

REPORT TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO LIBRARY OPENING HOURS



Report Reference COM-23-03
Meeting Date 19th June 2023
Agenda Item 8
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

Cheshire East Council provides 16 libraries and a mobile library service and has launched a consultation on changes to library opening hours across the borough. This follows the decision taken as part of its budget process to reduce library expenditure by just over £1m over the next four years.

CEC held a consultation on its draft budget (Medium Term Financial Strategy) which had proposed the closure of libraries on Saturdays and evenings and the closure of the mobile library scheme (which serves rural communities). These changes were reversed in the final budget with the council finding the £170k savings elsewhere.

The current proposals are that:

- a) All libraries in the borough close for 1.5 days during the week (Mon-Fri)
- b) There will be reduced funding for new books and newspapers

CEC is seeking feedback on:

- a) How income could be generated in libraries to keep them open longer
- b) How library provision should be delivered in local areas
- c) What the new opening hours for each library should look like

The consultation notes that CEC has a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service. It should be noted that unlike a number of principal authorities the council is not proposing the closure of any library in the borough, nor is it looking to transfer libraries to local councils (which some principal authorities have done in place of closure).

2.0 IMPACT ON KNUTSFORD LIBRARY

2.1 CURRENT SITUATION

Knutsford Library is currently open 44 hours per week across six days. It opens from 9am Monday-Saturday and closes at 5pm (Monday and Friday), 7pm (Tuesday and Thursday) or 1pm (Wednesday and Saturday). The library provides a traditional library service (a range of fiction and non-fiction books for adults and children, local history, access to microfiche readers and computers). In addition, the library is a customer service point for Cheshire East Council where customers are able to make arrangements for blue badges, railcards and certain benefits. The library hosts a number of groups

and activities.

2.2 PROPOSED CHANGES TO OPENING HOURS

The proposal is to reduce the opening hours of the library from 44 per week to 34 per week through a Thursday closure. There are no other proposed changes to the opening hours. The changes deliver parity amongst the larger libraries – no library will be open more than 34 hours per week.

The proposal is to close Knutsford Library on Thursdays.

3.0 LIBRARY “TOP UP” SERVICE

Cheshire East Council is inviting interested local councils to express interest in funding a “top up” of library services. This would be available from half a day to the current service level for a minimum of three years. The guide cost is between £9,000 (smallest library) to £28,000 (largest library) per half day per annum.

Under this scheme, the Town Council could agree to provide funding for a half day/full day of opening to reduce the proposed closure. Such an agreement would commence from April 2024 and therefore form part of the 2024/25 budgets.

4.0 DECISIONS REQUIRED

The committee should consider:

- a) Would it prefer all libraries in the borough to be closed on the same day each week e.g. all libraries closed on Thursdays and a half day on Wednesdays OR would it prefer different opening hours such that a library is available within the vicinity of each community each day?
- b) Does it wish to explore the “top up” funding service with Cheshire East Council?
- c) Does it have any specific or general comments to make as part of this consultation?
- d) Does it have any suggestions as to how CEC could increase income from its libraries?