

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 19 July 2016
By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport
Title: Update on the Libraries' Transformation Programme
Purpose: To provide Cabinet with an update on the Libraries' Transformation Programme and to recommend that Cabinet approves the proposed amended changes to Library Opening Hours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) approve the proposed changes to library opening hours in Appendix 3.; and**
 - (2) note the progress on the other aspects of the Libraries' Transformation Programme.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. In December 2015 Cabinet approved the proposed Libraries' Transformation Programme (LTP), including an Internal Review of the Library and Information Service (LIS) and the development of the Libraries' Strategic Commissioning Strategy (SCS). Cabinet also agreed to the public consultation on proposed changes to library opening hours, which took place from 11 January to 3 April 2016.

1.2 The December Cabinet report noted how patterns of library usage are changing locally and nationally, with a declining trend in physical visits to libraries and an increase in take up of online library services. The aim of the LTP is to ensure that East Sussex has a modern, affordable library service that meets the needs of people who live and work in the County.

2. Financial Analysis

2.1 The LTP has an agreed savings target of £2m by the end of the current Medium Term Financial Plan period in 2018/19. The net revenue budget of the LIS in 2015/16 was £6m (including depreciation of £567k), consisting of £3.63m of staffing costs (150 full-time equivalents) and £2.37m of non-staffing costs.

2.2 The LTP is on target to deliver the identified savings of £1.25m from the Internal Review of the service (£425k in 16/17, £700k in 17/18 and £125k in 18/19). Savings which total £750k will be delivered from a restructure of staff (£500k) and the reduction in the Libraries stock fund (£250K). The implementation of the amended opening hours proposals will deliver £500k. If the opening hours proposals were not to be approved by Cabinet these savings would have to be found from elsewhere in the County Council. Proposals to achieve the final £750k saving from the Libraries SCS will be quantified as work on the strategy progresses.

3. Supporting Information

Update on the Libraries Transformation Programme

3.1 A review of staffing identified potential efficiency savings that would create a leaner service, focussed on our current agreed priorities. In February 2016 a library service restructure was implemented as part of the Internal Review. The focus of this restructure was a reduction in management posts, with an emphasis on strategic decision making by a smaller senior management team. The restructure also rationalised operational management, librarian roles and Bibliographic Services.

Development of the Needs Assessment and Draft Strategic Commissioning Strategy

3.2 The Libraries SCS will be based on a robust assessment of the needs of residents of the County as a whole and within specific communities, and the development of the draft SCS will be guided by priority outcomes informed by the needs assessment. It will enable the development of a

strategy which will outline what is required in future and how this can be delivered, by focussing on outcomes, not the existing service.

3.3 The LIS is currently undertaking the needs assessment, demand and gap analysis. In addition a wider research programme is underway that includes a review of current library service provision, our property portfolio and accessibility to the service, our traded services, use of volunteers, income and funding opportunities, legislation, and innovation and good practice. It will recognise where we already work in partnership with others to deliver services to local communities through libraries, for example with Parish and District Councils.

3.4 The LIS is working with a council-wide project team to develop a draft Strategy that will enable the County Council to understand the contribution that the library service can make to achieve the County Council's priority outcomes and ensure that it is aligned with the County Council's existing and future plans and strategies for other services. The draft SCS will be presented to Cabinet in the summer of 2017 and, if agreed, publicly consulted on before being finalised for implementation.

Proposed changes to library opening hours

3.5 The rationale behind the consultation proposals to change library opening hours was to cut library running costs by reducing opening hours at quieter times, whilst ensuring that people have access to services across the County when they are most used. It was proposed that libraries would only be open at times between the hours of 10am and 5pm, except for those libraries that are currently open later than 5.30pm, which would retain one evening opening until 6pm on a Thursday. It was acknowledged that the County Council would not be able to make all of the necessary savings by only reducing opening hours before 10am and after 5pm, but that by making some further changes to opening hours we would still retain a comprehensive service across the County.

3.6 The proposals would result in an overall reduction of around 25% of current opening hours. It was recognised that a uniform reduction of 25% for every library would have a disproportionate impact on smaller libraries in particular and for their users. Therefore, the proposals were individual to each library, with a reduction of between 8% and 27% depending on their current opening hours.

Results of the public consultation

3.6 The Opening Hours Consultation ran from 11 January to 3 April 2016. The consultation was promoted widely to registered library users, and to residents more generally. Information was provided in Your County (sent to all residents) and a feature was included in our e-newsletter (sent to around 70,000 people). An online version of the consultation questionnaire was also available on our 'Have Your Say' webpages. Key stakeholders and user groups were written to and discussions held with partners, including a number of Parish Councils and the Youth Cabinet

3.7 2,970 people replied to the consultation. The headline results are summarised below and a Consultation Analysis Report Summary is provided as Appendix 1 to this report. The full version of the Consultation Analysis Report, which includes a copy of the consultation questionnaire, has been placed in the Members' and Cabinet Room, and is available on the Cabinet pages of the County Council's website. It can be inspected upon request at County Hall. Members must read and have regard to the full version of the Consultation Analysis Report.

3.8 Most people who responded to the consultation were regular library users, with 97% of respondents having used the library in the past 12 months and 74% of respondents saying they visited the library on at least a fortnightly basis. The reason most often cited for visiting was 'for leisure and enjoyment', which was stated as the main reason in 42% of responses. The next main reasons given were 'for education and training' and 'finding out about other local/central government services' in 11% of responses each.

3.9 The most popular times of the day when people told us they usually visited the library were between 10am and midday, closely followed by 2pm to 5pm. Overall, the period from 10am to 5pm was cited as the time when people usually visited the library in 80% of responses. Over 70% of people who replied to the consultation said they would still have access to a library if the County Council implemented the proposed new opening hours and fewer than 13% said they would not.

3.10 Additional surveys commissioned about the use of the 15 libraries that currently open during the evening period showed that the number of visitors counted entering the library decreased

significantly during the course of the evening. In total, almost 80% of all those we interviewed in the evening survey (from 4pm onwards) said they would not be adversely affected (to the point they would be unable to use the library) by the planned changes. There was very little evidence that the libraries were being used as study spaces, with 8.5% of evening users describing themselves as students, but only 2% of users saying that access to a study space was the main reason for their visit. 5.6% of users interviewed were aged under 16 and 10% were under 25. This does not suggest that reducing evening opening hours would have a disproportionate impact on young people using the library for homework or as a quiet study space.

3.11 As part of the Opening Hours Consultation people were also invited to give their general comments or suggestions on the proposals. These are also summarised in Appendix 1. The majority of respondents (77%) had no comment to make or were neutral towards the proposals. 4% of comments were positive towards the proposals and 19% were negative. We also asked whether there were alternative proposals, other than reducing opening hours, that could help achieve the necessary savings and invited other general comments or suggestions. A total of 651 comments were received, including suggestions for cost-cutting and income generation. A summary of the feedback received in response to these open questions is contained in Appendices 1 and 2. Unfortunately it is not anticipated that the suggestions put forward would secure the level of savings required even as part of a package of measures.

3.12 Respondents were also invited to express an interest if they would like to know more about volunteering opportunities within the service. There was a very good response rate to this with over 300 people expressing an interest in volunteering and we have made contact with those people with an offer of current volunteer roles within the service. The potential for further avenues of volunteer support, on top of those already used effectively by the service, will be considered as work on the Libraries SCS proceeds.

3.13 Some partners, stakeholders and respondents asked the County Council to consider different opening hours at specific libraries. These comments were carefully examined and have resulted in changes to the proposed opening hours for 11 of the County's 24 libraries. The final opening hours proposals for all libraries, including the reasons for revisions to the original proposals, are included in Appendix 3.

3.14 Under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 it is: 'the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof'. A draft Rationale and Impact Assessment was undertaken for the consultation proposals. This provided an assessment of needs to enable the County Council to form a view as to whether the library service will be 'comprehensive' and 'efficient' if the proposed changes are implemented. This Assessment has been updated with the data gathered from the consultation and two sets of further surveys. A final Rationale and Impact Assessment of the final opening hours proposals is attached as Appendix 4.

3.15 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) of the proposals has also been undertaken which has informed the final Rationale and Impact Assessment. In considering the amended opening hours proposals, Cabinet Members are required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty). The EqIA is carried out to identify any adverse impacts that may arise as a result of the proposals for those with protected characteristics and to identify appropriate mitigations. A summary of the EqIA is attached as Appendix 5 to this report. The full version of the EqIA has been placed in the Members' and Cabinet Room and is available on the Cabinet pages of the County Council's website. It can be inspected upon request at County Hall. Members must read the full version of the EqIA and take its findings into consideration when determining these proposals.

3.16 The final Rationale and Impact Assessment confirms that there will be some impacts as a result of the implementation of these proposals. Impacts occur where groups of people have less flexibility than others over when they are able to visit libraries. The EqIA identified three main groups to whom this applies: people who work full-time, children and young people who are in full-time education, and people with a disability (especially where they rely on support from another individual or particular services to access the library). However, we know from the results of the consultation and the evening surveys that the level of impact for these groups is small.

3.17 The final proposals include mitigation for the impact of reductions in library opening hours by prioritising one late evening each week until 6pm for those libraries that already have evening provision, through lunch-time opening, and by all libraries opening on Saturdays. The exception to this is Ringmer library, where in response to public consultation we are proposing not to have a late night opening but instead to open the library on Saturdays. It is also important to remember that the LIS is a service that extends far beyond library buildings. The existing e-library offers library users the opportunity to access materials such as e-books, e-magazines and audio books online 24 hours a day without the need to visit the library and also to renew loans on items borrowed or place a reservation. Items can also be renewed 24 hours a day by phone using the library helpline. The Home Library Service delivers books and other materials to people who cannot easily use a library due to disability or frailty. If the proposed changes are implemented, we will promote the new opening hours widely in libraries and across the County to make sure people are aware of, and are able to easily remember the changes. As part of the promotion we will actively promote the expanding offer and role of the e-library and other means of accessing the library service at alternative times.

3.18 The final assessment concludes that the needs of the public that are met by using the library would still be fulfilled if the County Council implemented the proposed library opening hours in Appendix 3, and that the County Council would continue to fulfil its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

3.19 If approved, a reduction in library opening hours of 25% on average across the County would result in a similar percentage reduction in the numbers of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff who work in and manage the County's libraries. It is estimated that the staffing complement would be reduced by around 30 FTEs. In order to minimise the potential for redundancies, staff vacancies arising since the autumn of 2015 have mainly been filled by existing staff working additional hours on a fixed-term basis or by recruiting temporary staff, both of which arrangements will end in the autumn of 2016. In addition, a number of voluntary severance requests have been received, which will be considered against the future needs of the service. Overall it is expected that the measures outlined in this paragraph would mean that the number of FTE posts that would be at risk of compulsory redundancy would be significantly less.

Governance

3.20 It was agreed at Cabinet in December that a Scrutiny Review Board will be established to provide advice and critical challenge throughout the development of the SCS and ensure proposals reflect the needs of the community. The Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee will have the opportunity to review this report once the July Cabinet agenda and reports are published and prior to the Cabinet meeting itself. It is proposed that the Libraries SCS Scrutiny Review Board has its first meeting in the autumn to consider and have the opportunity to comment on the findings from early work to identify need and the strategic priorities.

4. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

4.1 Based on the results of the libraries Opening Hours Consultation and the final Rationale and Impact Assessment, the proposals for library opening hours have been revised. However, if implemented, they would still deliver the full year savings of £500k as originally identified and contribute towards the overall LTP savings target of £2m. The consultation has enabled the County Council to ensure that the impacts of the proposals are fully understood and they have been revised to have the minimum impact on current service users. The final Rationale and Impact Assessment concludes that the needs of the public that are met by using the library would still be fulfilled if the proposed library opening hours were implemented and that the County Council would continue to fulfil its duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. It is therefore recommended that Cabinet agree to the proposed amended changes to library opening hours, to take effect by the end of 2016.

4.3 The LTP is on target to deliver the proposed savings from the Internal Review of the service of £1.25m. The implementation of the SCS will optimise how the LIS is delivered, responding to current and future need, to achieve the best possible service within available resources. The outcome of the Strategy is dependent on the findings of the needs assessment. Proposals to achieve the final £750k saving from the Libraries SCS will be quantified as work on the strategy progresses, with a draft strategy ready by the summer of 2017.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Libraries' Transformation Programme, Cabinet Report and Appendices, 15 December 2015
Consultation Analysis Report Full Appendix 1
EqIA Full Appendix 5