

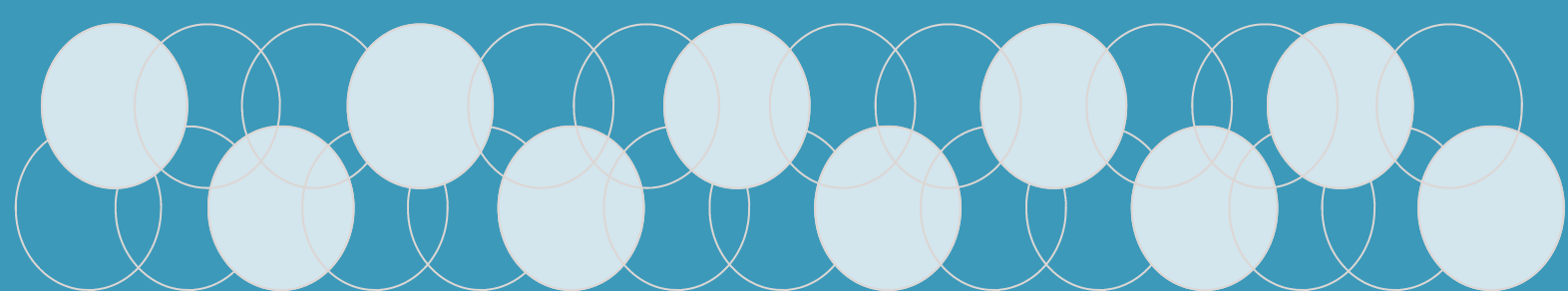


Scottish Library & Information Council



Midlothian Council self evaluation 2009

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)



Summary

Midlothian Council library staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus on the ways in which the library service meets readers' needs through its activities and resources and organises its space and resources.

From detailed discussions with staff, 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 provide extended reading choices for the public. The number of issues is increasing, the percentage of the population who are active borrowers is showing a steady increase and the number of visitors to libraries is growing.

Good use has been made of national opportunities to improve stock and training, with support for both the Big Plus in Libraries initiative and the national Reader Development Network. Literacy development is linked into well established local partnerships. Promotion and display work is good and the new library at Penicuik shows what can be done in flagship developments. Other libraries like Roslin and Newtongrange were more traditional buildings but had equally high aspirations to promote stock and the front-of-house display of Scottish titles was good practice.

All libraries are purpose built and general maintenance is good, however, some of the fittings and furnishing are looking tired. Given the increasing uptake by the public, the Council should consider an on-going programme of upgrade to match the ambitions of the service. The application of the performance factor in the annual budget to this well-used frontline service is an anomaly compared to other Council frontline services and is hindering the service from development.

Services had important strengths which are having a positive impact. The offer to readers is rich and varied, with author visits, reading groups, writing groups a Healthy Reading scheme, a wiki of children's activities to share ideas and Skills for Midlothian business reading collection. The other quality indicator reviewed, Organisation and Use of Resources and Space, has key strengths including the well-developed LiveIT branding, staff participation in stock selection, participation in purchasing consortium and staff training matrix.

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

Midlothian Council covers an area on the south border of Edinburgh. The authority has a population of around 80,000, making it one of the smaller councils in Scotland. Historically the area relied heavily on coal-mining and a number of small manufacturing industries, and the demise of these industries significantly worsened the financial and employment base of the area and its local council. The majority of Midlothian's workers are now employed outside the district. There remain a number of areas of high social deprivation, which have been partially balanced by an influx of white-collar workers who commute to Edinburgh for employment.

The Library Service has 10 branch libraries and 60 staff (37 full time equivalent), very few of whom are professional librarians, and about half of the total staff are employed on a part time basis, with a heavy reliance on a pool of 'casual' supply staff. This can lead to disproportionate impact when making even small budgets cuts. In common with many library authorities in Scotland, there have been repeated cuts over many years in both staffing levels and resources budgets. These have had major impacts on the range and quality of the services that Midlothian Libraries are able to provide.

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. Midlothian Library Staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs and Quality Indicator 6 Organisation and use of resources and space. Following SLIC-led staff introduction meetings, 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.

Working with the assistance of an external verifier, Frances Roberts, Service Development Co-ordinator, South Lanarkshire Council, SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, stakeholders, the public and the management team on 26th May 2009. Visits were made to Penicuik Library, Roslin Library, and Newtongrange Library.

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

Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs

Strengths

- Staff participation in stock selection
- Access to a wide range of reading-related activities
- Children's activity wiki
- *Skills for Business Midlothian*
- Promotion of Scottish materials

Identification of reading needs

The Collection Management Policy is used as a basis for stock management decision making. Staff are involved in buying stock on a rotation basis which develops their skills and knowledge and allows for local input. This brings a fresh approach to purchasing different areas of stock and results in a time efficient use of staff, as well as providing leadership opportunities. The process is co-ordinated by the Principal Librarian. Local partnership working with East Lothian Council and Scottish Borders Council has resulted in a consortium purchasing arrangement which supports Best Value. The number of borrowers as a percentage of the population fell steadily for a number of years, and this may reflect the falling investment in bookstock, but has recently shown a 2.5% increase. This may be attributed to the investment of £250k in bookstock made by the Council at the time of the opening of the new library at Penicuik. The investment in the new library in a convenient co-location has contributed to the increase in the number of visits per 1000 population. The number of members across all service points has increased by 31,000. The number of issues per borrower has fallen more steeply, possibly reflecting the narrower choice.

Stock Team meetings are minuted and shared with staff. Staff are encouraged to identify gaps in stock. Stock is rotated every six months. In all the Rotation Plans items will circulate once ending up at the branch they started from and becoming part of the stock there (with the exception of Talking Books). This refreshes stock available locally at relatively low cost. There is an opportunity to integrate the use of management data from the library management system to inform future stock selection and to move towards more evidence-based stock management, although this has implications for staff time. There is a small charge for requests which are taken from the public. There has been a small increase in the number of requests in the last year and, interestingly, requests made over the web have shown a continued rise, now accounting for 15% of all requests. Members of Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian public libraries may also borrow books held in Napier University and there is a £2 charge for inter library loans. This offers wider choice and helps to support the lifelong learners in the community.

The public feedback survey carried out in 2007/08 indicates public concern about the levels of investment in stock. There is demand for wider range and choice. For example, the stock of talking books, an expensive format that meets the need of both the visually impaired user and the wider population is the subject of complaints. Other feedback on a similar theme relates to general collections, historic fiction and jazz collections.

Choice of activities and resources

A wide range of activities relating to reading are organised by the service but only 3 libraries have meeting spaces. Activities in 2008/09 increased by 14% and attendances have grown by 25%. Public support for the type of activities run by the service is reflected in their turn-out and feedback from the public is supportive and offers constructive ideas for improvements. Branch and Service Reports are circulated on a regular basis and show a wider range and diversity of reading activities for a small authority. Some of the events support local studies including the BBC supported Remembrance 90, and Homecoming. Others relate to class visits, storytelling, displays, after school clubs,

Chatterbooks, and MALANI ESOL sessions. There are reading groups at Bonnyrigg, Howgate, Dalkeith and Penicuik, and writers' groups at Penicuik and Dalkeith. Tyne and Esk Writers coordinate a Scottish Arts Council funding award which supports local writing. With so many events, there is a need to improve co-ordination of events, through the Reader Development Co-ordinator and Stock Management Team. Bookstart Rhymetime sessions are held at Bonnyrigg, Penicuik, Dalkeith, Danderhall, Mayfield and Newtongrange. Attendances are roughly 1800 in the course of a year and a total of 231 people, including 142 children attended events to support Bookstart in Scotland Day. Figures are kept recording the new library memberships generated as a result and these are steady.

The Library Service makes a conscious effort to consider its 'offer' to children and young people. The Children's and Schools Library Services have been particularly badly affected by the loss of professional posts. At present there is good uptake of Bookstart sessions, the Summer Reading Challenge, Chatterbooks and class visits. There is a need to increase the number of children taking part in events and integrate activities held throughout the year into a consistent 'offer'. This all needs to be supported with staff time and funding for activities but it will help to deliver increased literacy, achievement in schools and the single outcome agreement. For example, there is a potential partnership with local school librarians to join plan and run events across library services.

Another piece of excellent practice is the children's activity wiki which shares ideas, tips and techniques for storytelling and Bookstart sessions <http://mcstorytelling.pbworks.com/> This is full of practical ideas for craft activities, colour-in sheet templates, suggested books, rhymes, songs and stories. This is a very good way of sharing ideas and building a community of practice.

A partnership between Midlothian Library Service, Midlothian Wellbeing Interventions Network, chooselife and NHS Lothian has launched *Healthy Reading Midlothian*. The collections are available in all libraries and Orchard centre in Bonnyrigg. The scheme also includes a prescription element in partnership with local GPs. This has been launched recently and feedback is being monitored.

Skills for Business Midlothian is an innovative local partnership which received EU funding to increase skills in the local workforce. The partnership includes *new leaf* Adult Guidance and Development Service, Midlothian Voluntary Action, MALANI, the Library Service, Jewel and Esk Valley College and Essential HR, a subsidiary of Midlothian Enterprise Trust. The Library Service's involvement includes the use of library facilities and ICT, and a special collection of reading material. This seeks to support workers, supervisors, managers and anyone in work or those looking for work who wishes to improve their skills. This is excellent practice and helps support skills development and economic regeneration.

Provision for readers

The mobile library service operates on a 2 weekly cycle, making about 75 stops for those who cannot travel to a static branch. The Library Service provides a Home Service for those who are not able to visit the library independently. There is also a Deposit Collection service for those in care homes. The profiles of the Home Service readers are gathered and updated regularly and the users of the Deposit Collections are asked for feedback in alternate years. A survey of Eastern Europeans living in Midlothian was carried out with MALANI, the Midlothian Adult Literacy and Numeracy Initiative, with whom the Library Service has a good working partnership. This shows very small numbers and demand is for computer facilities, limited demand for English language learning material, children's books and general information. The Bookstart Co-ordinator recently visited the Gypsy Traveller site with packs and is intending to hold Rhymetimes on site.

Midlothian Library Service has a strong focus on Scottish and local materials. They recently hosted the launch of *Images of Scotland: Midlothian* published by Tempus Publishing. The images from the book come from the local studies collections. Local libraries have a good collection of material by Scottish writers and these books are promoted at the front of house, giving Scottish writing the same priority as in high-street bookshops. Scottish and local authors are highlighted by categorisation of stock but this could be improved. The reader development training carried out nationally could be cascaded more widely to good effect and help to improve displays and promotional work. All staff have been trained by MALANI in literacy spotting but refresher training might now be appropriate.

Areas for improvement

- Introduce more evidence based stock management approaches
- Continue to improve provision for children and young people
- Improve co-ordination, publicity and marketing of events
- Cascade reader development training
- Continue to ensure literacy awareness skills are current

Quality Indicator 6 Organisation and use of resources and space

Strengths

- Consortium purchase arrangements with East Lothian Council and Scottish Borders Council
- Promotions like *Survivors: Guide for teachers*
- Out of hours use
- Live IT branding
- Staff participation in stock selection
- Skills available through partnership

Accommodation and facilities

The Library Service has 10 branch libraries, a mobile library and a specialist local history unit. Only three libraries have public meeting spaces which restricts activities. Each service point produces an annual service plan, which is reviewed on a 6 monthly basis. The buildings visited were in good repair but where refurbishments had been carried out, there was a significantly higher quality of environment for the public to use. Penicuik is a new, purpose built facility co-located with the local leisure facilities and integrates the best in library design and layout features. The building is being put forward for a UK library buildings award. Roslin Library is an example of what can be done on a smaller scale to improve facilities and enhance the visitor experience. Feedback from the public demonstrated that the small local service is highly valued and the Council should consider how it plans to upgrade existing facilities which are used regularly by around 60% of the public. Fire risk assessments are carried out annually and health and safety manuals are maintained at all service points. The service would benefit from health and safety risk assessments should be introduced for all buildings. A few of the facilities have issues about public parking, toilet facilities and DDA access.

There is good use of library buildings outside library opening hours for events, author visits, training, bookings by partners and elected members and community groups. This helps to alleviate the shortage of public meeting space. There are 4 rooms which can be booked for quiet study.

Organisation and promotion of resources and services

As mentioned under QI 3, the Library Service uses its Collection Management Policy as its overarching tool. There is a potential for greater use to be made of the library management system to extract information about borrowing trend and reading interests to inform stock selection. Although this creates work, there is already some evidence from services using the approach of its effectiveness.

A Marketing Strategy has been developed by the Library Services and this is supported by an annual Marketing Plan. This is a recent initiative and needs to be implemented and monitored. The *Live IT* brand is particularly strong and well used. A new website has been developed and it is more user-friendly and colourful than previous versions. There is good promotion of the electronic reference subscription services from the homepage and any increase in usage, as a result, will be of interest to other local authorities. Better use could be made of the Council Intranet to promote services to colleagues in Midlothian Council.

A leaflet *Survivors: Guide for teachers* helps to promote the Library Service to staff and encourages the uptake of lending services, class visits, mobile library visits to the local schools, the Schools Library Service and the use of online information resources.

There is good consultation with communities using a range of different tools – mystery shoppers, quarterly user surveys, user group surveys and use of the Citizen's Panel, as well as customer comments and the Corporate Feedback Scheme. All the consultations feedback useful information and there needs to be a plan, linked to funding, for acting on customer suggestions This all focuses on existing users and it would be helpful to move into non-user consultation to explore how the service might be developed to meet the needs of those it is currently not appealing to.

Deployment of skilled staff

There is a high level of product knowledge amongst staff. Staff training records, briefings, procedures manuals and the Library Training Plan help to ensure that skills are kept up to date. Customer Care Standards are in place and good customer care skills are instilled in staff from their induction programme onwards. The use of supply staff means that there can often be different staff in branches so it would be helpful to review the training programme for the supply staff to ensure that the current high quality of service does not slip. The public feedback relating to the service they receive is full of praise for staff, who they regard as an important part of local community. Training is costly in terms of attendance at courses and in terms of making time available for staff briefing and awareness sessions but it is a worthwhile investment in terms of improved customer service.

Savings required by the Council over the years are beginning to have a impact on service delivery. As mentioned elsewhere there is no Children and Young People's Service specialist and there are about 150 hours of gaps in staffing. This is filled by using a large register of supply staff. Some of the permanent staff provide flexibility by working additional hours, however, there comes a point when the quality of the frontline service suffers. The Library Service needs to consider how it can contribute to overall Council efficiencies by using technology to cut down staff time taken on routine tasks.

The small size of the Council allows for more personal and informal co-operation between departments, such as with the Community Learning & Development section. Community Learning and development provide tutors for classes. The Library Service has built up some very productive partnerships, with organisations such as MALANI, and Tyne and Esk Writers and this gives access to a wide range of skills beyond the library workforce. Other partnerships include Citizens Advice Bureau who run regular advice sessions, local history organisations who provide knowledge and expertise and the part-time Bookstart Co-coordinator which is jointly funded with money from the Early Years Partnership and MALANI.

Use of funding

The Council's Strategic Property Review was last completed in 2007 and highlights buildings which are unfit for purpose. Specifications have been prepared for a new Library HQ and Records centre and Mayfield Library, Dalkeith Library/Arts Centre/Heritage Hub/Registrar's Office. Co-location and shared services are important in small authorities and it is good that the Library projects have secured capital funding through the corporate capital plan. Thought still needs to be given to libraries which are still fit for purpose but which would benefit from refurbishment.

Staff are consulted on the allocation of the materials budget and this is monitored via regular stock meetings. The Maintenance budget spend is agreed with the Maintenance Manager. There would be a benefit to involving Senior Staff with regular reports on finance to develop their skills in financial management.

Local partnership working with East Lothian Council and Scottish Borders Council has resulted in a consortium purchasing arrangement which supports Best Value. The contract was successfully tendered for by Bertrams and is for a 3 year period with a 1 year extension. Supplier selection was also considered but the rotation of staff in stock selection teams has proved an imaginative solution

to balancing the needs of local, professional input and the drain on staff time to include all staff select across the whole stock.

One of the key pressures on the Service is the need to deliver a 5% performance factor annually, which has over the years resulted in a £50k drop in budget. It would appear that other frontline services are not part of this performance target. The link between the allocation of resources and the performance factor is not sustainable in libraries and needs to be addressed, or it will inevitably lead to a reduction in library posts, hours or service points.

Areas for improvement

- Develop plan for acting on customer feedback
- Investigate ways of consulting non-users
- Review ways in which administration can be further reduced through use of technology
- Work with Council to reduce dependency on supply register
- Disaggregating the performance factor and allocation of resources in frontline services

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