

2007-08

Fife Council evaluation report

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)

Summary

From a review of the evidence, discussions with staff and a library visit, it is clear that Fife Council's library service staff are working extremely hard to provide a range of value-added learning experiences. Whilst the percentage of the population using learning centres is slightly lower than the Scottish average, it is showing steady growth. There is potential to continue to develop and promote a range of learning opportunities for individuals and target groups and to work with partners to offer progression into certificated courses.

Good use has been made of the Scottish Government's Public Library Quality Improvement Fund, which supported the development of training for staff in running taster sessions. Taste IT also developed a range of appropriate learning sessions and this has proved popular with the public. There is scope to explore a range of online learning. Confidence and competence is growing and expectations have been created amongst staff that learning can be delivered in the small, local community libraries. Increasing access to learning across the library network is a significant improvement from the previous self-evaluation process carried out with the Scottish Library and Information Council in 2006.

It is recognised that it is not possible to offer spacious accommodation for learning in all libraries. The programme of building refurbishments is in place to ensure that, where opportunities exist, learning is offered in well-planned and attractive environments. A programme of upgrade is replacing computers, but significant concerns remain about the Council IT network and the constraints which learners face in accessing information to support their learning.

A wide range of activities are in place for all age groups and uptake is increasing. Staff are processes in place which review feedback and monitor impact. The demand for ESOL materials and materials in other languages is being carefully considered and Fife are supporting the national feasibility study on a national collection for new workers.

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taste IT with its equity of access to learning • Staff training programme and support for staff delivering learning • A programme of building refurbishments • A programme of PC refreshment • Range of partnerships with the Community Planning Partnership

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

Fife Council serves a population of 356,700 located on the east coast of Scotland, stretching between the Forth and Tay. Whilst Fife has major population centres in Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, Cupar, Glenrothes and St Andrews, much of the area consists of small villages. The library service has 54 service points, including 3 mobile libraries and 3 service points which are open less than 10 hours per week. The service employs 195.7 (FTE) staff. The number of users of learning centres in Fife has grown steadily to 7.6% of the population since 2003/4, slightly below the Scottish average. The number of times terminals are used per 1000 population is slightly below the Scottish average at 835.6 (916.7), but shows steady growth.

Process

Building on success: a public library quality improvement, self-evaluation toolkit prepared by the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) provided the framework for the process. Fife staff developed themes around Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences and encourage the management team to contribute. Fife went through the process of self evaluation for Quality indicator 4 during the pilot phase of the framework in May 2006. They evaluated themselves as level 4, 'Good' but it was clear they had some major strengths and the key area for improvement was to increase access to learning more equitably across Fife. Staff prepared a programme of training for staff in delivering IT Taster sessions and successfully applied for funding from the 2006/7 Scottish Executive Public Library Quality Improvement Fund. A grant of nearly £87,000 was made and SLIC was invited to return and look at the impact of the funding, which is also the subject of an external impact report by economist Steve Westbrook and soon to be published by SLIC.

SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with the management team on 14th November 2007. Feedback from learners has been integrated into the evidence.

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences

The library learning environment

Since the last visit by SLIC Fife Council has opened two new libraries at Dunfermline's Duloch and a modern replacement at Oakley. Co-location and refurbishment projects have been completed at Cadham and Kincardine and are underway at Leslie, Inverkeithing and Valleyfield. Refurbishments are underway at Elie and Pittenweem. The 2007/8 Service Plan details the plans for library relocation, and refurbishment. Visits and pictorial evidence demonstrate that, where libraries are refurbished, that learning is offered in attractive and well planned environments. Some facilities can offer dedicated spaces but in others learning is integrated into the overall library provision for the community. Opening hours are reviewed to seek public views on existing provision. The first replacement of the People's Network public access computers is complete and all PCs will again be replaced by 2010-11. Network capacity issues, in terms of both speed and reliability, are a barrier to public access to learning. The lack of streaming and VOIP is constraining further development of the range of learning opportunities offered by the library service and this is a matter which should be addressed by the IT Department. In particular, the library service depend on the assistance of IT Department to resolve this issue to offer access to the videos on the BBC website, for teenagers to participate in social networking and access to music, the Open University, Radio 4 and CBeebies. The network problems are further exacerbated by heavy periods of use, causing slow access, during the lunch period and late on Friday afternoons. Speed of access does vary across the council area and is tested regularly by library staff.

Range of learning

The programme of IT taster sessions which was developed with the Public Library Quality Improvement Fund was called *Taste IT*. The programme aimed to promote computer learning and enjoyment and was focused on learners in rural or economically disadvantaged communities. A team of specially selected library staff developed the taster session content. The range of topics included PC basics, using email and digital photography. Staff in community libraries were able to attend training on *How to run a taster session* to give them confidence and ensure quality. The training was supported with appropriate support packs to give staff confidence. The feedback from staff demonstrates how effective this training was in developing confidence and competence, as well as raising staff awareness of customer expectation: 59 staff have received training. The team used 49 venues to deliver 269 taster sessions in the first six months. These sessions attracted 967 learners. This has now increased to 483 sessions across 30 libraries with 1056 learners. Five celebration events at which certificates are presented have been held. Feedback from learners is positive. Banners advertising Taste IT continue to be used. Staff training is on-going with demand from smaller community libraries for training so that more learning opportunities could be offered locally. A series of Awaydays were run for frontline staff to listen to issues and build a strong team which can provide access to information and learning resources in communities.

Library staff provide a range of attractive displays and promotions to promote stock and resources to learners. These support all types of activities - those held within the libraries themselves, partnership events and outreach work at community-based events and facilities, such as Family Fun Days, BRAG and C U in the Park. Supporting partners to deliver learning is a key part of provision, offering progression routes and a difference learning experience. For example, there were 681 attendances at externally provided courses in libraries with tutors from Elmwood College, Lauder College and Training Services Fife. Library staff supported Kirkcaldy High School's Family Learning Day and students from Adam Smith College were given training on reading and storytelling. A series of new help sheets have been developed and 12 IT Buddies trained to help on a one to one basis. Library staff are actively seeking other partners and improved partnership working within the context of the Fife Community and Development Partnership.

The staff are continuing to improve their knowledge base and there have been improvements in community libraries and also in the outreach work in schools. Over 720 school visits have been made reaching over 12,000 school pupils. Staff have tracked a direct increase in library membership of 206 as a result. Staff are striving to be more responsive to customer needs, broadening their awareness of individual learning needs and the range of learning experiences. For example, pre-loaded MP3 players are available for loan. Staff are demonstrating their enthusiasm and progress by asking about new technology and for additional training to increase their knowledge. Since the introduction of the People's Network service and consequent change in library duties, the single status/job evaluation process has been carried out. Using interviews with staff and management, as well as existing job descriptions and person specifications, the grading for Library Assistants and Supervisors has improved, based on the communication skills competencies required. Annual reviews of job descriptions are now in place.

Addressing the needs of learners

Bookstart is the early¹ introduction for families and membership has increased by 858 since the last review and this reflects a 10% increase in distribution to 97% of babies. There are around 4000 packs to be distributed to recipients each year and a healthcare partnership to be maintained, from within the existing staff resources. This makes an important contribution to the development of literacy and numeracy and babies can progress into Lots for Tots to continue to build early learning skills. There is considerable activity within the early years, reaching over 2000 and demand for greater geographic spread and hard-to-reach groups. The library service is providing a project loan collection for local schools of over 75,000 books. Over 1309 activities for children and young people have been successfully delivered in summer 2007 and 250 after hours events offered. Provision for young people includes Book Groups for Kids which have been established in 24 schools and over 450 children are taking part, with 'talkback' sheets recording positive experiences and book reviews demonstrating literary awareness. Methil Library ran a book shadowing group for the Royal Mail Book Awards 2007 and one of the group's reviews won second prize in Scottish Booktrust's Review Competition. Creative writing is further encouraged in the Libraries' contribution to the Anne Frank + you Festival – a Creative Writing Award.

Polish, Urdu and Chinese collections are available to local people and cultural carnivals are organised to celebrate the range and diversity of the local community. There is a need to widen multi-language provision for the early years. The service had supported four pilots of the BBC initiative, *Tell better stories*. The Carnegie Children's Book Festival was also offering new learning experiences.

The library service is offering a menu of courses and taster session and is aware of a need for fuller consultation with existing learners and potential learners. The customer base has been increased in some areas, but in other areas of provision, such as ABE learners, there is an acknowledgement that new strategies must be considered to reach target groups. This may include longer term programmes of activities and consideration of progression routes for successful learners.

Partnership working in learning

A wide range of partnerships are in place and libraries make an active contribution to the Fife Learning Network and the Fife Community Learning and Development Partnership. Partnership with the youth services team is developing a library 'offer' for teenagers. Discussions between libraries and museums services have taken place, exploring partnership opportunities and ways in which services can be developed. Library staff are supporting parenting initiatives, working with Homestart to deliver courses for parents about experiential learning through play. The Adult Basic Education partnership had resulted in a series of very successful local and family history courses, which have proved popular with the ABE target group, including a trip to Edinburgh for research. Libraries provide venues for literacy classes and special collections, such as Quick Reads and First Choice collections to support classes. RaW reading groups have been established in around six places. It is proving harder to reach the market for ABE learners. Staff report that although they are persistent, there is great reluctance to come forward. Examples of success

¹ At 6 weeks old

include one reader who developed to the extent of volunteering to tutor a group and another who wrote a successful lottery bid for a community project.

Work with the younger age group includes some new variations which take into account the needs of the community, such as running a Bounce and Tickle session for mothers and babies in Polish. There is an ESOL collection set up for citizenship and language, which is based at Dunfermline. A launch was held for ESOL organisers to raise their awareness and to help to reach the target learners. It seeks to help with integration into the community and this led to the Cultural Carnival. The ESOL learners are continuing to make consistent use of the service and this is ably demonstrated by the fact that many of the new workers keep their library cards from year to year. Some of the new workers are very well educated but they still need to use the library to use the internet and ESOL learning materials. There is an increase in incoming families with ESOL learning needs, especially from Poland. Staff anticipate that there will be a demand to develop cultural and social learning experiences.

Next steps

Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council IT constraints are holding back the development of learning opportunities. There is a need to increase the reliability and speed of the network, and to enable streaming of audio and video. • Improving the evidence base on which to plan provision. • There is an opportunity to improve provision for the early years. • There is potential to build on Taste IT and develop more online courses.

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 4 Learners' experiences	
Extent to which the environment stimulates and motivates learners	Good
The range of learning opportunities	Very Good
Provision for learners with differing abilities and aptitudes	Very Good
Partnerships enabling progression with others	Very Good

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