



OPENING HOURS REVIEW

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR CONSULTATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Consultation period :
12th September – 2nd December 2011**

Libraries NI
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Report prepared by

The
Equality Company

Access to information

As part of our commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations, we want to ensure that everyone is able to access the documents we produce. We would therefore be happy to provide any of the information in this document in an alternative format or discuss it with you in person. Please contact **Mrs Anne Todd** –



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Consultation

Please submit all comments on this report to:

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The closing date for receipt of comments is Friday, 2nd December 2011. Comments will be accepted in any format.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 When it was established in April 2009, Libraries NI inherited an inconsistent pattern of opening hours from the five Education and Library Boards and recognised the need to harmonise opening hours into one consistent approach that best meets the needs of customers and communities.

1.2 The significant reduction in the Libraries NI budget over the coming years which resulted from the 2010 Budget process, means that there is now a need to create substantial savings by reducing opening hours.

1.3 The policy review therefore aims to deliver the required level of savings whilst ensuring consistency of approach.

1.4 The Libraries NI Board has agreed that the proposals resulting from the policy review should be issued for consultation and that the potential equality impacts should be assessed through an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

1.5 This Executive Summary briefly outlines the initial findings of the EQIA to date. The full EQIA report and all other documents referred to can be accessed on the website www.librariesni.org.uk

2. DEFINITION OF THE AIMS OF THE POLICY

2.1 The principal aim of the policy review is to deliver savings as required by the NI Executive. The Libraries NI Board considered a range of options for making the required savings and selected reduced opening hours as one of several initiatives because the reduction can be reversed at a later date if the economic position improves.

2.2 Another aim of the review is introduce greater consistency of approach across Northern Ireland. The review report therefore proposes that libraries should be grouped into four bands and that there should be consistency in terms of the total number of opening hours within each band. Libraries have been allocated to bands mainly on the basis of the historic level of use (measured by number of visits, issues and computer sessions and the number of active members).

2.3 Consideration has also been given to the need to ensure that the opening hours of each library are sustainable, so that ad hoc closures due to staffing shortages can be avoided, other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

2.4 Although the proposed reductions in opening hours will affect all users, some people will be able to adjust their pattern of library usage and will not be significantly affected. However, those who use libraries on specific days or at specific times of day may be adversely affected, although it is anticipated that all libraries will continue to operate with a mixture of morning, afternoon, evening and weekend hours which should reduce the level of impact.

2.5 This EQIA therefore focuses on identifying the impacts on users whose flexibility to access libraries is restricted. The EQIA also considers the impacts on staff.

3. CONSIDERATION OF AVAILABLE DATA AND RESEARCH

Available data – library users

3.1 The full EQIA report includes an analysis of the population of each district council area by Section 75 categories; there is at least one library in each district council area where it is proposed to reduce opening hours. It should be noted that the proposals for reduced opening hours have been developed by examining the historic level of usage of each library individually and not on a geographical basis. However, Libraries NI does not, at present, monitor usage by Section 75 group.

3.2 The analysis suggests that, in terms of participation in the impacts of the policy review, there is no particular area which is likely to suffer a higher adverse impact than another. The key issue in this EQIA is not the number of people affected but the extent to which a reduction in hours would impact on the daily lives of people in different Section 75 categories.

Available data - staff

3.3 Libraries NI maintains monitoring information on staff by community background and gender. The latest figures (1st January 2011) show that:

- the workforce is predominantly female – approximately 80%;
- in terms of community background, there is a good balance within the workforce, with approximately 45% from a Catholic community background and 50% from a Protestant community background.

3.4 Traditionally women are regarded as care givers and they tend to take the major role in looking after children and elderly/disabled relatives. There is therefore a strong possibility that some members of staff have caring responsibilities and this may affect their ability to cope with new working hours and/or locations. However, there is no data at this stage on the number of staff with dependants; the key issues will be explored with staff and Trade Unions during the consultation period.

Available research

3.5 In 2010 and 2011, Libraries NI carried out a strategic review of library services across Northern Ireland. The EQIAs carried out as part of the strategic review and the associated consultation processes provided some information on usage of libraries by people in particular Section 75 groups. This information is set out in Table 1 below.

3.6 The full EQIA report also contains information on two recent reviews and consultation exercises carried out by library authorities in England which included some possible mitigating measures.

4. ASSESSMENT OF ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

4.1 The proposals for revised opening hours should have a positive impact for all library users in that the opening hours at each library will become sustainable so that ad hoc closures due to staffing shortages will be avoided, other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

4.2 However, Libraries NI acknowledges that people in certain Section 75 categories may suffer an adverse differential impact, although the extent of that impact will depend on each individual and cannot be defined for an entire Section 75 category.

4.3 The Section 75 groups for whom there may be an adverse differential impact include the following for the reasons set out in Table 1:

- children and young people;
- people of working age who are in work and work standard office hours;
- older people;
- disabled people;
- people with dependants.

Table 1

Category	Groups	Specific needs	Potential adverse differential impact
Community background	People with a Catholic community background	None identified	None identified
	People with a Protestant community background	None identified	None identified
Racial group	People from a Black or Minority Ethnic background	None identified	None identified
Age	Children and young people under 16	Make extensive use of libraries, particularly after school in the late afternoon and early evening	May be affected if their local library reduces afternoon and/or evening opening hours
	People of working age (16-64)	People who work normal office hours tend to use libraries in the evenings and at weekends	May be affected if their local library reduces evening and/or weekend opening hours
	Older people (65+)	Older people mainly prefer to use libraries during daylight hours	May be affected if their local library reduces morning and/or afternoon opening hours
Marital status		None identified	None identified
Sexual orientation		None identified	None identified
Gender		None identified	None identified

Category	Groups	Specific needs	Potential adverse differential impact
Disability	Disabled people	Car ownership and use of public transport among disabled people is substantially lower than for people without a disability	May be affected by any changes to opening hours
	People with learning difficulties	People with learning difficulties find it particularly difficult to change their routines and need more evening and weekend activities	May be affected by any changes to opening hours May also be affected by reduced evening and weekend closures
People with dependants	People with dependent children	Parents of young children (under school age) make extensive use of play sessions which tend to be held during morning hours	May be affected if their local library reduces morning opening hours but Libraries NI will try to ensure that such sessions are still provided
	People providing unpaid care	People with caring responsibilities need to manage their time and have less flexibility in terms of when they use libraries	May be affected by any changes to opening hours
	Staff with caring responsibilities	People with caring responsibilities need to manage their time and have less flexibility in terms of their working hours	May be affected by any changes to opening hours

4.4 At this stage Libraries NI has found no evidence to suggest that people with different community backgrounds, racial group, marital status, sexual orientation or gender may be differentially affected by the proposals. However, any impacts identified by consultees during the consultation process will be taken into account when the final EQIA report is prepared. Libraries NI would welcome information from consultees on how a change in opening hours might differentially affect people in all the Section 75 categories.

5. CONSIDERATION OF MEASURES

5.1 The key mitigating measure identified by Libraries NI is the flexibility to determine the optimal pattern of opening hours for each library in conjunction with the library customers. It is intended that each library (even those which are to be open for only 18 hours per week) should offer some morning, afternoon, evening and weekend hours.

5.2 Libraries NI intends to engage with customers in respect of each library where hours are to be reduced. This engagement will take place in January 2012 after the Board has made a decision on the review proposals. Libraries NI will aim to provide a spread of opening hours across libraries which are geographically close to each other, as far as possible, to enable users to access library services for as many hours as possible.

5.3 In addition, Libraries NI will ensure good communication of any changes to allow library users to plan future visits. Particular attention will be paid to communicating with children and people with learning difficulties.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 Libraries NI is committed to consultation which is timely, open and inclusive, and conducted in accordance with the Equality Commission's Guiding Principles. The consultation process in respect of the proposals in the review and the potential equality impacts will continue until 2nd December 2011 (a period of 12 weeks). This process includes –

- a questionnaire available in libraries in both hard copy and electronic format;
- opportunities to comment via the Libraries NI website;
- a focus group for organisations representing people in specific Section 75 categories.

6.2 All consultation documents can be made available in hard copy and alternative formats on request, although it is envisaged that most people will access the documents via the Libraries NI website, either at home or at a library.

7. FURTHER ACTION

7.1 At the end of the consultation period, the EQIA report will be revised to take account of all comments received from consultees. The EQIA report, together with a full report of the consultation process, will then be submitted to the Libraries NI Board to assist them to make final decisions on the proposals in the review. The Board's decisions will be incorporated into a final summary report which will set out the consideration given to the impact of alternative policies and mitigating actions. This will complete Step 6 of the EQIA process.

7.2 Libraries NI is in the process of updating its monitoring systems to provide more detailed Section 75 information on library users. As part of this process, a system will be established to monitor the impact of the Board's

decisions in order to find out the effect on the relevant groups and sub-groups within the equality categories.

7.3 The results of ongoing monitoring will be reviewed on an annual basis and included in the annual review on progress to the Equality Commission. This review will be published on the Libraries NI website. This will complete Step 7 of the EQIA process.