

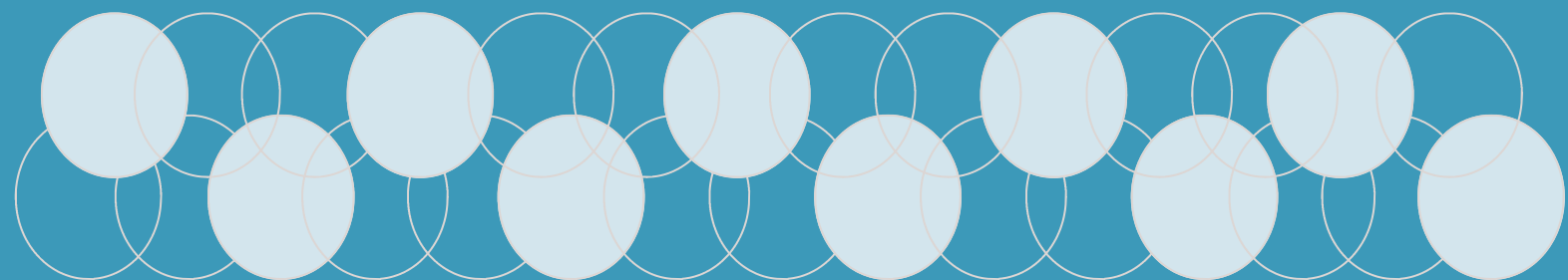


Scottish Library & Information Council



Falkirk Council self evaluation 2009

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)



Summary

The service used the Public Library Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus attention on the ways the Library Service provided access to information and how they organised and used resources and space.

From detailed discussions with staff, visits to libraries and a review of the evidence, it is clear that the Falkirk Council Library Service staff are committed to developing a range of services from a traditional base. The Council have supported the service well, providing funding for a number of new buildings and sustaining funding for library materials and skilled staffing. In addition, staff have accessed funding from external sources to enhance the range of services, bringing on stream wireless internet access, a public library internet network and adaptive technologies to aid access.

Key strengths of the service include the provision of the broadband internet access on regularly refreshed machines, new and refurbished buildings and promotion of libraries through events like the RED Book Award.

As part of the PLQIM, staff have identified a number of areas for improvement and this will form the action plan on which to build better services.

Introduction

Sited in all types of communities and with extensive mobile library service provision, libraries remain one of the few 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

Falkirk Council is a mid-sized unitary authority serving a population of just under 150,000. In Scotland's central belt, the services are delivered over an area of 112 square miles, stretching from Banknock in the West to Blackness in the east. It takes in the port of Grangemouth with its petrochemical industry and Falkirk, which is a sizeable town, with a range of industries, as well as a number of small communities and villages.

At the time of the visit, Falkirk had seven static libraries and two mobile libraries. A new library opened in Polmont and Braes in November 2008. In addition, there is a housebound service for those who cannot easily reach a service point. Currently around 350 people access services in this way. Falkirk have been successful in accessing Public Library Quality Improvement funding for assistance in developing services, including the Accessible Audio Books for the housebound and visually impaired and the flexible e-services wireless internet project.

Audit Scotland's statutory performance indicators show a steady decline in active library borrowing over the last five years, with the number of borrowers as a percentage of the resident population falling from 26.5% in 2002/3 to 20.0% in 07/08. The number of visits to libraries is also falling. Expenditure on materials per thousand of population is the fifth highest in Scotland, according to figures produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and there has been an investment programme in new buildings and improved ICT provision in libraries.

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 Falkirk Council Library staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 1 Access to information and Quality Indicator 6 Organisation and use of resources and space. Following a series of staff focus meetings, led by the Libraries Manager, 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 two external verifiers, Elizabeth Brown, Libraries and Cultural Services Manager, 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, the public and the management team on 29th August 2008. Visits were made to Larbert Library, Falkirk Library, Denny Library and the new-build site at Meadowbank. 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 just outweigh weaknesses
- weak – important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory – major weaknesses

Quality Indicator 1 Access to information

Strengths

- Wireless internet access provision
- Widening access via laptops by the housebound service, Daisy players and access to specialist software
- All public access computers are less than 3 years old and regular upgrade programme is in place

Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources

Reference collections are stocked in all libraries, with the main collections based in Falkirk and Grangemouth. All stock is available via the online catalogue and searches can be made across usual categories, including the notes field. Users can access the Credo reference online subscription services remotely or directly via all Council public access computers. Moodjuice, a website run by Forth valley NHS, is also available. This provision is enhanced by making direct links to the library collections.

Requests from other Falkirk community libraries are free and the full Inter Library Loan service is also available at a charge.

Partnerships have been established to improve the range of specialist information available. A Macmillan Cancer information service operated from Falkirk library as a pilot and this initiative is being evaluated. Information about learning opportunities include Learn@theLibrary, a Book prescription Service and providing study facilities for day release prisoners registered at Forth Valley College. A dedicated telephone line has been installed at Bonnybridge Library for use when the Job Centre is closed. Library Services produce an electronic, weekly Current Awareness Bulletin and a newspaper clippings services for other council services and elected members.

An extensive local history collection is housed at Falkirk Library. This includes a comprehensive collection of local maps and access to both hard copy and microfilm of local newspapers. There is still some work to be done to add index of the Bo'ness Journal. Local history clippings are catalogued. The local history collection is available via the online library catalogue.

Provision for access by disabled people is good, with adapted keyboards, Dolphin software and flexible furniture in all libraries. A number of Daisy players, which are specially designed to make accessing information or reading material more easily accessible by those with visual impairment or with motor skills difficulties. EasyConverter and EasyReader software is available to provide information in alternative formats.

There are collections in minority ethnic languages and work is underway to provide information in different formats to a range of minority groups include the non-English speakers, those with visual and auditory problems and people who have low literacy skills. Falkirk Library Services have been participating in a national study into library provision for new workers from Eastern Europe led by Dundee City Council. A sign interpreter has been used occasionally. The current Service Plan highlights the need for improving information provision for non-mainstream users and a member of staff is currently developing a pictorial method of information delivery for non English readers.

A Principal Librarian is responsible for developing and delivering information services to young people. Initiatives are focused on literacy and reading skills and a dedicated Bookstart officer works across all public libraries. Access to the internet by young people is via a 'walled garden'. It is unclear what the levels of access to the Internet are for children under the age of 12. This contains access to a range of pre-identified websites. Whilst this may appeal to adults, young people should have access to a wider range and there is a need to improve the quality of the ICT services on offer to children. The Service does recognise that there are better, more productive ways to encourage the development of information literacy among children and young people. Plans are being developed by the Young People's Services Team and the e-Services Team to address these issues.

Arrangements for access

Six of the larger libraries are open 54 hours per week, including Saturdays, which is a small increase in recent years. Free access is provided to information sources in all formats (including audio-visual), computer access, book use and enquiries.

Since the People's Network initiative, Falkirk Council has added to the original number of public access computers so that there are over 70 machines in regular use. All the computers are less than 3 years old and access is available via the ICam booking system. The original 2MB connections were found to be insufficient and five now have 100MB connections, one has a 10MB connection and plans are in place to upgrade to a 1GB line to Falkirk Library. The two smallest libraries will still have 2MB lines but this will be sufficient to meet expected needs. Around 20% of the population used library internet access in 2007. Falkirk Library Service launched its wireless internet access service in January 2007 to extend access to its existing provision. Connections are available 24/7. Uptake is good, with many users coming from the migrant workers' group. Interestingly, the demographic profile is different from that anticipated with many older people taking the opportunity of using their laptops in libraries.

Filtering software is used and there have been a number of complaints about denied access to various website. Procedures are in place to release access but it can be frustrating for the public. Whilst reports of problems with access to the library information network are few, the response time of Corporate ICT has not always been at the level required by the library services who are trying to maintain a public service. Response times in the newer facilities appear to be better and, as new facilities are being introduced it is hoped that these issues can be addressed.

Falkirk Council's website was upgraded in 2007 and Library Service pages were improved as a result. Currently around 10% of visits are to library pages. Just over a quarter of reservations are made via the website but only a small percentage of renewals. Online library membership was introduced in 2006. At the time of the visit an upgrade to the web-based version of the Open Galaxy library

catalogue was being tested. Whilst the online catalogue already offers transactions and is part of the CAIRNS web service, an upgrade will pave the way for new developments such as interoperability with the National Entitlement Card.

The mobile library service has two vehicles which make visits on a two weekly timetable, covering 115 stops between them each week, including 35 in Regeneration Priority areas. They carry a small range of information and requests are free of charge. Whilst they do have online access to the Internet or the library management system, they use data capture technology via laptops.

Three weekly visits are made by the housebound service. SLIC provided funding for laptops in 2006 to enable access to Internet sites and the library catalogue. Laptops also provide access to reader development websites and initiatives. This service is supported by dedicated members of the library staff and they provide a personalised service, based on a dialogue with customers.

Staff interaction and support

Under the People’s Network ICT training programme, funding was provided for all staff to be trained to European Computer Driving Licence level. The service decided not to prescribe the qualification. A number of staff have been supported through the qualification, but it is now felt a more structured accreditation should be considered. Plans are in place to undertake this with the Staff Development Team through the corporate Achievement and Personal Development Scheme. If staff are delivering IT taster sessions to the public, then it is important that the quality of their own skills is appropriate and that their responsibilities are reflected in their job descriptions. Discussions with staff indicate that they are sometimes unable to use electronic reference sources as the staff computers are in use for other functions.

Quality Indicator 1

<p>Areas for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add index of Bo’ness Journal to microfilm • Improve the quality of ICT provision for children and young people • Implement plans to accredit ICT skills

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

Quality Indicator 6 Organisation and use of resources and space

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacement of 4 out of 8 libraries, refurbishment of another and a new build library between 2005 and 2012 from Capital Programme • Promotion of reading to children and young people, including the RED Book Award and work with schools • Imaginative projects funded by external partners

Accommodation and facilities

Library Service facilities are managed within the context of the Falkirk Council Asset Management programme. Library Services are responsible for 8 libraries and Victoria Buildings. Four facilities (Grangemouth, Slamanan, Denny and Victoria Buildings) have been identified as being unfit for

future needs and a programme of replacement has been put in place. Some of the problems are structural whilst others concern accessibility.

Falkirk Council has made significant investment in refurbishing and replacing library buildings which are unsuitable for their current and future purpose. This will lead to the replacement of four out of eight libraries (Bonnybridge, Larbert, Grangemouth and Denny), the refurbishment of Bo'ness and a new library at Polmont between 2005 and 2012. All library buildings are DDA compliant.

The new build libraries opened at Bonnybridge, Larbert and Meadowbank are bright, attractive and spacious, allowing ample room for library activities and events, including ICT access, community meetings, children's activities and quiet study. The refurbished Bo'ness provides a flexible and attractive environment within a beautiful, old building. Regeneration programme are offering the opportunity to address buildings issues at Denny and Grangemouth by 2012. A public consultation in Slamanan some years ago showed that the public preferred the current location, however the building is small and inflexible. Falkirk Central Library was extended some years ago to provide additional accommodation and it has been acknowledged that it does lack convenient public parking. Efforts were made to ensure that library closures were kept to a minimum to avoid disruption to services.

Organisation and promotion of resources and services

The improved library facilities and mobile services offer good access to the range of resources. According to the CIFPA Public Library statistics for 2006/07, Falkirk is the fifth highest spending Council in Scotland on library materials per 1000 population. Library adults users in Falkirk have access to higher than the Scottish average books and audio-visual items per 1000 population according to Audit Scotland. Falkirk Council is the lead authority for the tendering and contract of book supply in a consortium with Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils. This co-operative approach is in line with best value. Online resources are purchased as part of a Scottish consortium co-ordinated by SLIC through JISC Collections.

Library Services have a small budget of £6000 for promotion and publicity. Press coverage of events, particularly through the Falkirk Herald, is good. The Council circulates a News Bulletin to households and library events and initiatives are reported. Giving talks and presentations at local groups and societies is part of the job descriptions of all professional members of staff. Efforts are made to promote the Library Service at outside events, such as Children's Festivals, through partnerships with schools and a biennial readers' Day is held at an external venue. Bookstart and the RED Book Award also attract publicity and are used to promote reading, culture, and library services. In particular, the RED Book Award is featured widely in the education and library circles and is an excellent event for attracting new readers from primary schools and encouraging literacy and cultural engagement.

A 'Passport' system is currently being developed with the local library partnership, Libraries in Central Scotland to widen access and to help satisfy specialised information enquiries. There are significant potential benefits for co-operative working of this nature and this is to be encouraged.

Deployment of staff

Staffing levels are just above the Scottish average per 1000 population and there is a very good ratio of professional staff. In the larger libraries, professional staff have responsibility for the management and operation of that library, with devolved resource budgets. A Policy and Procedures Manual is in place and there is a programme of regular monitoring to ensure that quality remains high across the council area. As with many library services, there are a high percentage of part-time workers and the Senior Librarian at Falkirk Library, who acts as co-ordinator for staffing, is looking at ways of streamlining extra-staffing opportunities. The budget allows for overtime and casual employment to ensure that absence for training, sickness or other reason does not result in closure of any service point. Additional cover is provided during the summer months to help with holiday cover.

In 2007 Library Services undertook a Best Value exercise to consider the mobile library service and to ensure that hours, routes and processes were appropriate. It is anticipated that this will progress to a full Review.

The Single Status Agreement outcomes were implemented in November 2006 and did have a detrimental effect on staff morale. An immediate appeal was lodged for library assistants and, as a result, no member of staff has lost income. The outcome of some appeals is not yet known so support for individuals from management is continuing.

In comparison to other similar services, there appeared to be little evidence of performance monitoring and impact assessment. Falkirk has a high number of professional staff. Reviewing staff deployment should be a priority for Falkirk with the aim of releasing staff time to spend supporting reader development, learner support and building up local partnerships. The need to maintain high levels of customer satisfaction should underpin the review.

Use of funding

Library Services has an allocation of the annual revenue funding which is fixed and has an inflationary percentage increase. As previously mentioned, professional staff have responsibility for resource budgets in individual libraries. Librarians monitor these budgets through the library management system’s acquisition software. The use of evidence based stock management techniques would help to monitor the effectiveness of stock selection.

There has been sustained support for the Capital programme from the Council over a period of 7 years. This has provided not only the very attractive new build libraries but also stock purchase costs and fittings and fixtures. The replacement of computers has also provided for. Falkirk Library Services have been successful in applying for and delivering projects using external funding and this has greatly assisted the modernisation of the service, in particular, with the introduction of assistive technologies and wi-fi. As well as the Scottish Government’s Public Library Quality Improvement Fund and SLIC Innovation and Development grants, a Paul Hamlyn Foundation grant is funding a reader-in-Residence at Polmont Young Offenders Institution.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that planned improvements are made to Grangemouth and Denny libraries
- Support development and implementation of ‘Passport’ scheme
- Review and monitor staffing deployment
- Review mobile library services and implement recommendations
- Use of evidence based stock management
- Review staffing deployment

Quality Indicator 6 Organisation and use of resources and space	
<i>Accommodation and facilities</i>	<i>Very good</i>
<i>Organisation and promotion of resources and services</i>	<i>Good</i>
<i>Deployment of skilled staff</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>
<i>Use of funding</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>

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