

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet Member – Leisure and Tourism

**DATE:** 23 March 2011

**SUBJECT:** Reduction in library opening hours

**WARDS  
AFFECTED:** All

**REPORT OF:** Graham Bayliss, Director of Leisure and Tourism

**CONTACT  
OFFICER:** Christine Hall, Head of Library and Information Services

**EXEMPT/  
CONFIDENTIAL:** No

**PURPOSE/SUMMARY:**

The savings agreed by Council on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2010 for the financial year 2011/2012 included the reduction in opening hours to the same level as in 2001, with a cost saving of £140,000. This report sets out how this saving can be made.

**REASON WHY DECISION REQUIRED:**

Full Council approved the reduction of opening hours on 16 December 2010. A decision about the pattern of opening hours is needed so that the necessary work and staff consultation can take place, enabling the revised opening hours to be implemented as of 1 July 2011.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Cabinet Member approves the recommended pattern of opening hours as set out in Appendix E.

**KEY DECISION:** No. This report is not a key decision in itself but forms part of the process for setting the Council's budget.

**FORWARD PLAN:** Yes. Setting the Council's budget is included in the Forward Plan

**IMPLEMENTATION DATE:** Following the expiry of the call-in period for the minutes of this meeting

**ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS: None – this was a budget decision made by Council**

**IMPLICATIONS:**

**Budget/Policy Framework:** Council has agreed a reduction in budget of £140,000 for the reduction in opening hours

**Financial:**

<b><u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u></b>	<b>2009/ 2010 £</b>	<b>2010/ 2011 £</b>	<b>2011/ 2012 £</b>	<b>2012/ 2013 £</b>
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<b><u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u></b>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure				
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources				
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	When?			
How will the service be funded post expiry?				

**Legal:** None  
**Risk Assessment:** None  
**Asset Management:** None

**CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN/VIEWS**

Staff who work within the libraries.  
 Public consultation aimed at users of the libraries, to establish their preferred

pattern of opening hours. The proposed consultation was submitted to the Consultation Panel.

FD703 – The Head of Corporate Finance and ICT has been consulted and her comments have been incorporated into this report.

#### **CORPORATE OBJECTIVE MONITORING:**

<b><u>Corporate Objective</u></b>		<b><u>Positive Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Neutral Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Negative Impact</u></b>
1	Creating a Learning Community			✓
2	Creating Safe Communities			✓
3	Jobs and Prosperity			✓
4	Improving Health and Well-Being			✓
5	Environmental Sustainability		✓	
6	Creating Inclusive Communities			✓
7	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy			✓
8	Children and Young People			✓

#### **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS RELIED UPON IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT**

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Opening hours in libraries were increased from 2001-2003 as a result of additional funding from the Council to meet the Public Library Standards. The Public Library Standards were removed in 2008 and replaced with one National Indicator (NI9 – use of libraries). NI 9 was removed by the Coalition Government in June 2010.

In 2001 libraries were open for a total of 447 hours per week. The pattern of opening hours in 2001 meant that some of the larger libraries (at Bootle, Crosby, Formby, Maghull (now Meadows) and Southport) were closed at lunchtime, and were open for the same number of hours as the smaller ones.

- 1.2 Libraries are a customer facing frontline service and as a consequence staff costs account for the largest proportion of operating costs. Therefore the effect of reducing the number of opening hours will be a reduction in the number of staff delivering services to the public.
- 1.3 In addition to the opening hours saving the Council also agreed to reduce the number of library manager posts by 40%. This in turn has reduced the number of staff hours available to operate the new library hours. Therefore the revised hours identified in this report has taken this into account and a level of staffing established per hour in each library. The culmination is that the level of staffing per hour in all libraries will be lower than it is now.

## **2. PATTERN OF OPENING HOURS**

- 2.1 In determining the pattern of hours it is proposed that the larger libraries needed to be open for longer hours than the smaller libraries. This results in the opening hours being 44 hours per week for the larger libraries and 30 hours for the smaller libraries. This provides a total of 460 hours per week.
- 2.2 The current library opening hours do not account for a geographical spread of hours. For example, all the smaller libraries plus Crosby library are closed on a Thursday afternoon; all libraries are open late on a Wednesday but no library is open late on a Tuesday. The current opening hours are attached at Appendix A.
- 2.3 A revised pattern of opening hours with 3 different options for smaller libraries and 2 options for larger libraries was devised. This took account of the need to spread out half or full day closures and late nights within local areas. All options included at least one late night during the week and Saturday morning openings for all libraries. All options also included opening on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays. This was to reduce the amount of time any library would be closed to a minimum. The options are attached at Appendix B.

### **3. PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

- 3.1 Public consultation took place from 7 February 2011 to 18 February 2011. The proposed consultation methodology was agreed by the Consultation Panel on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011.
- 3.2 The consultation was aimed at library users. A questionnaire was produced for each library, and each one gave the users the choice of options for that library. The survey was also published on the website. Each library was provided with information about the levels of business for different times of the day and different days of the week.
- 3.3 A total of 13,000 forms were distributed to libraries, and 9,556 of these were returned, and a further 224 surveys completed on-line. This is an excellent response rate within a short timescale, and limited advanced publicity.
- 3.4 There was a clear majority for a favoured option in most libraries. In these libraries there was also no significant difference according to age, disability, ethnicity and gender. A summary of the results are attached at Appendix C. However, the consultation results at Birkdale and Meadows were much closer, with differences between the age groups.
  - 3.4.1 At Birkdale, 38.8% preferred option 3 and 33 % preferred option 2. Option 3 was preferred by over 55s but option 2 was preferred by under 17s. Option 2 means opening at 10am and no additional half day closure. Option 3 means opening at 9.30am but with a further half day closure. Young people have limited access to the library during term time, and an afternoon closure would restrict this further. In general, over 55s have far more hours available when they can use the library. Also, Option 2 gives a better geographical spread between Ainsdale, Churchtown, and Birkdale libraries. The proposed hours included at Appendix E are option 2 with the retention of the late night as Wednesday, as in option 3
  - 3.4.2 At Meadows, 48.5% preferred option 1 and 43.2% preferred option 2. As with Birkdale, there was a difference between the age groups. Option 1 was preferred by over 55s and option 2 was preferred by under 17s. Option 1 means opening at 10am and closing at 6pm on weekdays, as the library does now. Option 2 means opening at 10.30am and closing at 6.30pm. Option 2 gives more opening hours that young people can use. However, it makes class visits and rhymetimes difficult to include. Also, the library has a self service area that is open when the library is closed. The proposed hours included at Appendix E are option 1.

3.5 All forms had a space for comments. The majority of forms were returned without making any comments but a significant number of people did make comments. A sample of these is attached at Appendix D. Of those who did comment a large number did not agree with any reduction in opening hours, with some very strongly worded comments. A smaller but substantial number of respondents felt that a reduction in library opening hours was preferable to closure, and were pleased that their library was not closing. The other area of significant comment in the larger libraries was from people stating the need for late night and weekend opening, even though they might not need it themselves. There were two libraries where there were a number of the same comments, specific to that library:

3.5.1 At Birkdale, from the 1065 returns, 141 (13%) did not want Tuesday to be the day the library closes. This is because there are a number of activities that take place in the library on that day. This is a problem for all the smaller libraries that have to close for a whole day where they have built up community involvement on different days of the week. In most instances, it is easy to change the day of the week of the activities. There were two groups who would find this difficult but they have been consulted and alternative arrangements are being put in place.

3.5.2 At Meadows, from the 754 returns, 114 (15%) people want the Sunday opening retained. This is clearly a popular day for people to wish to have available although the actual use on Sunday is not high. At a time when savings are made, staffing on a Sunday is twice as expensive and this would require a further reduction elsewhere in the week. There are therefore no plans to open on a Sunday.

#### **4. STAFF CONSULTATION**

4.1 Staff have been consulted as part of the staff consultation process and in line with the Council's procedures. Due to the number of vacancies and expressions of interest in Voluntary Redundancy/Very Early Retirement some libraries will have too many staff whilst some will have too few. As a result, there will need to be a reallocation of staff to other libraries. Staff have been asked to express their preferences of where they are located.

4.2 Staff were also consulted as part of the public consultation about their preferred pattern of opening hours. The results from staff were analysed separately. In all but one library, the staff agreed with the preferred option from the library users. In the library where this was not the case, it was a larger library where staff preferred one late night, instead of two. Although people want late nights, there is relatively low usage compared to during the day.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The public consultation exercise was a worthwhile exercise, raising people's awareness of the impact of reduced opening hours on their library. The response was very good, and gave an indication of the depth of support from the people using the libraries.
- 5.2 The results from the consultation, with the exception of one library mean that the preferred option from the majority of users in any one library will be implemented. There will be a variation in the times that libraries open throughout Sefton but this was the case in 2001. There will be an improved geographic spread of opening hours within a local area. The proposed opening hours are attached at Appendix E.
- 5.3 The proposed hours will be implemented from 1 July 2011. They will be monitored to assess usage and reviewed where appropriate. Both Netherpton and Southport libraries hours have been determined for their current locations. Both of these will need to be reviewed as part of the joint facilities when they open, partly dependent on availability of self service facilities when the library is closed.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 That Cabinet Member approves the recommended pattern of opening hours, as set out in Appendix E.