

Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Rhondda Cynon Taf

Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Rhondda Cynon Taf's annual return, impact statements and narrative report submitted to the Culture Division of the Welsh Government.

1. Executive summary

Rhondda Cynon Taf met all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Rhondda Cynon Taf is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. Four were not met.

Rhondda Cynon Taf libraries are clearly valued by members of the local community. The number of visits per capita, and customers rating the choice of books, customer care and library overall 'good' or 'very good' are all above the median for Welsh library authorities. It would appear that users are gradually returning to the service after the Covid pandemic, and visits per capita are above the median for Welsh library authorities. However, Rhondda Cynon Taf is facing a challenging financial situation. 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. The proposed reduction in staffing may well hamper the service's ability to make improvements in other areas where it is not currently able to meet targets, including opening hours and activity provision.

- Rhondda Cynon Taf performs well for many areas of customer feedback; customers rating the choice of books, customer care and library overall 'good' or 'very good' are all above the median (Q12).
- User training opportunities are well-supported; attendance at pre-arranged user training is now recovering from the pandemic and is above the median for Welsh library services (Q15).
- The library space is well-used; visits per capita are in the top quartile of Welsh library services (Q18).
- The service did not experience any unplanned closures or missed home deliveries (Q16).

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

Rhondda Cynon Taf reported meeting all 12 of the Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment, providing detailed and helpful commentary within the return on each area covered. The independent assessor agreed with the self-assessment.

2.2. Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which 10 have constituent targets. Of these, Rhondda Cynon Taf is achieving 5 in full and 1 in part. Four were not met.

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/Reading Well 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	x	Not met
QI 7 Location of service points	√	Met in full
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material		Not met
Acquisitions per capita	x	
<u>or</u> Materials spend per capita	x	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	√	
<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		Not met
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	x	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	x	
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	x	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita	x	Not met

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 were only required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the original three-year period of the framework (2017-20). The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are

based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 return. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. However, it is important to bear in mind that some authorities have conducted surveys since 2020, whilst others report survey data from before the Covid pandemic. Some responses therefore reflect the situation several years ago, whilst others may have been affected by disruption during the pandemic period. As a result, there are limitations on the extent to which these data might be considered comparable.

Rhondda Cynon Taf completed its adult user survey in March 2022 and its children's user survey in March 2023.

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:	90%	=7/16	58%	90%	98%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	85%	11/16	41%	86.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	96%	=9/17	82%	96%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide an impact statement describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year. Rhondda Cynon Taf provided an impact statement about the provision of increased space and activities for local communities to support more non-traditional use of the library and to help combat loneliness and isolation. This provides customers a chance to connect with others in a warm, safe, welcoming, non-judgemental environment. With the closure of other community venues and the cost-of-living crisis, this was seen as especially important. Initially, as part of the Places to Connect programme, three Coffee and Craft sessions were set up in three libraries and were attended by a total of 95 people and attendee feedback was positive. Building on the success of these events, eight other events were organised and attended by 239 people. A crochet club has been started at Treorchy library and 'Community Puzzle' tables set up at several libraries. Feedback from two Ukrainian settlers has led to the establishment of a library 'Coffee and Chat' group for people whose first language is not English. The events have reportedly contributed to increased confidence and wellbeing for many community members and resulted in more diverse use of the library space.

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 Rhondda Cynon Taf's position for 2022-23. 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 from some authorities. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 1 Making a difference					
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	62%	12/16	24%	69.5%	90%
c) health and well-being	42%	14/16	35%	66.5%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	93%	=14/16	93%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	94%	=4/16	80%	91%	99%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=2/17	92%	98%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	83%	10/16	65%	86%	99%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	99%	=3/17	94%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.4	7/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 5 User training					
a) attendances per capita	17	8/22	1	10.5	222
c) informal training per capita	8	18/19	5	131	424
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	129	15/22	13	165	559
QI 8 Library use					
a) visits per capita	2,559	4/21	781	2,106	4,814
b) virtual visits per capita	490	13/22	124	537.5	7,979
c) active borrowers per capita	83	17/22	43	106.5	167
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	44	=15/22	13	53	864
QI 11 Online access					
a) Computers per 10,000	6.82	16/22	3.32	7.99	16.99
b) % of available time used by the public	11%	=9/19	7%	11%	77%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications ¹					
(v) a) total volunteers	7	-	0	8	256
b) volunteer hours	1,032	-	0	583.5	14,014
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£8,932	17/21	£6,726	£11,476	£27,330
b) % on staff	69%	7/21	46%	64%	78%
% on information resources	16%	5/21	5%	12%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	=11/21	1%	3%	29%
% on other operational costs	12%	14/21	1%	15%	35%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=12/21	-£479	£145	£2,865
QI 15 Net cost per visit ²	£2.31	8/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22
QI 16 Opening hours ³					
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0%	=1/21	0%	0.07%	0.95%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0%	=1/19	0%	0%	3.74%

¹ Following discussion with the peer review group it was decided not to include rankings for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.

² Rankings here have been reversed, so that 1 is the lowest scoring (best performing) authority.

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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.

3.1. Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Rhondda Cynon Taf achieves the median for percentage of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out (QI1). It is below the median for feedback from adult users in relation to Making a difference, but it is acknowledged that the timing of surveys over the pandemic period may have an impact on this measure. Customers rating the choice of books, customer care and library overall 'good' or 'very good' are all above the median (QI2). Three of the four 'Living Well in Wales' campaigns took place during this period, and activities, events and information resources were organised for: Dip into reading, Age Well and Places to connect. A number of organisations involved in promoting healthy lifestyles and wellbeing make use of libraries, including Foodwise (healthy eating), baby massage and NHS long Covid and depression sessions (QI4). Whilst attendance at user training sessions is lower than pre-pandemic levels, the number of attendees has been increasing steadily throughout the year and overall, attendance at user training was above the median (QI5). Participation in informal training was below the median, however. During this period, the service has looked to both re-establish existing partnerships that were lost during the pandemic and also to create new partnerships with organisations that wish to make use of facilities to provide training sessions.

3.2. Access and use (QI 6-8)

Rhondda Cynon Taf did not meet the target for events and activities for those who have special requirements as only 11 of the 13 static service points offered such provision. Whilst the number of events and activities increased throughout the year, event attendance was below the median (QI6). Visits per capita are in the top quartile of Welsh library services, however, and the service reports that this is now only 16% below pre pandemic levels. The number of virtual visits per capita is below the median and Rhondda Cynon Taf reflects that this may be the result of people returning to traditional borrowing practices after the pandemic. Whilst the survey reports that the number of active borrowers and adult loans have increased, the service is currently below the median for these measures, as well as for children's issues (QI8).

3.3. Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

Rhondda Cynon Taf does not meet the target for acquisitions (QI9), although it is close to the median for materials spend per capita. The service reports that performance against this target is unlikely to improve given the current financial situation and the service has been advised that a percentage of the book budget will be offered up as an efficiency saving in 2023- 2024. The service meets the target for acquisition of Welsh language materials, but issues are below the median per capita Welsh speaker (QI10). Rhondda Cynon Taf acknowledges that, whilst Welsh language issues have increased on last year, they are still remain below pre-pandemic levels. The service also offers an extensive programme of Welsh language events and activities.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is below the median for PCs per capita, but achieves the median for the percentage of time these are actively used (Q111). The service notes that the demand for, and usage of, public access computers has fallen to its lowest level since public access PCs were introduced. Whilst these computers provide the only method by which some users can gain access to the internet, increasingly library users are relying on their own devices and making use of the library WiFi. Rhondda Cynon Taf is now taking the approach of providing smaller numbers of PCs for everyday use, whilst maintaining larger numbers within IT suites in some larger libraries which can be used for classes and training purposes. The service does not meet the target for supply of requests (Q112) and notes that its performance against this target is unlikely to improve as budgetary pressures lead to a reduction in its book budget.

3.4. Expertise and capacity (Q1 13-16)

Rhondda Cynon Taf does not meet the targets for overall staffing per capita or qualified staff per capita, although it does have a qualified operational manager. The number of qualified staff has reduced by one (as a result of retirement), but two members of staff are currently working towards professional qualifications. The service is also below the target for proportion of staff time devoted to training (Q113). Rhondda Cynon Taf notes a lower than average number of volunteers this year as the council's work placement scheme was suspended for the majority of the reporting period. Total revenue expenditure is below the median and the service reports that this is down on last year as a result of a 0.5% compulsory efficiency saving imposed on services throughout the council in response to the current financial position (Q114). Rhondda Cynon Taf does not meet the target for opening hours (Q116), but it notes that the cluster model means that at least one branch library and an area library is open in each cluster for 6 days of the week to enable access for customers within the resources available. The service did not experience any unplanned closures or missed home deliveries. Its mobile libraries are yet to return to service following the Covid pandemic and it continues to run an expanded 'At Home' service for members of the community that cannot visit a static library. A decision is expected later in the year on whether this model will be adopted as a permanent change of service.

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. Rhondda Cynon Taf highlights how libraries are contributing towards the seven wellbeing goals prioritised by the Welsh Government. Some examples highlighted are as follows.

- **A prosperous Wales:** supporting Job Clubs and back to work programmes with Communities for Work Plus and other local organisations; volunteering opportunities offered within the Library Service help people gain additional skills to improve their job prospects.
- **A resilient Wales:** the council's policy of developing local hubs with libraries at their heart provides local access to a wide range of services for education, leisure, support and advice. These help to build resilience in the community by providing network structures, social support and community bonds and

good information and communication systems that assist in informing the public.

- **A more equal Wales:** providing audio books, large print books, Welsh language stock, books in braille and dyslexia-friendly books.
- **A Wales of cohesive communities:** close ties with the Business Improvement Districts at Pontypridd, Aberdare and Treorchy allow libraries to play a key role in programmes that involve the whole community thereby raising the profile of the library whilst providing resources and locations for events to take place.
- **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language:** supporting and participating in Welsh Language events including Parti Ponty and Shwmae Day.
- **A globally responsible Wales:** information and advice on local initiatives, plus recycling bags and battery drop off points.

5. Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Rhondda Cynon Taf highlights increasing visitor numbers and issues as a priority. The service notes the challenges presented by further efficiency savings for 2023/24, which include replacing the mobile library service with an enhanced 'At Home' service, the loss of one Library Assistant post and a 10% cut to the book budget. Its priorities will therefore be:

- Continuing to build audiences, returning usage to pre-pandemic levels
- Carrying out a service review
- Working with SCL Cymru and the Welsh Government on the re-tendering process for an All-Wales Library Management System.

6. Conclusion

Rhondda Cynon Taf libraries are clearly valued by members of the local community. The number of visits per capita, and customers rating the choice of books, customer care and library overall 'good' or 'very good' are all above the median for Welsh library authorities. It would appear that users are gradually returning to the service after the Covid pandemic, and visits per capita are above the median for Welsh library authorities. However, Rhondda Cynon Taf is facing a challenging financial situation. 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. The proposed reduction in staffing may well hamper the service's ability to make improvements in other areas where it is not currently able to meet targets, including opening hours and activity provision.