

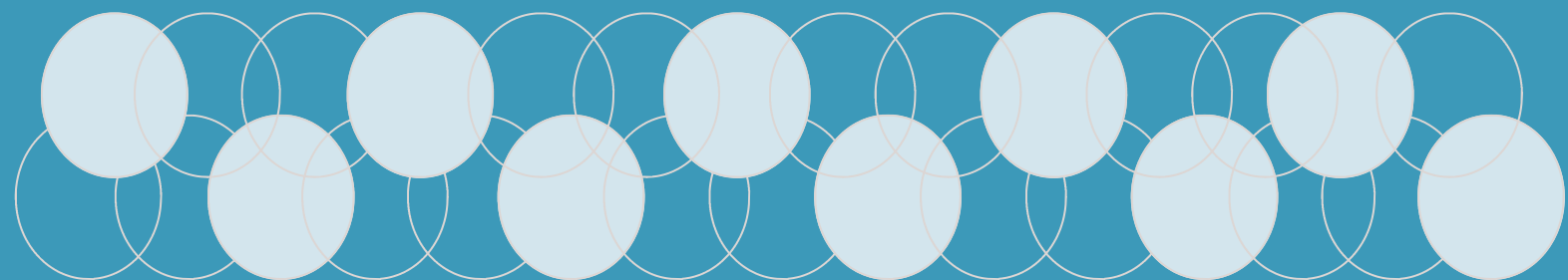


Scottish Library & Information Council



Argyll and Bute Council self evaluation 2009

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)



Summary

Argyll and Bute library staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus on the ways in which the library service provides access to information and supports community and personal participation, reading and learning through its activities and resources.

From detailed discussions with staff, councillors, the public and other stakeholders; visits to libraries; and a review of the evidence, it is clear that the library staff are working hard to ensure that a limited range of quality library services are delivered across the authority and, in particular, to engage with individual and across communities in a purposeful and effective way. Staff are working hard to identify opportunities to develop and deliver services which meet the needs of communities and which support community growth. Feedback from the visits clearly shows that whilst the services are highly valued by their users, there are a number of issues for the local authority to consider: lack of capacity in rural authorities for service development and the costs and logistical challenges of delivering services in very remote, rural parts of Scotland. The major weakness in Argyll and Bute are the barriers put in place by the corporate IT department which prohibit access to services such as BBC iplayer and YouTube. The public find this very frustrating. It becomes all the more ridiculous when the public discover Argyll and Bute Council are uploading videos to YouTube to promote services like registration, which they can't access from their own public library. The service has a low profile of the service within the council and has suffered from sustained under investment for a number of years. Public support for greater investment in resources was clearly expressed in meetings with SLIC and also in response to plans proposed earlier in 2009 to close 5 community libraries, regarded key community resources. It is also worth noting that there are a wide range of reading activities offered which is highly valued by readers, including island book collections, reading groups, Summer Reading Challenge, reading chains and the Six Book Challenge. There is a specialist Autism Argyll Collection and Pictures to Share (which supports Alzheimer's sufferers).

Services have strengths which outweigh weakness. The provision of information services was highly praised by the public, who had a high regard for the skilled staff. The mobile library service is one of the key strengths of the service. The individual nature of the service results in a very high value being ascribed to it by users and to those who live in very remote rural settings; the mobile library is a vital social and community link. The unique cultural heritage of the community is made accessible in the local and family history resources and the Gaelic collections in print and other media.

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

Quality Indicator 1 Access to information	
<i>Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Arrangements for access</i>	Unsatisfactory
<i>Staff interaction and support</i>	Satisfactory

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

Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs	
<i>Identification of reading interests</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Choice of activities and resources</i>	Good
<i>Opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy</i>	Good

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences	
<i>Extent to which the environment stimulates and motivates learners</i>	Satisfactory
<i>The range of learning opportunities</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Provision for learners with differing abilities and aptitudes</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Partnerships enabling progression with others</i>	Satisfactory

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 just outweigh weaknesses
- weak – important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory – major weaknesses

Introduction

Sited in all types of communities and with extensive mobile library service provision, libraries remain one of the free universal services for communities where the population can visit as individuals or in groups to pursue reading for pleasure, learning or hobbies. Libraries can support the business community, individual and community information needs and are inclusive 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 contribute 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

The second largest local authority in Scotland terms of area, Argyll and Bute covers 690,900ha that includes 6 main towns and 25 inhabited islands. The island populations range from 5 to over 7,000 and account for one fifth of the total population of 91,306. Argyll and Bute has over 2,704km of coastline stretching over 100 miles from Appin in the north to Campbeltown in the south and more than 80 miles across from the island of Tiree in the west to Cardross in the east. The Council is divided into 4 administrative areas.

The library service has 11 community libraries, 5 mobile libraries and the school library at Tiree also provides a public library service point. Staffing consists of 10 librarians, including the Culture and Libraries Manager, and 24 fte senior library, mobile librarians and front line staff. The annual library budget is approximately £1.5m.

Scotland's local government reorganisations of 1975 and 1996 have brought new libraries into the service – Rothesay, Helensburgh, Cove, Cardross, Rhu, Rosneath and Garelochhead. Like many other library services, departmental responsibility has changed from Leisure Development and is currently within Planning and Performance, Community Services. The service is currently under going a best value review.

Within Scotland, Argyll and Bute represents less than 2% of the population, yet the area accounts for 10% of Scotland's land mass. The challenges of providing a service, which depends on face-to-face interaction, across very remote rural areas and multiple island communities cannot be over-estimated.

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. Argyll and Bute Council Library Staff chose to look at the four service indicators: Quality Indicator 1 Access to information, Quality Indicator 2 Community and personal participation, Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs and Quality Indicator 4 Learners experiences. This was a considerable undertaking but staff felt that it would inform the best value review and service planning. Staff worked together to identify and evaluate evidence about the impact and outcomes and their findings were presented to SLIC.

Working with the assistance of an external verifier, Silvija Crook, Library and Information Services Manager, the Shetland Islands Council, SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, a wide variety of partners, the public and the management team on 19th May 2009. Kathleen Milne, Team Leader Youth services, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar as an observer in preparation for a Public Library Quality Improvement self evaluation process in her own authority. Visits were made to Helenburgh Library and on 15th June 2009, visits and discussions were held in Oban Library and Gareloch Library.

SLIC would also like to thank all those who participated. Time was spent talking to members of the public, councillors and the wide range of partners about the service they receive. These arrangements helped SLIC to come to a balanced view on the outcome of the self-evaluation.

Quality Indicator 1 Access to information

Strengths

- Planned approach to the provision of reference online and print collections in the Reference Strategy
- Staff skills, knowledge and attitude
- Planned approach to preservation and widening access to local studies collection

Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources

The Central Reference Library is located in Helensburgh and there are some print resources in branches. A Reference Strategy is being developed and this intends to concentrate on online provision rather than print collections. Most library services across Scotland have subscribed to a range of online reference tools and are struggling with low uptake of online services. In the current financial climate, it is not feasible to fully support both book-based reference collections and online services. The library service will need the support of the Communications and IT departments to ensure that the marketing of online services reaches interest groups and the general public. The current range of online service includes KnowUK, NewsUK, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Oxford reference services and CANS legal advice services.

A new library management system, Spydus, was introduced in 2007. The online resources and catalogue, with its range of interactive functionality is available 24/7. Assistive technologies are available on some computers in the full-time libraries but there is a need to widen this provision to part-time libraries.

The Central Collection of local studies resources has extensive holdings and the photographic collection is currently being digitised. This will widen access and there is a growing interest in materials from around the world. The newspaper collections are also unique and currently being microfilmed; again, opening up access to a wider user group. The library has a publishing programme which makes information from fragile sources available without endangering the primary source. Taking these steps together, the service is making real progress and a concerted effort to preserve unique items whilst ensuring as many people as possible have access, with thought given to format, location and conservation.

Arrangements for access

In 1997, a UK initiative funded by the New Opportunities Fund (now the Big Lottery Fund) and called the People's Network installed computers and free internet connections in all UK libraries. This was first introduced at Helensburgh and Oban Libraries in 2002 and rolled out to other locations in 2003. However, since 1996, not all of the libraries in Argyll and Bute have full internet access. In 2006, the People's Network connections were withdrawn from Cove, Cardross, Rhu, Rosneath, Garelochhead, Rosneath and Tarbert on cost grounds. This left the users of these facilities at a disadvantage compared to other library users across the UK, even those in similar very remote rural and island communities. The Pathfinder Project, installing broadband access across Argyll and Bute, is planning to eventually reconnect 3 of the libraries currently without internet connectivity. This lack of connectivity is unsatisfactory and requires immediate action to provide a service in line with public expectations and the rest of the UK.

Network capacity issues, in terms of both speed, reliability and replacement of computers, are a barrier to public access to information. The lack of access to social networking and particularly restrictive filtering is constraining public use of the facilities and this is a matter which should be addressed by the IT Department. Immediately following the SLIC visit, the Council's Corporate Communications department issued information about registration services on YouTube yet the intended audience were unable to access it from public libraries because of lack of connectivity or filtering. Access for young people to Glow, the schools digital network, from public libraries for study and homework is not supported either, which is a matter of priority for the Council.

Many library services are now providing free wi-fi as part of their core service provision and the installation of facilities in Argyll and Bute libraries would have a number of immediate benefits, in particular extended access to the internet. The library service depends on the assistance of the IT Department to work with them to resolve these issues and SLIC is happy to offer expertise to support them.

Staff interaction and support

There are dedicated posts to manage ICT, Reference and Local studies services. Staff are trained in ICT, customer care and online resources. Taster sessions are available to support beginner use of the internet and silver surfers. The number of courses, however, is limited by the space and facilities available. There is also a need to balance blocking off long periods for training and drop-in use, which would be greatly assisted by the availability of wi-fi. The nature of the service means that one-to-one support is only available in certain locations and the library service should consider how it can use web2.0 tools to promote online use of resources, hold information surgeries and participate in national services like the Ask Scotland reference service. The skills and helpfulness of the staff were highly regarded by the partners represented during SLIC's visit.

Quality Indicator 1

Areas for improvement

- Council IT constraints are holding back the development of information services
- There is to review filtering with a view to enabling access to social networking and online services such as Glow
- Wider Council contribution to and support for promotion of online services
- Extend provision of assistive technologies
- Introduction of Wi-fi access to ease issues about capacity

Quality Indicator 2 Personal and community participation

Strengths

- Mobile library service
- Community point of contact with council services
- Strong local collections promoting culture and heritage of the islands
- Programme of activities to promote local studies materials
- Participation in scotlandspople voucher scheme

Promoting personal and community development

The library service is clearly focused on its range of offers to customers: a wide range of national and local information; leisure and learning opportunities for individuals and groups; partnerships with others to progress shared aims and values; services to housebound members of the community; and free access to the internet and PC applications. The access to information has been discussed in the indicator 1 and is satisfactory for a library service presented with the challenges of rurality and tight budgets. The most important thing to note is that, in the context of remote rural communities, the library is sometimes the only point of contact with council services which individuals have. Leisure and learning opportunities are influenced by the ability to provide suitable facilities and adequate staffing and public feedback about staff interaction is very positive. The formal partnerships can be more reactive than proactive and this means that informal partnerships lack a management overview to nurture and sustain them. There has been a vacuum in taking forward partnerships but this will be an important area for the new Libraries and Cultural Services Manager on appointment. Libraries currently provide a range of personalised housebound services but these are constrained by capacity and the wider Council staff need to be aware of the provision. Internet access has also been discussed under indicator 1; however it is worth noting that there is no evidence of other providers of free internet access and this service is a key strand of the Scottish Government's digital inclusion policy.

Providing community space

The mobile library service is one of the key strengths of the service. The individual nature of the service results in a very high value being ascribed to it by users and to those who live in very remote rural settings; the mobile library is a vital social and community link.

Libraries offer opportunities for social inclusion and interaction, however it is worth noting that not all libraries have social spaces and there is a lack of staff time to support less confident users. In Oban, for instance, the local bus timetables do not facilitate easy access to the library for those who do not have their own transport and those who do have to pay parking charges.

Access to community heritage and culture

As with many library services, the richness of the service is in the local collection. There are both central and satellite collections, much of which is available for lending. The materials vary in topics and formats and some needs expert staff support for appropriate interpretation. One of the areas for improvement would be to extend the limited virtual access through a programme of digitisation but funding for this is not currently available. Not all of the library's holdings are catalogued as new records using the MARC 21 standard need to be created for local resources and this is limited by staff capacity. Improving access through digitisation and full interoperable standards will help reach the global and local audience.

The service has embraced the scotlandspeople discount voucher scheme and is already running taster sessions and help for genealogical research for family history enthusiasts and ICT novices. The Local Studies librarian organises exhibitions to promote material of interest locally and co-ordinates participation in Local History Week. In addition, a number of Reminiscence workshops also take place throughout the year so that individuals can share and record memories. This also enables oral histories to be recorded for future generations. The work is limited, again, by staff capacity to take part in planning with partner groups and to progress projects. There is a publications programme for works of local interest. Print runs are very small but the publications are sold worldwide and help to promote the local area, heritage and culture. There is no graphic design or marketing expertise available to the service, so effectiveness as well as quality could be developed.

Areas for improvement

- Improving access through digitisation and full interoperable standards
- Pressure on staff capacity limits activities, development and partnerships
- Lack of design and marketing expertise limits effectiveness

Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs

Strengths

- Range of reader-centred activities in a small authority with limited capacity
- Pictures to Share – collection for those with Alzheimer's to stimulate verbal engagement
- Autism Argyll Collection
- Print and audio Gaelic collection

Identification of reading needs

The stock management policy was revised in December 2008. Area librarians are responsible for stock selection with the central team providing specialist subject input. Generally one copy of is purchased for each location because of the logistics of moving stock. The very remote rural nature of Argyll and Bute means that there are very real challenges in exchanging materials to refresh existing stock and extend the range of reading choices. In the worst case scenario, it can take 2 months for requested books to reach their reader. There is an opportunity to improve matters, which currently relies on the goodwill of staff taking out boxes of books as they travel on council business, but this would best be done as part of a council-wide review of transport and logistics.

A new library management system was purchased in September 2007 and this has enhanced the presentation of the catalogue for the public, with an *Amazon*-like approach. There are improved search facilities across collections, stocklists can be produced to promote resources and the public and staff can post reviews. Staff are in process of moving to MARC 21 records. Reading groups and individuals are encouraged to submit requests, but staff are aware that there is a danger of raising expectations which cannot be met from within existing resources. There are comments from readers about the lack of books.

Choice of activities and resources

A new reader development strategy is being implemented. There is limited capacity to support promotions so the service seeks to provide 2 adult-centred and 2 children-centred promotions per year; participation in the Scottish national promotion, World Book Day and the summer reading challenge. The choice of activities are well-considered to meet the

needs of a rural community including island book collections, reading groups and reading chains.

Bookstart is working well, with support from health visitors and partnership with nurseries. The Treasure Chest is a larger item so distribution is more problematic. Children's activities continue on the mobile library so that they are also engaged in storytelling and book-based events.

Book events include Bounce and Tickle, Book Feast, Tell a Story and Story of the Month. Local partnerships, for example, with countryside rangers, add a richness and diversity to this work. The Helensburgh Writers' Group are a good example of a community partnership and they organise a range of activities, promoted through libraries.

Provision for readers

As readers might anticipate, the authority-wide collection forms a distributed centre of excellence on Gaelic audio and print resources. There has been some funding to support this and the local bookshop in Dunoon has been very helpful in identifying suitable resources. With the direction in Scottish government policy, it is important that specialist collections of this nature continue to be supported and access made as easy as possible.

The other unique area of practice is the provision of a picture reminiscence collection, Pictures to Share, specifically for the use of those suffering from mental health conditions, such as Alzheimer's. This is an inspired initiative and whilst uptake is low, the value to those targeted by the collection is high. There is also an Autism Argyll Collection to assist a small but very important group, whose needs seldom attract the special support.

The library service promoted the Six Book challenge for literacies learners. A small collection of Polish material is proving popular as this is the most widely spoken of the migrant worker languages and the free access to computers attracts workers to libraries. Literacies and ESOL materials are also promoted.

Areas for improvement

- Capacity restricts development of reading activities
- Logistics of stock rotation and transporting request material across the service could be improved with cross-council support

Quality Indicator 4 Learner's experiences

Strengths

- Staff initiatives to support learning
- Mobile libraries visiting schools

The library learning environment

The library provides both formal and informal learning opportunities. The size and layout of many of the buildings means that it is very difficult to keep aside dedicated learning space and, of course, providing staff time which staffing levels are tight is also problematic. Oban Library is very active in looking for opportunities to work with University of the Third Age, local schools and adults seeking IT taster sessions. On other occasions there might be a community heritage and local history focus. The ability of other venues provide learning opportunities is dependent on space and staff capacity to devote time to supporting

individual learners.

Range of learning

There are pockets of good practice where the geography allows and individual librarians show initiative in taking forward learning programmes on a local basis. The area librarian based at Oban had built links with a local primary school resulting in a programme of 6 two hour sessions which focussed on developing a range of learning and information skills to support homework and project work. This was successful but the ability to continue or extend the arrangement is limited. The public also have access to Scotlandspeople training sessions and programmes promoting the use of the electronic subscription and information services. In some cases it is possible to offer 1:1 support for ICT. ICT course content includes an introduction to the internet, search engines, search strategies and using email. In order to extend support further a volunteer IT buddy scheme was introduced at one location but this did not prove successful. The key issue was a lack of reliability and there may also be concerns about the quality of support offered. It would help learners if a learning strategy was developed for libraries with partners and a clear range of provision offered, albeit limited.

Addressing the needs of learners

The Council's Education Resource Service was discontinued around 12 years ago. With no budget to provide resources, support is offered directly to individual children and young people rather than educational establishments or class teachers. At present there is no support for projects but this is an area which could be developed, with minor investment, to enrich the Curriculum for Excellence and learners' experiences. Schools are included in the mobile library routes which brings them into contact with a fresh range of resources. The Culture and Libraries Manager has organised in-service training meetings for school library staff, which offers them some professional support and development as well as occasional contact with each other.

Specialist collections have been brought together for learners with disabilities and their access to learning has improved as a result. Collections are promoted with visits with Careers and local resource centres.

Partnership working in learning

Community Learning and Development colleagues offer classes on a weekly basis to different groups at Oban. This attracts a range of visitors who would not normally use the library. In Helensburgh library, alterations are being made to the building to accommodate CLD colleagues and offer learning support for classes. This is a sensible and productive partnership which is helping to build employability, skills and confidence. There are good relationships with the local careers offices but one of the difficulties faced for the provision of learning in Argyll and Bute is the lack of progression routes which can be offered to the local community. For example, the only degree course offered by Argyll College which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands is in Marine Biology. Partnerships have been developed with groups like the Macdougall Trust and the War and Peace Museum in Oban. There is no museums officer but there are local partnerships with museums, such as the council-run museum in Campbeltown, and the Arts Development Officer in Rothesay.

In conclusion, library development and the exploitation of its value to customers is severely restricted by staff and building capacity. There are a range of issues about transportation of resources between libraries and ICT which could improve the service for the end-user at low cost. Minor investments in marketing and promotion or partnership working across the

council and with the corporate communications team could assist with awareness of library products and services.

Areas for improvement

- *Explore how support for Curriculum for Excellence could be improved*
- *Development of learning strategy for libraries with partners*

2009

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