LIBRARY OPENING HOURS REVIEW

WARDS AFFECTED

All

EXEMPT/CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

No

1. PROPOSED DECISION

1.1 To note the outcome of the consultation undertaken with regard to proposals to reduce library opening hours.

1.2 To consult with the Trade Unions on the proposals.

1.3 To implement from 3 June 2013 the proposed arrangements for reduced library opening hours originally presented to Cabinet on 27 February 2013 as set out in Appendix 1.

2. JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DECISION

2.1 The Council currently operates a network of 13 libraries across the Borough, the majority of which are open 5 days a week and which, collectively, provide 507.5 hours on a weekly basis. The cost of the service in 2012/13 was £2,611,083 (Gross Controllable Budget).

2.2 On 27 February 2013 a report was presented to Cabinet identifying proposals to achieve savings to the service required as a result of Central Government cuts. This report proposed to achieve the required savings through a 20% reduction in library opening hours from 507.5 hours to 406 hours per week and to operate new arrangements for the Local History and Archive Service based on public drop-in and group access which will allow for groups to use these facilities when they are not open to the general public. Appendix 1 identifies how the proposed reductions in opening hours will impact on each of the Borough’s libraries.

2.3 Following Cabinet approval to consult on the proposals to achieve the required savings, a six-week consultation period with residents and other stakeholders has been undertaken to seek views on the Council’s proposals. The outcome of this consultation is detailed in Section 3.10 of this report below.
2.4 In total 750 responses were received. A full copy of all the responses and an assessment of the comments have been provided in the Members Room. Issues raised during the consultation have been considered and addressed through the Equality Impact Assessment. Whilst some residents affected by the changes at individual branch libraries and the Local History and Archive Service have indicated their disagreement to the proposals, no alternative proposals have been submitted through the consultation process which address the fundamental requirement to make the required savings as a result of the cuts that are being imposed on the Council by Central Government. Consequently, responses from the consultation are not considered sufficient to require a change in approach or amendment to the proposed hours set out in Appendix 1 that were originally considered by Cabinet on 27 February 2013.

3. FACTS SUPPORTING THE PROPOSED DECISION

3.1 Following reductions in Central Government grant funding, the Council is required to achieve further savings of £14m by 2014/15 in addition to £36m savings already achieved.

3.2 Following zero based budget reviews of all services within the Urban Regeneration, Housing & Culture portfolio, potential savings have been identified across a number of service areas which will meet portfolio cash limits whilst continuing to protect those who are most vulnerable. Proposals to reduce library opening hours is one of the services where savings have been identified.

3.3 The Council currently operates a network of 13 libraries across the Borough. The majority of these are open 5 days a week and provide 507.5 hours of service. To meet the savings required for 2013/14 proposals have been developed to reduce library opening hours by 20% to 406 hours per week. Appendix 1 identifies the proposed revised hours which will deliver the savings required whilst maintaining the current network of libraries and providing services at times when they are most used by the community and service users.

3.4 The proposal will allow for the library network to be classified within the following bands or tiers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier One</th>
<th>Central Library</th>
<th>47 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier Two</td>
<td>Chester Lane, Haydock, Moss Bank, Parr and Thatto Heath</td>
<td>36 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier Three</td>
<td>Billinge, Eccleston, Newton and Rainhill</td>
<td>29 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier Four</td>
<td>Peter Street and Rainford</td>
<td>22 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier Five</td>
<td>Garswood</td>
<td>19 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 This proposal has taken into account the following:

- Levels of existing use;
- Previous investment in libraries and ICT infrastructure. In all the refurbished libraries there is a strong offer for young people which has been successful in encouraging increased use of the ICT facilities;
- Community need and levels of deprivation;
- The need to accommodate different client groups, allowing for access during mornings for older people, parents and carers and continuing to be available during afternoons for after school visits; and
- Lone use by children and young people which has been a critical factor in contributing significantly to neighbourhood safety and the overall well-being of the community. In Moss Bank, Merseyside Police have attributed much of the 42% reduction in anti social behaviour to the new library.

3.6 Under the proposals, arrangements for opening hours at Central Library will be aligned with those of other branches, opening to the public at 10.00am (instead of 9.30am) and closing on late nights at 7.00pm (instead of 8.00pm), but having three late nights compared to two at present.

3.7 To reduce the costs of providing the Local History & Archive Service it is proposed to introduce new arrangements that will provide a combination of public drop in and group access which will allow the use of this facility when it is not open to the public. This is intended to balance the competing needs of heritage users and also allow a programme of local history class visits to be organised during the times when it is not available for public drop in. The proposed opening hours for the Local History and Archive Service are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>10am – 7pm</td>
<td>Public Drop In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Group Access</td>
<td>Including schools visits and heritage sessions provided by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>10am – 7pm</td>
<td>Public Drop In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Group Access</td>
<td>Including schools visits and heritage sessions provided by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Group Access</td>
<td>Including school visits and heritage sessions provided by staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>10am – 4pm</td>
<td>Public Drop In</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8 The new arrangements for the Local History and Archive Service will, if approved, be managed by a Service Level Agreement with the heritage groups and will contribute to the overall savings achieved through the opening hours review.

3.9 On 27 February 2013, Cabinet approved the draft proposals set out above and agreed to consult on these. The results from the consultation are set out below.

3.10 Outcomes from Consultation

3.10.1 In accordance with the Cabinet’s decision of 27 February 2013 public consultation was undertaken over a 6 week period from 28 February until 11 April. This was undertaken via the Council website and questionnaires distributed to all libraries and the Local History and Archive Service.

3.10.2 In total 750 responses were received consisting of 64 online responses and 686 survey forms. Respondents were asked to consider whether they felt the proposals would make it more convenient, less convenient or would make no difference to the use of their own branch library.

3.10.3 The highest number of responses came from residents using the following libraries:

- Central Library;
- Rainford Library;
- Chester Lane Library;
- Newton-le-Willows Library; and
- Eccleston Library.

When asked to consider if the proposals would make it less convenient for them to use their library responses ranged from 36% at Parr to 75% at Rainford.

3.10.4 Respondents were also asked to comment on the proposals. The main issues raised can be categorised as follows:

a) retention of the current arrangements with no reduction in hours;
b) recognitions that whilst the proposals are not ideal, they are preferable to library closures;
c) recognition that the libraries provide excellent services and staff and are a much needed and valued resource;
d) concerns about the impact of the proposals on communities; and

e) concerns about the level of reduction in hours at particular branch libraries, primarily at Rainford, Peter Street and Newton-le-Willows as well as the Local History and Archive Service.
3.10.5 Whilst the majority of respondents felt there should be no change to the current service and therefore disagreed with the proposals, there was little consensus about what alternative arrangements should be put in place or how the required savings could be achieved.

3.10.6 Consequently, responses from the consultation are not considered sufficient to justify any amendments to the proposed hours set out in Appendix 1 that were originally considered by Cabinet on 22 February 2013.

4. RISKS

4.1 Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

The Council’s libraries have high service take up and the service makes a significant contribution to other corporate priorities from supporting community well-being through the provision of informal learning and digital inclusion to community safety by providing diversionary activities for children and young people. Although it is recognised that the reduction in library opening times may have some impact in these areas, the proposals have been developed to minimize the impact on communities, particularly in the areas of greatest deprivation, to achieve a balance between the needs of service users and the requirement to achieve the required budget savings and to provide services at times when they are most in need.

4.2 Should this Risk be added to the Corporate Risk Register?

No

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Legal – The provision of the library service is a statutory function under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Council must provide a comprehensive and efficient library service to those who live, work or undertake full-time education in the Borough. The proposal should be considered in the context of this statutory duty.

Financial – The proposals will deliver a saving of £132k from the Library Staffing budget and £13k savings in premises and related costs.

Human Resources – The proposed reduction in opening hours and the potential impact on current structures and the number of posts required will be subject to staff and Trade Union consultation. There are currently a number of vacant Library Assistant posts and these vacancies will be held pending staff consultations and subsequent implementation of the proposals. Vacant posts will be deleted when these are not subsequently required.

Reductions in staffing will be made working closely with HR and following agreed redundancy and redeployment procedures where this is required.

Land and Property (Asset) – None.
Anti-Poverty – The revised opening hours are intended to protect services to deprived communities.

Effects on existing Council Policy - None

Effects on other Council Activities - None

Human Rights - None

Equalities - An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed (Appendix 2).  

The assessment has raised the following positive or negative impact for staff or service users as outlined below:

- Disability and Carers
- Age

As outlined in Section 3.5 of this report, the amended opening hours have taken into account the needs of older people, parents and carers and the requirements for younger people to access the service after school hours.

Asset Management - None

Health - None

6. PREVIOUS APPROVAL/CONSULTATION

Cabinet agreed on 27 February 2013 to consult on the proposals to reduce library opening hours.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS THEREOF

7.1 Previous savings by the service have been achieved without affecting frontline services. However these options have now been exhausted and failure to achieve the proposed savings from the review of library opening hours would require savings to be made from other services.

8. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Proposed Library Opening Hours
Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

RC Hepworth  
Director of Urban Regeneration & Housing

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Tel 01744 676 490.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following list of documents was used to complete this report and they are available for public inspection for four years from the date of the meeting, from the Contact Officer named above:

None.