

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:**           **LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**DATE:**               **THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2015**

**REPORT BY:**       **CHIEF OFFICER (ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE)**

**SUBJECT:**           **PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS**

**1.00**    **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01    To provide members with an update on progress against delivery of Public Library Standards and outline the way forward for working with these standards and the current budgetary context in the future.

**2.00**    **BACKGROUND**

2.01    The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964<sup>1</sup> makes it a duty of the relevant Welsh Ministers (currently the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism) “to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities...and to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the functions in relation to libraries conferred upon them as library authorities under this Act”. Under the same Act, library authorities are required to “provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof”.

2.02    Since 2002, the Welsh Ministers have fulfilled this duty through the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS, or, the Standards). The first framework ran from 2002 to 2005 with subsequent frameworks covering the periods 2005-08, 2008-11 and 2011-14. Each individual framework evolved to reflect the changing needs and expectations of public library users. In addition to the fulfilment of statutory duties, the WPLS framework plays a valuable role in supporting the development of public library services. There is general consensus among stakeholders concerned with the provision of public library services in Wales that these performance measurement frameworks, introduced and administered by the Welsh Government for the sector, have helped public library services to improve in a number of ways and in key areas. For example, as a result of the Standards, there have been significant improvements in service areas such as the delivery of requests and provision of ICT facilities and services, leading to enhanced outcomes for library customers.

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2.03 Local authorities also have a statutory duty (under section 7 of the Act) to provide a library service and encourage both adults and children to make full use of that library service. The performance indicators assist the Welsh Government in assessing whether or not local authorities in Wales are complying with their duties under the 1964 Act, and in assessing the comprehensiveness and efficiency, in terms of the manner of delivery, of library services in Wales.

2.04 Flintshire's performance against the WPLS Fourth Framework 2011-14

2.04.1 **2011-12** Flintshire achieved 5 of the 9 standards. These were:

- WPLS 1. Provision of service points and access to them.
- WPLS 2. Services to users with special requirements.
- WPLS 3. Opening hours and delivery of services.
- WPLS 5. Acquisitions to stock.
- WPLS 7. Delivery of user requests.

Flintshire partially achieved the requirements of the 4 remaining standards:

- WPLS 4. ICT facilities and services
- WPLS 6. Expenditure on books and materials (due to in year budget cuts)
- WPLS 8. Staffing
- WPLS 9. Buildings and space (due to lack of funds for property surveys).

This was slightly below the average level of achievement for Wales. (Highest in Wales was 8 standards achieved, lowest was 3, average was 6.)

2.04.2 **2012-13** Flintshire achieved 4 of the 9 standards:

- WPLS 1. Provision of service points and access to them.
- WPLS 2. Services to users with special requirements.
- WPLS 5. Acquisitions to stock
- WPLS 7. Delivery of user requests

Flintshire partially achieved the requirements of the remaining standards:

- WPLS 3. Opening hours and delivery of services (due to mechanical breakdowns of mobile library)
- WPLS 4. ICT facilities and services
- WPLS 6. Expenditure on books and materials (due to in year budget cut)
- WPLS 8. Staffing
- WPLS 9. Buildings and space (due to lack of funds for property surveys).

This was below the average level of achievement for Wales. (Highest in Wales was 8 Standards achieved, the lowest was 3, average was 6)

- 2.04.3 **2013-14** Flintshire achieved 6 of the 9 standards:
- WPLS 1. Provision of service points and access to them.
  - WPLS 2. Services to users with special requirements.
  - WPLS 3. Opening hours and delivery of services.
  - WPLS 5. Acquisitions to stock.
  - WPLS 7. Delivery of user requests.
  - WPLS 9. Buildings and space

Flintshire partly achieved the requirements of 2 Standards:

- WPLS 4. ICT provision
- WPLS 6. Annual expenditure on stock. For this Standard the authority reached all the targets in the final year of the Framework, but on average it failed to achieve the target set for the expenditure on materials for adult users over the three year period. This marginal overall failure to meet all the requirements showed clearly the adverse effect of expenditure reductions in this area during the first two years of the Framework.

Flintshire failed to meet the standard (WPLS8) for staffing.

## 2.05 Current Position

Flintshire is due to report on 2014-15 performance against the Fifth Framework of standards in June 2015.

The Fifth Framework consists of **Core Entitlements** and **Quality Indicators**. These are designed to ensure that library services:

- Engage with customers and potential users
- Provide opportunities for individual and community development  
(core entitlements 1,2 & 3)
- Are delivered from buildings and facilities which are welcoming, inclusive and fit for purpose  
(core entitlements 4,5,6 &7)
- Provide a range of resources and services to meet people's needs  
(core entitlements 8,9,10,11,12 & 13)
- Are professionally managed with adequate resources  
(core entitlements 14, 15, 16, 17 & 18)

There are 23 Quality Indicators. Not all are measured by a target, and authorities are required to report on data collected from user surveys, feedback, sampling and to use Performance Indicators such as visitor numbers, attendance at events and level of ICT use.

For those Quality Indicators where a target is set, forecasted performance indicates that Flintshire could meet the following:

- QI 5. Location of service points
- QI 8. Number of items acquired per 1000 resident population
- QI 9. a) Percentage of material budget spent on resources for children.  
b) Minimum of 4% of materials budget to be spent on Welsh language materials.
- QI 16. Opening hours (no less than 120 per week should be provided per 1,000 resident population)

The following Quality Indicators would be only partially met:

- QI 10. Online Access
  - a) Every static library and mobile library should provide a minimum of 1 device giving public access to the internet and networked digital content. Aggregate access of at least 9 devices per 10,000 resident population should be achieved.
  - b) All static service points should provide WiFi access.
- QI 13. Staffing levels and qualifications would not be met.

*For full document visit:*

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/drah/publications/140425wpls5en.pdf>

## 2.06 Future of Performance Indicators

The Welsh Public Library Standards are set every three years within a new framework following discussions and seminars with experts and practitioners. They reflect factors such as budgets, local government and ministerial advice and guidance, and user feedback. They have evolved to support the development of library services but in the current economic climate the new framework has been set to present some aspirational targets whilst recognizing that local authorities are making difficult decisions about what services they provide.

The latest framework includes impact and outcome measures for the first time. This should help to demonstrate the range of benefits that result from people using a library service, including literacy skills, digital skills and health and wellbeing.

## 2.07 Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014

In October 2013 it became apparent that Local Authority funding in Wales would be under significant pressure from 2014-15 onwards. It was clear by November 2013 that this would result in far reaching changes and a reduction in public library provision in Wales.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013 in a written statement to National Assembly Wales, the Minister for Culture & Sport announced that he would commission an expert review of current and future plans by Local Authorities to deliver public library services in Wales.

A panel commenced work in February 2014 and reviewed a body of evidence supported by CyMAL, from a range of stakeholders. The panel reaffirmed the importance of the public library service, its positive impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Libraries will play vital role in the ongoing delivery of local and national priorities such as social inclusion, lifelong learning, literacy, digital inclusion, health and wellbeing and community cohesion.

***See appendix A for Findings and Recommendations.***

## 3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 In the current budgetary context the old framework for Public Library Standards while a good benchmark will become harder and harder to meet. Its rigid nature does not allow for different approaches to service delivery. However the revised framework and expert review build more flexibility in how they are delivered. Determining local priorities and ways of delivering an effective and sufficient service will become increasingly more important.

3.02 In light of this, the Library Service has commenced work on the following strands of a local Libraries framework. The framework addresses the findings and recommendations of the Expert Review and also the requirements of the Council to deliver services within the available budgets. These key strands are as follows:

- Flintshire Library Service will develop an evidence and outcomes approach to commence in 2015-16;
- The service will implement efficiencies during 2015-16 to meet budget targets whilst operating the full current network of libraries;
- Work will take place to develop the use of volunteers within the next two years, following the guidelines and good practice developed by CyMAL;
- Flintshire Library Service will continue to collaborate with the library authorities in North Wales to implement a shared Library Management System and a shared bibliographic services unit, funded by CyMAL.

- The Council will work with town and community councils and other community groups where appropriate to consider asset transfer of libraries to the community.
- We will work to explore all innovative and alternative ways that might sustain future service provision post 2016, including co-location of services.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.01 That the committee note and comment on progress against Public Library Standards.

4.02 That the committee comment on the key strands identified as a future overarching framework for library provision moving forwards.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.01 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

6.01 There are no direct poverty implications arising from this report.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

7.01 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

8.01 There are no direct equalities arising from this report although the strands of the future framework aim to ensure the best possible level of provision is achieved in future within budgetary constraints.

#### **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.01 None.

#### **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

10.01 None undertaken.

#### **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

11.01 None required although many of the detailed actions that follow from the way forward will result in reports coming back to Council and local organisations.

**12.00 APPENDICES**

12.01 Appendix A - Expert Review of Public Libraries in Wales 2014:  
Recommendations.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985**  
**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

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