



Report to Cabinet Member for

Community Services

Decision to be taken on or after Wednesday 16 May 2007

Decision can normally be implemented at least 3 working days after decision has been signed.

Cabinet Member Report No. CS02.07

Title: Library Opening Hours
Date: 8 May 2007
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Electoral Divisions Affected: All

Relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Adult Services

Summary

Over 3,500 people responded to public consultation before it closed at March 31, 2007. In addition 3 petitions were received with 2,200 signatures. Overall the response rate was low, with only Bourne End, Burnham and Haddenham achieving over 10% of active library borrowers.

Overall, 30% of respondents were happy with proposed changes, 70% against in varying ways. In Tier 1 (Centres of Excellence) libraries (High Wycombe and Aylesbury), the majority were in favour of the changes. In Tier 2 (Area) libraries (Hazlemere, Chesham, Amersham, Beaconsfield, Buckingham and Marlow) there was little overall opposition to proposed reductions, and a response rate of less than 5% of library users in all cases. In Tier 4 (Community) Libraries there were very modest protests against generally small reductions. Within these tiers, some specific variations from the proposed pattern of opening times were expressed, and a number of these have been included in the recommendations below.

The strongest protest against the proposed reductions came from Tier 3 (Town) Libraries (Bourne End, Burnham, Chalfont St. Peter, Haddenham, Princes Risborough, Great Missenden, Winslow and Wendover. Excluding petitions, the overall number opposed to the proposals in these libraries was 1,418.

Recommendation

1.1 That in Tier 3 libraries, 26 hours of the proposed weekly reduction of 61 hours should be restored, in order to respond positively to the principal concerns of library users and residents.

1.2 The detailed recommendations for Tier 3 libraries are as follows

Library		Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Total
Bourne End	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.30	10.00-1.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-6.00	9.30-1.00	31
	<i>Proposal</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	26
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.30	10.00-1.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	29.5
Burnham	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.00	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-5.30	9.30-4.00	40
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-5.00	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	29
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-4.00	36
Chalfont St Peter	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.30	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	9.30-7.30	9.30-1.00	34.5
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	26
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	26
Gerrards Cross	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-4.00	42.5
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	29
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00 -4.00	32
Great Missenden	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.30	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	9.30-7.30	9.30-1.00	34.5
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	29
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	9.30 -5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	9.30-7.00	9.30-1.00	31.5
Haddenham	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.30	CLOSED	9.30-5.00	9.30-7.30	9.30-1.00	31
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	26
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	9.30-5.00	CLOSED	9.30-5.00	9.30-7.00	9.30-1.00	28
Princes Risborough	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-8.00	9.30-1.00	9.30-8.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	35.5
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-7.30	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	33.5
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.30	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	36
Wendover	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	9.30-7.30	9.30-1.00	9.30- 5.00	9.30-7.30	9.30-1.00	34.5
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	10.00- 5.00	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	29
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	9.30-5.00	9.30-1.00	9.30- 5.00	9.30-7.00	9.30-1.00	31.5
Winslow	<i>Current</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	31
	<i>Proposed</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	CLOSED	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	26
	<i>Recommendation</i>	CLOSED	10.00-5.00	10.00-5.00	10.00-1.00	10.00-7.00	10.00-1.00	29

1.3 That in the following libraries the proposals for change are amended as a result of the preferences expressed in the public consultation, without increasing the overall number of hours proposed:

Chesham Close on Monday. Open on Wednesdays from 9.30 to 5.30

Ivinghoe Close on Thursday morning. Open on Thursday afternoon from 2.00 to 5.00

Stokenchurch Wing Close at 5.00 pm on Tuesday. Remain open until 7.00 on Thursday.
Close at 5.00 pm on Tuesday. Remain open until 7.00 on Friday

1.4 That the opening hours proposals in relation to all other libraries are adopted as set out in the consultation.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

2.1.1 In accordance with the terms of reference set out in the Cabinet decision of 27 November, 2006, the consultation invited library users and members of the public to express their preferences in relation to a proposed pattern of opening hours for each library. Respondents were asked whether they were happy with the proposed changes, and then invited to comment on details such as morning opening times, evening closure times, and preferred days for the library to be open.

2.2 This information, used in conjunction with existing performance statistics, has permitted a detailed analysis of public preferences, which is reflected in the recommendations set out above.

2.3 In view of the generous consultation period and the extensive media coverage of the consultation, the overall response rate has been low. The only significant protest against the level of the proposed reductions (as distinct from the detailed pattern) has come from the Tier 3 Town Libraries. This was unsurprising as the greatest reductions in the number of opening hours (up to 27.5%) had been proposed for this tier.

2.4 The present recommendation will restore 26 hours of weekly opening from the total of 61 hours originally proposed for libraries in this tier. It recognises the strength of feeling within the majority of the affected communities, while preserving the fundamental principle of providing tiered opening times that reflect catchment populations and established levels of use. It will also reduce the overall percentage reduction in library opening hours across Buckinghamshire from 11.6% to 8.7%

2.5 The recommended course of action will show that the Council is responsive to public opinion, and demonstrate that participation in consultation can have positive benefits. It will also be perceived as being within the context of the Getting Closer to Communities strategy.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

3.1 The only viable alternative would be to retain the level of reductions set out in the consultation proposals, while varying the pattern of opening hours at individual libraries in accordance with the details of the public response. This would deliver the full level of savings required, but would preserve reductions that although equitable and fair in terms of the overall service, are perceived locally as being punitive and unfair.

C. Resource implications

4.1.1 The total estimated full year revenue budget saving from the proposals set out in the public consultation was £152,000. Implementing the recommendations set out in this document will reduce this saving by an estimated £48,000. Representations are being made in order to secure Corporate resources to help cover this and the

additional shortfall due to the changes not being in place for a full year 2007/08 and thus avoid an adverse impact on other areas of the service.

- 4.1.2 The Service believes that in order to help restore public confidence in the County Council's commitment to a highly valued service that it is essential for the implementation of these recommendations to be followed by a period of stability, with no further library closures or reductions to opening hours. However, the Council's Medium Term Plan currently includes £149,000 set against further reductions in library opening hours in 2008-9. This will need to be addressed as part of the development of the 2008+ Medium Term Plan.

D. Legal implications

There are no legal implications to this decision

E. Property implications

There are no property implications to this decision

F. Other implications/issues

User opportunities to access library services will be reduced, although the recommendations seek to maintain a balance of opportunity between times of the day and the week. Impact on partner organisations and other stakeholders will be minimal. The proposed reductions will have a further negative impact on the Council's performance against the Public Library Service Standards (BVPI 220), in particular those relating to user satisfaction, visits and the time taken to satisfy requests. The Council currently meets these standards. Further deterioration of the Council's performance against the standard relating to opening hours is inevitable, although this is a standard which the Council does not currently meet. It should be noted that this BVPI and the associated standards are currently under revision, and a number of quantitative standards are likely to be replaced.

G. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

A summary of the public consultation is included in the Summary on page 1 of this document. Correspondence and telephone conversations have taken place between Mr. Peter Mussett, Senior Operations Manager, Culture and Learning and County Councillors representing Gerrards Cross, Burnham, Bourne End, Chesham, Amersham and Ivinghoe. County Councillors Mr. Roberts and Mr. Appleyard have been involved in compiling public petitions asking for the proposed reductions at Gerrards Cross and Bourne End to be reconsidered.

The Head of Culture and Learning, Mrs. Amanda Brooke-Webb, presented a report and answered member questions at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Adult Services on March 14, 2007. Mr. Mussett presented a report and answered questions at the South Bucks Joint Local Committee meeting on April 11, 2007.

H. Communication issues

Decision to be announced publicly via a County Council Press release.

Progress Monitoring

Impact of the decision will be monitored through standard measures of service performance, such as visitors, loans, customer feedback.

I. Review

[The following sentence should be included if the decision will result in a revised or new policy to indicate an appropriate review period e.g 1 year.]

Not applicable

Background Papers

Library Opening Hours Summary Workbook, showing full details and analysis of responses to the public consultation, with details of recommendations.

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on Tuesday 15 May 2007. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 383610), Fax (to 01296 382538), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk