



NI Libraries Review of Opening Hours

Belfast City Council Draft Response

1.0	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the review of opening hours of libraries in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The Council has made comment on a number of occasions about the role of libraries in local communities and the potential that the service represents in meeting local needs. This response reiterates many of the points previously made and the important role we believe that libraries have to play in terms of building a sense of inclusion and citizenship, as well as developing an understanding of our heritage, cultural diversity and dealing with conflict.</p> <p>The Council notes that Libraries NI have selected reduced opening hours as one of several initiatives as the reduction can be reversed at a later date if the economic position improves. The Council would strongly advocate this principle. We recognise that this initiative is being implemented in order to avoid library closures.</p> <p>In its response to the RPA Further Consultation Document in September 2005, Belfast City Council stated that it believed that it was essential, when thinking about the future of the public library service, to agree what role we expect the libraries of tomorrow to perform. The Council is committed to the view that successful libraries are not simply about a formal academic understanding of education; they are also about improving quality of life through the provision of a combination of educational, social, cultural, health and general information opportunities for local people.</p> <p>The Council would reiterate its comments made in April 2010 to the consultation document 'Meeting the Demands for a Modern Public Library Service within Northern Ireland - Stage 1: Greater Belfast Area'</p> <p>As previously highlighted Belfast City Council would be keen to explore the co-location of library services within Belfast City Council owned buildings. Belfast City Council previously recommended the need for a more collaborative approach in the creation of estates strategies and the co-location of services in the future. It is important that Libraries NI work closely with other statutory organisations, particularly with the Council, to ensure that a collaborative partnership is adopted. This would help to ensure that the service would reflect the needs of the community by working to incorporate other public services within the facility – based on best practice facilities such as the Grove Well-being centre.</p> <p>The council recognises the need to deliver savings as required by the NI Executive, however would stress that Libraries have a strong role to play, in terms of building a sense of inclusion and citizenship, as well as developing an understanding of our heritage, cultural diversity and dealing with conflict. It is critical that libraries are seen as a public place for community interaction and accessible to all. Any reduction in hours should take account of the needs of the users of that library in terms of accessibility.</p> <p>Libraries are an important meeting place for social and community activities many associated with life-long learning outcomes but also just places to drop in, attend thematic events, meet socially and are used by the local community in such a way. Libraries are regularly used as community spaces and local people use them as such. In particular, older people, younger people and migrant workers use libraries frequently.</p>
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Appendix Three – Draft Response

With respect to Libraries being allocated to bands mainly on the basis of the historic level of usage, it is interesting to note that the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals *"What Makes a Good Library Service – Guidelines on public library provision in England for portfolio holders in local Councils"* clearly states that " *Libraries benefit everyone, whether or not they use their local library or not. They stand for intellectual freedom, democratic engagement, community cohesion, social justice and equality of opportunity*"the guide goes on to say that " *Libraries give identity to a community and provide opportunities for everyone in it.*

In Belfast the opportunities for libraries to offer a safe and shared environment for people from all sections of the community is also an important consideration

The Council would highlight that The Department of Culture & Leisure in the report " *Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries*" stated under the heading "Access" that "Static libraries should be located and designed so as to provide suitable access, mobile libraries should serve people where there is no static library, and opening hours should meet the needs of users – with the target – 85% of households have access to a library service within 2 miles". Libraries NI should be mindful of this when making decisions in relation to proposed reduction of hours.

The Council would again highlight the need to consider alternative methods of delivery and it would be worthwhile to note that, across the world, an increasing number of public libraries are being located in, or close to, shopping centres in recognition of the very large numbers of people which shopping centres attract. There is mutual benefit to retailers and libraries of co-location, with the added benefit of parking convenience for library users. In the United Kingdom, research found that placing a library in a shopping centre puts the library where many people can easily visit. This includes people from a potentially larger population than would usually access a public library.

Libraries must be community facilities and for this reason the Council continues to believe that libraries should no longer be stand alone buildings but should be integrated with other public service facilities such as education and health for the ultimate benefit of the whole community.

One such example is a new £2 million Shepherd's Bush Library which was opened at London's biggest shopping centre in September 2009. Situated at the heart of Westfield Shopping Centre the library was entirely built and fitted out by the centre's owners at their own expense.

Belfast City Council's comments are intended to be constructive and positive and the Council looks forward to working with Libraries NI to ensure that the review has a minimal impact on communities at the local level.

It is important to ensure that any decisions on reduced opening hours are made as a result of genuine engagement with the local community and that the equality implications of this strategy are fully considered.

Belfast City Council seeks reassurances from Library NI that any decisions about future library provision in Belfast should take into consideration the need to maintain shared spaces and would fully address issues relating to need in communities across the city.