



People Scrutiny Committee

Cultural Services Scrutiny Group

Welsh Public Library Standards Annual Assessment Report 2014-15

Scrutiny Observations January 2016

Introduction

On 24th November 2015 Cabinet received the Welsh Public Library Standards: Powys Annual Report 2014-15. The Cultural Services Scrutiny Group has previously examined this report prior to receipt by Cabinet but unfortunately had not had an opportunity to do so this year. Cabinet advised that they would welcome Scrutiny's comments once they had scrutinised the report.

A meeting of the Cultural Services Scrutiny Group was held on 6th January 2016 with the Principal Librarian in attendance. The Portfolio Holder for Commissioning, Procurement and Children's Services gave his apologies due to a prior engagement regarding Children's Services matters.

Scrutiny noted that this is the first year of the new three year reporting framework. The new framework has changed to show impact and outcomes and the contribution that libraries make to the national and local agenda. There are 18 core entitlements and 16 Quality Indicators (QIs) of which 7 have targets.

Scrutiny noted that 17 out of the 18 core entitlements had been met and of the 7 QIs with targets 3 had been met, 3 had been partially met and one had not been met. This was an encouraging position given the financial pressures the service was facing. However, it was noted that the only changes that had occurred during the period of this assessment was the withdrawal of the bookrunner service. The effects of the reduction in library opening hours (a cut of 20%) and the alterations to the mobile library service (reduction from 4 to 2 mobiles and change from fortnightly to monthly visits) which took place from 1st April 2015 will be shown in the next Library Standards Annual Assessment Report (2015-16).

Issues

The Scrutiny Group focussed on the areas that were not met including:

Core Entitlements:

One core entitlement was missed which related to failing to have the Library Service Strategy available online. It is understood that in order to meet this core entitlement

in the period 2015-16 it will be necessary to upload this document before 31st March 2016.

Quality Indicators:

Quality Indicator 1 was partly met failing to meet the subsection 'Reader development'. It is understood this particularly relates to adult reader development and whilst approximately half of libraries have Reading Groups run by volunteers this is not universally available. The service is seeking to introduce reading groups in the remaining libraries which would go towards meeting this indicator.

Quality Indicator 8 was not met. This relates to having up-to-date reading material and includes acquisitions and the replenishment rate. Powys has for a long time failed to meet the acquisition measure and would need to find an extra £80,000 to satisfy this indicator. It is accepted that this would be extremely challenging in the current financial climate. In particular the geography of Powys means that providing access to service points (libraries and mobiles), the indicator of which was met in full, means that funds are disproportionately required for buildings and vehicles. It is understood that the replenishment rate indicator was not met in part due to problems collecting data when the Library Management System was changed. No such changes are planned for the current period and it is expected this indicator will be met this year.

Quality Indicator 10 (online access) was partially met. All libraries have wifi but the current mobiles do not have this provision. Welsh Government are grant funding a new mobile library equipped with satellite which will provide wifi and computer access. This will go towards meeting this part of the indicator. The second section relates to provision of computers per capita. This indicator was narrowly missed as a number of older computers were withdrawn from service during this period. There is no indication that this will be met during the current period.

Quality Indicator 13 staffing levels was partially met failing to meet the staff per capita measure. It is not likely that given the cuts the service has been subject to this will be met during the current period.

Observations

The Scrutiny Group understand that the completion of the return for 2014/15 has been subject to some confusion with in some cases different authorities interpreting the requirements in different ways. An all Wales meeting is being held to ensure that returns are all undertaken using comparable data.

The Group understands that the potential for co-location is being explored particularly in conjunction with the 21st Century Schools Programme but also with regard to the Brecon Hub project which would see co-location of the museum and library. It is understood that the proximity to schools has an impact on the use of libraries as shown by the decline in visits when the location of schools changes.

The Group understand that in some of the indicators the authority are unlikely to meet the aims in the current period however, there are a number of areas where

work could be undertaken to give the best opportunity of reaching the target and to this end the scrutiny Group make the following recommendations:

Regarding Core Entitlements

Recommended to the Portfolio Holder that arrangements are put in place to ensure that the Library Service Strategy is available on the Powys County Council website prior to 31st March 2016.

Regarding Quality Indicators

Recommended to the Portfolio Holder that:

- **Those libraries without a Reading Group be encouraged to explore the potential to develop a Reading Group in conjunction with volunteers.**
- **Effort is made to ensure that the requirements of online access are met both in libraries and on the mobile fleet.**
- **that co-location be encouraged where an opportunity arises, particularly with schools working with the 21st century schools' agenda.**
- **When considering budget cuts that the library service is not disproportionately affected to enable the service to continue to contribute to the local and national agenda**

Councillor J. M. Williams Lead Member

Cultural Services Scrutiny Group

Membership of Cultural Services Scrutiny Group

Councillors J. M. Williams, D. R. Jones, M. Dorrance, G. Bowker, G. Jones, T. Turner.

Members in attendance at meeting on 6th January 2016

Councillor J. M. Williams, D. R. Jones and G. Bowker

Background papers:

- Notes from Cultural Services Scrutiny Group 6th January 2016