

2007-08

# North Ayrshire Council evaluation report

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLOIM)

## **Summary**

The range of activities to develop community and personal participation in community life through the library is very good. Dedicated staff use the local community and cultural planning frameworks to engage across communities in a purposeful and effective way. Hard-to-reach groups are targeted and there is an ambition to develop and deliver services which meet the needs of communities. Feedback from the public clearly shows that libraries in north Ayrshire are highly valued by their users. Services have important strengths which are having a positive impact on individuals and community life.

From a review of the evidence, discussions with staff and library visits, it is clear that North Ayrshire Council's Library and Information staff are working extremely hard to provide extended reading choices and experiences to the public. Children's issues are rising against national trends and performance against HMIe benchmarked group for uptake of services is very good. There are still some developments to be made in the reading strand but there are examples of very good practice. Overall performance in this quality indicator is good.

The verifiers were impressed by the range of services offered and the commitment of the library staff to those services. Good use has been made of national opportunities to improve reader development and skills need to be cascaded to the wider library workforce and staff would also benefit from Bookstart training. Library staff trained and more are currently being trained in Bookstart Music Rhymetime. Other development areas are Collection Development Policy, creating a reader development strategy, changes to selection and monitoring of the use of stock, which will lead to evidence based stock management.

The offer to readers is rich and varied, with an attention to taking services out to where people are and not passively offered through static service points.

As part of the Public Library Quality improvement Matrix, staff identified a number of areas for improvement and this will form the basis of an action plan on which to build better services.

## **Introduction**

Sited in all types of communities and with extensive mobile library services provision, libraries remain on the free universal services in communities where the local population can visit as individuals or groups to pursue reading for learning, learning or hobbies. Libraries can support the business community, individuals and community information needs and are inclusion of all age and social groups, nationalities, genders and religious beliefs. The delivery of high quality information and library services to individuals and communities helps people to develop their skills, realise their aspirations and contributes to the economic growth and well being of the country. Libraries encourage the use of digital technologies by communities and individuals providing access to information, learning and culture.

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 services 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 and community planning objectives.

## **Local Authority Background**

North Ayrshire Council is a medium sized local authority located on the west coast of Scotland and serving a population of around 136,000 people. The local authority area is divided between the mainland and two islands – Arran and Cumbrae. Kilwinning and Irvine are the two main centres of population where around 40% of the population is based. Some parts of the Council area are considerably more affluent than others. Whilst the Council's Plan for 2008-2011 reports that around two thirds of the population are satisfied or very satisfied with their place to live, unemployment is higher than might be expected and this has led to concerns about dissatisfaction and potentially disaffection, particularly amongst young people. Regeneration is the number one priority and libraries can make a significant contribution to achieving this aim.

Audit Scotland's Best Value report in 2005 noted that Libraries were amongst a range of departments who had embraced the improvement agenda, reporting high levels of customer satisfaction and practical measures to address the skills deficit, such as learning and ICT skills development library courses. The report states 'The service performs reasonably well on statutory performance measures. It is innovative in its use of IT and promotes digital inclusion, while maintaining a focus on reading.'

The Library and Information Service provides a community based service to the residents of North Ayrshire by the provision of 17 branch libraries and 2 mobile library vans, one of which is dedicated to providing the service on Arran. There is a Local history Centre, Library HQ and the Greenwood Teachers' Centre. All libraries provide on line access to the entire range of books and audiovisual resources available in North Ayrshire through the library management system (Talis). North Ayrshire is currently reviewing the library service, with findings published in June 2008 and some progress on implementation. Opening hours have been extended with Wednesday opening for the first time in many years and the elected members review group will be implementing their findings in 09/10. Only the property elements are delayed till 09/10 due to capital funding issues. At time of visit there has been a substantial cut in the book fund, there are 3.5 posts vacant in a staff of 74 FTE posts, due to ongoing restructuring of the management team.

## **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. The North Ayrshire library staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 2 Personal and community participation and Quality Indicator 3 Meeting reader's needs. Staff encouraged to collect evidence about outcomes and impact and these were presented to SLIC.

Working with the assistance of two external verifiers, David Kenvyn, Assistant Manager, Community Libraries, East Dunbartonshire Council and Alistair Campbell, Libraries and Museums Manager, the Moray Council, SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, stakeholders and the management team on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2008. Visits were made to Irvine Library and the Vennel (local studies centre). The visiting team were very impressed with the level of preparation and evidence provided for them to review. The way in which the North Ayrshire Council team addressed the process was considered to represent very good practice.

Time was spent talking to members of the public about the service they received. These arrangements helped SLIC to come to a balanced view on the outcome of the self evaluation.

### **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
- satisfactory – strengths outweigh weaknesses
- weak – important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory – major weaknesses

## **Quality Indicator 2 Personal and community participation**

### **Strengths**

- Local community information database on corporate website with planned development through Talis Engage
- Community Information Access Point pilot at Kilwinning
- Electronic information delivery service
- Community Planning Partnership project to support 'Raising Educational Attainment'
- Regeneration Outcome Agreement data zone libraries Homework Clubs
- Youth Inspector programme

### **Promoting personal and community development**

There is a Community Planning co-ordination group that meets regularly and the Library Service is well-positioned to influence the Community Planning process. The service works with various organisations to bring added value to the Education Service within the Council Area. Again, libraries are well-positioned within this process. Libraries have a clear role with the Community Guidance element of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to deliver 'First Steps in ICT' learning.

Libraries have a key role in managing local information. The database of local organisations is on the Council website, and its maintenance is a duty of the library service. North Ayrshire will be one of 2 pilot authority for the TALIS Engage project in Scotland; this is a community information project. Each Library has developed its own Community Profile. A policy for Community Information has been developed, with emphasis on what is appropriate to be displayed on noticeboards. A Community Information Access Point is being piloted at Kilwinning Library and will be extended to other locations. This is proving successful and will be further extended to other libraries as part of the North Ayrshire Council Customer Contact strategy.

The Greenwood Teachers' Centre and 15 libraries have an electronic information delivery system funded by a successful application by Library and Information services to the Community Planning Partnership. Seen as a key strand of the Community Engagement process, the system hosts information from a range of partners including the Chief Executive, Social Work, Trading Standards and the Community Health Partnerships.

People's Network facilities in libraries have been updated to support increasing demand for access to information and learning. There is an intention to further

improve Internet access in all libraries in North Ayrshire. Just finished first "Join the Library Week" and recruited 135 new members.

The Library and Information Service is a key partner on the Cultural Planning group and is working to develop a pilot programme for the provision of cultural opportunities within the authority. A highly successful supported study and homework club has been developed by the Library and Information Services under the 'Raising Educational Attainment' strand of the process.

### **Providing community access**

Communities and individuals have access to a wide range of activities and resources through the Library and Information services. In the learning strand, for example, the service successfully delivers the 'First steps in ICT' and 129 learners received one to one support through the Volunteer Computer Buddy Scheme in 2007/08. A further 63 learners have registered for learning in 2008/09 and Digital Photography workshops have been delivered by the Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator and volunteer tutors. Family learning activities are offered through libraries. Examples of very good practice include encouraging four parents from the local under 12s football team to write an exercise training book and a partnership with Corsehill and Castlepark Nurseries which resulted in improved support for pupils' learning by introducing parents to specialist library resources. Seven homework clubs have been developed in the Regeneration Outcome Agreement (ROA) data zone libraries.

Access to health information services are being developed, with interesting and engaging activities being designed to draw people in. Health information packs about coping with cancer and long term conditions are available and are being promoted and their uptake monitored. A new partnership with Macmillan Cancer Relief is being discussed with a view to integrations into the Saltcoats' library refurbishment. Libraries also provide a wide range of opportunities to widen reading experiences and opportunities to develop writing skills; these are discussed under Quality Indicator 3.

Library and Information Service focus groups meet frequently to provide useful feedback on service developments. The development of the Youth Inspector programme to identify good practice and areas where provision can be developed is another example of very good practice. Careers points have been established in libraries in conjunction with Careers Scotland offering useful information on training and employment. Irvine Library is working with Kilmarnock College to provide a student placement for 4 weeks every year. Outreach collections have been placed in a variety of workplace and community locations to enable better access to collections. Working with the Clydesdale bank, the Library and Information Service offers Count Me In, an early numeracy project. The BBC and Libraries partnership has used the Breathing Places campaign as another way of reaching into the community; this time working with Eco-committees from primary schools. These varied ways of approaching audience development seek to modernise and widen the public library 'offer' and popular support indicates that the service is largely successful at broadening its appeal to different age groups and interests.

### **Access to community heritage and culture**

The Local and Family History centre was moved to an Irvine town centre location, the Vennel, in 2007. The Vennel has accredited museum status and is part of the Burns Heritage Trail. Group facilities are now available and uptake of services is good, showing considerable increases on number of visits than in previous years.

Local studies traditions are strong with the Largs Historical Society and the Largs Family History Society early contributors to SCRAN.

Scotland's People, the online genealogical database run by the General Register Office of Scotland has provided training for staff and is about to launch a national scheme of offering discounted vouchers through libraries. Staff currently offer guidance sessions for the public. Partnership working with Registrars will result in a planned co-location with local history services to improve access later in 2008. The resources of this specialist centre are further supported by local collections in libraries.

There is close working with Ayrshire Archives and the North Ayrshire Council Library and Information Services Manager chairs the consortium of archives' providers. Libraries offer facilities which can widen access to archive materials and plans are in place for a cataloguing programme and for making archival materials more accessible.

The rich diversity of the community well represented in library provision. British Citizenship software and support is offered through three libraries. Members of the Chinese community in North Ayrshire are offered support by the Lifelong Learning Officer in developing literacy, ICT skills and numeracy. A Chinese newsletter is produced with an English translation. The editorial team is currently working on an online version using blogs and wikis to encourage participation. Similarly the Sikh community is being offered ICT tuition and Punjabi books.

Other projects with hard-to reach groups include the parenting collections in the ROA libraries, 'Write to be Bright' young adult reading group, the Saltcoats' Out of School Care group and the Education Resource Service's website's 'Pathfinder' are which has a collection of resources on Racial Equality issues. Where the public are unable to reach services, the mobile library service and home library service for the housebound bring services within reach. New mobiles are on order which will provide better access, computer facilities and more attractive accommodation for readers. The mobiles also visit a range of nursery schools.

<b>Areas for improvement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop the role of the Library and Information Services within the Community Planning Partnership</li> <li>• Pilot initiatives such as the Talis Engage and Three Towns projects</li> <li>• Continue to consult customers in a variety of ways</li> <li>• Seek to further develop the role of the Library and Information service within the community</li> </ul>	

<b>Quality Indicator 2 Personal and community participation</b>	
Planned approaches to promoting personal and community development	Very good
Provision of community space for a range of activities	Very good
Supporting, recording and providing access to community heritage and culture	Very good

**Quality Indicator 3 Meeting Readers' Needs**

### **Strengths**

- Good range of reading initiatives across the age-groups
- ROAR about books
- Outreach collections
- Libraries – not just about books brand
- Use of text messaging in partnership with YoungScot
- Authority-wide Festivals

### **Identification of reading needs**

The book supply contract is put out for tenders every three years and a Collection Development Policy is in place. Performance in Statutory Performance Indicator returns shows that North Ayrshire performs well in meeting targets for adult acquisitions of stock. Children's book issues are increasing. Plans are in place to reverse budget cuts to the resource fund. Currently, library staff carry out stock selection at fortnightly meetings but supplier selection is under consideration. Staff training visits have taken place to both Waterstones and Borders in Glasgow. New display furniture, for face-on displays, has been acquired.

There are a number of improvements which can be made in terms of reviewing the Collections Development Policy, monitoring the impact of streamlining business processes so that stock is delivered directly to libraries rather than a central point and to use the Talis Library Management System to monitor the use of stock. Together with regular reviews of the existing community profiling and continuing to consult customers, this will help inform stock selection and ensure that needs are met effectively.

A range of online transactions are available through the online library catalogue offering 24/7 access to some services. Online reference resources are available in all libraries and via the library website. In common with many other local authorities, libraries need to put in place strategies for regular promotion and to ensure that staff knowledge of the services is up to date.

### **Choice of activities and resources**

Stock is promoted through a variety of means including Best Sellers lists (adult paperback fiction, adult hardback, adult non-fiction) which are available in all libraries and on the library website. There is a small charge for requested items. Popular favourites amongst the children's collection have a similarly high profile. Talking book lists are produced for both cassette and CD, however updates take place every six months. Book displays are in place on counter tops, in traditional display furniture and for quick reads. North Ayrshire has been involved in the national programme of Reader Development training and there is scope for further sharing of the training using cascade methods to the wider staff group. This will provide the knowledgebase to support a Reader Development Strategy to integrate promotions and events.

Statutory Performance Indicators for the number of borrowers as a percentage of the population has improved from a ranking of 13<sup>th</sup> in 2005/6 to 9<sup>th</sup> in 2006/7. In line with national trends there is a decrease in active membership; a fall of 0.4% in 2007/8. This can only be combated by having effective strategies to promote the uptake of services in place.

North Ayrshire's children's issues have increased over the past year growing from 116,668 to 121,908 in 2007/8. Children are not charged fines. Summer Reading

scheme works well, and there is no difficulty in attracting children to take part in it. This is supported with a programme of summer activities for children, which attracted nearly 900 children and over 200 adults. Two book shadowing schemes are in place, the Royal Mail Awards and the Carnegie/Greenaway Medals, to help to encourage an interest in reading. Children's staff work with three classes from Cumbrae, Dreghorn and Stevenston schools on a recommended reading scheme. Attractive resources to support reading in the early years and in primary and special schools are provided by the Educational Resource Service. Use of text messaging to connect with younger library users has been developed in partnership with Young Scot. The Radio Scotland Book Café has on two occasions featured Library and Education Resource Service projects.

The CPP has also supported 'ROAR about books' which is delivered by the Education Resource Service and Library and Information Service. Involving schools, libraries, local communities, parents, carers, authors, storytellers, travellers and other organisations such as the Highland Trust, this project encourages listening skills, the development of literacy skills and a love of reading. Whilst the project is obviously successfully improving writing and listening skills, other impacts are increased motivation in writing, growing confidence in reading, writing and interactions with authors and improved self-esteem. Nearly 80 author sessions have been run through libraries, which is in excess of what would normally be offered in a medium sized authority and over 3600 children took part. This represents excellent practice not only because of the number and diversity of events but also because of the strong links to educational outcomes.

There is a very good focus on World Book Day 2008 in the branch libraries. There was also a Storytelling Festival, bringing children from the schools to the libraries. The Library service pays for the buses between the schools and the libraries. Parents are also invited to attend school/library events by letter. It has been found that the best parental turnouts are when the children are performing at an event in the libraries.

There are 14 reading groups, and 2 writing groups which meet monthly. Most are facilitated by staff and some by volunteer readers. An adult literacy book group has been started in Saltcoats. In what is thought to be unique practice, the Library Service, impressively supports for the Saltcoats Philosophy Group, which meets in the library and sources books for discussion through the library service.

### **Provision for readers**

Early literacy and numeracy are supported by Bookstart, Baby Rhyme Time and Count me in projects. This is developed into good support for schools and a wide offer to children. Family literacy opportunities are also provided. Adult Literacy resources have all been catalogued as part of the library stock, and adult literacy tutors are given automatic membership of the library. There is some work to be done in promoting resources to adult literacy tutors and learners and this is being planned.

Outreach collections are placed in a variety of community and workplace locations. Libraries are seeking new audiences and to make the uptake of services easier. Collections have been placed in the Stellar UK Call Centre, which has 281 staff, of whom 173 are in the 16-30 age range, a group under represented in library membership. Partnership with Morrisons and Tesco supermarkets has resulted in similar schemes. Many of the staff are aged under 30. The Tesco Rivergate canteen staff recently taken up the scheme and collections are regularly updated in Morrisons

in Largs and Stevenston. Feedback forms give a connection with the readers at these locations. The collections are mainly recreational fiction.

Deposit collections are also in place in a number of community centres in areas of deprivation, and which are some distance from the nearest service point. A book collection is in the Greenbank Nursing Home in Irvine and the Events Organiser in the home is working with the library to maintain the collection.

North Ayrshire has secured a reasonable discount for the supply of stock, including servicing of the stock. 13 libraries have stock delivered to them direct by the supplier, including Arran. Other libraries are not open long enough for this to be an option.

During wide consultation, many people said they stopped using libraries because they felt they were “just about books” and they didn’t like reading. Working with the Council Communications department and an outside company, a new strap line, “Libraries – not just about books” was introduced to try to widen appeal.

The library works closely with the Chinese and Sikh communities to select appropriate stock. Reading groups, focus groups and surveys are also used to inform the stock selection process. It was recognised that there was a need to manage information about stock performance, to assist the stock management process. This is partly to counteract bias in the stock selection process, and partly to encourage staff involvement in that process.

North Ayrshire Council organised a highly successful Storytelling Festival in late 2007 with a range of events running in different venues across the authority. Again, reaching out into communities, events were held in libraries, schools, the Harbour Arts Centre, A Care Home, Tesco Coffee Shop and Council HQ. The Arran Book festival took place in September 2008 with all Primary school pupils and S1/2 having the opportunity of an author visit. There were also two author visits for an adult audience and a n after school session for children. The whole of S5 had a creative writing even and S2/3 also had author visits. This Festival is a particularly good example of a strategic approach to developing literacy.

A range of resources have been developed to meet the needs of specific groups. The CHILL collection comprises of a range of mental health resources. Parenting collections have been established. Graphic novels attract a different type of reader and these collections have been place in all main branches.

<b>Areas for improvement</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and revise Collection Development Policy on a regular basis</li> <li>• Reader Development Strategy and cascade training of reader development skills</li> <li>• Promote resources on website to all readers</li> <li>• Bookstart training for children’s team</li> <li>• Promote adult literacy resources</li> </ul>	

<b>Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers’ needs</b>	
Identification of reading interests	Good
Choice of activities and resources	Very good
Opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy	Good

**2008**