

**Chief Executive's Budget Proposal**

**OPTION: Community Libraries**

<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>
<b>411</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>411</b>

**SUMMARY OF OPTION**

We are the one of the only Councils to not close any libraries. We believe this is the right decision as libraries play a hugely important role in any community. However, maintaining 24 libraries in their current form in a borough as small as Wirral is clearly not possible in the current financial climate. This option would see our community libraries, which are smaller and less well used, 15 in total, reduce their opening hours to an alternating 2/3 days per week, 10am-2pm. This option would NOT affect central libraries or libraries with one stop shop facilities included.

These hours would be implemented on an alternate basis – so that on any given day, at least one library in a constituency area would be open. This option brings the benefit of major savings, while at the same time keeping all 24 of Wirral's libraries in operation. It also gives us the opportunity to actively seek community involvement to potentially increase the libraries opening times and use in the future – rather than closing the facilities permanently.

Analysis confirms customer demand across these sites currently peaks during 10am – 12pm and 2pm – 4 pm with a significant reduction in demand outside of these periods. It is anticipated that the removal of the lunchtime closure at these sites will encourage more uniform and focused usage across a proposed 4 hour day.

**IMPACT ON RESIDENTS**

Wirral libraries have approximately 52,000 active borrowers (average for local population) and process approximately 1,500,000 customer transactions (above average) per year. Other services such as public access IT facilities are also well-used (approximately 215,000 user hours per year), especially in comparison with other regional/national authorities.

Reducing available opening hours/closing community libraries will obviously restrict this provision though access is still available from central libraries (Birkenhead, Wallasey, West Kirby and Bebington) and merged sites (Eastham, Heswall, Moreton and Rock Ferry). Alternative access via the web; call centre or home reader is unaffected by these proposals.

Analysis confirms the current opening hours/number of sites is over-comprehensive when compared to actual demand (and regional/national comparator authorities) and that the trend over the last 5 years is for a reducing number of physical library visits.

### **IMPACT ON PARTNERS**

There are no significant implications as partners could potentially utilise the buildings outside of proposed opening hours.

### **IMPACT ON COMMUNITY, VOLUNTARY AND FAITH SECTOR**

Voluntary and Community groups often use libraries as a venue for surgeries and meetings. Alternative times or venues would need to be explored for some of these sessions or self access could be arranged outside of proposed opening hours.

The voluntary sector has previously shown an interest in supporting library provision on Wirral (e.g. Reader organisation) and may present new offers as a result of the budget options being presented.

As mentioned individual community groups may also offer support.