



Cabinet 19 July 2016

Appendix 5

Equality impact assessment – summary report for proposed reduction to East Sussex library opening hours

The results of equality impact assessments must be published. Please complete this summary, which will be used to publish the results of your impact assessment on the County Council's website.

Members and officers are required to have due regard to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 when making decisions and must therefore read and take into account the findings of equality impact assessments in determining the impact of a proposal on equalities.

Date of assessment : July 2016

Manager(s) name: Matthew Wragg **Role:** Project Manager – Strategic Commissioning

Proposal, project, service, strategy or policy, that was impact assessed:

Proposed reduction to East Sussex library opening hours.

An overall 25% reduction of library opening hours is proposed to achieve savings of £500k toward total Library Transformation Programme savings of £2million. Rather than implement a uniform reduction of 25% for every library it was recognised that this would have a disproportionate impact on smaller libraries in particular and for their users. Therefore, the proposals are individual to each library, with a reduction of between 8% and 27% depending on their current opening hours.

Summary of findings:

The EqIA has been developed alongside the opening hours proposals from the outset in order to carefully consider their practical impact on users. We have taken into account all of the relevant evidence that we have on who uses our libraries, how they are used and why, so that we can properly understand what the changes would mean to people.

The general approach has been to develop proposals which reduce library hours at quieter times to reduce the overall impact. We were mindful that the impact therefore is potentially greater for a minority of people who use libraries very early or later in the day. The proposals aimed to mitigate this by protecting some later provision and Saturday provision, while achieving the overall reduction in hours.

A draft EqIA carried out for the draft proposals in 2015 identified three main groups who it was considered might be more affected by the proposals, as follows:

- Working age people who work full-time;
- children and young people, particular those who are in full-time education;
- people with a disability, particularly those who rely on support from a helper or a lift to access libraries

These groups were primarily identified for a common reason, that they are likely to have less flexibility over times when they are able to visit libraries than others.

Since forming these early conclusions we have examined evidence of actual impact on these and on other groups by analysing people's responses to the public consultation and undertaking targeted library user insight for the final EqlA. This included a comprehensive evening survey to test the impact of the proposals on school age children and young people and people who are employed full time. The EqlA identifies the following key areas of impact.

Full-time employees / working age people

The main cause of impact for this group was anticipated to be for those people of working age (between the ages of 16 and 64) in full-time employment. They would be restricted in their opportunities to use libraries if evening hours are reduced and if they are unable get to the library at other times in the day. The results of the opening hours consultation show that people who work full-time have the potential to be most affected by the proposals of all employment groups. Analysis of their comments confirms that this is due to an inability to get to the library at other times of the day. Those of working age are also therefore proportionately more likely to be affected than other age groups. However, the evening library user survey shows that only 19% of evening users were employed full time, an increase of only 3% from the daytime surveys. Some evening provision has been maintained in the proposals at certain libraries as well as provision on Saturday at all libraries. The E-library also offers 24 hours access.

Children and young people

The main cause of impact for this group was anticipated to be the ability to access libraries after school for homework and study if hours are reduced. The evening library user survey was conducted during term time and the Easter school holiday to account for variation. There was very little evidence from the survey that libraries were being used as study spaces in the evenings, with only 2% of evening users saying this was the main reason for their visit. Only 5.6% of evening users were under 16 and 10% under 25. 8.5% of evening users were students. The evidence does not, therefore, suggest that the proposals for reduced evening opening hours would have a disproportionate impact on children and young people. Some evening provision has been maintained in the proposals at certain libraries as well as provision on Saturday at all libraries. The E-library also offers 24 hours access.

Disability

The main cause of impact for this group was anticipated to be the reliance by an individual on a helper to access the library, and their availability during the proposed hours. Analysis of the results of the public consultation was undertaken for those people with a disability who said they would be unable to use a library during the proposed hours. 19 of the 46 people in this group made comments. Generally the cause of the impact did not seem directly attributable to specific needs arising from their disability, but concerned their own availability during the proposed hours. Only one of these comments made reference to their reliance on a lift. The specific nature of their disability covered a range of mental health as well as physical health issues. The evidence does not, therefore, suggest that reduced opening hours would have a disproportionate impact according to disability. However, service mitigations are in place for those library users who have a disability, such as the Home Library Service and 24 hour access to the E-library.

Though the actual evidence of impact for all groups seems relatively low or negligible, we recognise that there are still some users who may not be able to access the library during the proposed hours. The draft proposals were developed to mitigate for the impact of reductions in hours and a focus on core hours of 10.00am to 5.00pm by prioritising Thursday evening opening until 6.00pm at some libraries where there is currently evening provision, even though use in the evenings is relatively low. All libraries are proposed to open on Saturdays and, along with those libraries that are open during lunchtime, provide opportunities for people in full-time work or education to visit a library.

The EqIA concludes that we are confident we have taken reasonable steps to ensure that those groups with protected characteristics have been considered among existing library users. The final opening hours proposals have been amended for 11 out of 24 individual libraries to try to lessen the impact of these groups and for users more widely.

Summary of recommendations and key points of action plan:

The EqIA identifies that, if agreed, the effective communication of the new opening hours and corresponding mitigations would be key to successful implementation of the proposals. The mitigations, both in general terms (such as the e-library and mobile library) and for those with specific needs, such as disability (i.e. the Home Library Service) are already in place within the current service offer and are not affected by the proposals. Mitigations for those with specific needs would be promoted in a targeted way by library staff in front line roles and in coordinating and support roles.

Promotion

The new hours would be clearly publicised in libraries so that customers are aware of them in advance of and following the implementation. Other channels of promotion would include the County Council's website, the e-library, social media, the library e-newsletter to 70,000 registered users, public and community sector partners, as well as press releases to the local media, and a feature in Your County magazine. The availability of the e-library and of personalised help to use it would also be promoted alongside the new opening hours to increase uptake.

E-library

The 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. Computer training and advice is provided in libraries by 'computer buddies' – staff and volunteers who are able to explain to visitors how to access the e-library using the People's Network computers in libraries and using their own devices. Computer advice is available on Saturdays as well as weekdays. This training would be promoted as part of the coordinated plan to mitigate for any impact of the proposals.

Disability

There are a range of current provisions for users with disabilities. Different types of membership are available according to need for those who find it more difficult to manage a standard library account. The Home Library Service is a volunteer provided service which delivers books and other materials for library users who

cannot easily reach a library because they are disabled or frail or because they are caring for someone else who cannot be left. We recognise that adjusting to new hours may present a real challenge for some users and would promote the new opening hours widely in libraries and across the County in different formats to make sure people are aware. We would provide handouts with the new opening hours so that people are able to easily refer to them. We would actively promote the expanding offer and role of the e-library and other means of accessing the library service remotely and at alternative times.

Mobile library

The Mobile Library service provides additional access to the library service for rural communities. It would be promoted as part of the coordinated plan to mitigate for any impact of the proposals. It visits stops across the County every three weeks and is wheelchair accessible.

Monitoring

Once implemented, the impact of the proposals would be monitored on an ongoing basis, using informal and anecdotal evidence by staff as well as more formal review. Service complaints will be kept under review at three monthly intervals for a period of 12 months. Periodic library user surveys would also monitor the suitability of opening hours, for example the Public Library User Survey (PLUS survey) which is carried out every three years. The library service is also undertaking a whole service review to determine the longer term future of the service and will consider suitability of opening hours for current and potential library users as part of that. The resulting Strategic Commissioning Strategy is expected to be produced in July 2017.

Protected characteristics that this project, service, strategy or policy will impact upon

Please mark the appropriate boxes with an 'x'

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Age			x
Disability		x	
Ethnicity		x	
Gender/Transgender		x	
Marital Statues/Civil partnership		x	
Pregnancy and maternity		x	
Religion/Belief		x	
Sexual Orientation		x	
Other (i.e. carers, rurality): Carers		x	
All		x	