



## Report to Policy Committee

**Author/Lead Officer of Report: Hilary Coulson,  
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Service**

**Tel: 0114 4742084**

**Report of:** Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

**Report to:** Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee

**Date of Decision:** 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Subject:** **Library Opening Hours**

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given?	2625				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide an update and ask the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee to endorse the current extended Library Opening Hours. The report further sets out a proposal to open all Council run libraries from lunchtime for one day each month to allow for staff training and development.

### **Recommendations:**

The Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report.
2. Note the data analysis in Appendix 1.
3. Endorse the change in opening hours and that these will continue as the standard opening hours for Council run libraries.
4. Approve the proposal for Council run libraries to open at a later time one day per month to allow for staff training and development.

### **Background Papers:**

**None**

Lead Officer to complete:-		
1	I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.	Finance: Adrian Hart
		Legal: Nadine Wynter
		Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton
		Climate: Hilary Coulson
<i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i>		
2	<b>SLB member who approved submission:</b>	Ajman Ali
3	<b>Committee Chair consulted:</b>	Cllr Richard Williams
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	<b>Lead Officer Name:</b> Hilary Coulson	<b>Job Title:</b> Head of Libraries and Archive Services
	<b>Date:</b> 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The 2023/24 Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee (CPL) budget was balanced on the assumption that the first phase of a strategic review would include changes to opening hours of the 11 Council-run Community Hub Libraries.
- 1.2 From April 2023 the opening times of Chapeltown, Crystal Peaks, Darnall, Ecclesall, Firth Park, Highfield, Hillsborough, Manor, Parson Cross, Stocksbridge and Woodseats libraries were standardised and increased from 31 hours to 34 hours a week. This change ensured we can use our staffing more flexibly to keep our libraries open during their published opening times and better reflect demand patterns of our customers.
- 1.3 Council-run Community Hub Libraries are now open on the same days and times across the city as follows:
- Monday 10am-5pm
  - Tuesday 10am-5pm
  - Wednesday 10am-5pm
  - Thursday - closed
  - Friday 10am-5pm
  - Saturday 10am-4pm
  - Sunday - closed
- 1.4 As with any change, it is good practice to review and understand its impact. We have now concluded this review and the data in Appendix 1 shows that the feedback from our customers has been largely positive. It is therefore proposed to maintain these standard opening hours on a permanent basis (or at least until the next review is required).
- 1.5 In addition to data analysis, the change in opening hours and new approach to staff timetabling has highlighted the lack of available time for training and development of our frontline teams. Whilst the libraries are open longer for customers, this means that libraries and archives staff do not have any allocated time for team meetings, one to ones, training, or personal development.
- 1.6 To remedy this, it is proposed to delay opening the libraries on one day each month (on either a Tuesday or Wednesday) and to use this time for staff development.
- 1.7 The days will be scheduled well in advance to make these as visible as possible to our customers and have been chosen as the least busy days across the libraries.

## **2. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?**

2.1 There are risks with making any changes to the current provision because libraries are more than just a place to borrow books; they offer community meeting space, events that tackle isolation and support speech & language development in early years, access to IT for those who do not own their own equipment and/or cannot access the internet and are key provider of Sheffield's Warm Spaces. We hope that by continuing these changes to opening hours, we will extend the availability of library benefits and keep the changes under review.

2.2 The nature of libraries means they continually change, especially in today's digital environment. We need to be flexible and able to evolve. Our Community Hub Libraries need to embrace change and we need to continue to develop our professional and technical skills. By investing in library staff training, we improve the quality of service and also aim to increase staff satisfaction and retention.

2.3 Investing in our staff personal development contributes to improve the workforce opinion scores in the Library and Archives Services on Theme 3: Environment to Thrive. Particularly the areas that consider:

- I believe there are opportunities for me to develop my career here if I want to
- I believe I have everything I need to do my job to the best of my ability

## **3. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?**

3.1 The original customer consultation was carried out to inform the new opening hours in early 2023. Consultation began on 10th January and concluded on 26th February 2023 and there were 1271 responses to our survey. This consultation told us that for the majority of respondents, the change in the opening hours would not impact them, with 45% indicating "no change". 22% of respondents said they would use the library service more, and 17% said they would use it less. DCMS, as statutory superintendent, has been kept informed during this change.

3.2 Following the changes to opening hours last April, we asked customers for their feedback about how the opening times affect their use of the libraries. This ran from 9th January to 22nd February 2024 and was promoted in our libraries, our social media accounts and direct messages (for those who had signed up for this communication).

373 people responded to the recent consultation. 82% of respondents were broadly positive about the changes<sup>1</sup> and 78% of respondents said they used the libraries the same or more with the new opening hours<sup>2</sup>.

3.3 There were 56 respondents who solely use the Council's Community Hub Libraries who stated they use our Libraries less than before, accounting 15% of all those who responded to us. This does correlate with the original consultation feedback, when 17% of people said they would use the library less than before.

3.4 The majority of these responses (43 people) said they were impacted by the removal of the late afternoon opening. and shows that 12% of those who responded have used the library less because of this change.

3.5 There were a further 13 who solely use the Council's Community Hub Libraries who stated they use our Libraries less than before due to the mid-week closed date moving to a Thursday (prior to April 2023, each Hub Library was closed for 1.5 days mid-week, but these were staggered across the week).

3.6 We want our Libraries to be open and accessible to all customers, but recognised we had to balance the need to make the Service more financially sustainable (with around a 13% reduction in the Council's core funding to the Library Service from 2023/24) and reflect the majority of customer demand, which showed that more people use the library in the morning than after 5pm.

3.7 Over the last year, library usage in person has continued to increase and come back from the impact of the Covid pandemic<sup>3</sup>. The trend in increasing usage and customer feedback indicates that overall, the changes to the opening times have been a success and therefore we are proposing to maintain these.

3.8

## 4. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE REPORT

### 4.1 Equality Implications

4.1.1 There are no new equality implications from this report. The change to library opening times, from April 2023 was subject to a full equality impact assessment as part of the 2023/24 budget proposals. This has been reviewed for following the recent consultation in equality impact assessment number 2526.

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<sup>1</sup> 307 respondents who answered, "Very happy", "Happy", or "Neither happy or unhappy" to the question: "Overall, how happy are you with the changes to the opening hours?"

<sup>2</sup> 291 respondents who answered, "I use the libraries more" or "No change" to the question: "How has your use of Community Hub Libraries changed since the introduction of new opening hours?"

<sup>3</sup> Visits to Council run libraries between April 23 and January 24 was around 750,000, compared to 625,000 for the same time last year.

4.1.2 The 11 Community Hub libraries run by the Council will continue to remain open for longer than they were prior to April 2023 and longer than our statutory requirement, based on the judicial review in 2014.

4.1.3 The monthly half day late opening will be alternated between Tuesday and Wednesday mornings to not adversely impact one group of customers or regular users. The EIA notes the impact of standardising opening times reflecting that all the libraries are of equal value. Each library has an intrinsic worth and potential for its community and the value of a library should not only be measured by volume of users or busy periods, as this can be influenced by wider geographical inequalities (e.g. relative deprivation and/or the availability of healthy leisure time, etc).

#### 4.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

4.2.1 The financial implications arising from changes in opening hours and having a standard day for closure are contained within the existing financial budgets. There is no requirement for additional funding.

#### 4.3 Legal Implications

4.3.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 outlines the legal framework for public libraries in England. According to section 7(1) of the 1964 Act, local authorities, acting as the Library Authority for their respective areas, are obligated to offer a 'comprehensive and efficient' library service to everyone who lives, works, or studies full time in their jurisdiction.

4.3.2 As the terms 'comprehensive and efficient' are not explicitly defined in the 1964 Act, the Council has the power to decide the best way to deliver public library services, considering the specific needs of its locality. The proposals presented in this report are tailored to the local requirements set out in this report.

#### 4.4 Climate Implications

4.4.1 There are no direct Climate Implications, as the opening hours are already in place and whilst these are longer than previously, the buildings were already open for 5 days out of 7 prior to April 2023. As such the buildings were already heated on those days and any increase in energy use is therefore minimal.

4.4.2 Loaning library books to customers is a greener option than individuals purchasing themselves, as such the extended opening times should allow more customers to access the Library Services.

#### 4.5 Other Implications

4.5.1 There are no further implications from this report.

## 5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 5.1 We could revert to the original opening hours. However, the way our service is currently structured, coupled with our available budget resources, mean that we would not be able to offer our customers consistency or the high-quality service they are now receiving.
- 5.2 Operating the previous opening hours often meant that we had to close our libraries at short notice because we cannot provide the right resources and the new opening hours has mostly prevented this from happening once the Service recruited to a significant number of vacancies over the summer of 2023.
- 5.3 There may be opportunities to integrate and co-locate library services with other government and partner agencies who share library values in the future, and we will continue to explore these opportunities. Any changes would need to include an impact assessment for customers and would be subject to further consultation.
- 5.4 There is an option to pay additional overtime for staff training and development. However, this would adversely impact our staff teams as they would need to complete all training and development activities outside of their normal working hours and full-time staff would routinely work 6 days a week. This would also adversely impact the libraries budget which is already committed to savings targets.
- 5.5 There is an option to not close our libraries for half a day each month to allow for staff training and development. However, this would mean that staff would need to take ad hoc time out of their working day to complete the necessary training, one to ones and any personal development. This would likely have an impact on customers as libraries would not be able to provide a consistent service.

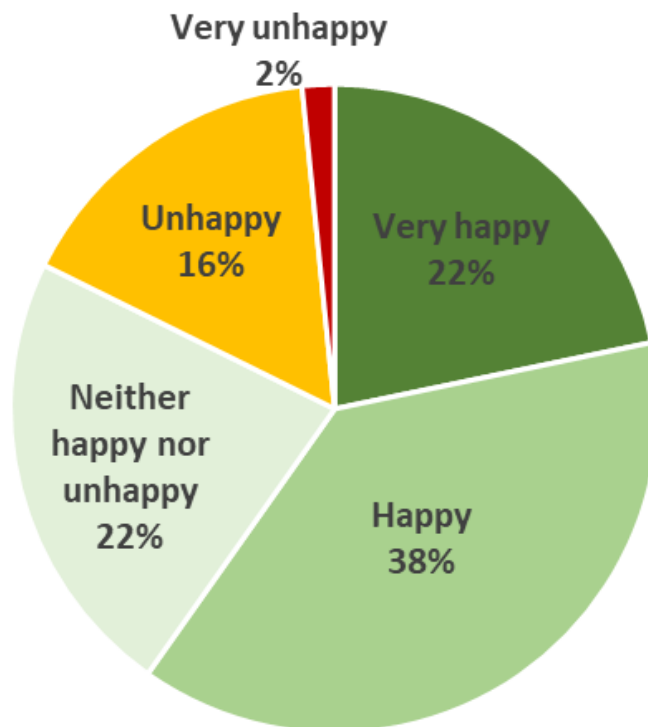
## 6. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 The new opening hours provide library customers with the optimum available hours.
- 6.2 The new opening hours provide stable staff resources.
- 6.3 The proposed monthly half day late opening will enable investment in our staff, furthering their development and ensuring they can offer the highest quality service to customers.

## Appendix 1

**Question:** Overall, how happy are you with the changes to the opening hours?

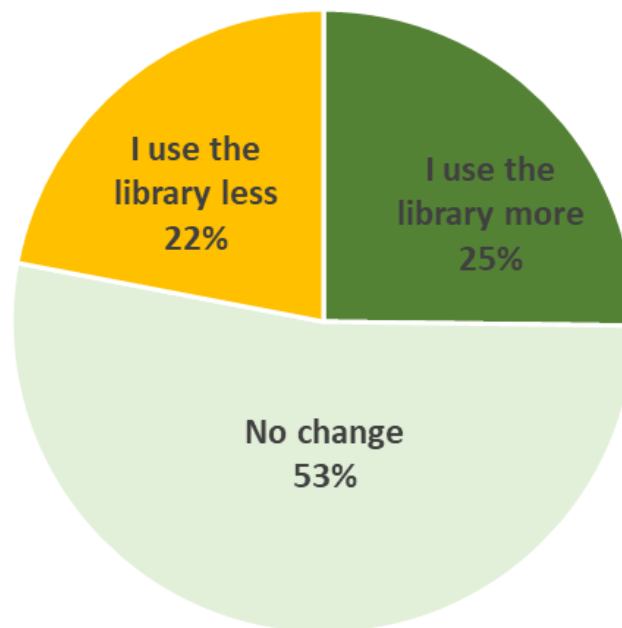
Response	Number	%
Very happy	81	82%
Happy	142	
Neither happy nor unhappy	84	
Unhappy	60	18%
Very unhappy	6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>100%</b>





**Question:** How has your use of Community Hub Libraries changed since the introduction of new opening hours?

Response	Number	%
I use the library more	94	78%
No change	197	
I use the library less	82	22%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>100%</b>



**For those who solely use Council Community Hub Libraries and who stated they use the libraries less:**

**Question:** Which of the changes contributed to your response to the question “How has your use of Community Hub Libraries changed since the introduction of new opening hours”?

[Note: individuals were able to choose more than one option]

Response	Number	%
No late opening	39	70%
Thursday closed	13	23%
Both Thursday closed & no late opening	3	5%
Multiple	1	2%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100%</b>

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