

WIRRAL COUNCIL

TRANSFORMATION & RESOURCES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

15 JULY 2015

SUBJECT:	INTERIM REPORT ON RECONFIGURATION OF LIBRARY SERVICE
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	HEAD OF BUSINESS PROCESSES
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	CHRIS MEADEN
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the library service available from the 15 community library sites following Cabinet budget proposal of December 15th 2014 (reducing opening hours to 18 per week at these sites) has been implemented.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Consultation

- 2.1.1. Following the cabinet budget proposal, officers conducted a period of consultation with friends groups and library users alongside statutory consultation with Council staff, to begin the process of implementing this decision.
- 2.1.2. The sites are Beechwood; Bromborough; Greasby; Higher Bebington; Hoylake; Irby; Leasowe; Pensby; Prenton; Ridgeway; Seacombe; St James; Upton; Wallasey Village and Woodchurch libraries
- 2.1.3. An initial proposal was put forward how the 18-hour per week operating model could be delivered. This model was discussed at a series of meetings with friends groups, emailed to over 30,000 registered library users and formed the main part of the consultation pack which was used in discussion with Council staff and Trade Union colleagues.

2.2 Revised operating model

- 2.2.1. Based on the feedback received from this consultation process a revised 18-hour per week operating model was implemented, accepting the main concerns from library staff, friends groups and Trade Unions. These were the introduction of longer weekday working with shorter Saturday opening and restricting Wednesday opening, whilst still achieving the saving which was required for the agreed budget in 2015-16.

- 2.2.2 The revised opening patterns also looked to accommodate existing activities within library sites and offer site opening on days requested by friends groups.
- 2.2.3. The revised hours and opening patterns across community libraries were implemented from 16 March 2015.

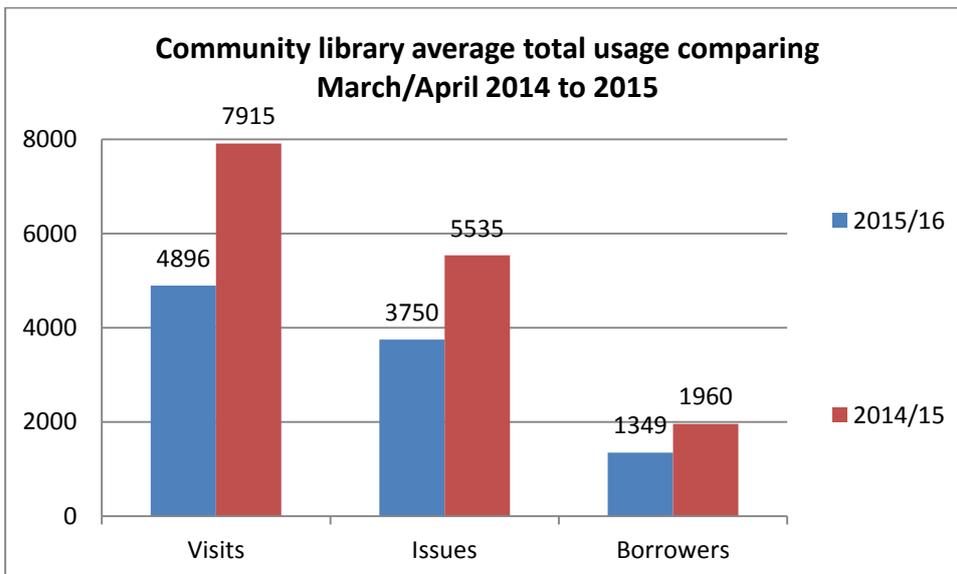
2.3 Post implementation

- 2.3.1. During the feedback process, a number of proposals were received offering support for the service in general but also specific libraries. An assurance was given that developing the service through the use of such charities and volunteers would be a priority following on from the implementation of the new opening hours.
- 2.3.2. An on-going commitment was similarly given to work with service providers and other groups to minimise the disruption experienced by people accessing additional services and activities available across these sites.
- 2.3.3. Officers also committed to continuing to work with library staff, on a one-to-one and group basis, in order to minimise disruption for them as they are assigned duties within the new opening pattern.

3.0 IMPACT OF CHANGES

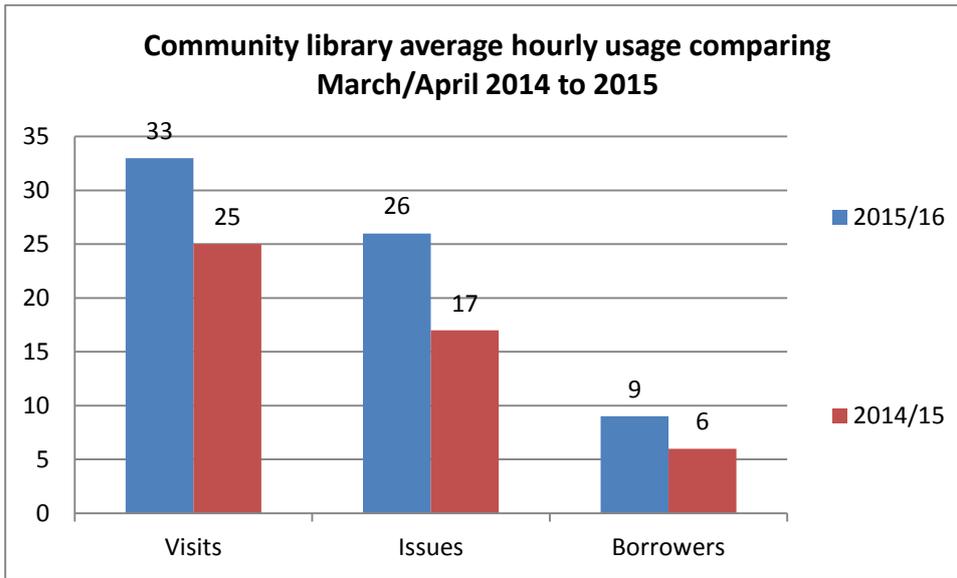
3.1 Customer usage at community libraries

3.1.1. Measured in total average usage using the number of visits (footfall counter); issues (number of item issues and renewals) and borrowers (individual borrowers using the service) the following impact can be noted when comparing historic usage in April/May 2014 to usage for the same period in 2015:



3.1.2. This represents an approximate 33% drop in average total usage across all metrics when comparing the two periods though it should be seen in the context of a generally declining library site usage measured over the wider service, including central and merged library sites unaffected by the changes.

3.1.2. However when taking into account the reduced opening hours at these sites and calculating an average hourly usage based on the new hours it reveals a significant increase in average hourly usage between the two periods:



This represents an approximate 45% increase in average hourly usage across all metrics.

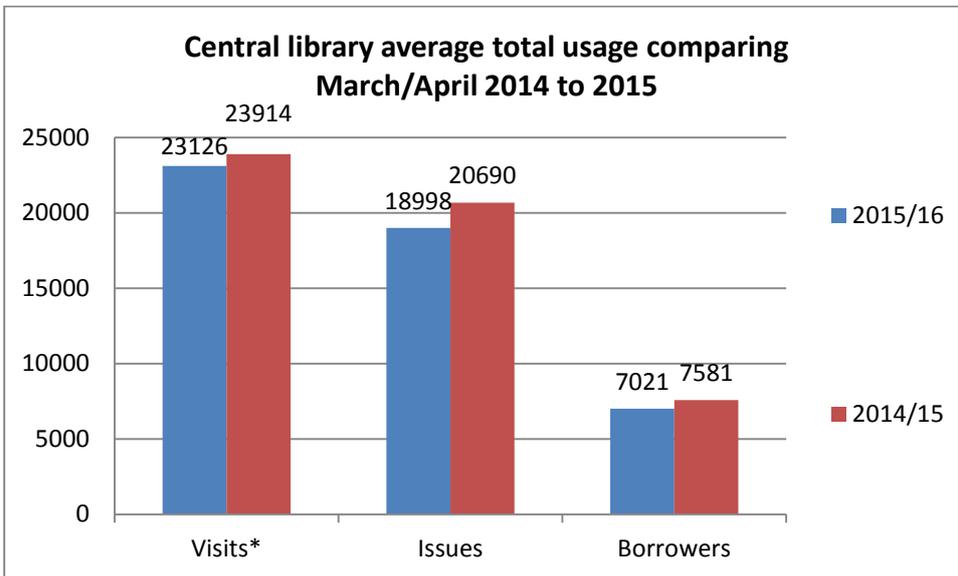
3.1.3. Previous analysis undertaken at these particular sites revealed a significant disparity of usage and costs per customer across the previous opening hours. The revised opening pattern has in effect improved the efficiency of the service with staff serving a higher average number of customers per hour than previously recorded.

3.2 Customer usage at central and merged libraries

3.2.1. Similar comparative analysis was undertaken at central and merged libraries to ascertain what if any impact was being felt at these sites as a result of the changes to community libraries hours.

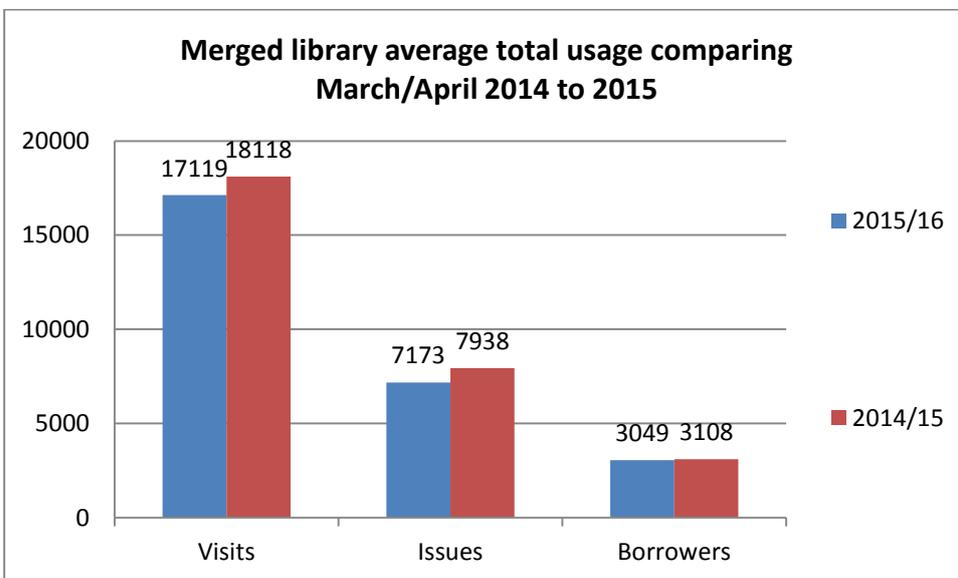
3.2.2. Central libraries are Bebington merged central library; Birkenhead central library; Wallasey central library and West Kirby merged central library. Merged libraries (with One Stop Shops) are Eastham; Heswall; Moreton and Rock Ferry

3.2.3. Again measured in total average usage using the number of visits (footfall counter); issues (number of item issues and renewals) and borrowers (individual borrowers using the service) the following changes in demand can be noted when comparing historic usage in April/May 2014 to usage for the same period in 2015:



*Visits includes one stop shop customers at Bebington/West Kirby merged libraries

This represents an approximate 6% decrease in average total usage across all metrics (opening hours remain unchanged).



*Visits includes one stop shop customers at all sites

This represents an approximate 6% decrease in average total usage across all metrics (opening hours remain unchanged).

3.2.4. In summary, though this analysis at central and merged library sites should be viewed in the context of an overall trend of declining site usage there does not seem to be any significant shift in demand coming from customers previously using community libraries.

3.3 Activities and auxiliary services available at community libraries

3.3.1. A commitment was given on this change to minimise the disruption to 'in house' activities and services delivered by partner agencies at community library sites.

- 3.3.2. To date 89% (55 in total) of existing activities and other services offered at these sites have either been able to continue unchanged or have been re-scheduled to alternative dates/start times after liaison with providers/customers. A number of activities have been allowed to continue as service users have stepped forward to offer their support or friends-run activities have been given access to sites outside of the new opening hours. This is a model that is envisaged for the future library service, as a collaboration between the local library and the community it serves.
- 3.3.3. The remaining activities 11% (7 in total) have ceased due to the changes in opening hours with an additional activity ceasing due to lack of on-going demand. For the majority of these specific activities alternative provision is available at other locality sites.

4.0 CUSTOMER/STAFF FEEDBACK ON CHANGES

4.1 Customer feedback

- 4.1.1. As of the end of May 2015, approximately 350 separate pieces of feedback had been received from customers though the majority of these (70%+) came from a cluster of six community libraries affected by the changes – Bromborough; Greasby; Pensby; St James; Wallasey Village and Woodchurch libraries. This feedback group represents approximately 3% of all borrowers using the service in the April/May period analysed.
- 4.1.2. The feedback revealed that the majority of these customers were regular library users, visiting their local library at least once a week (83%) and predominately using the service to borrow books (75%).
- 4.1.3. Over half of these respondents (57%) indicated that they were using their library less frequently as a result of the changes though the remaining proportion (43%) reported either no impact; use of an alternative library sites or that their usage had increased.

4.2 Feedback from staff

- 4.2.1. There have been 25 separate pieces of feedback from staff on the impact of the changes, with the majority (56%) coming from Upton and Wallasey Village libraries and a number of libraries (8) not providing any feedback.
- 4.2.2. The two main concerns highlighted are insufficient time now being available to undertake necessary library duties and a lack of continuity of service as staff become more agile, providing cover across a number of sites opening less frequently.
- 4.2.3. In response to this staff have been given additional time (outside of the new opening pattern) to catch up with administrative tasks though this is at the discretion of the relevant manager. As regards the second issue raised (continuity of staff) it has been emphasised to staff that there is a need for the library service to become more consistent, relying on a flexible and agile workforce to respond to the changing demands imposed on the service. However some consideration will be given to allowing staff to remain within their current 'patch' (roughly based around constituency areas) to minimise disruption for both staff and customers.

5.0 SUMMARY

- 5.1. Although there has been an impact of implementing the revised opening hours at community libraries this has largely been mitigated by actions taken by the service, flexibility of the staffing resource or acceptance by the majority of customers of the new opening pattern.
- 5.2. The approximate 33% reduction in overall average usage at these sites should be taken in the context of a wider declining site usage (experienced to a lesser extent at other libraries not affected by these changes) as other channels are becoming popular such as online self-service; e-books and the phone service. From a service efficiency perspective the average costs per customer have reduced significantly (approximately 45%) at these sites as the new hours focus demand across a shorter opening period. This has partly addressed the previously highlighted high cost of service at periods of lowest demand across the longer opening hours.
- 5.3. The commitment given to continuing current activities/auxillary services provided by partner agencies has been largely met with 89% of these regular events continuing in the same or updated format. These changes have also acted as a catalyst for securing community/volunteer support at certain sites, ensuring the on-going provision of services and proving this is a model that can be adopted more widely in the future.
- 5.4. The feedback from a minority of active library users showed that whilst these regular borrowers felt the new hours had reduced the number of times they used their local library there was a significant proportion (43%) who confirmed no impact or indeed a positive outcome of the changes.
- 5.5. A response has been given to staff feedback received, addressing some of their concerns directly (additional time for administrative tasks) or attempting to accommodate some requests (consistency of staffing) within the changing demands of a responsive and flexible service provision.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 6.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

7.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

8.0 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Extensive consultation was undertaken as part of the wider future council process, including consultation on this particular budget option. As detailed in the report subsequent consultation on the specifics of the proposed changes to service has been initiated and used to inform the revised opening pattern.

9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

- 9.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

10.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

11.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

12.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The potential impact of the proposal has been reviewed with regard to equality and the impact review is attached

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/budget-options-eias>

13.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

14.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

14.1 There are none arising from this interim report.

15.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

15.1 That this interim report is noted pending a full review of the impact of the revised community library opening hours.

16.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

16.1. So that Members are aware of the up to date position with regard the changes of opening hours at Community Libraries

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APPENDICES

None

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	15 December 2014