

**Report to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services**  
**Report submitted by: Executive Director of Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing**  
**Date: 5 November 2014**

**Part I - Item No. 1**

Electoral Division affected:  
All

**Review of Library Opening Hours 2014**  
(Appendices 'A' and 'B' refer)

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**Executive Summary**

Following the completion of the 2014 Review of Library Opening Hours, the Library Service is now in a position to recommend:

- i. Further increases to opening hours at 21 branches;
- ii. Amendments to opening hours at 8 branches resulting in more convenient opening times.

The net combined effect will be an overall increase in opening hours of 50.75 hours per week, the equivalent of 2%, which will be achieved with no additional staffing costs.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and Standing Order 25 has been complied with.

**Recommendation**

The Cabinet Member for Environment, Planning and Cultural Services is recommended to approve the increases and changes in opening hours at the 29 libraries set out at Appendix 'A' to take effect as soon as possible after 1 January 2015

**Background and Advice**

In January 2014, the Head of Cultural Services undertook a review of library opening hours on the basis that any proposals would not incur any additional staffing costs.

In 2013 when the last review of opening hours took place, it was agreed that the library opening hours would be reviewed every year to ensure that the needs of the public are fully met and to deliver a cost effective service.

The review has now been completed for the opening hours at 63 libraries. The review has also involved identifying further opportunities for opening libraries for extra sessions at no additional cost. Although the scope for doing so is limited, the proposal as presented in the list of libraries at Appendix 'A' incorporates at least one of the following elements for each of the libraries involved:

- Increased opening hours at libraries which already out-perform the average in terms of usage per hour.
- More coherent patterns of opening at libraries.
- Building on the first review by opening earlier in the mornings at additional libraries and more lunch time openings.

Part of the review involved examining hourly usage evidence to identify times when libraries were under-utilised, often in the evenings, and to investigate whether closing at these quieter times and opening instead for sessions likely to be busier, was feasible. Where possible, the resultant proposals, which again involve no additional cost, incorporate an overall increase in hours at the library concerned, though in some cases such increases are very modest.

Because this review involves closing at times when the library is currently open, customers were consulted at all the libraries concerned, being offered a simple 'Yes/No' choice between retaining the status quo and moving to the suggested new hours of opening. This consultation was extended to non-users by being made available online. Although it was publicised by a press release and through social media, online take-up by non-users remained relatively low. Where the results of the consultation indicated a clear public majority against the proposals, they have been withdrawn as to pursue them was likely to prove counter-productive. A full list of the final proposed changes following the consultation is set out in Appendix 'A'.

Those libraries where no change is suggested appear in Appendix 'A', in section 3. The current usage evidence for those libraries indicates that both the present total number of hours open and the pattern of opening hours are suitable for the levels of business, as well as being in line with comparable libraries countywide.

As in the first review, the major potential public benefit from these proposed changes would be to improve access to library services by extending the times at which they are available and/or amending the opening hours to reflect local preferred usage patterns. This should contribute towards improved use of library services, particularly significant as increasing the number of physical visits made to public libraries is one of the key performance measures for the County Council.

The net effect of these proposals will be an overall increase in opening times of 50.75 hours, an increase of 2%. There is a good geographical spread of libraries included in the proposals, with at least one library in each of Lancashire's twelve Districts proposed for an overall increase in hours.

## **Consultations**

As noted above, for all libraries where amendments to opening hours are proposed there has been direct public consultation on the specific suggestion for each library. Where there was a clear public majority against the proposal, these are shown in

Appendix 'A', section 3, included in this report and consequently no suggestions for change are currently being pursued for 34 libraries. At one other library, Oswaldtwistle, the vote was also against the proposals. Local managers have carefully reviewed their budgets and staffing availability and have concluded that they can implement some, or all, of the positive elements of the proposals without including any of the negative elements to compensate. This library has accordingly been transferred to the second list of libraries in Appendix 'A', where simple increases in opening hours are being proposed.

In all cases where amendments to opening hours are proposed in this report, they have been endorsed by the public following site-specific consultation. Appendix 'A' also shows the libraries that were considered to be out of scope for this consultation as their hours were already fitted to the staffing hours available or they were in line with hours proposed in this review (section 4).

### **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

### **Risk management**

Library usage is currently declining overall, whether measured by the number of physical visits to premises or the number of items borrowed. By not addressing the issue of public dissatisfaction with opening hours and not taking the opportunity to increase hours at no cost it is likely that this decrease will continue, with a consequent adverse effect on performance. Increasing hours provides a better opportunity for the service to try to arrest this decline in visitor figures, though the environment surrounding libraries and the whole of the physical book trade will remain extremely challenging in the current market-wide move away from print. It has been demonstrated that when hours were changed in the first review some libraries did show an upturn in their usage figures.

Also, with seventeen libraries being considered as Strategic hubs for the County Council, some of the suggested hours of opening are allowing more flexibility for access by other services in library buildings.

### **Financial**

There would be no financial implications as the proposals are on the basis that opening hours can be extended in such a way that no extra staffing costs are incurred. There may be very minor implications on energy costs, but this is considered to be immaterial in value.

### **Equality and Diversity**

The proposals increase accessibility to information and services for all the people of Lancashire. Increasing the time available for the whole community to access the range of print and electronic materials held in libraries will contribute towards combating social exclusion and narrowing the gaps between the varied range of groups and individuals that make up the population of Lancashire. There is a good geographical spread of increases across the county in these proposals, while those

libraries not involved on this occasion are regarded as having opening hours that are appropriate for the scale and nature of their use. Opening hours will be reviewed on a regular basis and further proposals will be submitted in future years.

An Equality Analysis has been carried out for the review of all the 29 libraries that are changing. Any impact on customers with protected characteristics is expected to be of an extremely minor nature and alternatives are available as noted in the Assessment document. The Equality Analysis is set out at Appendix 'B'.

## **Personnel**

Minor changes to staff rotas may be necessary in some cases, though the number of hours worked in total will be neither increased nor decreased. Any changes will be achieved by individual negotiation and agreement with the members of staff concerned and the Trade Unions will be kept informed throughout.

## **List of Background Papers**

| Paper   | Date | Contact/Directorate/Tel |
|---|------|-------------------------|
| N/A   |      |                         |
| Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate |      |                         |
| N/A   |      |                         |