

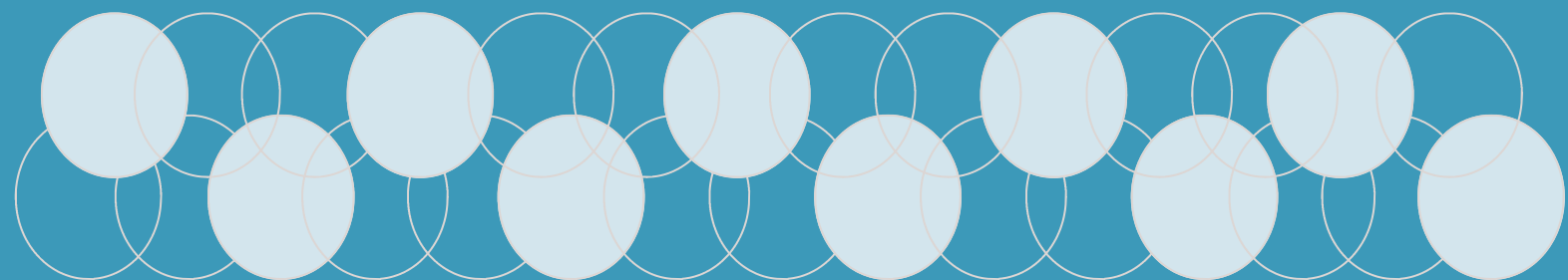


Scottish Library & Information Council



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar self evaluation 2009

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)



Summary

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Library staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus on the ways in which the Library Service supports community and personal participation 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 library staff are working hard to ensure that a range of quality library services are delivered across the authority and, in particular, to engage 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 service has a low profile within the council and also needs to address its involvement in the community planning process. There is also a need for the new Principal Officer: Cultural and Information Services to strengthen planning within the service. Public support for greater investment in resources is clearly expressed in surveys carried out in recent weeks and there is support for improved access to ICT in libraries. The lack of an up-date and comprehensive library management system hampers the service's ability to offer a range of services, which extend provision 24/7 – web renewal and reservation transactions and interoperability with the national entitlement card. It is worth noting that there are a wide range of reading activities offered including the Poet Partner initiative at Sgoil Lioncleit School and Community Library, Bookstart (including Gaelic rhyme), and support for Faclan the Hebridean Book Festival and local reading groups.

Services have strengths which outweigh weakness. The mobile library service is one of the key strengths of the service and accounts for around one third of library issues. 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 2 Personal and community participation	
<i>Planned approaches promoting personal and community development</i>	Weak
<i>Provision of community space for a range of activities</i>	Satisfactory
<i>Supporting, recording and providing access to community heritage and culture</i>	Good

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.

Background

The Western Isles (Outer Hebrides) are situated 30 miles off the North West coast of Scotland, a 150 mile long chain of islands made up of the Isle of Lewis, Harris, the Uists, Benbecula, Barra and smaller outer isles. The most recent mid-year population estimates (2007) for the Western Isles, gives a population of 26,300. The only large town in the Outer Hebrides is Stornoway with approximately 5,740 people. Almost 30% of the total population of the Outer Hebrides, some 8,000 people, live within Stornoway or the immediately vicinity. The remaining population is scattered throughout over 280 townships. The Gaelic culture in the Western Isles is more prominent than in any other part of Scotland. Gaelic is still the language of choice amongst many islanders and around 60% of islanders speak Gaelic, whilst 70% of the resident population have some knowledge of Gaelic. Native islanders in the Western Isles have a strong cultural identity largely stemming from a unique and eventful history. Life in the Western Isles relates directly to the physical environment and geography of the Islands, the crofting system and specifically, to the Gaelic language. The islands suffer from the traditional problems associated with remote, peripheral rural areas: depopulation, high transport costs, lack of employment opportunities and a narrow economic base.

The lead post for the Library Service is a new joint post, since February 2009, of Principal Officer, Cultural and Information Services that also includes Museums and Archaeology. She reports to the Head of Leisure and Learning. There are 28 members of Library staff (but only 14 FTE) of which 5 are professional librarians (including the Principal Officer). They are responsible for Stornoway Library, five Community/School Libraries, the Nicholson Institute School Library, 3 Mobile Libraries and the Education Development Centre Library (school library service) and support for up to 30 school libraries. Two other new appointments have recently been made - Team Leader Youth Services and a new Curator.

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 Comhairle Library staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 2 Community and Personal Participation. Following SLIC-led staff introduction meetings on 5th May, led by the Assistant Director, staff worked together to identify and evaluate evidence about the impact and outcomes and their findings were presented to SLIC. Kathleen Milne, Team Leader Youth Services, accompanied the SLIC team on a verification visit to Argyll and Bute Library Service on 18th May. Keith Beamish, the CEO of Goulburn Valley Regional Library Corporation, Victoria, Australia took part in the staff introduction sessions on 5th May as part of the Being the Best We Can self-evaluation developments in the state of Victoria.

SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, councillors, stakeholders, the public and the management team on 8th and 9th June 2009. Visits were made to Stornoway Library, the Nicolson Institute, Sir E Scott School Community Library in Harris and Shawbost Community Library (5th May). A telephone discussion took place with John Macarthur from the mobile library service and a video-conference with Felicity Bramwell at Sgoil Lionacleit School/Community Library, Benezbula. In addition there were discussions with frontline staff, Bill Houston, Head of Leisure and Learning, Ian Macaulay, Director of Social and Community Services, Councillor Archie Campbell, Councillor Annie Macdonald, Councillor Angus McCormack and a library focus group. The Rhymetime at Stornoway was observed and a heritage talk by the Stornoway Historical Society. There was also a visit to the Local studies and Gaelic language collection.

SLIC would also like to thank all those who participated and in particular to note the very tight timescale within which the evaluation was carried out. This was a remarkable effort from a newly formed team and more than fulfilled requirements. These arrangements helped SLIC to come to a balanced view on the outcome of the self-evaluation.

Strengths

- The mobile library
- Poetry Partner initiative
- Access to a wide range of reading-related activities in very remote rural communities
- Centre of excellence on community heritage and culture with a wide range of Gaelic material

Promoting personal and community development

Previous to the appointment of the new Principal Officer, Cultural and Information Services in February 2009, the post of Chief Librarian was vacant from December 2006 (due to the long term sickness absence and eventual early retirement of the previous incumbent). Team Leaders within the Library Service acted up in addition to their original posts. Inevitably there was a vacuum in terms of strategic planning, and within that time period the Council also implemented the outcomes of the Single Status Review which can have a paralysing impact on planning and service development. As in many rural areas in Scotland the Library Service is highly valued by the residents and their active interest is reflected in this staff comment *'It's more like having 26,000 shareholders'*. The PLQIM process had initiated a couple of customer surveys about services with some very interesting responses which will inform planning.

Reflecting the static position of the Library Service in recent months, there is almost no mention of the Library Service in official papers, except for Community Learning and Development. Discussions are already taking place with key partners, particularly in learning. The islands have the smallest percentage of population in the 18-35 age group in the whole of Scotland. The Library Service has an essential role in promoting education in its widest sense. Developing formal links through Community Planning Partnerships and establishing the underpinning planning as part of the Comhairle's planning process are two key priorities for the Principal Officer, Cultural and Information Services. The public focus group gathered together to respond to the PLQIM verifiers were very supportive and it would be a useful mechanism to inform future developments. The two key public priorities for service improvement are speedier internet access and more reading materials.

Mobile library services are crucial to communities, visiting most parts of islands on a regular basis. The mobile library service is a key strength of the service and accounts for around 30% of all library issues. Almost all of the customers get a doorstep service because of the nature of the community. Careful profiles of the reading interests of each resident on the routes are maintained, which is very helpful for providing a quality services and also for continuity in should relief drivers be asked to cover routes. Many of the customers are so isolated that the mobile library assistant is the only person they speak to for days at a time. The service has also experimented with taking mainstream

events onto the mobile library service. Bookstart in Uist was launched with Gaelic stories and Rhymetime on the Mobile Library. This has been very popular with the community.

Recent savings have meant the non—replacement of a post of library assistant (Stornoway)/ relief driver for the Lewis & Harris Mobiles and it is certain to have an impact on the ongoing service. However, with regards to relief staff, this is consistent with service provision from the Uist Mobile and the Community Libraries as the Comhairle's policy is not to provide relief staff – however the result is that services are suspended in times of holiday and sickness and backroom processes and activities also suffer. This is an important issue for the Comhairle to reconsider.

Providing community space

The main barrier to public access is the lack of a full web-enabled catalogue which is available 24/7 and which offers a range of transactions. The lack of an up-date and comprehensive library management system hampers the services' ability to offer these services, now regarded as standard in the UK, and it will not be interoperable with the national entitlement card. This is a key priority for improvement as many other service developments rest on it. The Comhairle is missing the opportunity to showcase the Gaelic collections to cultural and genealogical tourists and the ex-pat community.

The public focus group praised the Library staff helpfulness and described the Library as *'like a club'*. Two members of the group had started out with staff help to use computers and had progressed successfully to gain ECDL certificates at the local college. Others used the Library Service for personal research or leisure reading. The demise of the local Stornoway Woolworths in the recession has had an impact on the whole town and Library staff have noticed that visitor numbers on Saturdays have declined as people no longer pass the Library on their way to the store. An interesting reflection the social value of the library in rural communities was *'If libraries were to follow Woolworths into disaster, I don't know what I'd do'*.

A good example of the Library reaching out to the community is provided by the Poet Partner scheme, funded by the Scottish poetry Library and Paul Hamlyn Foundation. Poet Partner Pauline Prior-Pitt has started sessions and is already out on the mobile library talking to the public and encouraging a love of poetry. Sessions planned include a poetry slam, a poetry party at Lochmaddy Primary School and sessions for the over 60s.

The logistics of the very remote rural community needs to be considered for all planned events for example, the North Uist Reading group finds it easier to meet at Urachadh Uibhist Community Enterprise Centre than travel to the Library because it is considerably nearer their homes. Providing multiple copies of books for reading groups is not possible given the current levels of funding.

The small communities do have access to a wide range of reading-related activities – including poetry competitions, lunchtime event and the occasional author visit, through Live Literature Scotland funding. There is an appetite for more events, which are always well-received, but this is dependent on securing external funding. Special events are run to support national schemes like World Book Day and National Poetry Day. Shadowing of the Royal Mail, Book Awards has taken place with much success and Primary 5s shared their book recommendations for World Book Day. The Library Service has a representative on the Faclan Book Review competition group. Book promotions take place on a regular basis in the different libraries and a selection include: a partnership with Dyslexia Scotland joint promotion to support dyslexic readers, Beach Reads, the Celtic Festival and BBC events like Springwatch and Autumnwatch. With imaginative use of technology, this could be extended to wider, even more parts of the community.

The Department of Education funds the after school club in the Sir E Scott School Community Library. They also have a paired reading scheme with S6 and younger pupils. Much of the current success of the Library Service rests on the quality of the staff engagement with their community and staff commitment to providing a wide range of services.

Access to community heritage and culture

Stornoway Library is a centre of excellence on community heritage and culture with a wide range of Gaelic material. Gaelic is primarily an oral language but engagement with it is encouraged by the Library Service from an early stage. There is a clear policy to purchase, and preserve all new local history and recorded resources relating to the islands. These include local papers, over 25 community periodicals, photographs, maps, old parochial registers, census returns and international genealogical databases. The Library Service also provides access to school log books, minutes, rental and valuation rolls, Seaforth Muniments and croft histories. Local history sessions take place and are recorded in Stornoway. The Bookstart Rhymetimes are exceedingly popular and include Gaelic rhyme. At the launch of Bookstart, a Gaelic Rhymetime took place on the Uist mobile library which was very well received. The local students studying Gaelic are also most appreciative of the resources and staff support. The Gaelic Collection has been indexed and a new library management system would allow this unique collection to be showcased to a global audience.

The Library Service has helped to support a number of important community events. This includes Sin Thu Fhein, the successful funding bid to the Bòrd na Gaidhlig for an intergenerational project on childhood to start in the Autumn. It documents what it is like growing up in a Gaelic community for future generations. Other examples of involvement include Faclan, the Hebridean Book Festival. Assistance is given to those researching community life, for example the provision of croft maps. The 90th anniversary of the Iolaire Disaster, the worst peacetime shipping disaster in British waters, was marked on 1st January 2009.

Areas for improvement

- Developing formal links through Community Planning Partnerships
- Establishing the underpinning planning as part of the Comhairle's planning process
- New library management system to provide fully web-enabled catalogue available 24/7 with a range of transactions and interoperability with the national entitlement card
- Reconsider mobile library service staffing levels
- Developing ways of showcasing the unique collections to a global audience
- Using technology to extend engagement in reading to remote communities

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