

Community Engagement and Wellbeing

222 Upper Street, London, N1 1XR

Report of: Assistant Director of Community Learning and Libraries

Meeting of: Employment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee

Date: 12 October 2023

Ward(s): All

Subject: Libraries Quarter 1 2023-24 Performance Report

1. Synopsis

- 1.1. The council has in place a suite of corporate performance indicators to help monitor progress in delivering the outcomes set out in the council's Corporate Plan. These indicators are in the process of being refreshed, with a view to more accurately measuring libraries' contribution to strategic council priorities and will be drawn up following the Community Spaces Review, implementing the recommendations from it. Progress on key performance measures is reported through the council's Scrutiny Committees on a quarterly basis to ensure accountability to residents and to enable challenge where necessary.
- 1.2. This report sets out Quarter 1 2023-24 progress against targets for those performance indicators that fall within the Library Service outcome area, for which the Employment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee has responsibility.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To review the performance data for Q1 2023/24 for measures relating to Library Services.

3. Background

The performance measures covered by this report are largely based on the Corporate Performance Indicator set, which is refreshed annually. The performance indicators for the library service are:

Number of library visits

Number of library issues (physical and online)

Number of active members – i.e. someone who has used their library ticket in the past 12 months

In addition to these Corporate Performance indicators, this report shall include data/feedback for the following:

- PC usage
- Library activities – number of attendees at events
- User feedback

4 Quarter 1 2023-24 Performance Update

PI No.	Indicator	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Yearly trend-line	Better to be	2023/24 Q1	2023/24 Q2	2023/24 Q3	2023/24 Q4	In-year trend	Notes on measure (cumulative / quarterly / rolling), targets (annual / quarterly / longer-term & rationale) and benchmarking
Empowering strong and supportive communities														
CEW1	Number of library visits	NEW	NEW	NEW	342,384 (Q3 & Q4 only)	766,000		↑	202,394					Target 800,00 per annum
CEW2	Number of Library issues (online)	NEW	NEW	NEW	NEW	253,644		↑	62,469					Target 256,180 (1% increase on 2022/23) per annum
CEW3	Number of Library issues (physical)	NEW	NEW	NEW	NEW	515,227		↑	125,800					Target 520,379 (1% increase on 2022/23) per annum
CEW4	Active Library members	NEW	NEW	NEW	NEW	21,282		↑	N/A					Target 22,346 (5% increase on 2022/23) per annum

3.1. Corporate Indicator CEW1: Number of library visits: Q1 figure 202,394 (target 800,000)

Visits	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
2023/24	202,394				202, 394
2022/23	185,321	182,660	190,756	207,263	766,000

3.2. Visitor figures for Q1 are slightly above the quarterly target of 200,000, an increase that continues the upward trend in visits seen over the majority of 2022/23. In response to the cost of living crisis, the service formally abolished fines and waived outstanding fines which was received with positive feedback from users and media recognition. This decision, and the marketing messages that went around may have resulted in increased visits.

3.3. Corporate Indicator CEW2: Number of online library issues online Q1: 62,384

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
2023/24	62,384				62, 384

2022/23	62,110	61,176	64,470	65,898	253,654
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- 3.4. This is a new corporate indicator that aims to highlight the breadth of the library offer and the uptake of online and e-resources. The issues here show the take-up of a number of resources: e-books; e-audio books; e-newspapers and e-magazines that users can access via Libby, Borrowbox and other library apps.
- 3.5. The library service is promoting this digital aspect of its offer, which sees usage peak in quarters 3 and 4.
- 3.6. **Corporate Indicator CEW3: Number of library issues physical Q1 125,800**

Issues	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Totals
2023/24	125,800				125, 800
2022/23	123,620	128,881	126,756	135,970	515,227

- 3.7. **Corporate Indicator CEW4: Active library members Q1 21,282**
- 3.8. Target of 22,346 which is a 5% increase on the figure achieved in 2022/23.
- 3.9. The quarter has seen the continuing trend of increasing active members of the service. The trend for the active members for the last four years is as follows:
- 2022/23 - 21,282
2021/22 - 18,130
2021/21 - 6,954
2019/20 - 26,821.

3.10. **PC Usage**

- 3.11. All of the libraries offer public computers which are free to use. In addition to using the software on the machines and accessing the internet, users can print and scan from them. There are a total of 123 computers across all of the 10 libraries.
- 3.12. Within the digital offer, all libraries offer free Wi-Fi. The last few years have seen user habits change, with a steady reduction in the demand for public computers and an increase in demand for usage of Wi-Fi, enabling users to use their own devices. Several reasons for this are likely to be the affordability of internet-enabled devices, such as tablets and smartphones. In addition, over the course of the pandemic, several partners, including Adult Community Learning launched laptop and tablet grant schemes that gave residents in need of devices something they could use to access the internet. The service has responded to these changes in habits by modernising the layout where possible, increasing the amount of study desking with power for usage

and retaining PCs where demands need to be met.

3.13. The PC booking system provides detailed reports on the uptake of the public PCs, with usage currently standing at circa 50% take up of available sessions. The data below indicate higher usage of PCs in libraries that have more of them and have longer opening hours.

3.14. In Quarter 1, 16,924 hours of computer usage across all 10 libraries was recorded, broken down as below:

Library	Number of Hours
Central	6,125
N4	2,580
Finsbury	2,216
Archway	1,509
North	1,240
South	1,057
West	984
Mildmay	851
Total	16, 924

4.0 **Number of residents attending events and activities in Libraries**

4.1 In 2022/23, the service recorded 43,970 attendees to a wide range of events across the library service. This was above the target of 32,000 and represented approx. 15% of the Islington population.

4.2 The free activities on offer cut across a range of themes under the Library Service strapline of Read, Learn, and Connect. They are responsive to community need and support the Universal Library Outcomes identified by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in their strategic ambition for public libraries, 'Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England'. Uptake of these engaging and creative sessions was positive, with 12,326 attendees attending a wide range of events in Quarter 1. In addition to bespoke and themed activities, some of the regularly timetabled activities include:

- Weekly under-fives and baby bounce sessions
- Chess and games clubs for adults and children
- Reading groups for adults and children
- Gentle exercise class for older adults
- Gadget support sessions
- Knit and natter groups
- Lego clubs for children
- Toy libraries.

4.3 Some of the diverse one-off events in Q1, many of which celebrate the cultural calendar, include:

- Caribbean Rub-a-dub – a social event for older people to commemorate the King’s coronation
- Royal School of Rhyme – poetry workshops for children with poet Paul Lyalls to celebrate the King’s coronation
- Easter craft sessions
- Eid craft sessions.

4.4 The service organised a reading activism event to celebrate Earth Day on 26 April. The session focussed on climate anxiety and how reading can help and was attended by two secondary schools. The young people made pledges around their contribution to reducing climate change. They also made recommendations as to what the Council can do, and these have been shared with Cllrs. A booklist was also produced for children and young people.

4.5 The library service plays a key role in supporting local priorities and services that deliver on them. Some of the activities that were run in local libraries included:

- Sobell Leisure Centre consultations, where all libraries were used
- Pop-up sessions to consult with residents as part of the Culture Strategy survey
- Age UK delivering events and activities, including poetry and advocacy workshops at Central, West and Archway libraries
- Rethink Mental Health using the gallery at Central Library to deliver training and activities.

5.0 Feedback from users

5.1 The library service receives a large amount of feedback from users. Some of this is received in libraries via customer talk back forms, some comes in via the website, on Twitter or from contact Islington.

5.2 In Q1 a total of 24 compliments/suggestions, comments and complaints were received.

5.3 Examples include:

- Libraries talkback form received at Archway Library “ it was really lovely to have an Eid related event for local children. They really enjoyed making their lanterns and getting involved in the craft activities. The staff were very helpful and friendly”
- Libraries talk back form received at Finsbury Library “I’m Kurdish and I celebrate Newroz. When I saw the display on the library wall, I was really happy. Being recognised and included is a lovely feeling. I see libraries as our community. Where we feel comfortable and access books”
- Complaint about noise from other library users
- Complaint about speed of public pcs and Wi-Fi at Central Library
- 1000 words in a precious hour at the glorious reading rooms at Central Library (whist my mum and the children enjoy story and rhyme time)
- Thank you Islington Libraries for this amazing physical and emotional space (on Twitter)
- Complaint about response from member of staff regarding library opening times.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

- 6.2 The cost of providing resources to monitor performance is met within each service's core budget.

6.2 Legal Implications

- 6.2.1 There are no legal duties upon local authorities to set targets or monitor performance. However, these enable us to strive for continuous improvement.

6.3 Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030

- 6.3.1 The libraries service is committed to contributing towards achieving a net-zero carbon Islington by 2030. All libraries are collection points for recycling bags and food waste bags.

6.4 Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4.1 The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 6.4.2 An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, because this report is looking at historical performance information and does not relate to a new policy, procedure, function, service activity or financial decision. Where a new policy, procedure, function, service activity or financial decision is mentioned in the commentary within this report, there should be a separate Equalities Impact Assessment for that specific development, rather than attached to the reporting on performance for any measures that this would affect.
- 6.4.3 The libraries service continues to offer a service that is inclusive, accessible, welcoming and relevant to all. Addressing inequalities is central to the 'Read, Learn, Connect' mission of libraries, and is reflected in opening hours; the online

offer (where e-audiobooks support those who have visual conditions access library materials); the activities offered (such as Eid craft events); thematic displays (such as for Pride and Black History months).

- 6.4.4 Operating within the Directorate of Community Engagement and Wellbeing, working alongside the Equalities team and reporting to the Executive member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion, the Library Service is committed to developing an even stronger offer that addresses inequalities by mapping the offer to need and addressing gaps where they may be identified.

7 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 7.1 This report has presented a detailed narrative describing the performance of Libraries Services in Quarter 1 2023-24. Where performance is off target, a summary of the actions being undertaken to improve performance has been included.

Appendices:

- None

Background papers:

- None

Final report clearance:

Signed by:

**Assistant Director Community Learning & Libraries
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Date: 12.10.23

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