

2007-08

East Lothian Council evaluation report

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLOIM)

Summary

From a review of evidence, discussions with staff, reading group members and a library visit, it is clear that East Lothian's staff is working conscientiously to provide access to information and a range of value-added reading experiences. Whilst the percentage of the population borrowing books is showing a year on year decline, the average number of issues per borrower is showing small growth over the last three years. Audit Scotland have identified that the Council has weaknesses in community planning processes, the evaluation of business plans and the lack of a formal financial strategy.

All libraries have 2MB connections via the Council but access is subject to interruption and there are concerns about the response time by the IT Department to restore access or resolve technical issues. Funding has been identified to replace public access computers in a three year rolling programme. Libraries provide access to a range of information resources and have scope to increase use in partnership with schools and communities.

There is still potential to develop and improve the range of reading activities offered particularly in the 5-18 age range. The average number of items which readers borrower is growing, which would indicate that books are well promoted within libraries. However, East Lothian Council should be seeking to promote libraries within communities to try to increase the number of active borrowers. East Lothian has recently developed a brand and attractive marketing materials to attract and retain readers but it is early to assess impacts.

Staff identified a number of areas for improvement, in particular in relation to network reliability. Libraries are fundamental to digital inclusion and access to e-government services depends on robust and consistent connectivity. The ability to deliver the other areas for improvement is dependent on capacity and continued investment by the local authority. Staff are aware of national developments in stock management, readership development and retail techniques and have made efforts to introduce embryonic evidence based stock management. They are building up relationships with adult literacy and numeracy teams to promote literacy but community planning and community learning processes are, as yet, underdeveloped.

Introduction

Sited in all types of communities and with extensive mobile library service provision, libraries remain one of the free universal services in communities where the local population can visit as individuals or groups to pursue reading for pleasure, learning or hobbies. Libraries support the business community, community and individual information needs and are inclusive of all age and social groups, nationalities, genders, and religious and political beliefs. The first public library legislation in Scotland was passed in 1853 and the base legislation is the 1887 Public Libraries Consolidation (Scotland) Act, so local authorities have a statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities for all persons resident in their area. Library services make a significant contribution to delivering the Scottish Government's five strategic priorities, as well as local council corporate and community planning objectives.

Local Authority Background

East Lothian Council serves a population of around 92,000 located on the east coast, covering an area of approximately 679sq km. East Lothian offers a good quality of

life to its residents including an attractive environment, good transport links and high educational attainment in its schools. There is only one data zone in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation in the most deprived 15%. A recent Audit of Best Value and Community Planning by Audit Scotland¹ calls for immediate action on the following issues by the Council: an effective framework for strategic planning; medium to longer term strategies for effective management of resources, including financial planning and asset management and an integrated framework for continuous improvement. These weaknesses at corporate level can be clearly seen at service level and have an impact on the library services' ability to deliver effectively, despite the best efforts of staff. The Audit Scotland Report cites the library services as performing poorly due to its failure to meet national targets for additions to library stock for both adults and children and the declining percentage of the local population who are active borrowers; which is a national trend largely attributable to increased pressure on resource funds. The Service has a library and museums headquarters and a Local History Centre in Haddington, and 12 community libraries, with 42.5 (FTE) staff. There are two mobile libraries. East Lothian Council Library Service has worked closely with neighbouring authorities on joint initiatives such as readership development, stock procurement, the National Entitlement Card and benchmarking.

Process

Building on success: a public library quality improvement matrix, self-evaluation toolkit prepared by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) provides the framework for the process. East Lothian staff developed themes around Quality Indicator 3 Meeting Readers' Needs and Quality Indicator 1 Access to information, encouraging staff to contribute. The staff had concerns about the levels of resources. They focussed on demonstrating the range of activities supported by the existing levels of investment. External feedback was provided in the form of 757 responses to SLIC's Public Library Quality Improvement from 13 of the 14 library service points and from discussions with representatives of library-supported reading groups.

SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out interviews with members of staff and the senior management team on 29th October and 3rd December 2007. The first visit focused on QI 3 Meeting readers' needs and the second on QI 1 Access to information. Both visits included an opportunity to meet a range of stakeholders-users, volunteer buddies, partners and staff.

Quality Indicator 1 Access to information

Strengths

- Development work on National Entitlement Card
- Funding to replace the public access computers over a 3 year period
- Visibility of online subscription services on website

Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources

The level of enquiries handled by public library staff in East Lothian varies from year to year, rising to 59,384 in 2005/6 and falling to 37,217. The online subscription services are clearly available from the library section of the Council website and resources offered include Encyclopedia Britannica, KnowUK, NewsUK and SCRAN. Usage levels are low even though remote access is offered through the Council website using the library barcode.

¹ http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/work/local_bestvalue.php?year=2007

Community information is held on a database, searchable by keyword and location, and a password-protected function allows over 1700 organisations to keep their information updated. This self-regulating approach has attracted over 1500 updates in 2006/7. Profiles of 11 communities are available from the website as pdf files, including information on planning, housing, schools, churches and community councils. Staff have bookmarked and organised websites providing information services suitable for the general public.

All libraries keep basic European information and the library HQ has a wider range of books and information. Links to key European information websites are on the library section of the Council website. Haddington is the partner library which provides information about the Scottish Parliament. The demand for access to print material is low, in keeping with national trends, as web access is readily available and clearly marked on the library website.

East Lothian Library Service has been at the forefront of library involvement in the National Entitlement Card developments. The Principal Libraries Officer, Alison Hunter, is a member of the national advisory group for libraries in relation to National Entitlement Cards. The library services issue the Concessionary Travel card application forms and verify supporting information, prior to a new National Entitlement Card being issued. The new card is then used as a library card and plans are in place to extend the range of services available using the card.

Children and young people can log-in and access specialized provision, including a subscription service to Britannica Junior and Britannica Student. Use of online resources by primary school children and in study support is encouraged in presentations. Promotion of online resources, in partnership with schools, must be persistent to help improve the disappointing uptake of useful support for learning.

Arrangements for access

As well as 12 static service points, East Lothian Council has 2 mobile libraries. Community libraries have 2Mb connections but users report that the speed of access varies depending on location and that services are subject to interruption. Details of opening hours and mobile library timetables are available from the Council website. The library service uses the Talis Prism Library Management System, which is part of the CAIRNS (Co-operative Information Retrieval Service for Scotland) which offers a single-search access point for many of Scotland's library catalogues, aiding information supply and resource location.

Funding is in place to replace all the public access computers in a three year programme. It is important that investment is made to ensure that the machines are fit for purpose and able to support the range of software and services required by users.

Levels of demand in terms of the machine occupancy rates vary from library to library and depend on network access. In some instances, levels of uptake of services can result in over 80% utilisation of computer availability. In other libraries, services can be unavailable for over 180 hours at a time, disrupting public services and causing poor performance in SPIs. Pharos, the self-service booking system for computer use, is not working properly with the new build computers, which is adding to access problems.

The staff perception is that access to the network is unreliable and downtime is monitored. On some occasions, community libraries have been regularly left without access for their users, leading to frustration amongst staff and users and a poor perception of the library service. The response rates for computer support needs to be improved and establishing a service level agreement with the IT Department is a matter for urgent attention. This could provide an opportunity to develop policies relating to updating the range of software currently available. Other strategies for improving resolution of network problems might include allowing access for a range of administration purposes to appropriately trained and approved staff, who could work in partnership with the IT Department.

The library catalogue allows borrowers to browse, to request items and to renew items online. This service is appreciated by library members. There are areas which can be developed including the range of information available about items such as links to covers, audio clips and reviews; the ability to reserve multiple items; and the presentation of information. Schools and public libraries use an integrated management system so there is scope to promote the use of the catalogue and online resources.

Information about local and family history is available from the Council website and at the Local History Centre. A number of concerns were raised about local studies and archives which need to be addressed, including the lack of proper environmental storage conditions, the poor accommodation for both staff and visitors, lack of space to preserve any additional material and fragmentation of the archive.

East Lothian Library Service has produced a Welcome Wallet with a range of information about library services. If the reliability of access to the network can be improved, there is scope to promote the uptake of online subscription services and computers and this should be addressed in the marketing plan.

In terms of service development, East Lothian has plans to provide laptops on the mobile libraries and there is a programme to implement Wi-Fi at Haddington. This will use wireless connectivity to expand internet access, making the most of the space available.

Staff interaction and support

The staff received training in the European Computer Driving Licence as part of the People's Network roll-out. This has been topped up with training in KnowUK, NewsUK and Scran. Regular training is important so that staff are familiar with resources and can encourage use of online services, ultimately helping customers to satisfy their own reference enquiries. Corporate ICT training courses and the Diploma in Applications of ICT in Libraries offer opportunities to extend the skills of staff. There is demand from staff in the use of adaptive technologies to support users and for improvements to adaptive technologies available. Currently, Supernova text magnification software and Dragon voice recognition software is available in all libraries and hardware for those with physical impairment, such as tracker ball mouse and enlarged keyboard, available in more than half of the community libraries.

Opportunities are offered to a number of volunteers to participate in the buddy system which provides one-to-one support for beginners who need help with their computing skills. The Buddies found this a valuable experience and were pleased to have the opportunity for community participation and their time and support was

valued by computer users. There was steady demand for more ICT taster sessions and funding is being sought to support new sessions. East Lothian Library Services provides access to Study IT online courses, including the European Computer Driving License learning content and Information Handling Skills but uptake is disappointing and further promotion is required.

Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for widespread reading group activity, including a reading group for the visually impaired and value-added activities to enhance the reading experience • An early-adopter in Scotland of Frontline training for staff • Leading role in the introduction of National Entitlement Card • Web-based reader development work including the teenage website 4ureaders and icanreadyoulikeabook • Recognised need of improved stock management processes

Identification of reading interests

Whilst all staff are encouraged to take part in reader development initiatives, leadership is provided by the Branch Librarian at Tranent (Reader Development Co-ordinator, the Area Librarian West (book group support), the Senior Librarian Young Peoples Services (reader development for children and young people) and the Senior Librarian Local History and Promotions (adult author events). Web initiatives are led by the School Librarian at Knox Academy (4ureaders.net) and the Adult Services Librarian (icanreadyoulikeabook.org.uk).

A Stock Management Policy had been developed, in line with the framework developed by SLIC in 2001. This had been revised in 2006. The staff expressed concerns about the levels of resources. East Lothian sits in the middle of the revenue expenditure on materials per 1000 population in the CIPFA tables but in the bottom quartile for total revenue expenditure per 1000 population on the library service. Processes are in place to circulate and exchange stock between community libraries to ensure that the range of stock is refreshed in each service point. Profiles of community library stock have also been put together in a move towards introducing evidence based stock management. Whilst this is a commendable start, there was potential for further development as an evidence base for stock selection. Recommendations contained within the branch profiles are focused on promoting existing slow-moving stock and it is not clear how addressing future stock selection needs are addressed. Staff have identified that more work needs to be done on analysing fiction and using more robust evidence based stock management systems will enable this and allow for more senior staff time to be reallocated to staff training on stock selection and promotion, as well as overall monitoring and evaluation. Investment in proprietary software would simplify the process, save staff time and offer a service-wide view across the stock. East Lothian Libraries had entered into a joint procurement for supply of library materials in order to achieve better value. Participation in the ABC benchmarking group was further evidence of performance monitoring in a broader context, when figures are compared on a quarterly basis.

East Lothian is performing poorly in relation to the provision of the recommended number of items for both adult's and children's books, which is highlighted in the Audit Scotland report. In the SLIC survey, 65% of the respondents felt that a better choice of books should be a priority. The library service also has a high number of requests per 1000 population, sitting in the top quartile of Scottish authorities. The

Stock Selection process should identify readers' needs and keep reader's requests to a minimum, especially as there is a charge for reservations.

The library catalogue is available on-line and whilst this has assisted in satisfying reader's requests more work remains to be done in improving the services offered. East Lothian Libraries have been to the fore of introducing the National Entitlement Card and the library service is one of the first to introduce the integrated smartcard.

Choice of activities and resources

There was a great deal of activity in promoting stock at strategic and community library level. The Branch Librarian at Tranent (Reader Development Co-ordinator) has been an enthusiastic participant in the nationally-run Reader Development Network. The Area Librarian West has responsibility for book group support and the Senior Librarian Local History and Promotions co-ordinates adult author events. Between them they have offered a wider range of different reading-related events and activities aimed at adults. It is important to ensure that, because of the division of responsibility, the different elements of reader development are part of a library reading strategy which offers progression and consistency across the age groups and throughout the year. There are 19 reading groups, with an annual event bringing all the groups together. Reading group collections are available in sets of 10 copies of 2 books, which are thematically linked.

There is a programme of regular author events, offering an opportunity to discuss writing as well as reading. The libraries have used the training given in the Reader Development Network to introduce good displays and special book marks are available for library users to recommend a book which they have enjoyed to another library visitor.

The Adult Services Librarian leads the icanreadyoulikeabook.org.uk website and blog. The website aims to provide an online reading group, offering 10 titles in 5 different categories every month. The title is reviewed by a staff member or a reader and these 'starred' items can be viewed and added to. Linking to the library catalogue will assist readers to reserve and borrow the book in an integrated approach which adds value to the browsing function. The message board is another form of reader to reader communication.

The regular activities for children are more focused on the younger, pre-school age group with Bookstart, Bounce and Tickle sessions and Bookcrawls. There was a programme of reading-related events for older children, including the Summer Reading Challenge, 2 book clubs, class visits at three stages (Primary 1, 4 and 7) and participation in the Braw book awards. East Lothian was involved in the 4readers.net and, as this web service has recently ceased due to lack of sustained funding by other partners, East Lothian is currently exploring a replacement web service for young people. The Senior Librarian Young Peoples Service has recently resigned and her successor has plenty of scope to build up services for the 5-18 year olds to seek to bring them into a progression of reading, enjoying books and library use to support their studies.

Provision for readers

Library buildings vary in their modernity and attractiveness. The Capital Investment Plan for 2007/8 indicates that funding has been allocated for Prestonpans Library, Musselburgh Library and the People's Network hardware replacement. Musselburgh is East Lothian's busiest library and the need to review the building to provide a high

quality civic space has been highlighted in the library service's business plan. A capital sum was allocated for a feasibility study in 07/08 but this has not been carried through to the capital plan for 08/09. The newly refurbished and award-winning Prestonpans Library provides an attractive public space for readers of all ages to visit. However, the location of both Dunbar and Wallyford Libraries needs reviewed and Tranent, Haddington and North Berwick Libraries need extension and refurbishment to provide appropriate public space for library and reading activities. The lack of adequate accommodation for the Local History Centre is a matter of concern, whilst it is recognized that the new facility for local and the library is planned with funding allocated for 2010. The lack of investment in public library buildings will be a contributory factor to poor performance in SPIs and an increasing percentage of the population will choose not to visit deteriorating buildings, as the gap between Council investment and public expectation grows. Internal promotions and displays would be improved by investment in reader-centred furnishings which are nicely presented and changed regularly.

There is a Bookstart Co-ordinator in a short-term funded post, who is delivering outreach services to vulnerable families. For those in 28 homes, day care centres, sheltered housing complexes and hospitals, the Library Service provided collections which are changed on a regular basis. The collections also provide additional materials for staff to support reminiscence groups. Other outreach work includes study support and work with disabled groups.

In addition to the support offered to library based reading groups, there is also a visually impaired readers' group which offers its participants an opportunity to be included in mainstream book events such as the Edinburgh International Book Festival, as well as the ability to access through a medium of their choice – Braille, audio or large print. This initiative allows a potentially isolated group to enjoy stories, books and social interaction.

Partnership working with literacies workers was developing, but there is concern that the contribution which libraries could make was not fully recognised by other partners. Libraries are a strategic partner and have delivered adult literacy and numeracy awareness training, participated in the Big Plus in Libraries and the BBC's RaW campaign and provided venues for ALN groups. However, the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Strategy fail to recognise the real and potential contribution of library services.

All staff had been included in reader development training which has been cascaded. There is a real commitment to promotion and reader development amongst staff, within a difficult environment of pressure on a small staff and the budget which restricted the range of events and materials available. *Frontline* online reader development training has recently been introduced. This specialist training package aims to further develop staff skills without the problems of releasing staff by using the internet. The co-ordinator monitors progress through the training and her assessments are checked by Opening the Book, the specialist reader development trainers.

Next steps

Quality Indicator 1

Areas for Improvement

- The IT network reliability needs to be improved with response rates specified in a service level agreement

- Sustained investment in the public access computer hardware and software is key to the future development of e-government and library services
- Scope exists for improved promotion and monitoring of the use of online subscription services and computers
- Planned improvements to archive services, including preservation conditions, access arrangements, capacity and working conditions

Quality Indicator 3

Areas for Improvement

- Introducing robust and effective evidence based stock management and improving stock selection and promotion
- Reviewing the range of activities for young people aged 5-18 and developing a strategy for offering regular and sustained programmes
- Reviewing the investment in library buildings and developing a programme of buildings improvement within a context of co-location and shared services.

Levels

This report uses a six level scale, as follows:

excellent - outstanding, sector leading
 very good - major strengths
 good - important strengths with areas for improvement
 adequate - strengths just outweigh weaknesses
 weak - important weaknesses
 unsatisfactory - major weaknesses

Quality Indicator 1 Access to Information	
Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources	Adequate
Arrangements for access	Weak
Staff interaction and support	Adequate
Quality Indicator 3 Meeting reader's needs	
Identification of reading interests	Good
Choice of activities and resources	Good
Provision for readers with differing abilities and aptitudes	Good

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