

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE & COMMUNITY SERVICES CABINET MEMBER

REVIEW OF LIBRARY OPENING HOURS

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for changes to library opening hours at Central, Ashby and Barton libraries.
- 1.2 The key points in this report are:
 - There are currently 387.5 opening hours per week across the library network
 - Service improvements and modernisation have enabled an increase in static library opening hours over the last six years
 - Traditional use of libraries has been declining for some time, but there have been increasing levels of virtual use of libraries
 - Reductions in government grants means that the council has to reduce its spend over four years, and must consider its spending priorities for ensuring continued value for money
 - In this context library service staff reviewed opening hours at the larger libraries, and drawn up proposed revisions to opening hours, based on performance trends and identified periods of low use.
 - Consultation on the proposals with customers has been undertaken at these libraries, focusing on those customers who would be affected by the changes
 - Most customers indicated that they would continue to be able to use their library within the proposed hours
 - Following consultation the proposed opening hours have been slightly amended; these are set out in Appendix 2.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 North Lincolnshire Council operates a network of 1 central library, 14 branch libraries and two mobile libraries. These libraries are currently open to the public for a total of 387.5 hours per week. There are 336 open hours across static libraries and 51.5 mobile library hours per week.
- 2.2 Over the last six years the library service has modernised and rationalised its static library provision through a series of transformational developments, including introduction of self-service facilities in six libraries. During this period there has also been a significant increase in 24/7 online library services.
- 2.3 These improvements have allowed the library service to increase opening hours. Static library opening hours have risen from 299 in 2005 to 336 in 2011.

- 2.4 Nationally take up of traditional library services has declined over the last two decades, and this has been reflected in North Lincolnshire. The service has seen a rise in library issues in the last few years, but the trend varies across libraries. Customers are also increasingly accessing online library services.
- 2.5 Reductions in government grant have required the council to reduce its expenditure by £25 million over four years. The council therefore has a responsibility to consider the types and levels of service that council taxpayers should now be asked to support.
- 2.6 Central, Brigg, and Barton libraries, and Ashby library and Local Link are the four busiest libraries in the network, and it is therefore important to maintain sufficient access to these facilities. However these libraries have operated with self-service facilities for over 18 months, and also offer the greatest capacity to achieve improved value for money through economies of scale.
- 2.7 Library staff looked at opening hours and patterns of use across these libraries. Overall performance trends were considered, and temporal analysis of library transactions undertaken to identify periods of lower use.
- 2.8 All four libraries have increased opening hours to varying degrees over the last six years. Analysis of library issues and use of the People's Network 2008 – 2011 shows a decline in People's Network at all four libraries, and declining issues at Ashby and Brigg. Issues trends at Central have varied, while issues at Barton library increased each year. The temporal analysis indicates that in general the quietest periods at all libraries are late afternoons and evenings.
- 2.9 From this analysis a set of potential changes to library opening hours was drawn up (see Appendix 1). In September 2011 a cabinet member decision was taken to consult on revised opening hours at Central, Ashby and Barton libraries. A decision was also taken to defer any changes to Brigg library until relocation of the library to The Angel in May 2012.
- 2.10 The proposals were for a reduction of 4.5 hours per week at Central and 5.5 hours per week at Ashby. There is continued capacity at Ashby for customers to access self-service facilities outside advertised library opening hours when the building is open for adult community learning. In light of increasing issues at Barton it was proposed to reduce some staffed hours at Barton and utilise self-service facilities outside of staffed library opening times.
- 2.11 Consultation with library customers on the proposals has been undertaken, focusing primarily on those customers who would be potentially most affected by the proposals. Consultation outcomes are summarised in section 7.
- 2.12 While the proposed changes will inevitably inconvenience a small number of people, the majority of customers said that they would still be able to access the library within the proposed opening times. In light of safety concerns about the proposed unstaffed hours at Barton, due mainly to the library lay out, proposals for Barton have been revised. Self-service facilities mean that there is scope to staff the extra 3.5 hours on Wednesday morning and still reduce costs. The revised proposals represent an overall net reduction of 6.5 opening hours across the library network. The revised proposals are set out in Appendix 2.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 The options are to approve, modify or reject the revised opening hours for Central and Barton libraries and Ashby library & Local Link set out in Appendix 2.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Approving the revised opening hours will allow the library service to implement opening hours that better reflect patterns of use and maximise self-service facilities in order to offer continued value for money.

4.2 By contrast modifying or rejecting the changes will delay and limit scope to implement changes to improve value for money

4.3 The proposals would not prohibit any further increases or changes to opening hours at these libraries. Opening hours across all libraries will continue to be subject to ongoing review to ensure they continue to meet local needs and offer value for money.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

The proposed opening hours set out in Appendix 1 have the capacity to reduce service running costs through reduced staffing needs. It is estimated that these changes would release around £16,000 in savings per annum.

5.2 Staffing

Lower staffing levels would be required to run Central, Ashby and Barton libraries following implementation of revised opening hours. This is estimated at an overall reduction of around 30 hours per week. These reductions can be achieved through existing vacancies. There will be a need to give 90 days notice to some staff in relation to some of the specific changes to hours.

5.3 There are no property or IT implications.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory

The council's statutory duty for library provision has been considered in developing potential changes to library opening hours and responding to the needs and responses of customers.

6.2 Diversity

Service staff have undertaken an integrated impact assessment for the proposed changes to library opening hours in Appendix 2.

6.3 The council will continue to reflect on the demand for library provision and service and respond with positive and focused action.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation with library and Local Link customers at Ashby and library customers at Barton took place between 12 December 2011 – 10 January 2012 and 9 – 26 January 2012 at the Central Library.
- 7.2 The consultation focused mainly on those customers using these libraries during those hours that would be reduced or managed differently. Customers were asked if and how they would be affected by the proposed changes, and whether they would still be able to access the library within the proposed revised hours. At each library a majority of respondents indicated that they would not be affected by the changes (76 out of 130 respondents at Central, 57 out of 109 respondents at Ashby, 118 out of 193 respondents at Barton). The majority of customers also said they would still be able to visit the library within the proposed new hours (111 customers at Central, 80 customers at Ashby, 122 customers at Barton).
- 7.3 The most common concern raised (43 at Central, 25 at Ashby, 11 at Barton) was around the loss of evening or late afternoon sessions leading to reduced access outside of school and working hours. The temporal analysis confirmed that these sessions have little take up. However, the library service recognises the needs of children and office workers, and some late afternoon or early evening opening hours have been retained across these libraries in the proposals.
- 7.4 Customers at Barton generally welcomed the proposed increase in access hours on Wednesdays, but fewer people expressed interest in earlier morning opening hours. Concerns were raised by customers and the council's Corporate Safety section about security and customer safety during proposed unstaffed hours, as the library is sited away from other services in the building. Having taken these concerns into consideration, the proposed opening hours for Barton as set out in Appendix 2 would ensure that all hours continue to be staffed.
- 7.5 Potentially affected staff and trade unions have been briefed on the proposed changes. If the proposed opening hours are approved, further consultation with staff will be undertaken in line with council HR policies.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves the revised library opening hours set out in Appendix 2, and
- 8.2 That service staff be authorised to implement these changes from 1 April 2012.

DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Civic Centre
Ashby Road
Scunthorpe
DN16 1AB
Author: Helen Rowe
26 February 2012

LIBRARY OPENING HOURS REVIEW - APPENDIX 1

Potential Changes to Opening Hours at Central, Barton, and Ashby – for consultation.

The proposed revision of hours have been drawn up taking into account overall performance trends and temporal analysis of library issues and transactions to identify periods of low use.

Central Library – levels of library issues vary year to year, and Apr – Sep 2011 has seen a decline compared to the previous year. People’s Network use is comparatively good, but has reduced Apr – Sep 2011. Opening hours increased by 2.5 hours in 2010 but average issues per hour have since declined slightly. Evenings and late afternoons have lower levels of issues and visits.

Barton Library – library issues have increased year on year for the last four years, and figures for Apr – Sep 2011 indicate these higher levels can be maintained. There has been a decline in People’s Network use. Average issues per open hour at Barton are higher than any other branch library, with evenings being the quietest times. There is some scope to consider extension to opening hours facilitated by self-service and/or unstaffed access periods.

Ashby Library – Ashby is a generic library and Local Link centre and proposals take into account activity in both services. Library opening hours increased from 23 to 42 per week following relocation to Ashby Link. Take up increased as a result, but library issues have declined since 2008/09. The average issues per hour at Ashby is around 20 per hour, and this falls to around 14 per hour at quieter times. There has also been a decline in use of the People’s Network. Ashby Link is a multi-purpose site – this means library self-service facilities can be accessed outside library opening hours when the building is open for other activity.

Proposals for Consultation

CENTRAL LIBRARY								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9 - 7	9 - 5	9 - 7	9 - 5	9 - 5	9 – 4.30	51.5	
Proposed	9 - 5	9 - 4	9 - 7	9 - 4	9 - 5	9 - 4	47	-4.5

BARTON LIBRARY								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9.30 - 7	9.30 - 5	Closed	9.30 - 5	9.30 - 5	9 - 1	36	
Proposed	9 - 6	9 - 5	9 - 2	9 - 5	9 - 5	9 – 1	42	+ 6
Potential to explore unstaffed access 9-10 each weekday morning and 9-2 on Wednesdays – as other services in the building are open and able to offer minimum level of support.								

ASHBY LIBRARY AND LOCAL LINK								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9 - 5	9 - 6	9 - 4.30	9 – 4.30	9 - 4	9 - 12	42	
Proposed	9 - 5	9 - 4	9 - 2	9 - 4	9 - 4	9.30 - 12	36.5	- 5.5

LIBRARY OPENING HOURS REVIEW - APPENDIX 2

Proposed Changes to Library Opening Hours

Following customer consultation December 2011 – January 2012

CENTRAL LIBRARY								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9 - 7	9 - 5	9 - 7	9 - 5	9 - 5	9 – 4.30	51.5	
Proposed	9 - 5	9 - 4	9 - 7	9 - 4	9 - 5	9 - 4	47	-4.5

BARTON LIBRARY								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9.30 - 7	9.30 - 5	Closed	9.30 - 5	9.30 - 5	9 - 1	36	
Proposed	9.30 - 6	9.30 - 5	9.30 - 2	9.30 - 5	9.30 - 5	9 – 1	39.5	+ 3.5

ASHBY LIBRARY AND LOCAL LINK								
Open Hrs	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Total	Change
Current	9 - 5	9 - 6	9 - 4.30	9 – 4.30	9 - 4	9 - 12	42	
Proposed	9 - 5	9 - 4	9 - 2	9 - 4	9 - 4	9.30 - 12	36.5	- 5.5

Access via self-service would be available in evenings when Ashby Link open for adult learning courses – but this would not be year round, so not possible to set as permanent access hours

Changes to Overall Opening Hours

Reductions	Increases	Net Change
- 10	+ 3.5	- 6.5