

## 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**

<b>Proposal Title</b>	Draft Library Service Strategy
<b>Date of Assessment</b>	20.06.2024
<b>Assessment Lead Officer Name</b>	Joanne Shannon
<b>Directorate/Service</b>	Place
<b>Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.</b>	<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 92 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"> <li>• A wide range of good quality book stock and digital resources including e-books, e-magazines and online subscriptions</li> <li>• Trusted information</li> <li>• Cheshire East Council Customer Service Points</li> <li>• Free internet access</li> <li>• Free Wi-Fi</li> <li>• Signposting to accredited advice and guidance</li> <li>• Learning and wellbeing opportunities</li> <li>• A range of activities and events for adults and children</li> <li>• Warm spaces</li> </ul> <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 seek options to co-locate library sites into other facilities and at the same time move forward with</p>

	<p>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><b>Who is Affected?</b></p>	<p><b>Local residents</b> – whilst retaining access in their local community to the range of library services, access will be restricted as at least 4 libraries will reduce opening hours (staffed by Cheshire East Council staff) to a maximum of 1.5 days per week, opening hours will be reviewed at other sites to ensure these are aligned with times of greatest use. This could restrict 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>Home library service recipients – home delivery service for those who can no longer access the service due to age or disability will continue but the days/timings of deliveries may change.</p> <p><b>Library staff</b> – reduction in opening hours may 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><b>Volunteers</b> – reduction in opening hours will reduce opportunities for IT Buddies, Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, work experience placements.</p> <p><b>Elected members, town and parish councillors &amp; MPs</b> –reduction in opening hours will reduce opportunities for surgeries or meetings with constituents.</p> <p><b>Citizens Advice</b> – library staff have been trained as preferred referrers to assist Citizens Advice with current demand, the time available for this will be reduced at sites where opening hours are reduced.</p> <p><b>Work Club partners</b> – reduction in library opening hours could reduce opportunities to meet with/support those looking for work/training</p> <p><b>Health colleagues</b> – reducing opportunities to run clinics; awareness sessions; classes in a safe accessible space in the local community</p> <p><b>Room hirers</b> – reduction in opening hours may reduce availability of accessible inexpensive meeting rooms at some sites</p> <p>The consultation will provide details on the impact that the proposed changes would have upon all stakeholders’ individuals by proposing the revised opening hours and assessing the impact of these upon all groups.</p>

<b>Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.</b>	<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, etc. Whilst the new strategy retains access to these in the current 16 locations, there will be reduced opportunity for residents to access these important services in 4 sites where Cheshire East Council staffing will be reduced to 1.5 weekdays per week. This will particularly impact the digitally excluded who are unable to access services online.</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 providing:

- 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, refugee coffee mornings, the service seeks to provide opportunities to demystify stigma and breakdown barriers.

	<p>This proposal will continue to see these services provided across all libraries in Cheshire East however there will be some reduction in the service delivered by Cheshire East Council employees at the Tier 3 library sites as the proposed reduction in opening may limit the number of events/activities held in future.</p>
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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?
<p><b>Information you used</b></p>	<p>Library membership data and performance data from the previous 12 months including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visitor figures</li> <li>• circulation statistics including issues, returns, renewals, downloads</li> <li>• PC usage</li> <li>• Number of events and activities</li> <li>• attendance at events</li> <li>• enquiries</li> </ul> <p>has been used to inform the service design.</p> <p>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 Dec 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"> <li>• 75% of library members main reason for visiting was to borrow, return, renew or buy books</li> <li>• 38% visiting to browse, relax, read or use the toilet have</li> <li>• 27% to use a PC, Wi-Fi or study</li> <li>• 26% to get help or find information</li> <li>• 10% to access council services</li> </ul> <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</p>

	<p>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 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 the majority of respondents were against this and this was more likely amongst older people and females.</p> <p>The Council's budget consultation in Jan 2023 received 2300+ responses much of this feedback related to the library service and as a result proposals were amended and the Council reversed its proposal to close all libraries on a Saturday and in an evening and to stop the mobile library service.</p> <p>A full public consultation on the amended proposals for the library service took place from 9<sup>th</sup> June- 9<sup>th</sup> July 2023. This resulted in 3,200 responses detailing what residents valued most about the service, suggestions included keeping the larger libraries open for longer, opening libraries for parts of the day, so that full day closures are avoided, and the service generating as much revenue as possible. Residents felt that any future service improvements should be set out within a long-term library strategy, coproduced with key stakeholders. A commitment was made to develop a long-term Libraries Strategy from April 2024, which would be aligned with the new Corporate Plan which was due to be refreshed by that date.</p> <p>During w.c 17th June 2024 we undertook a series of pre-consultation engagement sessions to enable key stakeholders to influence the proposals that are formally consulted on, we met with 11 town and parish councils.</p>
<p><b>Gaps in your Information</b></p>	<p>It is acknowledged that the last detailed library survey was undertaken over 4 years ago and that the impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis may well have affected usage, although the public consultation undertaken in June 2023 suggested the service remained vitally important to many residents with many now reporting they valued libraries as warm spaces and also the free/low costs activities and events for all ages.</p> <p>A full library user survey will be conducted in 2025 to assess the impact of the changes to the service including the changes to opening hours which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2023 along with any changes as the result of the current proposals.</p>



	Any feedback from the consultation regarding specific economic impacts will be assessed to explore how stakeholders are and will be impacted by any proposed changes in the library service.
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### 3. What did people tell you?

<b>What did people tell you</b>	<b>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?</b>
<b>Details and dates of the consultation/s and/or engagement activities</b>	<p>During the week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024 Individual meetings were held with the Heads of Service from Public Health, Adult Social Care, Customer Services, Children's &amp; Families to ensure proposals were aligned with their own services strategies and future plans. A workshop was held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2024 consisting of Environment &amp; Communities committee members and officers from other Cheshire East services including Public Health, Children's &amp; Families, Adult Services, Customer Services and the Council's leisure provider to discuss the proposed strategy objectives and initial proposals for a sustainable service.</p> <p>A meeting was held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2024 with officers from the Department of Culture, Media &amp; Sport (DCMS) – regulatory body for public libraries acting as a “critical friend” the public consultation on the draft libraries strategy and the proposal that libraries be organised using a tiering system with the potential for some community managed sites was discussed, they raised no particular concerns and provided contacts to assist the development of proposals particularly relating to community libraries and alternative models of delivery.</p> <p>.</p> <p>During w.c 17th June 2024 we undertook a series of pre-consultation engagement sessions to enable key stakeholders to influence the proposals that are formally consulted on, we met with 11 town and parish councils.</p>
<b>Gaps in consultation and</b>	Public consultation is being developed on the draft libraries strategy and the proposed tiering system included within this.

<b>engagement feedback</b>	<p>The consultation will go-live in late July / early August 2024 and will include specific questions around the proposed tiering system for the management, branding and marketing of the service, on library opening hours and on income generation to ensure the service is sustainable.</p> <p>As part of this library service specific public consultation, we will contact partners including NHS and voluntary &amp; faith sector colleagues and representatives from those groups with protected characteristics who use the library on a regular basis e.g Good Vibrations - a music group for those living with Dementia to ensure they are aware of the consultation and are able to feedback. Both paper and digital consultation documents will be made available.</p>
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#### 4. Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

<b>Protected characteristics groups from the <a href="#">Equality Act 2010</a></b>	<b>What do you know?</b> Summary of information used to inform the proposal	<b>What did people tell you?</b> Summary of customer and/or staff feedback	<b>What does this mean?</b> Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential). These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.
<b>Age</b>	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 proposal retains all the existing libraries however the reduction in opening hours may restrict their use particularly if they are unable to travel to other sites.</p> <p>Excluded pupils tutored in the library and the home educated may be disproportionately affected in the libraries proposed to be in tier 3 as they may have nowhere to study locally outside of the 1.5 days per week opening proposed.</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.</p>

<p><b>Disability</b></p>	<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 proposal retains all the existing libraries residents should still be able to access these services within their local community however the reduction in opening hours particularly in the proposed tier 3 libraries may impact when and if they can access them. 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. Where possible engagement with groups and organisation that support this protected characteristic will be undertaken. Carers may be impacted if the library is closed on a day they are available or if it takes longer to travel to another library which is open</p>
<p><b>Gender reassignment</b></p>	<p>The library service doesn't hold gender re-assignment membership data. Census 2021 data could be used for population gender identity data</p>		<p>There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic. However, the public consultation will be available for anyone from the protected characteristic to complete.</p>

<b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>	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 however the reduction in opening hours at the proposed tier 3 sites may impact when they can access them. If libraries in close proximity to each other close on different days, there will be an option for people to travel between libraries to access activities on the days they would have done previously. Co-location of some family hub services may improve the service offer locally for residents with this characteristic
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	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 will 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 however the reduction in opening hours may impact when they can access them
<b>Religion or belief</b>	The library service doesn't collect religion membership data. Census 2021 will provide ward data		There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic. However, the public consultation will be available for anyone from the protected characteristic to complete.
<b>Sex</b>	Membership data and Census 2021	More women than men currently use the library service to borrow books and	Women will be impacted more than men as more women use library services

		groups are predominantly attended by children, and women	
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	The library service does not collect sexual orientation data. Census 2021 will provide population sexual orientation data		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. The public consultation will be available for anyone from the protected characteristic to complete.
<b>Marriage and civil partnership</b>	The library service does not collect marriage and civil partnership data		There is no evidence that there will be a detrimental impact for people with this protected characteristic. However, the public consultation will be available for anyone from the protected characteristic to complete.

## 5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

<b>Mitigation</b>	<b>What can you do?</b> Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts
Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified? Are there any actions that could be undertaken to mitigate, reduce or remove negative impacts?	Identified mitigations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• signposting to alternative library provision e.g other libraries open with in the borough on a particular day</li> </ul>

<p>Have all available options been explored? Please include details of alternative options and why they couldn't be considered?</p> <p>Please include details of how positive impacts could be further enhanced, if possible?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing mobile library routes and stops to see if these align with proposals for opening at proposed tier 3 sites.</li> <li>• providing travel information to assist in getting to other sites e.g bus timetables, car parking information.</li> <li>• promoting library and wider council digital services</li> <li>• offering customer service point appointments</li> <li>• access to Home Library Service if appropriate</li> <li>• investigate expanding outreach provision in partnership.</li> <li>• extend Home Library Service to include children and adults with long term health issues/disabilities.</li> <li>• working across teams and services the council will look to try and mitigate any negative impacts due to adoption of any of the proposals.</li> </ul>
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## 6. Monitoring and Review -

<b>Monitoring and review</b>	<b>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</b>
<b>Details of monitoring activities</b>	A full library user survey will be conducted in 2025 post implementation of the proposed service changes to assess their impact.
<b>Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA</b>	The EIA will be reviewed post public consultation to consider the feedback offered and in advance of any report to Committee to implement the proposals. This review will be undertaken by Joanne Shannon – Library Services Manager.

## 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.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director of Environment &amp; Neighbourhoods</b>
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2024

## 8. Help and Support

For support and advice please contact [EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk)