



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11TH MARCH 2024

**WELSH PUBLIC LIBRARY STANDARDS: RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH
COUNCIL'S ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022-2023**

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY
SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH COUNCILLOR BOB HARRIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR
PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES**

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide information to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee on the feedback received from Welsh Government in respect of the Library Service's performance against the Welsh Public Library Standards (WPLS) within the Sixth Quality Framework of the WPLS: '[Connected and Ambitious Libraries](#)' (Appendix 1) for the period 2022-2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the content of the Annual Assessment Report 2022-2023 (Appendix 2) received from Welsh Government.
- 2.2 Scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained within the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Welsh Government has developed a range of indicators (the [Welsh Public Library Standards](#)) against which the performance of library authorities in Wales can be measured.

- 3.2 Progress against the standards is reviewed by Welsh Government on an annual basis, to ensure that local authorities are endeavouring to carry out their statutory responsibilities in the delivery of a core library service.
- 3.3 This Assessment Report on the Library Service's performance falls under the Sixth Quality Framework of the WPLS: '[Connected and Ambitious Libraries](#)', which was due to expire in 2020 and a new framework created; however, due to the impact of the pandemic, the development of the seventh framework has been delayed and the sixth framework has been extended, with some minor revisions.
- 3.4 The aims of the Sixth Quality Framework are to:
- Enable the Deputy Minister for Culture and Sport to fulfil the statutory requirements of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 in respect of superintending the duty of local authorities to deliver a '*comprehensive and efficient*' library service;
 - Provide a robust assessment of the performance of library services;
 - Have clear links to the Welsh Government's agenda to ensure credibility across local government in Wales;
 - Be relevant and useful to all local authority library services in Wales;
 - Be transparent, easily understood and accepted by stakeholders;
 - Incorporate outcome measures to show the benefits of using libraries;
 - Act as a driver for improvements to library services and local communities; and
 - Minimise the burden of data collection on library authorities.
- 3.5 The Sixth Quality Framework of the WPLS includes 12 core entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators designed to monitor how well library services provide for the people of Wales.
- 3.6 The Quality Indicators fall into three broad types:
- Input indicators are concerned primarily with what the library service will provide for the citizens of Wales in key areas in order that core entitlements can be delivered;
 - Output indicators are concerned with levels of use; when considered alongside input indicators they can give an indication of the efficiency of delivery of the service;
 - Outcome and impact indicators measure the direct or indirect effects of the library service on its users and the wider community.
- 3.7 In addition to the core entitlements and quality indicators, authorities are required to submit an Impact Statement (Appendix 3) which provides evidence that the library service has made a positive difference to an individual or group of individuals.

4. RESULTS OF THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT 2022-2023

- 4.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Library Service was assessed as follows:
- All 12 core entitlements were met in full;

- Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taf achieved 5 in full, 1 in part and failed to achieve 4;
- ICT provision, stock acquisition and staffing were areas identified as requiring attention.

4.2 The Assessment Report recognises that '*Rhondda Cynon Taf is facing a challenging financial situation*' but expresses that '*the planned cuts to staffing and the book budget are a serious concern given that the service is already falling short of targets in these areas*'.

4.3 It is difficult to assess the 2022-2023 performance in comparison to 2021-2022 as the Welsh Government issued an abridged version that year due to the impact of the Covid pandemic, with many of the quality indicators reported upon in 2022 – 2023 not present in the 2021-2022 report; however, the quality indicators which have targets were reported upon in both years and our performance against these has remained static, with the service having achieved 5 in full and 1 in part.

4.4 Undoubtably, major changes to the service during the Covid pandemic continued to have an adverse impact on performance against some indicators; however, data on the number of visitors to libraries, and attendees at training sessions and organised events/activities, showed significant improvement on those reported in 2021-2022, yet these still have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

4.5 There is improvement to be made with regard indicators such as staff training, volunteers in libraries and the provision of events or activities for users with special requirements.

4.6 We will continually be unable to meet the quality indicator relating to expenditure, such as purchasing materials and the number of staff employed, without a significant increase in financial resources; however, this measurement does not correlate with the quality of service delivery, whereby our most recent Customer Survey indicated that 94% of our users rated the choice of books as very good or good, and in this area, we ranked 4th out of the 16 authorities that returned the data.

4.7 Furthermore, at a time when local authorities are required to make best use of limited resources, some of the quality indicators do not appear to ensure a best value approach with service decisions impacting negatively on performance against some indicators.

4.8 One such example is that of 2022-23 Computer usage across RCT libraries which was 11% of available capacity based on 6.82 computers per 10,000 population; however, to improve our performance against the WPLSQI 11 (online access) we would need to purchase more computers, and given that there is 89% of available capacity on the current number of computers within libraries, this is not best value for expenditure of a limited budget.

5. LOCAL AUTHORITY LIBRARY SERVICES ACROSS WALES: AN UPDATE

5.1 Local authority Library Services across Wales have developed differently over the past 10 years, as local authorities have adopted various approaches to funding their services following budget reductions.

- 5.2 As a result, many Councils no longer offer a full range of specialist services, such as home delivery and schools library services, which Rhondda Cynon Taf has maintained along with 13 static libraries; and additionally, some authorities have outsourced the management of their library provision to a trust, and others make extensive use of community-run libraries; as such, it is difficult to compare performance across Wales or to have a set of national benchmarks that measures the performance of library services in a meaningful way.
- 5.3 Rhondda Cynon Taf is one of 16 authorities that meet all the 12 core entitlements, and one of only 5 authorities that meet 5 quality indicators in full (the performance of local authority library services across Wales can be seen at Appendix 4).
- 5.4 A meeting was held between representatives of the Welsh Government's Culture Division and the Council's Chief Executive on the 8th December 2023 whereby the authorities financial pressures were outlined and the rationale behind the proposed changes to the library service discussed, noting that they have been designed to be equitable across the authority and have as little impact on customers as possible.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 6.1 There are no implications as a direct result of this report.

7. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

8. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 8.1 There are no consultation implications as a direct result of this report; however, it should be noted that developments to date and those in future, rely upon significant involvement from all key partners and agencies.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires local authorities to ensure the provision of a 'comprehensive and efficient service' without providing any criteria for what can be considered as 'comprehensive and efficient'; and in Wales, the Welsh Government's Welsh Public Library Standards has clear quality indicators that library services have to abide by, which are outlined in this report.

11. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

11.1 The Library Service specifically contributes to all four of the well-being objectives within the Council's proposed new Corporate Plan 'Working With Our Communities':

- **People and Communities:** supporting and empowering residents and communities to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives;
- **Work and Business:** helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy, with thriving town centres and a well-connected County Borough;
- **Nature and the Environment:** supporting a clean, safe and sustainable RCT;
- **Culture and Heritage:** recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future where culture and heritage are vibrant, preserved and recognised as enhancing well-being.

11.2 The Service reflects the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, considering long-term needs, focusing on collaboration and involvement of communities, contributing specifically to a Wales of cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language goals of the Act.

12. **CONCLUSION**

12.1 During a year where the effects of the Covid pandemic were still being felt, the Library Service has met all 12 Core Entitlements, and either fully or partly achieved 6 of the 10 Quality Indicators set by Welsh Government; nevertheless, it is recognised that there are opportunities for further improvement in some areas highlighted in the current report.