

Welsh Public Library Standards 2017-2020: Carmarthenshire

Annual Assessment Report 2018/19

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, and is one of only four authorities to achieve at this level.

Carmarthenshire has continued to perform well against the standards framework in its second year. Library use has generally increased, with Carmarthenshire recording some of the highest per capita performances for visits, membership and adult use. Greater consideration within the return of the factors underlying variations in usage would nevertheless help in understanding the implications for future performance. The authority is also continuing to invest strongly in the service, with plans to extend the successful Makerspace initiative to two further libraries, and to further develop its new mobile library provision, in line with the aspirations of its Library Strategy.

- Carmarthenshire submitted four case studies demonstrating the positive impact of the service on its local communities.
- Most areas of usage have increased, with Carmarthenshire recording some of the highest per capita performances for physical and virtual visits, library membership, and adult book loans.
- Investment in up-to-date reading materials remains strong, with Carmarthenshire one of only five services now meeting the requirements for QI 9, and continuing to record the highest acquisitions spend of any library service in Wales.
- Staffing levels overall have increased slightly, but remain below the target level; the service continues to meet the requirements for qualified staff, one of only six authorities to do so.
- Total revenue expenditure has increased again in 2018/19, with Carmarthenshire continuing to invest appropriately in its library provision.

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 continues to meet all the 12 core entitlements in full. Partnerships remain integral to the promotion and delivery of services, in implementing the vision set out in the service's Library Strategy 2017-22.

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

Carmarthenshire has maintained its performance in this second year of the sixth framework, with no significant change on 2017/18, and remains one of the highest achieving authorities overall. More detailed commentary within the return would however help clarify the factors influencing variations in usage and performance.

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 2017/18 or 2018/19. 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%	=3/13	60%	94%	97%
e) % of adults who think that the library has made a difference to their lives:	n/a		38%	88%	95%
QI 5 b) % of attendees of training sessions who said that the training had helped them achieve their goals:	98%	=7/20	80%	97%	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:

- Sewing Club – an evening club, using the library's resources and sewing machines, supported by library staff, with a diverse membership of varying ages and abilities. The club provides a valued social activity where older members can pass on skills, gaining in confidence and self-esteem, and younger members can learn in a relaxed environment. Feedback demonstrates the social and well-being benefits of attending.
- Mobile Services – the benefits of the combined mobile and Yr Hwb partnership service, bringing library resources and support services to more isolated communities. In some areas the mobile visits have become the focus for wider community activities, e.g. local cuppa clubs. For one young mother the combined service allows her to use the library, access advice and support, and meet socially with others from the area.
- Day Centre Visits – working with a Day Centre for adults with learning disabilities who now visit Ammanford Library twice weekly for Makerspace sessions supported by library staff. Interactive storytelling sessions have been particularly successful in building self-awareness, independence and self-esteem. For one individual the sessions have helped her gain in confidence and engage with the rest of the group.
- Digital Inclusion – working with partners the service offers free digital support sessions in some branch libraries, where attendees are able to learn new skills and access free online training. For one older couple, the sessions have helped them to use an iPad to communicate online with family and friends and access resources and information. The sessions were also an opportunity for them to make new friends, and introduced them to a wider range of online classes and learning opportunities.

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 2018/19. 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. Figures from the first year of the sixth framework or relevant previous surveys have also been included for comparison. Indicators 'per capita' are calculated per 1,000 population unless otherwise noted.

Performance indicator		Rank	Lowest	Median	Highest	2017/18
QI 1 Making a difference						[Framework 5]
a) % of adults who think that using the library has helped them develop new skills	n/a		24%	82%	96%	86%
c) health and well-being	n/a		33%	62%	94%	85%
d) enjoyable, safe and inclusive	n/a		90%	97%	100%	98%
QI 2 Customer satisfaction						[Framework 5]
a) 'very good' or 'good' choice of books	n/a		81%	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		65%	91%	95%	
d) 'very good' or 'good' overall	n/a		93%	97%	99%	95%
e) users aged 16 & under rating out of ten	9.1	=9/13	8.5	9.3	9.5	8.7
QI 5 User training						
a) attendances per capita	57	4/22	13	30	208	60
c) informal training per capita	272	8/22	15	199	433	473
QI 6 attendances at events per capita	327	8/22	91	295	689	245
QI 8 Library use ¹						
a) visits per capita	6,524	2/22	2,596	3,969	7,170*	6,137
b) virtual visits per capita	1,627	3/22	345	885	2,205	1,539
c) active borrowers per capita	89	20/22	58	150	251	155
QI 10 Welsh issues per capita ²	636	11/22	95	602	1,424	575
QI 11 Online access						
b) Computers per capita ³	11	7/22	5	10	14	12
c) % of available time used by the public	25%	=11/22	14%	25%	63%	20%
QI 13 Staffing levels and qualifications						
(v) a) total volunteers	17	18/21	3	30	214	16
b) total volunteer hours	1,530	11/21	90	1,477	9,806	1,206
QI 14 Operational expenditure						
a) total expenditure per capita	£19,449	1/22	£7,181	£12,145	£19,449	£17,771
b) % on staff,	47%	22/22	47%	62%	78%	48%
% on information resources	13%	=10/22	8%	13%	21%	14%
% on equipment and buildings	3%	17/22	0.4%	4%	25%	3%
% on other operational costs	37%	1/22	0.3%	16%	37%	34%
c) capital expenditure per capita	£7,044	2/22	£0	£467	£8,829	£0
QI 15 Net cost per visit	£1.29	20/22	£1.18	£1.82	£2.52	£1.25

¹ figures for co-located services are marked with an asterisk; performances for these services are likely to reflect higher footfall, and will not therefore be directly comparable with stand-alone library provision

QI 16 Opening hours ⁴						
(iii) a) % hours unplanned closure of static service points	0.04%	17/22	0.00%	0.00%	0.25%	0.06%
b) % mobile stops / home deliveries missed	0.64%	13/20	0.00%	0.28%	7.99%	2.95%

² per 1,000 Welsh speaking resident population; figures from 2017/18 reports corrected following a calculation error

³ per 10,000 resident population ⁴ 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 with the first year of the sixth framework (2017/18).

3.1 Meeting customer needs (QI 1-5)

Carmarthenshire conducted its children's user survey in 2017, but has yet to undertake its adult survey within this framework. All static libraries continue to provide the full range of support for individual development, with health and well-being also well-supported. Attendance at pre-arranged training sessions has fallen slightly in 2018/19, reflecting the closure for refurbishment of sections of Carmarthen Library during the period, but still remain high per capita. Numbers helped by informal training have also continued to fall significantly, although still above the median level – some additional consideration of the factors at work here would be merited.

3.2 Access and use (QI 6-8)

Carmarthenshire continues to meet the target for easy access to service points, through its network of regional, community, branch and mobile libraries. Events and activities for users with special requirements are provided at all main service points, and overall attendance at library events has continued to improve, in line with the enhanced mobile and makerspace offer. Other areas of usage have also increased in 2018/19, with Carmarthenshire recording some of the highest per capita performances for physical and virtual visits, library membership, and adult book loans. Numbers of active borrowers are however down on 2017/18, reflecting system changes as the service prepared to migrate to the all-Wales LMS, and book issues to children have also fallen, and in contrast to other areas of usage are among the lowest in Wales. It is noted that systems issues may be affecting reporting of children's book loans, and the service is looking actively at measures to improve performance in this area.

3.3 Facilities and services (QI 9-12)ⁱ

Although materials expenditure has fallen slightly in 2018/19, the authority continues to invest strongly in up-to-date reading materials, maintaining the highest acquisitions spend per capita of any library service in Wales. Budget allocations for children's resources and for material in the Welsh language have also increased, improving performance in these areas, and both QI 9 and 10 are fully met. This investment continues to be reflected in the increasing issues of Welsh language resources. PC provision has fallen slightly, due to closure of the IT suite in Carmarthen during refurbishment work, although usage rates have improved on 2017/18. Performance in relation to supply of requests has broadly been maintained, and the requirements of QI 12 are still met.

3.4 Expertise and capacity (QI 13-16)

Overall staff levels have increased slightly in 2018/19, although the service still fails to meet the target for staff per capita. Numbers of qualified staff have been maintained at 2017/18 levels, with Carmarthenshire one of only six 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, at an improved level, with a welcome commitment to the Welsh language training and mentoring of staff. Numbers of volunteers have also risen slightly, with 17 volunteers contributing an average 90 hours each to the service.

Total revenue expenditure has increased in 2018/19 with Carmarthenshire recording the highest per capita spend on library provision, an investment that is reflected in high levels of access and use. Opening hours have also increased slightly, and the target here is now comfortably met, with extended unstaffed opening hours offered at two service points.

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 again focuses on the delivery of its vision for the service, noting how this addresses the Universal Offers which themselves link to Government policy. The key role of partnerships is evident in delivering against a number of strategic priorities – promoting reading, supporting the digital agenda and lifelong learning, and contributing the health and well-being of local communities. More explicit reference to Welsh Government priorities and goals would however further evidence its contribution.

5 Future direction

Reporting on the authority's future direction and plans for the library service over the following year, Carmarthenshire notes plans to extend the successful Makerspace initiative at Carmarthen and Llanelli. Further developments to the new mobile library service are referenced, working with new partners and introducing Saturday / late evening availability to meet the needs of people living in rural communities. There are also plans to review how access at branches can be enhanced, working with partners, and through new self-service technologies. The refurbishment of Carmarthen Library and delivery of amalgamated Reference and Archive services is cited as a key ongoing development.

6 Conclusion

Carmarthenshire has continued to perform well against the standards framework in its second year. Library use has generally increased, although the numbers benefiting from training (formal and informal) continue to fall. Greater consideration within the return of the factors underlying these changes would help in understanding what this means for future performance. Carmarthenshire nevertheless records some of the highest per capita performances for visits, membership and adult use. The authority is also continuing to invest strongly in the service, with plans to extend the successful Makerspace initiative to two further libraries, and to further develop its new mobile library provision, in line with the aspirations of its Library Strategy.

ⁱ E-resources purchased through centrally-funded subscriptions have been excluded from acquisitions figures for QI 9 in 2018/19 to ensure that the standard accurately reflects individual authority strategy, investment and performance. In some cases this has impacted on achievement against the standard in comparison with 2017/18. CIPFA Statistics Returns continue to include figures for centrally-procured resources.