives such as hosting the Kurdish All Wales Association to provide a space for their work in supporting Black, Asian and minority communities.

Staffing

The service ranked in the top quartile for total staff per 10,000 population but for library-qualified staff it was in the bottom quartile. The service acknowledged the need to build library qualifications and staff training and was taking steps to address this, including supporting a cohort of staff to complete 'Digital Champions' training.

Digital data

Swansea provided digital data including click and collect and the number of online sessions held. 'Click and Collect' orders reduced by 69%, and e-issues by 20%, although the service ranked in the third quartile for both these services nationally. Online sessions increased by 628% but this large increase was partially due to the new use of a social media management platform that provided more data on activity and engagement than the previous year. The service provided online renewals and item requests, and links to wellbeing, business support and newspapers.

Future plans

Swansea Council's libraries showed many positive signs of recovery. The increase in borrowers and issues suggest much of the hard work in bringing users back to libraries has worked. Over the course of 22/23, the plan to build on its recovery by continuing to build relationships with schools in the local area to bring in new users, host a new Cultural Community Coordinator to develop partnership working and impact across the wider cultural sector, and continue to be prominent in delivering digital inclusion priorities.

A major challenge and opportunity on the horizon is the planned move of Swansea Central Library to a new location supported by Welsh Government Transforming Towns and Transformation Capital Grants funding, and UK Government Levelling Up funding.

Case studies

Swansea provided four case studies including stories from library users. This included activities by of local volunteers in the Kurdish All Wales Association delivering free Kurdish classes for children aged 6-8 years and the improved relationship between Penlan Library and a local Welsh-language school.