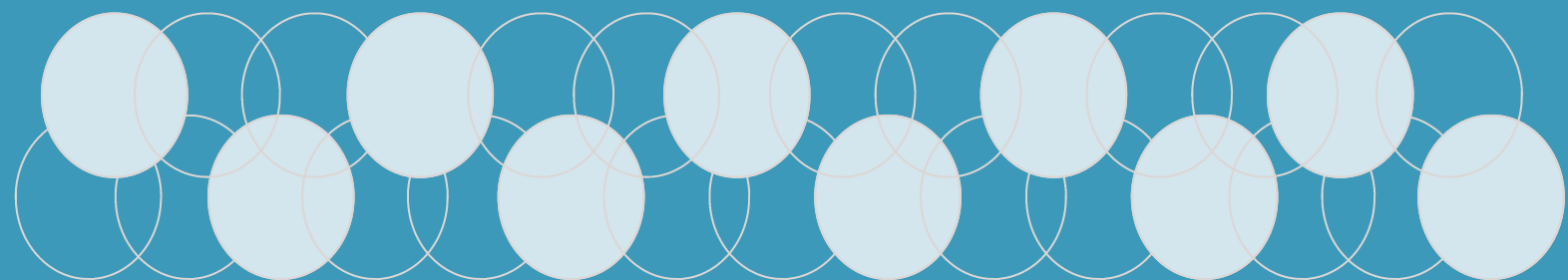# Scottish Library & Information Council

Aberdeen City Council self evaluation 2010

Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM)

Summary

In March 2010 Aberdeen City Library and Information Service's' staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to review its provision across Quality Indicator 1 Access to information. The outcomes overall were good, however, the Service made a swift response to the recommendations, inviting the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) to review progress after a six month period.

The SLIC team recognised that good progress had been made and welcomed the energy and enthusiasm with which staff had addressed the recommendations. At the time of the initial visits two long-standing vacancies important to the development and delivery of information services had recently been filled. Key improvements included the development of a draft information strategy now with staff for consultation, a programme of staff training, new resources for children and young people, upgrade of a quarter of the public computers, extension of wi-fi access and the new e-resource guides for the public. From detailed discussions with staff, the public and a wide range of stakeholders; visits to libraries; and a review of the evidence, it is clear that the Libraries' staff are strongly committed to developing a range of services which are valued in communities. The objective is to create an *information culture.*

Key strengths of the service include the provision of broadband internet access on regularly refreshed machines, wi-fi, and online enquiry services including 24/7 Enquire and Ask Scotland, better links to Curriculum for Excellence, use of Glow and support for information literacy skills. A number of working groups have been established to take forward issues and the involvement and support of the wider team is already having a positive impact.

Other important strengths include range of online resources, regularly updated web pages, use of social networking tools and a good programme for staff skills development. There are a number of areas for improvement: these include the need to implement and monitor the information strategy to shape and improve information service provision, to ensure that the staff training results in improved use of online resources in libraries and in IT taster sessions with the public and to analyse the customer information enquiries to tailor services appropriately.

As a result of the progress made, the SLIC team re-assessed the outcome and increased the effectiveness of practice in the first strand from good to very good. The impact of the developments in the third strand will be seen over time but the staff training needs time to embed and be evidenced in practice.

Quality Indicator 1 Access to Information	
Sufficiency, range and suitability of	Very good
Arrangements for access	Very good
Staff interaction and support	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.

Local Authority Background

Aberdeen City has a population of around 210,404 and is a prosperous port in the North-east of Scotland. The local authority covers an area of 188.46 square kilometres and is built between two rivers, the Dee and the Don. Traditionally the local industries were based on farming and fishing but its modern economy is based on the oil industry and its epithet from the 1970s has been the 'Oil Capital of Europe'. Unemployment rates are under 2% and the City contributes 28% of UK corporation tax, more than the City of London, to the UK economy. Aberdeen is a major retail, leisure and cultural centre for the North East of Scotland. As well as an estimated 5390 migrant workers Aberdeen has a large number of international students attending the two universities and college of further education. Over 65s account for 15.3% of the population whilst 15.7% are under the age of 15.

The City faces significant challenges financially and has the lowest total revenue support per head of population amongst all 32 Scottish authorities currently £1,720 compared to the average £2,051. There is considerable affluence; but there are also areas of deprivation with 15% of the population living in areas in the Scottish Index of Multiple deprivation.

The Library Service has been in existence since 1884 when the libraries Act was adopted at a public meeting in March by 891 votes to 134. It currently comprises a city centre Central Library, 16 Community Libraries, a Mobile Library and a Home Service. The Central Library is the main service point serving the city and acts as the headquarters. It houses the Information Centre, Adult Lending Library, Media Centre and Children's Library.

Since 2007 budget decisions have seen the number of staff have decrease by 12.5% and opening hours by over 700 per month. Ongoing budget constraints continue to present a challenging environment for libraries to operate and develop within the city.

In 2009/10 26.5% of the population were recorded as library members, with nearly 1.2million visitors, over 1 million issues, over ½ million webpage hits and 112.393 enquiries.

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. Library Staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 1 Access to information. 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, Robert Ruthven, Library and Archives Service Manager, Stirling Council and Christopher Phillips, SLIC Company Secretary and former Lifelong Learning Manager The Highland Council, SLIC reviewed the evidence and carried out discussions with members of staff, a wide variety of partners, the public and the management team on 7th October 2010. Visits were made to the Information Centre, Children's Library and Media Centre in the Central Library and to Bucksburn Community Library and Mastrick 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*
> - Very good connectivity
> - Effective links with corporate IT
> - Wi-fi
> - 24/7 services including enquiry services and subscription databases
> - Use of social networking tools

> *Progress*
> - Draft information strategy
> - Inclusion of key priorities for development of services in service and team plans
> - Information newsletter
> - Information roadshows
> - e-resources user guides
> - New webpages and programme for regular updating
> - New resources for children and young people
> - Strategic review of local studies and action plan for development of digital resources

Sufficiency, range and suitability of resources

The Information Services Manager had carried out a review of information services in the light of the March 2010 visit and the recommendations of the report. A draft information strategy has been developed to address areas for improvement. The objective of creating an information culture, particularly in Community Libraries was established. The Information Services Manager has worked hard to bring about the progress and, with her two new colleagues and the support of other staff, the team demonstrated energy and enthusiasm in their task of improving services. This draft will now go forward for staff consultation and it will be implemented and monitored once this process has been completed. Some of the proposals in the information strategy have already been included in the service and team plans for 2010/11. A programme of staff training on the online resources has been developed and the first in a series of information newsletters to highlight new resources has been published. Information roadshows promoting the range of information services to the public has been developed for the autumn 2010. The content is targeted and includes business information, careers, the Third Sector and European information as well as general reference tools. The public user guides for e-resources have been completely revised by the Database Promotions Group and are now available from the Library website. The Aberdeen Library and Information Service webpages have also been revised and a programme for weekly updating has been developed and implemented.

Aberdeen Library and Information Service is continuing to take an active part in the Ask Scotland enquiry service and Enquire, with a very good quality of response and support. These services seek to respond quickly to public enquiries by sharing the workload on a rota system across a number of local authorities. Participation in these shared services and offering a 24/7 response, in the case of Enquire through a network in the United States, are considered very good practice.

The Information Centre is located in the Central Library and acts as an information hub in providing support to community libraries. Since the last visit there has been a reorganization of the resources and layout which helps customers to find information more easily. The removal of an enquiry desk and sets of Yellow Pages improves lines of sight for customers and the overall appearance of the Information Centre. Exhibition space and resources to create exhibitions are limited and this is an area where some improvement could be made with the use of digital technology, for example.

There are good community heritage and local and family history collections. The new local studies librarian has assessed his stock and service and has an action plan with short, medium and long term goals. There are plans for collection development which will lead to digitisation and exploitation of local materials to the global market, as well as preservation and conservation work and the creation of a single database of resources. Plans to work collaboratively with communities to hold family history fairs, hold workshops and tutorials and continue to develop a joint Aberdeen Local History project are in place. There is potential to work with schools using local studies to deliver Curriculum for Excellence outcomes.

Information services for children and young people have developed quickly since the appointment of a Children's Services Manager. This post includes responsibility for children's services and the development of school library services. New developments include joint CPD sessions at the Curriculum Resources Information Centre for teaching staff with Information Services team, further develop and deliver an information literacy skills programme based on a skills package prepared for primary 6/7 pupils which is available from the website and library pages on Glow. Partnership working with Dialogue Youth has helped inform a review of Dialogue Youth Information Points. The Children's Services Manager has established a Children's Services Working Group which is helping support her with ideas and practical implementation. The driving objective is widening access to resources and support and making clear links to Curriculum for Excellence.

Staff are using web 2.0 technologies and have found survey monkey really helpful. There is a commitment to the use of social networking tools but some corporate decisions have yet to be agreed so progress is limited within this context. The staff are fully aware of the value of the tools within the business environment where perceptions of library services as traditional may need to be changed and use of twitter, facebook and linked in can help.

At the time of the first visit, the team concluded that the community library staff lacked clarity about their role in information work. In order to find out more about the use of information resources and enquiry work at community library level, a new method of recording enquiries has been developed. This identifies the enquiry, the sources used to answer it and the broad categories of information.

Arrangement for access

> **Progress**
> - Refresh of one quarter of public computers
> - Extension of wi-fi access
> - Programme to promote access to information resources
> - Improved support for access to information resources

Arrangements for access were assessed as being very good and additional investment has been made to sustain this level of provision. The Library Service's rolling programme of refreshment of public access computers has replaced one quarter of the computers. Provision of wi-fi access has also been extended.

A visit was made to Bucksburn Community Library which was holding an Open Day to encourage uptake of library services. The Library is co-located on a school campus, adjacent to leisure facilities. A class from the school was taking part in activities using the library computers and searching the online databases for quiz answers, another group of pupils were using the wii for health and fitness, and other groups included three reminiscence groups, drop in help for family history and psychology class for the public. The plans to work more closely with the community library staff to exploit local and family history resources and support learning 24/7 through the use of online resources are good but will take time to implement. At Mastrick Library the new wi-fi service had recently been introduced.

The National Entitlement Card has been in use as the Accord card for some time and sQuid, the electronic purse element has recently been added. Libraries plan to be partners in *loading system* for

the sQuid cards, so that the public link topping up their sQuid cards at the libraries with usage in library environment, thus improving uptake.

Uptake of online services through the Library Websites, pages views, enquiries and online transactions are good and increasing. This is monitored by Google Analytics.

Staff interaction and support

> *Progress*
> - Staff training programme
> - Training programme on web 2.0 technologies
> - Programme to promote access to information resources
> - Improved support for access to information resources

The Training Working Group has developed a programme of refresher training on the online resources and this has been has been carried out. This helps to build staff familiarity with the valuable tools so that they can be used in enquiry work and to promote use of the databases to the public. This is a great initiative but it is too early to measure evidence of its impact. There is an increase in use of online services and this is being monitored. The Database Promotions Working Group have revised all the e-resources guides which are available on the website. In addition a regular newsletter promoting new resources and highlighting existing ones has been launched.

A programme of staff training in Bookbug sessions has been developed and a web 2.0 training programme initiative with Surrey, Suffolk and Portsmouth library services called 23 Things is planned. This will underpin the web 2.0 plans as staff skills need to be developed to support its successful introduction. Training has also taken place on the use of sQuid on the Accord Cardand completing online membership.

Staff are trained to support the development of skills in others, whether a school or other group visits, delivering in-service training for education staff or through presentations at conferences and events. PC Taster sessions are carried out in some community libraries but the need to standardise this has been recognised. The partnership with Aberdeen College, who run a range of IT courses in the Learning Centres, is valued however the Library Service needs to ensure that they provide a less formal service which is of a uniformly high quality. The plans to develop Community Learning Hubs are still in progress so establishing quality and consistency will be welcomed in the context of widening the service.

> *Areas for improvement*
> - Continue to finalise, implement and monitor the information strategy
> - Continue to monitor the information enquiries and use of online resources
> - Continue to develop information literacy support
> - Continue to enable staff from across the service to contribute to the development of information services
> - Monitor and evaluate the impact and deployment of recent staff training
> - Work closely with community libraries to develop community-led exhibitions
> - Link the development of appropriate services with Dialogue Youth partnership and the National Youth Information Framework
> - Continue to develop IT training and support
> - Continue to seek new ways of promoting use of information services to the public
> - Continue to develop local studies content

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