

# Welsh Public Library Standards Sixth Framework: Neath Port Talbot

## Annual Assessment Report 2022/2023

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.

### 1. Executive summary

Neath Port Talbot met all of the 12 core entitlements in full. Of the 10 quality indicators which have targets, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 8 in full and 1 in part. One is not met.

Neath Port Talbot libraries are clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate them highly in terms of customer service and the difference they make to their lives. The service has strong partnerships with several local organisations and is dedicated to the provision of outreach, as well as library-based, services. Levels of attendance at training and events, as well as overall visits per capita, are recovering from the Covid period. Although the figure for virtual visits is not particularly high, the service's digital offer appears to be appreciated as e-issues are in the top quartile. The service is clearly making efforts to improve its Welsh language provision. However, there are concerns about the level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours. In light of these concerns, the service's plan to focus on strengthening the service, in particular through staff training and developing partnerships, would appear to be a prudent one. However, it would be helpful to clearly link these plans to local and national priorities.

- The service is in the top quartile for percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills; find helpful information for health and wellbeing; and made a difference to their lives, as well as the percentage of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out (Q11).
- User training opportunities are well-attended; attendance at both formal and informal training are in the top quartile of library authorities (Q15).
- Library events and activities are also well-attended; attendance at events per capita is in the top quartile of library services (Q16).
- The service is gradually recovering from the Covid pandemic and the figure for visits per capita is above the median (Q18).

### 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

Neath Port Talbot 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, Neath Port Talbot is achieving 8 in full and 1 in part. One is 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	√	Met in full
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		Met in full
a) % of requests satisfied within 7 days	√	
b) % of requests satisfied within 15 days	√	
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 Q11 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.

Neath Port Talbot completed its adult and children’s user survey in March 2023.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest
Q1 1 Making a difference					
b) % of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out:	97%	2/16	58%	90%	98%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	93%	=3/16	41%	86.5%	96%
Q1 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	94%	13/17	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. Neath Port Talbot Libraries provided an impact statement concerning support provided to Ukrainian refugees who had been relocated to the area. This involved working alongside Local Area Coordinators to develop a programme of sessions and workshops. At Neath Port Talbot Library, coffee mornings provided a meeting place for refugees and a point of contact to get support from representatives of local authority departments. This also provided a ‘befriending’ opportunity with local residents resulting in a ‘sharing of cultures’. Refugees were invited to take part in library activities and join library groups. As a result, children have made new friends and gained confidence and this has provided more opportunity to socialise and feel connected within the community in a safe and welcoming space. One refugee commented: *“I find myself entirely happy being here. That’s my escape from my own reality.”*

### 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 Neath Port Talbot’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	90%	1/16	24%	69.5%	90%
c) health and well-being	84%	2/16	35%	66.5%	94%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	98%	7/16	93%	97%	100%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction					
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	96%	3/16	80%	91%	99%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	99%	=2/17	92%	98%	100%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	90%	=5/16	65%	86%	99%
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	98%	=5/17	94%	98%	100%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.7	=1/16	8.0	9.3	9.7
QI 5 User training					
a) attendances per capita	39	3/22	1	10.5	222
c) informal training per capita	415	2/19	5	131	424
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	357	2/22	13	165	559
QI 8 Library use					
a) visits per capita	2,503	5/21	781	2,106	4,814
b) virtual visits per capita	147	21/22	124	537.5	7,979
c) active borrowers per capita	113	9/22	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	5.78	19/22	3.32	7.99	16.99
b) % of available time used by the public	14%	=5/19	7%	11%	77%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications <sup>1</sup>					
(v) a) total volunteers	1	-	0	8	256
b) volunteer hours	147	-	0	583.5	14,014
QI 14 Operational expenditure					
a) total expenditure per capita	£13,226	8/21	£6,726	£11,476	£27,330
b) % on staff,	62%	15/21	46%	64%	78%
% on information resources	9%	=16/21	5%	12%	21%
% on equipment and buildings	5%	8/21	1%	3%	29%
% on other operational costs;	23%	=4/21	1%	15%	35%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	=12/21	-£479	£145	£2,865
QI 15 Net cost per visit <sup>2</sup>	£3.22	13/19	£0.41	£2.76	£6.22
QI 16 Opening hours <sup>3</sup>					
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0%	=1/22	0%	0.05%	0.95%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	2.6%	19/20	0%	0%	3.74%

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

#### **3.1. Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)**

Neath Port Talbot performs well with regard to Making a difference (QI1). In particular, the service is in the top quartile for percentage of adults who think that using the library has helped them to develop new skills; find helpful information for health and wellbeing; and made a difference to their lives, as well as the percentage of young people who think that the library helps them learn and find things out. The service is also above the median for all aspects of customer service, and is particularly strong in relation to the rating out of ten by users aged 16 and under.

The service notes that, whilst there are no library-based shared reading groups (QI4), there are 25 adult and children's reading groups, including Welsh language groups. In addition, there are regular sessions where library staff visit locations in communities (e.g. schools, playgroups, nursing homes) to read to audiences. Five libraries currently have regular event/activities in collaboration with Macmillan, Quit Smoking and HWYL - signposting and guidance for mental health. Numbers attending both formal and informal training are in the top quartile of library authorities (QI5). In delivering training, library staff work in partnership with external organisations such as Digital Communities Wales, Community 4 Work and Jobcentre Plus.

#### **3.2. Access and use (QI 6-8)**

Attendance at events per capita is in the top quartile of library services (QI6). The numbers attending events has risen substantially since Covid restrictions were lifted. The figure for visits per capita is above the median (QI8) and the service notes that whilst they remain lower than levels pre-2020, figures are improving. The number of active borrowers is above the median, as is the figure for adult book issues. Neath Port Talbot is below the median for virtual visits per capita. However, as is the case for many library services, the website is becoming less well used as more interaction now comes via social media channels and apps such as Borrowbox and Pori. There is evidence of strong digital engagement as the service is in the top quartile of library authorities for e-issues.

#### **3.3. Facilities and services (QI 9-12)**

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for acquisitions (QI9) and it is below the median for materials spend per capita. It is also below the median for the proportion of the budget spent on children's resources. However, the service notes an increase in Welsh language stock, almost doubling in Welsh language spend last year and continuing to meet the target expenditure this year (QI10). However, issues per capita Welsh speaker are below the median. Neath Port Talbot is in the bottom quartile of library authorities for PCs per capita, but above the median for percentage of available time PCs are used. The services notes that there are many more users bring their own devices to access library WiFi, and consequently less demand for traditional desktop PCs. Neath Port Talbot meets the target for supply of requests

(QI12).

### **3.4. Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)**

Neath Port Talbot does not meet the targets for overall staffing levels or qualified staff. The operational manager is qualified, but the service is below the median for qualified staff per capita (QI13). The service notes that number of FTE staff has decreased slightly due to minor amendments to staff contracts and changes in working hours for some staff. In addition, Neath Port Talbot does not meet the target for proportion of staff time devoted to training. In the return, the continued challenges of managing staff time and sickness around Covid, as well as managing the closure and relocation of Neath Library, are listed as reasons for reduced levels of staff training. Despite opening hours increasing since 2018-19 as extra hours were added to Neath Library, Neath Port Talbot still does not meet the target for opening hours (QI16). However, it is worth noting that this excludes provision through community-managed libraries and there were no unplanned closures of static branches this year.

## **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. Neath Port Talbot notes that, in setting its strategic goals the library service takes its lead from the objectives set out in Neath Port Talbot's Corporate Plan, Recover, Reset, Renew (2022-2027), namely:

- All children get the best start in life.
- All communities are thriving and sustainable.
- Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations.
- Local people are skilled and access high quality, green jobs.

These wellbeing objectives reflect the need to respond to the pandemic and relate to the all-Wales goals, as set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Service has also delivered on national projects that have taken their lead from Welsh Government goals: Summer of Fun 2022 and Health and Wellbeing Campaign – Places to Connect. However, limited detail was provided indicating how library services specifically contribute to council and government priorities.

## **5. Future direction**

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Neath Port Talbot refers to its post-pandemic Recovery Plan. Whilst the last four years the focus has been on large scale relocation and redevelopment projects, during the next year the aim will be on strengthening the service; continuing to develop staff through training; and engaging with partner organisations and users.

## **6. Conclusion**

Neath Port Talbot libraries are clearly appreciated by members of the local community who rate them highly in terms of customer service and the difference they

make to their lives. The service has strong partnerships with several local organisations and is dedicated to the provision of outreach, as well as library-based, services. Levels of attendance at training and events, as well as overall visits per capita, are recovering from the Covid period. Although the figure for virtual visits is not particularly high, the service's digital offer appears to be appreciated as e-issues are in the top quartile. The service is clearly making efforts to improve its Welsh language provision. However, there are concerns about the level of acquisitions, staffing levels and opening hours. In light of these concerns, the service's plan to focus on strengthening the service, in particular through staff training and developing partnerships, would appear to be a prudent one. However, it would be helpful to clearly link these plans to local and national priorities.