

REVIEW OF OPENING HOURS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Libraries NI has, ever since it came into being, recognised the need to review opening hours in order to harmonise the opening hours inherited from the five Education and Library Boards into one consistent approach that best meets the needs of customers and communities.
- 1.2 The initial thinking was that the opening hours generally would be increased or maintained in order to improve access and increase participation, in line with the Corporate and Business Plans and with the Libraries NI overall approach of directing as much resource as possible to frontline services.
- 1.3 However the Budget 2010 process and the significant reduction in the Libraries NI budget over the coming years has transformed the opening hours review into a process designed to create substantial savings by reducing opening hours, whilst ensuring a consistency of approach.
- 1.4 A reduction in opening hours is one of the four Savings Delivery Plans submitted to DCAL against which Libraries NI is required to report progress on a regular basis. These Plans have been considered by the Board on a number of occasions and will continue to evolve as budget information and spend in this and further years becomes clearer. The Board has supported the thinking that a reduction in opening hours would protect the network of sustainable libraries for the future, although it is a significant reduction in service now.

2. Guiding principles

- 2.1 In developing proposals for the revised opening hours the following principles were applied:
 - The proposals must deliver the required levels of savings;
 - Consistency of approach;
 - The available hours should be used in the way that best meets customer need;
 - Opening hours should relate to the historic level of use in a library; and
 - The opening hours should be sustainable i.e. ad hoc closures due to staffing shortages should be avoided other than in the most exceptional circumstances.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 The detail of the proposed opening hours appears in Appendix One.
- 3.2 It is proposed that there should be four bands of libraries for the purpose of opening hours:

- Band 1 - 57 hours per week
 - Band 2 - 40 hours per week
 - Band 3 - 30 hours per week
 - Band 4 - 18 hours per week
- 3.3 Within all of these bands it is possible to provide a mixture of morning, afternoon, evening and weekend hours.
- 3.4 There should be a limited number of exceptions to these categories. These relate to libraries that have recently undergone/will undergo significant changes that mean that historic levels of use are not a reliable indicator. These libraries fall into three categories:
- New libraries or libraries that have undergone a major refurbishment. It is proposed that libraries which were refurbished or new in 2010/11 or 2011/12 should generally remain at their current opening hours for a two year period from the date of opening/reopening or January 2013 whichever is the sooner;
 - Libraries that have been affected significantly by the Stage One Strategic Review, because they are close to libraries that have closed; in these cases it is proposed that the opening hours should be reviewed again in September 2012 to ensure that they remain appropriate; and
 - Libraries where the opening hours were revised as part of the outworking of the Strategic Review Stage 1 i.e. Tullycarnet and Woodstock. In the case of these libraries the Board agreed that the future of the libraries would be reviewed at the end of 2 years (i.e. September 2012).
- 3.5 Appendix Two gives more details about the exceptions referred to in paragraph 3.4.
- 3.6 Centre for Migration Studies and Irish and Local Studies.
The measures that can be used to assess the level of use of these specialist heritage libraries are more limited than for mainstream branch libraries. It is proposed that the current level of opening hours (32.5 hours and 38.5 hours respectively) should form the basis for public consultation. In the case of CMS detailed discussions with the partner organisations will be required.

4. Process

- 4.1 The following process is recommended for the review:
- Information collection and analysis;
 - Provision of an initial discussion paper to the Board;
 - Public consultation on the principles and proposals; this would also address equality and rural proofing;
 - Draft of final proposals and recommendations to the Board;
 - Consultation with customers at an individual library level to establish the actual pattern of opening hours; and
 - Implementation

- Alongside this process there will need to be an ongoing process of communication with staff and discussion with the Trades Unions.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1 It is recommended that the proposals and principles set out in this report be adopted and taken forward as the basis for public consultation.
- 5.2 It is recommended that the process for the review of opening hours set out in this report be approved.