

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

5

MODERNISING LIBRARY OPENING HOURS

Report of the Director of Community Information

Author: Glenda Wood

Tel: 01992 555610

Executive Member: Derrick Ashley

1. Purpose of report

To invite the Cabinet to consider proposals for changing library opening hours.

2. Summary

Feedback from users and others made it clear that opening hours could be more effectively structured. A proposal for revised opening hours was the subject of consultation with the public from 8 May to 28 June. The proposals have been amended in consultation with the Library Panel and other members to reflect views expressed through the consultation.

3. Conclusion

Cabinet is asked to consider the proposed revised changes to the opening hours set out in Appendix 1.

4. Background

Library authorities are being urged to achieve the public library standards set out by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport by 2004. Currently Hertfordshire does not meet PLS 3 (total opening hours) by a considerable margin. The revised proposal will give us an increase of approximately 30 hours a week. This will improve our position against the standard as shown below. Moreover in this year's Annual Library Plan we have to provide evidence that we are planning to reach the Standards. This may help to ensure that we retain a top grade result for the plan. The increase will be achieved by more effective timetabling and flexible working practices.

PLS 3

Total opening hours

Current

Standard	128 hours per 1000 population
HCC	112 “ “ “ “

Revised proposal

Standard	128 hours per 1000 population
HCC	114 “ “ “ “

Feedback from customer comment cards, the Public Library User Survey (PLUS) and changing patterns of usage originally prompted the need to look at opening hours. For example, the practice of half day or full day closure of the larger libraries was seen as anachronistic, and use in the evenings was declining particularly in some of the smaller libraries. The recent CPA Inspection also highlighted opening hours as an area where better use might be made of existing resources. After discussion at the first of the Library Panel meetings it was agreed that a consultation should take place based on a set of proposals which aimed to provide consistency and more memorable patterns of opening by reallocating resources.

The consultation period ran from 8 May to the 28 June 2002. Using the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) PLUS methodology questionnaires were distributed to the libraries and mobiles. The questionnaire was also posted on the website. Press releases resulted in coverage in local newspapers and one local radio station (Hertbeat). Staff were proactive and encouraged people to fill in the forms. MORI were engaged to analyse the responses. Over 11,000 responses were received in total. The results are summarised in Appendix 2. Comments received from the Library Panel and from other members are summarised at Appendix 3.

5. Revisions Further to the Consultation

Comments from respondents to the questionnaire, feedback from Library User Panels and staff together with usage statistics have been used to inform the revised proposals. A number of clear messages were given in response to the consultation. The most important of these was the need to meet the particular needs of different groups of people. The revised proposals seek to accommodate these needs by:

- extending opening after 5pm for students and commuters
- earlier opening for elderly users and those using the library after the school run
- spreading and complementing opening hours of adjacent libraries to extend access