

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Engagement and our equality duty

Whilst [the Gunning Principles](#) set out the rules for consulting ‘everyone’, additional requirements are in place to avoid discrimination and inequality.

Cheshire East Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Act 2010 simplified previous anti-discrimination laws with a single piece of legislation. Within the Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) has three aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, by consciously thinking about equality when making decisions (such as in developing policy, delivering services and commissioning from others)
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, by removing disadvantages, meeting their specific needs, and encouraging their participation in public life
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

The Equality Duty helps public bodies to deliver their overall objectives for public services, and as such should be approached as a positive opportunity to support good decision-making.

It encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people’s opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve providing a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic, such as providing computer training to all people to help them access information and services.

The Equality Act identifies nine 'protected characteristics' and makes it a legal requirement to make sure that people with these characteristics are protected from discrimination:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Applying the equality duty to engagement

If you are developing a new policy, strategy or programme you may need to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. You may be able to ascertain the impact of your proposal on different characteristics through desk-based research and learning from similar programmes, but you also need to carry out some primary research and engagement. People with protected characteristics are often described as 'hard to reach' but you will find everyone can be reached – you just need to tailor your approach, so it is accessible for them.

Contacting the [Equality and Diversity mailbox](#) will help you to understand how you can gain insight as to the impacts of your proposals and will ensure that you help the Council to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Section 1 – Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure

Proposal Title	Library Services Review
Date of Assessment	05.06.2023 – in support of public consultation Revised 17.07.2023 - post consultation and in line with final service review proposals
Assessment Lead Officer Name	Christopher Allman
Directorate/Service	Place, Environment and Neighbourhood Services
Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who wish to make use of it. but can determine where and how this service is delivered to ensure the needs of residents are effectively met whilst ensuring best value.</p> <p>Cheshire East Council provides public libraries in 16 towns across the borough and operates a mobile library service to 93 communities more than 2 miles from a static service point. The service is held in high esteem by residents with the most recent survey recording a 96% satisfaction rate.</p> <p>Our public libraries are welcoming, safe and trusted community spaces open to all and free at the point of access, providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of good quality book stock and digital resources including e-books, e-magazines and online subscriptions • Trusted information • Cheshire East Council Customer Service Points • Free internet access • Free Wi-Fi • Signposting to accredited advice and guidance • Learning and wellbeing opportunities • A range of activities and events for adults and children • Warm spaces <p>The Council is not proposing any library closures, but to ensure ongoing affordability of services across the borough, this proposal would reduce current opening hours of libraries during the week only and reduce the funding for purchase of new books and newspapers. Aligned to this and as part of the review</p>

	<p>seek options to co-locate library sites into other facilities and at the same time move forward with opportunities for additional income generation based within these sites. Proposals would consider options to work with Town and Parish Councils to mitigate impacts where viable.</p>
<p>Who is Affected?</p>	<p>Local residents – whilst retaining access in their local community to the range of library services, access may be restricted as libraries will close for more hours than currently, restricting access to books, information and other resources, free ICT access, study spaces, warm spaces, places to meet others and face to face council customer service support e.g. Blue Badge applications</p> <p>Library staff – reduction in opening hours will impact staffing numbers with posts deleted and/or reduced to deliver financial savings, as the majority of library staff are part time and paid on Grades 4-6 this potentially will result in financial hardship</p> <p>Volunteers – opportunities for IT Buddies, Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, work experience placements may be slightly reduced</p> <p>Elected members, town and parish councillors & MPs – minimal reduction in opportunities for surgeries or meetings with constituents although as the majority of these are on Saturday mornings or early evening and these hours have been retained at all sites.</p> <p>CAB – library staff have been trained as preferred referrers to assist CAB with current demand, the time available for this may be reduced</p> <p>Work Club partners – minimal reduction in opportunities to meet with/support those looking for work/training as sites.</p> <p>Health colleagues – minimal reduction in opportunities to run clinics; awareness sessions; classes in a safe accessible space in local community</p> <p>Room hirers – some reduction in availability of accessible inexpensive meeting rooms</p> <p>The public consultation provided details on the impact that the proposed changes would have upon all stakeholders. The feedback from the consultation and resulting assessment of the impact of these upon all groups has informed a change to opening hours that mitigates much of this.</p>

<p>Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.</p>	<p>Libraries currently deliver most of the Council's face to face customer service functions e.g. concessionary travel applications, Blue Badge applications, council payments, DBS checks, benefit verification etc.</p> <p>The revised opening hours retain access to these in the current 16 locations and by reinstating 31 opening hours of the original proposed reduction whilst access will be slightly reduced there will still be opportunity for residents to access these important services on the same number of days as they would have done previously. Any reduction in opening hours will particularly impact the digitally excluded who are unable to access services online but by reinstating some hours across the majority of sites and by reducing the number of days libraries are closed this will mitigate much of this.</p> <p>Libraries will operate an appointment-based service for customer service point and in particular functions the Council does provide. The Council does have an overarching Digital and Customer Service strategy that details the way people can interact with the council and how this will be developed over time to address changing technologies.</p>
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How does the service, service change, strategy, function or procedure help the Council meet the requirements of the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#)?

The Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal requirement contained within the Equality Act 2010 which requires public authorities and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not to assist those facing discrimination, harassment, and discrimination.

Cheshire East public libraries are, safe, and trusted community spaces, open to all and free to access. The services provided includes the following:

- A wide range of good quality book stock and digital resources including e-books, e-zines and online subscriptions
- Trusted information
- Cheshire East Council Customer Service Points
- Free internet access
- Free Wi-Fi
- Signposting to accredited advice and guidance
- Learning and wellbeing opportunities
- A range of activities and events for adults and children

Through its comprehensive book stock, displays and activities/events e.g. mental health reading groups, Dementia café, community coffee mornings, the service seeks to provide opportunities to demystify stigma and breakdown barriers.

	This proposal will continue to see these services provided across all libraries in Cheshire East albeit in a reduced way as the reduction in the book fund will restrict the purchase of new books and e-resources and reduced opening hours and staffing levels may limit the number of events/activities held in future.
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Section 2- Information – What do you know?

What do you know?	What information (qualitative and quantitative) and/or research have you used to commission/change/decommission the service, strategy, function, or procedure?
Information you used	<p>Library membership data and performance data from the previous 12 months including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • visitor figures • circulation statistics including issues, returns, renewals, downloads • PC usage • Number of events and activities • attendance at events • enquiries <p>has been used to inform the service design. In addition, conclusions from the last library survey conducted by Cheshire East Council were used to gauge opinion of the library service and influence strategy. The last survey was undertaken in December 2019 and demonstrated that satisfaction with the service overall remained extremely high at 95%. This also provided useful information as to what residents use the library service for and how often:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% of library members main reason for visiting was to borrow, return, renew or buy books • 38% visiting to browse, relax, read or use the toilet have • 27% to use a PC, Wi-Fi or study • 26% to get help or find information • 10% to access council services <p>However, the survey shows that people with some protected characteristics are more likely to use some of these services e.g families with children were more likely to borrow books and attend library events whilst those with long term health issues and disabilities were more likely to use the PCs, printing facilities and Wi-Fi. People who described themselves as not White British were more likely to use libraries for browsing, reading and relaxing. Getting help and information rose from 26% to 40% in those who were aged 75</p>

	<p>plus and from 26% to 34% for those who had a disability. Similarly using the library to access council services increased from 10% to 25% for those over the age of 75 and from 10% to 24% for those with a disability.</p> <p>It informed us that females were more likely to attend events than males and non-White British respondents were generally more interested in participating in events than others.</p> <p>The survey also identified barriers to use, these included: limited range of books, car parking availability and cost and opening hours not being suitable. When asked about the possibility of extending opening hours using an unstaffed self-service model most respondents were against this and this was more likely amongst older people and females.</p> <p>Most recently further data analysis has been undertaken around usage of individual sites and a scoring matrix compiled incorporating key site data alongside public health considerations.</p>
Gaps in your Information	<p>It is acknowledged that the last detailed survey was undertaken over 3 years ago and that the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis may well have affected usage. A full library user survey will be conducted in 2024 to assess the impact of these along with capturing customer satisfaction and identifying any areas for improvement or service enhancements.</p> <p>Feedback from the public consultation, that ran from 09.06.2023-09.07.2023, along with specific comments received as part of the engagement with town and parish councils and other stakeholders, has been used to revise the pattern of opening hours across each library site. This includes an assessment as to the impact on specific events and activities of the revised opening hours.</p>

3. What did people tell you?

What did people tell you	What consultation and engagement activities have you already undertaken and what did people tell you? Is there any feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations that could be included in your assessment?
Details and dates of the	Cheshire East Council's Budget Consultation in January 2023 received 2,000+ responses a significant number of which related to the proposal to reduce library opening hours and withdraw the mobile library service. As a result of this feedback the library proposal was

<p>consultation/s and/or engagement activities</p>	<p>amended to safeguard evening and Saturday morning opening and the proposal to withdraw the mobile library service was overturned with savings target adjusted.</p> <p>Following the approval of the MTFS further work was undertaken in preparation for a public consultation on the proposed detail of the library service review and in particular the revised opening hours.</p> <p>Following a meeting with Officers from the Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), acting as a “critical friend”, the public consultation on the proposal to reduce library opening hours was amended in part to provide more information on who is using the library service and what they are using libraries for.</p> <p>The original proposal was further revised because of the analysis of feedback from the recent public consultation which ran between Friday 09.06.2023 and Sunday 09.07.2023. The consultation received 2,920 responses in addition to specific comments from engagement with the town and parish councils and other stakeholders and library staff engagement sessions held on multiple dates as follows: 04 - 05.01.2023; 13.02.2023 and 05.06.2023</p> <p>A further engagement session was held with DCMS on 13.07.2023 to discuss the outcomes from the consultation and how these would change the proposal now presented as final.</p>
<p>Gaps in consultation and engagement feedback</p>	<p>Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond, with the consultation being heavily promoted within the Cheshire East libraries that the proposals would potentially impact. As part of this library service specific public consultation, partners including NHS and voluntary & faith sector colleagues and representatives from those groups with protected characteristics who use the library on a regular basis e.g. Good Vibrations (Dementia music group) were communicated with to ensure they were aware of the consultation and able to feedback. There were both paper and digital consultation documents.</p> <p>The consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey. 98% of the respondents to the consultation were library users.</p>

Public consultation ran from Friday 09.06.2023 to Sunday 09.07.2023 and received 2,961 consultation engagements, including:

- 2,470 online survey responses
- 306 paper survey responses (from 1,140 distributed in total)
- 128 email responses
- 41 social media engagements
- 3 letter responses
- 16 event attendees

Further to these engagements there were 2 other key events that took place in relation to the consultation, a “Read in” protest at Alsager library attended by 179 people and a question in the House of Commons raised by Fiona Bruce MP and responded to by Penny Mordaunt MP.

A full consultation report has been produced and published to the Council’s webpages [\[link\]](#).

4. Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

Protected characteristics groups from the Equality Act 2010	What do you know? Summary of information used to inform the proposal	What did people tell you? Summary of customer and/or staff feedback	What does this mean? Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential). These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.
Age	Library membership data, local demographic data	<p>Many children and families use the library service to borrow books and attend events/participate in activities. A number of young people are tutored each day in libraries.</p> <p>A number of families that choose to home educate their children use the library to access resources and as a place to foster collaboration and encourage social interaction</p> <p>A significant number of older people use the library to borrow books, access help, information and council services</p>	<p>Children who visit the library independently will still be able to do so as the revised proposal not only retains all the existing libraries but removes the half day closure by opening at 10.00am across 4 days each week.</p> <p>Excluded pupils tutored in the library and the home educated may be disproportionately affected by a reduction in opening hours but this has been mitigated by the removal of the proposed half day closure at all sites plus the reinstatement of half a day at the 5 highest ranked sites with additional small amounts of time being reinstated at other sites at busier times.</p> <p>Older people may choose to visit libraries more frequently, they may have difficulty travelling to other libraries, they may lack access to library digital provision, potential loss of social interaction at times libraries are closed.</p>

			<p>There is a risk that children, families and older people may feel isolated because of losing some of their social interaction. The revised proposal mitigates this by reducing the number of half days closed by opening later each morning excluding Saturday to provide access across the same number of days as previously. The revised proposal also maintains the programme of activities and events that residents told us were important to them by adjusting timings if necessary.</p>
Disability	<p>The library service doesn't hold comprehensive data on the disability needs of its members or wider users. Census 2021 will provide % of people disabled under the Equality Act</p>	<p>People with long term health conditions and disabilities use the library to access council services e.g. apply for concessionary travel, Blue Badges, access information e.g. Books on Prescription, attend events e.g. Crafternoon, Adult Colouring, Dementia Café.</p>	<p>As the revised proposal retains all the existing libraries over the same number of days as currently residents should still be able to access these services within their local community. People with this protected characteristic may find it difficult to travel to other libraries, particularly as accessible travel may be limited. People with learning difficulties and people who are neuro diverse or people with dementia may be impacted if they rely on their visit to the library being a familiar place they may prefer not to travel to other libraries. 15% of those responding to the recent public consultation reported their day to day activities being impacted by a long term health condition or disability.</p>

			Feedback from the consultation has informed a revision to the programme of events and activities which will see these maintained albeit it some timings will need to be adjusted.
Gender reassignment	The library service doesn't hold gender re-assignment membership data. Census 2021 data could be used for population gender identity data	NA	There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic.
Pregnancy and maternity	The library service doesn't collect pregnancy membership data	Post-natal clinics held at some libraries, Baby Bounce, Rhymetimes and Stories and Songs attended by many mothers on maternity leave, offering support on parenting and benefitting their mental health by meeting with others with the shared characteristic	As the proposal retains all existing libraries residents with this characteristic should still be able to access these activities within their local community. The revised proposal maintains opening across the same number of days as currently although the libraries will open later on weekdays the existing events and activities will be maintained albeit timings may need to be adjusted.
Race/ethnicity	The library service doesn't hold full and comprehensive data on race of its members or wider users. The membership form requests it but there is no obligation to provide this. Census 2021 with provide ethnicity data	The library survey and data collected for the Good Things Foundation as part of UK Online Centres and for the Homes for Ukraine project shows that people of many different ethnicities use libraries to find information and advice, use PCs, access Wi-Fi and socialise	As the proposal retains all the existing libraries residents with this characteristic will still be able to access these services within their local community. Although libraries will open later on weekdays and may close earlier on one day they will retain the number of days open each week therefore mitigating any impact.
Religion or belief	The library service doesn't collect religion membership data. Census 2021 will provide ward data	NA	There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic.

Sex	Membership data and Census 2021	More women than men currently use the library service to borrow books and groups are predominantly attended by children, and women	Women will be impacted more than men as more women use library services. However, the revised proposal retains the number of days each week sites are currently open.
Sexual orientation	The library service does not collect sexual orientation data. Census 2021 will provide population sexual orientation data	NA	There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic. However, as the library is an inclusive and welcoming place some individuals with this protected characteristic may be using it as somewhere in the community, they feel safe.
Marriage and civil partnership	The library service does not collect marriage and civil partnership data	NA	There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic.

5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

Mitigation	What can you do?
<p>Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified?</p> <p>Are there any actions that could be undertaken to mitigate, reduce or remove negative impacts?</p> <p>Have all available options been explored? Please include details of alternative options and why they couldn't be considered?</p>	<p>Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts</p> <p>Identified mitigations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> libraries will open at 10am on weekdays to remove the need for the half day closure a further half day opening will be reinstated at the 5 libraries ranked highest on the scoring matrix additional smaller amounts of time will be reinstated at other sites at busier times signposting to alternative library provision e.g. other libraries open with in the borough on a particular day providing travel information to assist in getting to other sites e.g. bus timetables, car parking information promoting library and wider council digital services

Please include details of how positive impacts could be further enhanced, if possible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offering customer service point appointments • access to Home Library Service if appropriate • investigate expanding outreach provision in partnership • extend Home Library Service to include children and adults with long term health issues/disabilities • working across teams and services the council will look to try and mitigate any negative impacts due to adoption of any of the proposals
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6. Monitoring and Review


Monitoring and review	How will the impact of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure be monitored? How will actions to mitigate negative impacts be monitored? Date for review of the EIA
Details of monitoring activities	A full library user survey will be conducted in 2024 post implementation of the proposed service changes to assess their impact. This will also inform the planned production of a new Library Strategy.
Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA	This review has been undertaken by Chris Allman, Head of Neighbourhood Services, supported by other officers as required. The document has been updated to reflect the outcomes of the public consultation process and the final proposals on opening hours.

7. Sign Off

When you have completed your EIA, it should be sent to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mailbox](#) for review. If your EIA is approved, it must then be signed off by a senior manager within your Department (Head of Service or above).

Once the EIA has been signed off, please forward a copy to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer to be published on the website. For Transparency, we are committed to publishing all Equality Impact Assessments relating to public engagement.

Name	Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director of Environment & Neighbourhoods
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Signature	
Date	18.07.2023

8. Help and Support

For support and advice please contact EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk