Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Merthyr Tydfil (Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust)

Annual Assessment Report 2017-18

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Merthyr Tydfil's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government.

1   Executive summary

Merthyr Tydfil met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Merthyr Tydfil achieved 9 in full, and 1 in part.

Library services are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has continued to perform well under this arrangement in this first year of the sixth framework; user satisfaction remains high, and usage levels have generally improved. Levels of book issues to children remain very low however, and it is encouraging to see that there are plans in place to focus on the development of children's services in the next year. The impact of falling budgets on the book fund is of greater concern, as further reductions here could seriously affect the service's future performance. The challenges of low levels of staff are also acknowledged, and it is noted that financial constraints mean that the service is continuing to look at different staffing models. While there is reassurance that the Trust and local authority are committed to supporting library services in the coming years, continued investment will be critical to ensure that the service can continue to perform at current levels, and meet its aspirations for delivering a quality customer experience.

- User surveys for adults and children were completed in March 2018 showing continuing high levels of satisfaction. 95% of young people think the library helps them to learn (down from 99% in March 2017), and 93% of adults believe that it has made a difference to their lives.

- Support for health and well-being is strong with Merthyr Tydfil one of the few authorities regularly offering the full range of services under QI 4 in each static service point. Formal training sessions continue to record the highest level of attendance per capita in Wales.

- Visitor numbers have increased and overall books issues have also risen slightly, although children's borrowing remains very low.

- The materials budget has fallen, although performance against acquisitions targets has broadly been maintained.

- There have been no changes to numbers of staff / qualified staff in 2017-18, but targets here are not met, and the low level of overall staffing is noted as a challenge for the service.

- Total revenue expenditure has fallen by over 15%, reflecting greater pressures on budgets across the Trust, with expenditure per capita now close to the lowest in Wales.

2   Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of core entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures. Section 2 summarises achievements against these areas. A narrative assessment of the authority's performance is provided in Section 3.

2.1   Core entitlements

Merthyr Tydfil is meeting all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Library services in Merthyr welcome all sections of the community, and tailor services to the demographic covered by each of their service points. Local links and partnerships are used to promote and support delivery. There is a centralised marketing budget for the Trust, and wide use is made of social media to promote services. Survey consultations with users are used to inform service development.

2.2   Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Merthyr Tydfil is achieving 9 in full, and one in part.

Quality Indicator	Met?	
QI 3 Support for individual development:		Met in full
a) ICT support	✔	
b) Information literacy and skills training	✔	
c) E-government support	✔	
d) Reader development	✔	
QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being		Met in full
i) Book Prescription Wales scheme	✔	
ii) Better with Books scheme	✔	
iii) Designated health & well-being collection	✔	
iv) Information about healthy lifestyles and behaviours	✔	
v) Signposting to health & well-being services	✔	
QI 6 all static service points offer events/activities for users with special requirements	✔	Met in full
QI 7 Location of service points	✔	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Met in full
Acquisitions per capita	✔	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	x	
<u>or</u> Spend on Welsh per capita	✔	
QI 11 Online access:		Met in full
a) i) Public access to Internet	✔	
ii) Wi-Fi provision	✔	
QI 12 Supply of requests		Met in full
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	✔	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	✔	

Quality Indicator		Met?
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications:		Partially met
i) Staff per capita	x	
ii) Qualified staff per capita	x	
iii) Head of service qualification/training	✔	
iv) CPD percentage	✔	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	✔	Met in full

There has been no significant change in overall performance compared to the last year of the fifth framework for those indicators where direct comparisons are possible.

2.3   Impact measures

The framework includes three indicators aimed at assessing the impact of library use on people's lives. These indicators do not have targets, and authorities are only required to carry out user surveys for QI 1 once over the three-year period of the framework. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during this first year of the framework. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Merthyr Tydfil carried out user surveys of both adults and children during March 2018.

Performance indicator		*Rank*	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	95%	*3/6*	73%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	*2/7*	38%	90%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	96%	*14/17*	75%	98%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide up to four case studies describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year. Merthyr Tydfil provided three such case studies, although in some instances it would have been useful to collect further evidence of impact on participants to inform development of the future service offer:

- Homelinks Service – impact of the home library service for the family of an individual living with dementia; the service helped her to continue reading, maintain her confidence and stay well for longer. She enjoyed the visits from Homelink staff, and being included in events.

- Writing Squad: Egypt – supporting young people to engage with cultural activities; a children's creative writing group based at the library worked with the local partners to develop written and performance works based on an Egyptology exhibition at Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery, developing research, writing and film making skills.

- 'Food and Fun' – contribution to the School Holiday Enrichment Programme, with the library service provided crafts, creative writing, play and reading activities, and children completing the Summer Reading Challenge. The project raised the profile of the service and its potential to contribute to the education curriculum.

2.4 Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets, but allow services to monitor and benchmark their performance over time, in comparison with other authorities. The following table summarises Merthyr Tydfil's position for 2017-18. Ranks are included out of 22, where 1 is the highest, and 22 the lowest scoring authority, unless stated otherwise. Indicators where fewer than 22 authorities supplied data are those where relevant data was not available to some authorities. Where possible, figures from the last year of the fifth framework have also been included for comparison; however, in some cases a change in definition or the introduction of additional measures makes comparisons impractical. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2016/17
QI 1 Making a difference						
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills:	94%	1/7	24%	83%	94%	93%
c) health and well-being	88%	2/7	33%	65%	95%	85%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	100%	1/7	90%	98%	100%	99%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	98%	1/7	88%	91%	98%	96%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	100%	1/7	93%	99%	100%	99%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	94%	1/6	74%	86%	94%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall;	99%	1/7	93%	97%	99%	99%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.0	4/6	8.5	9.1	9.2	9.0
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	238	1/22	10	32	238	248
c) informal training per capita	329	5/22	15	199	473	334
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	288	8/22	82	228	684	292
QI 8 Library use						
a) visits per capita	3,825	14/22	2,501	4,047	7,014	3,706
b) virtual visits per capita	865	12/22	243	866	2,211	994
c) active borrowers per capita	148	13/22	100	154	229	161
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita*	28	18/22	4	68	663	
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita^	10	8/22	5	9	14	10
c) % of available time used by the public	62%	2/22	14%	27%	67%	55%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	51	7/21	3	31	196	66
b) total volunteer hours	800	15/21	40	1,346	11,939	640
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£7,799	20/21	£7,047	£11,915	£17,771	£9,330
b) % on staff,	63%	11/21	44%	63%	75%	58%
% on information resources	20%	3/21	4%	13%	25%	24%
% on equipment and buildings	5%	9/21	0%	4%	20%	4%
% on other operational costs;	13%	15/21	0%	18%	37%	14%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	14/20	£0	£338	£17,432	£1,351

QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.29	*18/21*	£1.24	£1.82	£2.41	*£1.93*
QI 16 Opening hours#						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.00%	*1/21*	0.00%	0.02%	1.28%	0.00%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.00%	*1/20*	0.00%	0.35%	11.24%	0.00%

* per Welsh speaking resident population

^per 10,000 resident population

 # Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.

3   Analysis of performance

The core entitlements and quality indicators can be divided into four key areas. This section of the report outlines performance under these areas, and compares this performance (where applicable) with the final year of the fifth framework (2016-17).

3.1   Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Merthyr Tydfil carried out both its user surveys (adult and children) in March 2018, with some minor improvements on surveys undertaken the previous year under the fifth framework. Satisfaction levels remain high, with 94% of adults agreeing that the library helped them develop new skills, and users aged 16 and under giving the library an overall rating of 9 out of 10. All static libraries provide a full range of support for individual development, and good support for health and well-being, with Merthyr Tydfil one of only three authorities providing the full range of identified services and activities across all its service points. Attendance at formal training has fallen slightly, in line with a reduction in the overall training offer following loss of funding to some partner organisations, but remains the highest per capita in Wales. Numbers helped by means of informal training have broadly been maintained.

3.2   Access and use (QI 6-8)

Merthyr Tydfil continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, and offers events / activities for users with special requirements at all static libraries. Attendance at events / activities has dropped slightly, but it is noted that this reflects the cancellation of sessions during adverse weather. Visitor levels have increased on 2016-17, with Merthyr Tydfil one of only seven library services reporting increased footfall. Overall book issues have also risen slightly, although comparatively performance here is still weak, with children's book issues among the lowest per capita in Wales.

3.3   Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Overall budget pressures have impacted on the book fund in 2017-18, with a decrease in the materials budget of around 30%. Despite this, the service has managed to maintain and even improve acquisition levels, through strategic use of available funds, such that the target acquisition level per capita is still met. Expenditure on Welsh language resources is also noted as meeting the target spend per capita, although Welsh issues are below the median for Wales. PC provision is maintained at 2016-17 levels and usage here has increased with facilities recording the second highest usage levels in Wales, reflecting local demand and access required for Universal Jobmatch and Universal Credit purposes. Performance in relation to supply of requests has fallen, but both targets are still achieved.

3.4   Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Both overall and qualified staff levels have been maintained, although neither target is met; the return notes that there are no current plans for changes to service staffing. Qualified leadership is in place, and the service is meeting requirements for staff training / professional development. While the number of volunteers has reduced, the service has retained a core of volunteer expertise, with their contribution increasing in 2017-18.

Total revenue expenditure has fallen by over 15% in 2017-18, reflecting greater pressures on budgets across the Trust, with expenditure per capita now close to the lowest in Wales. Aggregate annual opening hours have nevertheless been maintained, with the target here met, and the service has been able to sustain planned levels of provision for both its static libraries and mobile services.

4   Strategic context

As part of the return authorities are asked to report on how the library service is contributing to wider Welsh Government priorities and strategic goals. Merthyr Tydfil has responded to the Welsh Government's Well-being Objectives by producing its own Statement of Wellbeing. The role of Library services in supporting this is noted, with a full range of activities and contributions identified. In particular, work to promote digital inclusion and enable skills development, support for healthy living, and work with local partners to strengthen local communities, and promote use of the Welsh language.

5   Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Merthyr Tydfil notes achievements to date with improvements linked to the co-location of service points, and the opening of a new community library. The challenges of low levels of staffing and budget constraints are however acknowledged, although there is a commitment from the Trust and local authority to support library services in the coming years. Specific plans include further work to develop community library provision, a focus on children's services, and improving the service offer to schools and individuals. Financial constraints are cited in relation to the need to continue to look at different staffing models; this must raise concerns when low staffing levels are already presenting challenges for service delivery.

6   Conclusion

Library services in Merthyr Tydfil are delivered by Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Trust on behalf of the Borough Council. The service has continued to perform well under this arrangement in this first year of the sixth framework; user satisfaction remains high, and usage levels have generally improved. Levels of book issues to children remain very low however, and it is encouraging to see that there are plans in place to focus on the development of children's services in the next year. The impact of falling budgets on the book fund is of greater concern, as any further reductions here could seriously affect the service's future performance. The challenges of low levels of staff are also acknowledged, and it is noted that financial constraints mean that the service is continuing to look at different staffing models. While there is reassurance that the Trust and local authority are committed to supporting library services in the coming years, continued investment will be critical to ensure that the service can continue to perform at current levels, and meet its aspirations for delivering a quality customer experience.