

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Carmarthenshire

Annual Assessment Report 2017-18

This report has been prepared based on information provided in Carmarthenshire's annual return, case studies and narrative report submitted to the Museums, Archives and Libraries Division of the Welsh Government.

1 Executive summary

Carmarthenshire met all of the 12 core entitlements in full.

Of the 10 quality indicators with targets, Carmarthenshire achieved 9 in full, and 1 in part.

Carmarthenshire library service continues to perform well, with improvements in some areas, and evidence of decline in others. Some consideration of the factors influencing areas of change would have increased understanding of what this means for future performance. The authority nevertheless demonstrates a strong commitment to the service, with budgets maintained and even increased on 2016-17, and levels of qualified staff retained. Proposals to realign staffing structures are noted, but in the context of ensuring that standards can be maintained and that staffing is consistent with service development. The Library Strategy 2017-2022 provides the framework for future delivery, and recent developments, with the launch of the 'Makerspace' facility at Ammanford library, provide a model for how traditional and digital provision can be balanced.

- Carmarthenshire submitted four case studies demonstrating the positive impact of the service. 96% of children surveyed think that the library has helped their learning.
- Attendance at pre-arranged user training has increased, but there has been a significant reduction in the numbers helped by means of informal training, although Carmarthenshire's performance here still remains the highest in Wales.
- There has been a decline in some usage levels, including physical visits, book issues, active borrowers and library membership, although Carmarthenshire remains among the top performers for physical visits per capita and adult book loans.
- Investment in up-to-date reading materials remains strong, with Carmarthenshire recording the highest acquisitions spend of any library service in Wales.
- PC provision has increased further in 2017-18 and is now the third highest in Wales, although usage levels remain low.
- Staffing levels overall have fallen slightly, but remain above the median level, and the service continues to meet the target for qualified staff.
- Total revenue expenditure has increased compared to 2016-17, with Carmarthenshire now spending more per capita on library provision than any other authority.

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

Carmarthenshire meets all the 12 core entitlements in full. A strong partnership ethos contributes to achievement in a number of areas, with a range of partners supporting the promotion and delivery of services to local communities. The service is part of Cat Cymru and is planning to join the all-Wales LMS by April 2019. An annual marketing and communication plan is put in place, with a set budget to support delivery, and designated staff in each regional library to promote the service. Carmarthenshire's vision for its library service is set out in a five year Library Strategy 2017-2022, the development of which was informed by customer surveys undertaken in 2016 and 2017.

2.2 Quality indicators with targets

There are 16 quality indicators (QIs), of which ten have constituent targets. Of these, Carmarthenshire is achieving 9 in full, and one in part.

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 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		Met in full
Acquisitions per capita	✓	
or Materials spend per capita	✓	
QI 10 Welsh Language Resources		Met in full
% of material budget spent on Welsh	✓	
or Spend on Welsh per capita	x	
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	✓	
iii)	Head of service qualification/training	✓	
iv)	CPD percentage	✓	
QI 16 Opening hours per capita		✓	Met in full

There has been no change in Carmarthenshire's performance compared to the last year of the fifth framework for those quality indicators where direct comparisons are possible.

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 are only required to carry out user surveys for QI 1 once over the three-year period of the framework. The summary figures (lowest, median and highest) are therefore based on those authorities indicating they completed their user survey during this first year of the framework. Rankings reflect the numbers of respondents, where 1 is the highest scoring authority.

Carmarthenshire carried out its children's user survey in October 2017 and is yet to conduct an adult's survey in this framework.

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:	96%	2/6	73%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	n/a		38%	90%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	98%	4/17	75%	98%	100%

Authorities are also asked to provide up to four case studies describing the impact which the library service has had on an individual or on a group of individuals during the year. Carmarthenshire provided four such case studies, although in some instances better evidence could have provided of the impact on the individuals concerned:

- Library Days Out – introducing children from schools in deprived areas to the resources and services on offer; promoting library membership and supporting reading / literacy skills, through an organised visit to the library with a range of fun activities.
- Health Competition – promoting the library's role supporting health and well-being. The service ran a competition for children to produce posters, stories or poems about the dangers of a high sugar diet, with an award event and touring exhibition of the children's work.
- New Year, New You – a taster event in partnership with local businesses, supporting health and well-being work, and promoting the library's collections / services.
- FE Audiences – reaching new audiences, promoting online services / digital inclusion; the library participated in Carmarthenshire Colleges' Freshers Fayre week - 150 students enrolled as library members with online resource use subsequently rising.

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 Carmarthenshire's position for 2017-18. 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 to some authorities. Where possible, figures from the last year of the fifth framework have also been included for comparison; however, in some cases a change in definition or the introduction of additional measures makes comparisons impractical. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2016/17
QI 1 Making a difference						
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills:	n/a		24%	83%	94%	86%
c) health and well-being	n/a		33%	65%	95%	85%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	n/a		90%	98%	100%	98%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a		88%	91%	98%	90%
b) 'very good' or 'good' customer care	n/a		93%	99%	100%	95%
c) 'very good' or 'good' IT facilities	n/a		74%	86%	94%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall;	n/a		93%	97%	99%	95%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.1	2/6	8.5	9.1	9.2	8.7
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	60	7/22	10	32	238	54
c) informal training per capita	473	1/22	15	199	473	712
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	245	11/22	82	228	684	218
QI 8 Library use						
a) visits per capita	6,137	2/22	2,501	4,047	7,014	6,171
b) virtual visits per capita	1,539	3/22	243	866	2,211	1,476
c) active borrowers per capita	155	10/22	100	154	229	190
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita*	213	5/22	4	68	663	
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita^	12	3/22	5	9	14	11
c) % of available time used by the public	20%	18/22	14%	27%	67%	22%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	16	17/21	3	31	196	23
b) total volunteer hours	1,206	12/21	40	1,346	11,939	1,398
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£17,771	1/21	£7,047	£11,915	£17,771	£16,271
b) % on staff,	48%	20/21	44%	63%	75%	47%
% on information resources	14%	8/21	4%	13%	25%	15%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	14/21	0%	4%	20%	2%
% on other operational costs;	34%	3/21	0%	18%	37%	36%

c) capital expenditure per capita	£0	14/20	£0	£338	£17,432	£0
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.25	20/21	£1.24	£1.82	£2.41	£2.07
QI 16 Opening hours [#]						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.06%	15/21	0.00%	0.02%	1.28%	0.16%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	2.95%	16/20	0.00%	0.35%	11.24%	0.99%

* per Welsh speaking resident population

^per 10,000 resident population

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, and compares this performance (where applicable) with the final year of the fifth framework (2016-17).

3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Carmarthenshire conducted its children's user survey during October / November 2017 spanning a week of school term and the half-term holiday. 96% of children thought the library helped them learn and find things out, and they awarded the library an average overall score of 9.1 out of 10, both improvements on survey results under the fifth framework. All static libraries provide the full range of support for individual development, and health and well-being is also well-supported. While attendance at pre-arranged user training sessions has increased, numbers helped by means of informal training have dropped by around a third. This is a significant reduction on 2016-17, although Carmarthenshire's performance in this area still remains the highest in Wales – some consideration of the factors at work here would be a useful addition.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Carmarthenshire continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, with 12 static service points open 10+hours a week, serving a relatively sparsely populated area. Rates of attendance at events and activities organised by the library have continued to increase, although reported usage in other areas is less positive. Visitor numbers, book issues, numbers of active borrowers and library membership have all fallen in 2017-18, although physical visits per capita are still second highest in Wales and no other library service records more adult book loans. Carmarthenshire is also one of only six library services reporting an increase in virtual visits.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)

The authority continues to invest strongly in up-to-date reading materials, with the highest acquisitions spend per capita of any library service in Wales. Budget allocated for children's resources and for material in the Welsh language has also increased, maintaining performance in these areas, and both QI 9 and 10 are fully met. Investment in book stock is reflected in the high number of adult book issues, and above average issues of Welsh language resources. PC provision has increased further and is now the third highest in Wales, although usage rates remain low. Performance in relation to supply of requests has fallen slightly, but the requirements of QI 12 are still met.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall staff levels have fallen again this year, but remain above the median level, although the service fails to meet the target for staff per capita. Numbers of qualified staff have however been maintained at 2016-17 levels, with the service one of only seven to achieve the stipulated target in this area. Qualified leadership is in place, and the service continues to invest in staff training and professional development, if at a slightly lower level than previously. Numbers of volunteers have also continued to fall, with 16 volunteers contributing an average 75 hours each to the service.

Total revenue expenditure has increased compared to 2016-17, with Carmarthenshire spending more per capita on library provision than any other authority. Opening hours have however fallen slightly, and are now at the target level; the authority is one of only four recording any unstaffed opening hours as part of its provision.

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. Carmarthenshire's narrative does not make direct connections to the national strategic context, focusing instead on the vision for the service itself, and the development of the 'Makerspace' ('Stordy Creadigol') facility at Ammanford Library. Within this a number of alignments with wider strategic goals are apparent – supporting the digital agenda, skills development, community engagement and entrepreneurialism – but a more explicit focus on the service's contribution in this respect would be appropriate.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Carmarthenshire notes how it seeks to work within its five Universal Offers to meet the needs of its customers and engage with new users and audiences. The Ammanford 'Makerspace' development is cited as blueprint for future digital development across Carmarthenshire Libraries, although no specific plans in this respect are detailed. Work to develop the current mobile library service is referenced, including changes to improve and enhance provision. Proposals to realign staffing structures to ensure consistency with service area developments are noted, as is work already underway to amalgamate the Archives and Public Library Reference Service.

6 Conclusion

Carmarthenshire library service continues to perform well, with improvements in some areas, and evidence of decline in others. Some consideration of the factors influencing areas of change would have increased understanding of what this means for future performance. The authority nevertheless demonstrates a strong commitment to the service, with budgets maintained and even increased on 2016-17, and levels of qualified staff retained. Proposals to realign staffing structures are noted, but in the context of ensuring that standards can be maintained and that staffing is consistent with service development. The Library Strategy 2017-2022 provides the framework for future delivery, and recent developments, with the launch of the 'Makerspace' facility at Ammanford library, provide a model for how traditional and digital provision can be balanced.