

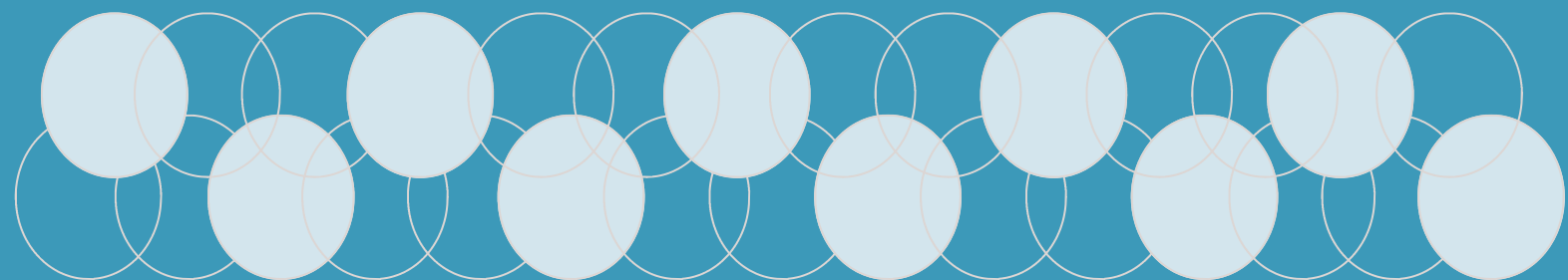


Scottish Library & Information Council



Stirling Council self evaluation 2009

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)



Summary

Stirling Council library staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus on the ways in which the library service provides access to information through its resources and services. Whilst not the original intention of the visit, the peer verifiers also assessed the ways in which learners are supported.

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 strongly committed to developing a range of services and publicising them well in the community. A wide range of productive partnerships have been formed which have resulted in new learning offers through libraries, Community Learning and Development, Forth Valley College and direct to communities such as HMP Cornton Vale, in areas of isolation and deprivation and to socially vulnerable groups. The installation of a wifi network, self issue and new technology has widened access to information. A recent project funded by the Scottish Government's Public Library Quality Improvement Fund has seen staff skills developed and new taster sessions will be offered to the public as a result.

In both indicators, services had important strengths which are having a positive impact. Key strengths include the provision of broadband internet via wireless technology on regularly refreshed machines, use of evidence based stock management techniques, partnerships and support for staff skills. Communication and marketing of services and reading to users is very good. Use of the media is a key strength but the introduction of wikis in regular use for communication, one for Stirling read 2.0, one for staff and one for the travel group based at Bridge of Allan, is effective and imaginative.

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 areas for service development and the costs and logistical challenges of delivering services in very remote, rural parts of Scotland. SLIC's main concern is the diminishing capacity within the management team to continue with innovative projects as the staffing is reduced.

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>	Very Good
<i>Arrangements for access</i>	Very Good
<i>Staff interaction and support</i>	Good

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

Stirling Council area covers 800 square miles, including both the northern part of the Central Lowlands and the southern Highlands. It has a population of 84,700 and has the highest net population growth of any local authority in Scotland. There is a significant, low population density in the rural areas.

The library service has 16 community libraries, 2 mobile libraries, and a central headquarters. The distance between Library HQ in Stirling and community libraries varies from 3 to 38 miles. 57% of the 80 members of staff are job-share or part-time. At the time of the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix, the service was in transition and key changes in personnel were being made.

Audit Scotland's statutory performance indicators show a steady increase in the number of occasions the public access internet terminals are used, although this is still below the Scottish average. The number of learning centre users and learning access point users is steady and when looked at as a percentage of the population, the figure is close to the Scottish average. Figures published by CIPFA up to 2007/8 show that the number of library issues was falling, as in many other library services across Scotland, this trend has subsequently been reversed in Stirling. Stirling is still ranked 3rd in terms of number of issues per 1000 population.

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. Stirling Council Library Staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 1 Access to information. As a result of the discussions and wide range of information provided, the verifiers also agreed to make an assessment of Quality Indicator 4 Learners experiences. Staff worked together to identify and evaluate evidence about the impact and outcomes and their findings were presented to SLIC.

SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, a wide variety of partners, the public and the management team on 5th June 2009. Visits were made to the Central Library in Stirling, Bridge of Allan Library, Bannockburn Library and Fallin Library.

SLIC would also like to thank all those who participated. Time was spent talking to members of the public 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

- Provision of broadband internet using wireless technology
- All IT equipment is regularly refreshed and less than 4 years old
- Award winning website with fully web enabled catalogue
- Training support for staff
- Use of evidence based stock management
- Use of wikis for planning, special groups and communication
- Librarytxt

Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources

Reference and information resources are available in all libraries. Subscriptions to online electronic services include Encyclopedia Britannica, KnowUK, NewsUK, and SCRAN. These services are available online and can be accessed 24/7 remotely using the library membership number. As in many library services, uptake of online subscription services is lower than the service would like, so ways of increasing use is an area for improvement. Libraries also provide community information. The Community Information database is available online and has over 1000 clubs and organisations. Currently there is no mechanism for partners to update their own information and this is in development. Each library has a Community Diary of local events and activities. Tourist information is well stocked. The Library service has guidelines to manage the requests to display posters, to ensure quality and maintain attractive notice boards. Solus promotes information direct to the plasma screens in libraries. The Library Service's promotion and marketing is already of a very high standard and the next stage is to push out community information, electronic resources, library updates, etc into the direct and targeted marketing channels and to empower users to upload their own data.

Resources are managed through the library management system and evidence based stock management software provides information to closely match the interests of readers and the supply of new stock. This approach provides a close match between readers' interests and stock, keeping a balance between fiction and non-fiction and specialist stock for young people. Evidence based stock management has been successful in reducing redundant (dead) stock and the attractiveness of the stock on the shelves to borrowers is a significant contributory factor in the current 9% increase in issues.

The Library Service provides information to the public on behalf of partners. Some of the strengths of this provision include the Book Prescription Scheme, Careers Information, Keep Well Stirling and the Stirling and District Association for Mental Health surgeries and information about a wide range of learning opportunities. A new library facility has been opened in the Raploch Community Campus to support residents in this area of multiple deprivation. There are also extensive local and family history resources and the specialist staff are professionally acknowledged experts, however knowledge transfer and succession planning should be addressed. The Library and Archives Manager has responsibility for the Archives Service and this close working provides additional opportunities for joint projects.

The Library Service website won an award in 2006. It is maintained by library staff and has many interactive features. The public access computers were upgraded in 2008 and are part of a rolling programme. Technology is well used by staff, who are using a wiki to discuss the current re-structuring plans. They have also instigated two wikis for use by the public – one for a range of readers, some of whom are housebound or have visual impairment, and one for a group based at

Bridge of Allan Library who are interested in travel. The wiki format is a useful electronic tool for gathering community information and views, and making them available to others.

Another innovative way of communicating with users is the introduction of librarytxt, originally aimed at young people but now being promoted to a far wider audience. As well as receiving information, there will also be a chance to take part in competitions, surveys and have your say by txt voting. Registered users can also renew their items on loan. The public can sign up via the website or in community libraries.

The Central Library is the named European Public Information Centre and Scottish Parliament Information Centre. The demand for access to print material is low, in keeping with national trends, as web access is readily available. Council and external agency information is also available and staff have noticed a decrease in the number of enquiries about the Council, possibly because the public are confident to access the information independently. Nine national newspapers and 4 Sunday papers are stocked; what is remarkable in Stirling is the range of high quality community newspapers. These are produced to a high standard and library staff are frequently involved in providing information and news items for them.

Arrangements for access

Since the People's Network initiative, Stirling Council has refreshed the original public access computers, renewing the equipment within the last 2 years. Bridge of Allan and Bannockburn libraries have dedicated learning suites but also offer drop-in access. A Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement Fund grant enabled the installation of wireless access in all libraries and this has increased capacity. Laptops are also available for loan by the services, increasing access for learners, the housebound and for teaching. The award-winning website facilitates 24/7 access to resources on the library catalogue and information via the online subscription services.

Staff interaction and support

All staff undertake information work with a range of initiatives supporting literacy development, ESOL, ASK Scotland reference service and learning. They have been trained to European Computer Driving Licence Standard. Budgetary pressures have resulted in a review of management posts and the impact of this has yet to be seen on the collective skills set and knowledgebase.

Staff interaction in supporting the development is particularly strong in learning, which will be more fully covered under QI 4. The staff training programme is under revision and the Diploma in Applications of ICT in Libraries is to be rolled out shortly. A staff wiki has been created to help with communication and to identify staff expertise.

Areas for improvement

- Council templates on websites restrict presentation and development
- Web-enable online booking service
- Continue to promote uptake of online subscription services
- Introduce online form for Community Information database
- Stock management policy revision, incorporating impact of evidence based stock management
- Continue to train staff in content of online resources

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences

Strengths

- The range of effective learning partnerships, including Forth Valley College, HMP Cornton Vale and Adult Learning and Partnership
- learndirect Scotland quality kitemark for learning centres
- Stirling Read 2.0 addressing the needs of readers who cannot readily access library premises for a variety of reasons
- Learn @ the Library
- Reader-in-Residence at HMP Cornton Vale
- Improving the learners' experience in Stirling

The library learning environment

Dedicated learning suites with full ICT provision are provided at Bridge of Allan and Bannockburn. The newly refurbished Killin Library has 6 computers and the library staff have made arrangements for access by a tutor and small class groups when the library is not open to the public. Bannockburn Library learning centre has learndirect scotland status and the library service plans to apply for Learndirect Scotland status for Killin and Bridge of Allan libraries. Learndirect Scotland have indicated that they would be supportive of such an application.

The installation of a wi-fi network, self issue and new technology, as part of a Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement initiative in 2006/7 has widened access to learning opportunities. This has balanced demand for computer access and the need to be able to book times for groups of learners.

Stirling Read 2.0 was a Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement Fund 2007/8 project which identified 5 vulnerable groups who could not readily access their library to discuss their reading experiences. These groups included: housebound, speakers of English as a Second Language, citizens with literacies needs, young parents and disabled citizens and to facilitate online discussion and interaction between these groups through a Wiki. The impact of the project continues to be assessed but it is clear that the project widened the readers' experiences, gave them opportunities for greater online interaction and confidence increased.

Range of learning

A wide range of productive partnerships have been formed which have resulted in new learning offers through libraries, the Adult Learning Team, Forth Valley College and direct to communities such as HMP Cornton Vale, in areas of isolation and deprivation and to socially vulnerable groups. A recent project funded by the Scottish Government's Public Library Quality Improvement Fund has seen staff skills developed and new taster sessions will be offered to the public as a result.

Stirling have a wide offer to learners from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded Reader-in-Residence project at HMP Cornton Vale to the induction of new library members. There is a widely held view amongst the team that working with socially vulnerable groups can build confidence, self esteem and basic skills, which over time can see learners move into more formal and challenging learning. The Reader-in-Residence has completed a range of projects including running book groups, diary groups which record thoughts and experiences, a *Quick Reads* basic skills group, poetry group, storybook mums who record stories for their children and finally a group who use specialist software to transform their stories into a comic strip format. The group is currently working on a cookbook.

In 2008/9 a third, successful application to the Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement Fund entitled *Improving the learners' experience in Stirling*, sought to offer additional learning opportunities for citizens in partnership with Forth Valley College. As a result, opening hours were increased in a remote rural library which is an important community hub and the number of computers available for learning was doubled. ICT beginners were targeted and new SQA qualifications in Internet Safety form part of the suite of learning. Learners are invited to attend 3

sessions: Using a Mouse, Setting up an Email account and Finding what you are looking for on the internet. Feedback is extremely positive, some of the learners had no previous computing experience and have been delighted with the progress they have made in a short space of time.

The learning range builds on many other activities which Stirling and other libraries are involved in Scotlandspeople, the Scottish genealogical database, family and local history classes, Bookstart, class visits, work with colleagues in Archives, to name but a few. Frontline training in reader development is also underway with a number of branch staff have completed the course.

Addressing the needs of learners

Improving the learners' experience in Stirling was a concerted effort to address accessibility issues. The introduction of the People's Network did see some adaptive technology introduced but it was clear to library managers that a fresh initiative was required to update and extend the existing range of the equipment and software and to refresh staff skills. The new funding provided a fresh opportunity for awareness-raising with the public.

Stirling worked closely with the Adult Learning Partnership, SLIC and Learning Connections to provide additional support for literacy learners through the Big Plus in Libraries and BBC Raw. Staff have benefited from ITALL training which helps improve their skills working in this area. ESOL learners were included as one of the groups in Stirling Read 2.0 and participants came for around the globe.

Partnership working in learning

Fife Council developed a range of learning for library users in 2006/7 with the Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement Fund called TasteIT and they agreed supported staff training. Over time learners can progress from TasteIT sessions to other learning offered by the library service, particularly Learn@ the Library online learning provision offered in partnership with Forth Valley College. This is achieved by including demonstrations of Learn @ the Library as part of TasteIT sessions and by inviting Forth Valley College staff to meet with learners and discuss their learning needs.

Learn @ the Library enables library members to sign up for a wide range of learning courses completely free of charge. Learners then have access to the college's virtual learning environment which offers the opportunity of learning at a pace, time and place of choice. Courses on offer include: garden design, childcare, cookery, mathematics and small business skills, as well as computer-related courses. These help build skills and also well-being.

As part of the visit, a range of partners came to speak to SLIC. The support demonstrated the high value which partners place on the library as trusted and effective colleagues and included the Stirling and District Association for Mental Health who described a pilot programme of information surgeries in libraries.

Areas for Improvement

- Sustainability for initiatives such as the Reader-in-Residence
- Offer more learning opportunities on online databases
- Extend access to new user induction programme
- Continue to build staff skills in this area

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