Shetland Library – report of a visit by
the Scottish Library and Information Council on 23rd and 24th July 2012

Summary

Shetland Library staff used the Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix (PLQIM) to focus on the ways in which the Library Service Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs and Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences through its activities and resources.

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 Shetland Library staff are strongly committed to developing a range of services for readers and learners and publicising them well in all parts of the community.

Since the last visit the library staff has coped well with a period of change and diminishing resources. The visiting team were impressed with the wide range of stock to which the public has access, including e-books, and the proactive approach to managing stock – including stock selection, rotation and free requests. The range of innovative reader development approaches for adults and children remains excellent. The Reader in Residence has taken forward the Poet Partner programme and has provided a better experience for readers. The space available for events is very limited but the staff are creative and work hard to provide a balance between quiet study and noisy activity times in quite difficult circumstances. One of the recommendations in the previous report was to review the use of evidence based stock management.

As a result of the last PLQIM report the use of evidence based stock management software has been explored and staff concluded that, given the significant investment required, regular analysis of stock would be sufficient. This has to be taken forward, along with the creation of a reader development strategy to complement the stock management policy.

Significant progress had been made in Quality Indicator 4 which improved the assessment levels. These included the Click Shetland initiative and the effective use of Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement funding to support development of staff and the informal learning environment. These include introducing wi-fi, laptops for loan in the library, the teenage laptop computer bar, well-promoted access technologies and the Bookbug space in the adjacent Old Library. Partnership working is very good, although the recent relocation of Adult Learning may make this more difficult.

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. This includes implementing Prism 3 and Netloan, continuing the e-books digital participation project and partnership working.

The visiting team agreed with the library staff that they should retain their previous assessment levels in Quality Indicator 3. Quality Indicator 4 has improved reflecting the progress made and it is assessed at a higher level than in 2008.

Quality Indicator 3 Meeting readers' needs	
Identification of reading interests	Very good
Choice of activities and resources	Excellent
Provision for readers with differing abilities and aptitudes	Good

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences	
Extent to which the environment stimulates and motivates learners	Very good
The range of learning opportunities	Good
Provision for learners with differing abilities and aptitudes	Satisfactory
Partnerships enabling progression with others	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 by 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, and 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
Shetland Islands Council is the second smallest and the most northerly of the 32 local authorities in Scotland. A total population of just over 22,000 is scattered over more than 100 islands (15 inhabited) in one of the most isolated communities in Scotland. Lerwick is the main centre of population with 41% of the population living there, and the remainder of the islands is very sparsely populated. This poses considerable challenges for service delivery and creates pressure to sustain services to small, geographically isolated communities.

The profile of communities is changing, with a projected decrease of nearly 10% in school age children by 2014 and a rise of over 15% in the population aged 65 and over. Shetland has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Scotland at 0.7% but traditional oil and fisheries industries are under pressure in the current economic climate, so there are concerns. The Council has been responding to declining oil revenues and a report in 2010 by the Accounts Commission, as well as the impact of the recession. In January 2012, the Accounts Commission welcomed the progress being made by the Council to address some of the concerns raised in their report. There has been considerable restructuring and spending restraint since SLIC's last visit.

The main public library is located in Lerwick with a Learning Centre adjacent, offering free internet access. The school libraries are all part of Shetland Library, providing welcome local library resources. Mobile library services are crucial to communities, visiting most parts of Shetland on a regular basis and there are community libraries in Brae, Unst, Fair Isle and Skerries. Library and computer usage, both public access and in the home, are among the highest in Scotland. The Old Library building adjacent to the current library has now created a welcoming space for baby and toddler rhymetimes. Suitable accommodation for library activities remains an issue as the St Ringan's building is a beautiful conversion but does not have capacity and there are concerns about noise.

The most recent PLQIM assessment took place in 2008 and the service reviewed all 7 Quality Indicators on that occasion. Quality Indictor 3 was assessed at level 5 Very good and Quality Indicator 4 was assessed as Satisfactory/Good.

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 Shetland Library staff chose to look at Quality Indicator 3 meeting readers' needs and 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 23rd and 24th July 2012. Visits were made to the Library and Learning Centre in Lerwick, the Adult Learning Team and Peerie Foxes.

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 3 Meeting readers' needs

Strengths
- Wide range of stock to which the public has access, including e-books
- Proactive approach to stock – including stock selection, rotation, e-books and free requests
- Range of innovative reader development approaches for adults and children
- Reader in Residence

Identification of reading needs

The Stock Management Policy is reviewed at least once every two years, the most recent update was July 2012, and is publicly available through the Library website. This clearly lays out the purpose of the policy, which is firmly grounded in meeting community needs, ways in which library staff select items for acquisition, selection criteria and criteria for withdrawing items from stock. The staff are very familiar with their public's reading tastes and are diligent in their efforts to extend reading choices and experiences. There is no charge for requests.

Shetland Library's online catalogue is available 24/7 from any Internet connection. The catalogue allows borrowers to browse, to request items and to renew items online. This service is well-used by library members. The Talis library management system is used to provide information about issues and so inform future stock selection. The service is about to introduce Prism 3 which will upgrade and extend functionality, making it more user-friendly. During the selection process, staff check on the popularity of specific authors and genres prior to purchase. The senior team have delegated budgets for areas of stock and share the stock editor role. They use information from the library management system and a physical examination of the condition of stock on which to base decisions. Use of evidence based stock management software has been explored and staff concluded that, given the significant investment required, regular analysis of stock would be sufficient.

Choice of activities and resources

A wide choice of activities and events is promoted throughout the year. Issues per 1000 population are the second highest in Scotland and 80% of these come from Lerwick and the mobiles. Shetland Library has recently formed a consortium with Moray, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian to launch an e-books service. This attracted funding from the Scottish Government Public Library Quality improvement Fund. This will be launched during summer 2012. There are challenges in changing and refreshing stock when the library has limited room for display and events. However, great efforts are made in promoting stock to the public. The language material is located beside the public access computers, as this helps to promote the stock to existing and new users.

Reader development is a key strength and reader-centred approaches are deployed creatively across stock management, organisation of events, reading groups and displays. Staff strive to arrange a large number of varied and successful events throughout the year. The space available for events is very limited but they are creative and offer a far wider range of activities than residents in remote rural areas might expect. Author visits are also arranged. Shetland Library is an active participant in the National Reader Development Network and links to their promotions offer further choice.

Morag Nicolson, the Young People's Services Librarian provides leadership for the development of a stimulating programme for children and young people. The Library's 'offer' for children begins with Bookbug and there are good links with the Childcare Partnership. Bookbug sessions are held in a newly refurbished room in the Old Library. These activities help to develop early literacy and numeracy and assist in the development of a lifelong love of reading. These events for parents/carers and children are followed up with nursery, playgroup and school visits. The Peerie Foxes nursery is in close proximity to the library and in discussions they demonstrated the way in which the library supports their work with early years. Following on from this it was clear that young readers in Shetland are enthusiastic participants in the Summer Reading Challenge and that the audience for reading is being strategically developed by the library.

Working with the Shetland Arts, a Reader in Residence post was secured for Shetland funded by Creative Scotland for a six month period. Jen Hadfield has successfully developed the existing range of activities. She was previously the Shetland Library Poet Partner in a three year project funded by the Scottish Poetry Library and Paul Hamyln Trust. Poetry has been actively promoted in Shetland for many years.

Provision for readers

Space is at a premium in the St Ringan's building. Stock is attractively displayed in the building but there is no doubt that the reading appetite of the local population means there has to be a delicate balance of promoting new titles and continuing to provide access to a wide collection. It is simply not possible for all the stock to be on display at one time. One way of alleviating the access problems is to open the storage stack in the basement to the public for serendipitous browsing on a regular basis. Free request services are offered to satisfy readers' needs and these are normally turned-around within 2 working days. Suggestions for purchase are considered and the ability to respond positively contributes to reader satisfaction. Inter library loan services are also provided. Access to e-books will be launched shortly but it is unlikely that the range of stock will resolve issues about the building and its suitability as a modern library.

Suitable stock is provided and promoted for those who are learning English. With many new workers and their families the library has taken great trouble to develop a collection in a wide variety of languages now used in the Shetland community. Good links between staff in Adult Learning built a good collection of materials chosen to meet the needs of literacies learners. The Adult Learning Team has recently relocated to a new office building and there are concerns that the previous close working partnership will be diminished.

The creation of a reader development strategy would provide a framework for services across age-groups and needs, prioritise resources and help staff to plan expansion of reading services within a set timeframe. Provision would be strengthened by clear articulation in supporting documentation.

Areas for improvement
- Development of reader development strategy
- Regular analysis of library management system data
- Implement Prism 3
- Continue the e-books digital participation project

Quality Indicator 4 Learners' experiences

Strengths
- Partnership working
- Click Shetland and the effective use of Scottish Government Public Library Improvement funding
- Development of the informal learning environment, including wi-fi, laptops for loan in the library, access technologies, Bookbug space and teenage laptop computer bar

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The library learning environment

The Learning Centre is part of the Shetland Library service, providing access to the People's Network. This provides free computer access to everyone via the network of public libraries and offers a variety of support for learning, from creating text documents to internet-based research and access to online subscription services. The Centre is located in the former St Ringan's church hall, next door to the main library building in Lerwick. It provides a

pleasant atmosphere for study and leisure, with staff on site to assist if necessary. Considerable efforts have been made since the last PLQIM review in 2008 to improve the library learning environment. This includes the introduction of wi-fi, new access technologies to assist learners, a new space for Bookbug sessions and a teenage area and laptop computer bar. Some of the changes were made through effective use of Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement funding. The improvements are across three buildings and, as pointed out earlier, it is challenging and staff intensive to continue to deliver services from separate sites. Netloan software has been procured to manage the online booking facility but this has yet to be implemented.

Range of learning
At the time of the previous visit libraries followed a strategy of supporting the delivery of learning by partners, with little direct delivery. The Scottish Government Public Library Quality Improvement funding for the Click Shetland programme helped staff to acquire skills and confidence to deliver their own IT taster sessions. This is being continued in drop-in sessions and a range of evening classes. The content includes first steps in using spreadsheets, word processing or sending large files. Opportunities to progress with partners are well promoted by the library. The Library's focus has been expanding participation in learning by those at risk of exclusion, such as literacies learners and new workers and their families who need help with developing their English or reading materials in their own languages.

Addressing the needs of learners
Library staff contribute to the Community Learning and Development Partnership, who keep an overview of provision to meet learning needs. School and home educators are offered additional support with a special educator membership category allowing them to borrow beyond the normal number of books to better support learning. There are good working relations between the Library and staff supporting the needs of literacies and ESOL learners, resulting in a better understanding of the support materials required. Support is also provided for Adult Learners' Week, which reflected the interests of the international community with music and reading from around the world and promoted diversity and integration.

Partnership working in learning
Shetland Library works in partnership to deliver support for learners and these partnerships include Adult Learning and the college. As external factors change the learner landscape, libraries remain able to provide premises, ICT facilities and resources. The Library is using its graduate traineeships well to develop its support for learning. The current project is creating themed online local studies resources for schools and others. These are mapped to the experiences and outcomes of Curriculum for Excellence but have a wider, public appeal.

Areas for improvement
- Continue close partnership working following relocation of adult learning team
- Implement Netloan
- Improve spaces dedicated for study, learning and teaching

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