WORKING METHODS

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCES

SLiC
Scottish Library &
Information Council

HOW GOOD IS OUR
PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE?

The Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

WORKING METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to outline succinctly some additional guidance on the Working Methods which will be adopted for reviews carried out under *How good is out public library service?* The entire process of review under *How good is our public library service* should be supportive and encouraging. The role of the assessment is to verify and benchmark against a known landscape, highlighting strengths and opportunities for development.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE: GENERAL

- Worked examples of Quality Indicator submissions will be developed as the process unfolds and these will be made available to assist submitting library services.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON 'WORLD-CLASS'

- World Class (Level 6) is deliberately intended to be *challenging* and *aspirational*. Panels will, however, certainly encounter some world-class activities during the reviews. Panel members must use their knowledge, expertise, judgement and objectivity in this respect. World-class should be deployed where the assessors agree that the level of service is exception or the innovation and creativity is outstanding, where the activity or activities are demonstrably of an excellent enough standard to be worthy of dissemination around the world and where there is clear and tangible evidence of the service or activity have made a *significant* and *positive* impact on individuals, groups or communities. A quality indicator would be awarded Level 6 – World Class – where the balance of evidence is clearly at this level in two or more of the three themes.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE ON 'GOOD EVIDENCE'

- Gathering good, meaningful evidence is crucial in supporting the narrative that the library service is seeking to present. Evidence may come in a variety of forms. It may be documentary, observational, through interviews or focus groups, from professional reflection or through various types of peer assessment. In attempting to demonstrate **value** and **impact** it is vital that library services consider evidence which **demonstrates the difference that particular services, schemes, initiatives have on users and communities**. The best evidence should demonstrate how services have delivered benefit to end users and not just an internal advantage to the library itself (such as more visits). It is important to be self-critical of evidence by asking how effective it is in supporting the quality indicator being reviewed, how it can be shown to be robust and reliable and various different types of evidence can be triangulated and substantiated. Two other aspects of evidence gathering are important. Firstly, when working in partnership with other agencies, always have the discussion about gathering evidence and data about impact **at the start of a project** and build-in this sharing from the beginning. Secondly, be open and creative about evidence. Robust, generalizable and transferable evidence is clearly crucial but the sometimes the richest and most valuable can be the "throw-away comment" from a user. Good evidence comes in all shapes and sizes.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR SUBMITTING LIBRARY SERVICES

- It is important that library services submitting themselves for review captured an overview of the current model of service delivery they use and explain demographics, geographical area, resources available and governance.
- A checklist for submitting library services for visit will be provided suggesting, for example, representation from all levels of staff, opportunities for assessors to interact with staff and library customers and other stakeholders. The Assessors will probably split up to this so the timetable for the visit should allow this.
- Clear mention should be made to A*mbition and Opportunity*, the national strategy of public library within the evidence and improvement plan.
- The schedule for the day is indicative and can be amended in any way by the chair, the panel and / or the submitting library service with agreement.
- It is suggested that the lunch break should be used as an opportunity for assessors to meet service stakeholders, partners and elected members and/or trust board members.
- Library services should make their submission electronically using email.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR PANELS

- The Scottish Library and Information Council in conjunction with the Chairs will look at the pipeline of library services wishing to submit, the number, potential dates for review and availability of assessment teams. The selection of the team will be done based on availability and expertise. A reserve assessor should be identified for each review in case of a member being unavailable at the last minute.
- A Register of Interests has been compiled for Chairs of Panels and Peer Assessors to ensure no conflicts of interest between reviewers and services being reviewed.
- New Chairs should shadow an experienced chair before undertaking leadership of a review.
- Panel members should look at previous reports done under *Public Library Quality Improvement Matrix* ahead of a visit. These can be accessed on the SLIC website.
- The Panel should meet (either in person or via telephone or Skype) ahead of the visits and confirm the schedule; they should also agree where they are to meet on the day ahead of beginning the review so that they arrive *as a team* rather than individually.
- Peer assessors should retain their notes and pass them to the chair of the panel for retention. The final Peer Assessors' report is, however, the collective decision of the panel.
- The service's improvement plan should be an on-going and organic document. It is expected that the comments of the Peer Assessors will be integrated into the next iteration of the plan as the service moves forward. This will not be reviewed by Peer Assessors; it will, however, be the basis for subsequent reviews.
- There will be an annual review meeting of the Chairs to examine any issues which have arisen, to look at lessons learned and to collect suggestions for any changes or amendments to the templates or guidance (for both submitting library services and for peer assessors). From this annual meeting, a bulletin will be produced highlighting (i) good practice which has been identified in reviews, and (ii) any modifications to the working methods. Peer assessors are encouraged to feedback via chairs to inform this annual review.

- There should be an on-going call to build a pool of assessors and increase number of chairs to meet potential demand. The existing chairs should encourage others to become involved, particularly identifying suitable candidates when out conducting the reviews.
- The travel arrangements and accommodate (if necessary) for panels can be facilitated by SLIC as appropriate.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE FOR CHAIRS

- The Chair of the Review Panel should contact the authority well in advance of the submission being made the necessary introductions and talk through any potential issues. The Chair and Head of Service should maintain semi-regular contact in the lead-up to submission. After the submission has been made, but ahead of the visit, the Chair should again contact the authority indicating areas assessors would like to explore further.
- On receipt of submitting authorities report, the Chair should circulate to the peer assessors immediately, asking for areas to be explored on the day and initial views. The Chair should collect questions or suggestions of areas to be explored (may need to prompt by sending own) and agree who will ask what or explore areas.
- The Chair should contact the Head of Service of submitting library service to discuss areas for further exploration and to confirm the visit schedule. The schedule for the day is indicative and can be amended in any way by the chair, the panel and / or the submitting library service with agreement.
- The duration of reviews is at the discretion of the Chair in situations where an authority may submit multiple Quality Indicators for assessment at one time.
- The Chair is responsible for completing the Final Report the template for which is available of the SLIC website as a Word document.
- Chairs should pass a draft version of the Peer Assessor comments to the local authority for comment and to correct any inaccuracies.
- Once the report is agreed it should be forwarded to the SLIC office for the Board of Trustees to receive and formally ratify it. A copy should also be send to the Chair of Convenors. Chairs should also note any 'global' or sector-wide issues which emerge from reviews (for example, issues associated with IT services) so that these can be recorded in the Annual Report for *How good is our public library service?*