

Neath Port Talbot Annual Assessment Report 2023-24

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

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Executive summary

Neath Port Talbot meets all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full. Of the 7 quality indicators which have targets, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

Neath Port Talbot performs well in many areas. The library service is clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate it highly. Attendances at events, training and informal support are all well above the median for Welsh library authorities. The service offers a wide range of activities, with a high uptake, many in partnership with other organisations. 2023-24 has seen increased expenditure on Welsh language materials, and loans of Welsh language resources have risen notably. It is also positive that the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased this year. However, concerns about level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours remain, in particular, the decrease in the acquisitions rate and the reduction in qualified staff per capita this year.

- Neath Port Talbot is above the median of Welsh library authorities in relation to Making a difference (Q11) and Customer satisfaction (Q12); it performs particularly well for customer care; percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills; and rating by users aged 16 and under.
- Formal training and informal support attendance per capita continue to be above the national median and have increased since 2022-23 (Q15).
- Per capita event attendance continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and has increased by 12% compared to 2022-23 (Q16).
- Neath Port Talbot is above the national median for active borrowers per capita, and the number has increased by 18% since the previous year (Q18).
- The proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased notably since 2022-23 and the service is now above the median for Welsh library authorities (Q113).

Performance against the standards

The standards framework comprises of Core Entitlements, quality indicators with targets, quality indicators with benchmarks and impact measures.

Core Entitlements

Neath Port Talbot reported meeting all of the 13 Core Entitlements in full through self-assessment. Based on the detailed commentary provided, the independent assessor agrees with the self-assessment.

Quality indicators with targets

There are 12 quality indicators (QIs), of which 7 have constituent targets. Of these, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 4 in full and 1 in part. Targets for the remaining 2 indicators were not met.

- QI 4 (a) Support for health and well-being, **met in full ▲**
 - i) Reading Well scheme, **met**
 - ii) Designated health & well-being collection, **met**
 - iii) Information about healthier lifestyles and healthy behaviours, **met**
 - iv) Signposting to health & well-being services, **met**
- 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
Acquisitions per capita, **not met ●**
- QI 10 Welsh Language Resources
% of material budget spent on Welsh, **met in full ▲**
- QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications, **partially met ■**
 - i) Staff per capita, **not met**
 - ii) Qualified staff per capita, **not met**
 - iii) Head of service qualification/training, **met**
 - iv) CPD percentage, **met**
- QI 16 Opening hours per capita, **not met ●**

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 required to carry out user surveys for QI1 once over the 2022-23 to 2024-25 period. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are based on all authorities providing data in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 returns. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

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:	97%	3/15	68%	94%	99%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	=5/16	31%	89.5%	96%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their purpose in attending:	96%	11/16	86%	98.5%	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. Neath Port Talbot provided an impact statement focussing on the way the library supported a man who was reclusive and had difficulties making friends and socialising. He was introduced to the library through a local men’s mental health group and has since become a frequent library user and a regular part of the library community. His engagement with the library has enabled him to make new friends and become actively involved with library projects which support the local community. He has also become a regular reader. His engagement with the library has supported his mental and social well-being and helped him benefit and contribute to the community.

Quality indicators and benchmarks

The remaining indicators do not have targets but allow services to monitor their performance over time. The following table summarises Neath Port Talbot’s position for 2023-24. Rankings reflect the number of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority. 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	90%	=1/16	17%	70%	90%
c) health and well-being	84%	2/16	1%	66.5%	90%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	98%	=6/16	90%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) ‘very good’ or ‘good’ choice of books	96%	2/16	56%	91.5%	97%
b) ‘very good’ or ‘good’ customer care	99%	=1/16	86%	98.5%	99%
c) ‘very good’ or ‘good’ IT facilities	90%	=3/15	47%	87%	94%
d) ‘very good’ or ‘good’ overall	98%	=5/15	74%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.7	=1/15	8.0	9.4	9.7
QI 5 User support					
a) attendances per capita	41	4/21	1	20	209
c) informal support per capita	449	1/18	12	137	449
QI 6 Attendances at events per capita	400	4/22	3	224.5	620
QI 8 Library use					
b) virtual visits per capita	221	18/21	158	743	7,851
c) active borrowers per capita	133	9/22	57	123	233
QI 9 Up-to-date and appropriate reading material					
b) % material budget children's resources	14%	18/22	12%	17%	26%
c) % material budget electronic resources	5%	21/22	4%	15.5%	49%
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita	579	16/22	161	631.5	2,725

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications ¹					
(v) a) total volunteers	15	N/A	0	15.5	358
b) volunteer hours	180	N/A	0	671.5	20,176
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£12,893	9/22	£6,046	£12,023	£24,685
b) % on staff,	62%	=15/22	50%	67%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=13/22	5%	11%	22%
% on equipment and buildings	1%	=19/22	1%	3%	27%
% on other operational costs	28%	4/22	0%	16.5%	34%

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.

Meeting customer needs (QI 1-2, 4-5)

Neath Port Talbot performs well in relation to Making a difference (QI1) and Customer satisfaction (QI2); it is above the median of Welsh library authorities for all measures and is equal highest nationally for customer care; percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills; and rating by users aged 16 and under. Neath Port Talbot meets the target for Health and well-being (QI4); the service works with a number of agencies including Social Services and Macmillan and has taken part in the Alive and Kicking 'Borrow a Football' scheme promoting a healthy lifestyle to children. Formal training attendances have risen by 5% compared to 2022-23 and continue to be above the national median. Informal support attendances are up by 8% and are the highest per capita nationally (QI5).

Access and use (QI 6-8)

Per capita event attendance continues to be in the top quartile of Welsh library authorities and has increased by 12% compared to 2022-23 as the service continues to recover from the pandemic (QI6). Neath Port Talbot offers a wide range of events including baby yoga; baby massage; Lego clubs; art workshops; craft clubs; adult colouring; homework clubs; Workways employment group; Age Connect IT; author events; knitting and crochet; archaeology and history groups; IT Help; writers' groups; language courses; reading groups; film shows; choir events; and storytelling. In addition, the service provides events at other locations such as schools, playgroups and community groups. Events for users with particular needs include Sightlife for the visually impaired; coffee mornings for Ukrainian refugees; and Chai and Chat.

Neath Port Talbot is above the national median for active borrowers per capita, and the number of borrowers has increased by 18% since the previous year (QI8). However, only 18% of library members are active borrowers. The number of virtual visits is below the median for Welsh library authorities. However, this has increased

¹ *Rankings are not included for volunteers as the implications of volunteer numbers are ambiguous.*

by 50% compared to 2022-23. In addition, the service reports that the total number of website visits recorded does not include visits via the portal. Neath Port Talbot is below the median for both adult and children's issues. However, whilst adult issues have declined by 21% compared to 2022-23, children's issues have increased by 9%. The service is above the median for electronic issues per capita and electronic issues have risen by 16% compared to the previous year.

Facilities and services (QI 9-10)

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for acquisitions per capita (QI9) and the number of items acquired has decreased this year as the book budget was underspent by 12%. The service decided not to renew its subscription to PressReader for 2024 following the introduction of newspapers on Borrowbox. Neath Port Talbot is below the median for the percentage of the budget allocated to both children's and electronic resources. The children's book budget was underspent by 26% compared to 2022-23 and the authority is in the bottom quartile nationally for spending per capita on under 16s' resources.

The proportion of the budget allocated to Welsh language resources has increased compared to 2022-23 (QI10) and Neath Port Talbot has an established relationship with a local supplier to improve its Welsh language book offer. Although per capita Welsh language issues are below the national median, issues have increased by 44% since the previous year. The service notes that this is mainly as a result of an increase in the number of children's loans. The library service runs Welsh language activities, including reading groups and Sesiwn Ganu events - Welsh language song and rhyme sessions in partnership with Menter Iaitth.

Expertise and capacity (QI 13-14 &16)

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the targets for total staff or qualified staff per capita, although it is around the national median for both (QI13). The total number of FTE staff increased slightly as a result of two new temporary posts, filling gaps that had been left since 2020. However, staff changes due to retirement mean that the total number of staff holding recognised qualifications has decreased. It is encouraging the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased notably since 2022-23 and the service is now above the median for Welsh library authorities. Total revenue expenditure decreased slightly in 2023-24 as there were no significant grants (QI14). Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for opening hours per capita (QI16). However, it is noted that the opening hours for community-managed libraries are not included in the return.

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. Neath Port Talbot takes its lead from Neath Port Talbot's Corporate Plan and the goals stated in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Wales Programme for Government. A range of examples of how the service contribute to these goals were provided and include partnering with health organisations to support physical and mental well-being; establishing the Reading Well for Teens collection; delivering

formal training sessions to aid job seeking and skills improvement; delivering a programme of adult learning activities; working with schools to deliver sessions for parents wishing to support their children's learning; increasing spend on Welsh books and developing a programme of events in the Welsh language.

Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Neath Port Talbot notes that it is looking forward post pandemic and is aiming to deliver to a new five-year library strategy in 2024-25. The service reports that central to the strategy will be embedding new objectives and actions that focus on sustainability; inclusivity and diversity; well-being; and ensuring that libraries are seen as safe, welcoming places for all. The service intends to develop its staff training programme to meet the needs of the new strategy. 2024-25 will also see the service focussing on the implementation of the new library management system, which will be at the forefront of its short-term planning.

Conclusion

Neath Port Talbot performs well in many areas. The library service is clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate it highly. Attendances at events, training and informal support are all well above the median for Welsh library authorities. The service offers a wide range of activities, with a high uptake, many in partnership with other organisations. 2023-24 has seen increased expenditure on Welsh language materials, and loans of Welsh language resources have risen notably. The service continues to invest in Welsh language resources. It is also positive that the proportion of staff time devoted to training has increased this year. However, concerns about level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours remain, in particular the decrease in the acquisitions rate and the reduction in qualified staff per capita this year.