

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 13th March 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Employment, Learning and Skills and Community

SUBJECT: Halton Library Service Review

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform Members of the changing needs of library service users, identified through public consultation and provide options on how best to deliver a service which is responsive to changing user needs, consistent across all libraries and continues to meet the Council's statutory duty in a climate of reduced resources.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approves:

- 1) The amended library opening hours; including closure of Runcorn Old Town & Ditton library on Saturdays; and**
- 2) Amending the 'Home Library' delivery service model, with the acquisition of an electric vehicle to increase service reach.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The library service undertook consultation which was open for six weeks from 27th August to 8 October 2024 and was widely distributed to those who live, work and study in the borough. Questions were posed around changes to opening hours and the reasons why people use or don't use the library service with consultations submitted both online and via hard copies at a variety of sites to ensure the engagement approach was inclusive.

3.2 Some key analysis from the consultations demonstrated:

- 94% of survey responders use Halton Libraries.
- 57% agree with the proposed opening hours.
- 43% who were unsure on the proposed opening hours wished to see access to library services for those typically working 9-5pm. (The library reconfigured service offers a late

night until 6pm, at both Widnes and Runcorn, plus Saturday opening 10-2pm at both Halton Lea and Widnes Library, along with free 24/7 remote access to online resources, the library catalogue and an extensive e-book and e-audio service. It is also worth noting an enhanced outreach service bolsters the library offer and access opportunities.)

- The most popular time to visit was ‘afternoons’.
- The most used library site by respondents is Widnes library (61%) whilst the least used is Ditton library (21%).

3.3 The Council’s, Research, Data and Insight team produced a consultation dashboard which is available here-
<https://my.visme.co/view/x40jq4jd-library-opening-hours#s1>

3.4 See *Appendix A* for a copy of the public consultation survey, current and proposed opening hours and a complete summary of findings.

3.5 **Changes to library service opening hours**

The current opening hours are inconsistent and can be confusing for our customers. The consultation results responding to proposed opening hours:-

- The majority were in favour, 57%.
- From 602 comments received, 316 showed as ‘no impact’.
- Respondents noted that the changes to weekend hours would have the most impact, as noted in 3.0.

3.6 This was also supported by an analysis of footfall and site use data conducted by the Council over a three month period in 2023. The data and feedback supported consistent opening hours. If the proposed changes are implemented, the libraries would open at 10am and close at 5pm, excluding on the one late night opening in each town until 6pm.

3.7 The proposed opening hours are:-

- 10am opening at all sites
- Late night at Widnes on Tuesdays until 6pm
- Late night at Runcorn Old Town on Thursdays until 6pm
- Widnes and Halton Lea library’s opening on Saturdays, 10-2pm

Appendix A shows the proposed opening hours.

3.8 The changes would impact one reading group located at Widnes library, which currently meet monthly between 5.45-6.45pm. This can be accommodated on the same day within the same building, therefore the impact on this group would be minimal and would be further reviewed.

It is also worth highlighting that Runcorn Old Town and Ditton Library

sites are used far less on Saturdays in comparison to Widnes and Halton Lea libraries.

- 3.9 The analysis found total Saturday footfall figures as:
- Ditton library- 8.3 %
 - Runcorn Old Town library -18.9 %
 - Widnes library- 26.6%
 - Halton Lea library- 46%
- See *Appendix B* for data charts showing hourly, total library service usage during current opening hours.
- 3.10 Based on the data, this proposal includes closing Runcorn Old Town and Ditton Libraries on Saturdays.
- 3.11 When Runcorn Old Town Library moves into its new library site at the Brindley in early 2026, library users will have the opportunity to use the library via the self-service check out options whenever the Brindley is open, enabling extended access at evenings and weekends.
- 3.12 **Amending the ‘Home Library’ (HLS) delivery service model, with the acquisition of an electric vehicle to increase service reach**
- The HLS and internal library courier service is currently provided by the Councils’, Records Management Unit (RMU) through an annual service level agreement at a cost to the library service of £15,330 per year. This has a maximum capacity of 100 deliveries, therefore limiting the development and growth of the library service in this area.
- 3.13 The library service would be greatly enhanced by the acquisition of its own vehicle and part time courier, which after initial capital outlay of £41,000 to acquire the vehicle and branding, would be a total annual cost difference to the service of £2,666 per year. It would help to significantly expand the library service’s outreach offer and provide new and enhanced services to a wider sector of the community, such as deliveries to: care homes, sheltered accommodation, community venues, family hub sites, schools, refuge locations and a click-and-collect service.
- 3.14 In addition to the RMU’s 100 HLS deliveries, 25 HLS deliveries are currently provided directly by library staff. It is anticipated, with the library’s own vehicle capacity would increase from the current 100 deliveries to:
- 150 deliveries in 3-6 months
 - 175 deliveries in 6-12 months
 - 200 deliveries or more, achievable thereafter.
- 3.15 The vehicle would also provide the ability to offer a “pop-up library”

to all areas of the borough and provide flex and adaptability for library service delivery. With distinct branding, it would be a recognisable vehicle in the community, utilised at events to promote the library service and wider Council services.

3.16 **Service Savings**

The overall financial position is the proposals provide a budget saving in year one of £49,599.97. With reduced costs in subsequent years of £91,599.97 less the £2,666 increased outreach costs, a net position of £88,933.87 savings per annum.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires the Council to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who live, work or study and want to access the service in the borough.

4.2 Consultations with the Department for Culture Media and Sport have taken place to help construct a robust public consultation regarding changes to library opening hours.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) annual library survey, published in 2023, found that the, 'total expenditure on libraries in Great Britain rose 3% to £12,551 per 1,000 people in 2022/23' equating to £12.55 per person. Halton library service currently spends £16.91 per person based on the current budget for 2024/25 of £2,180,740 based on the current Halton population of 128,964.

5.2 Halton Borough Council currently spends an additional £4.36 above the average spend for libraries in Great Britain yet it should be noted that Halton is recognised as a deprived borough, relative to England as a whole (27th most deprived of 326 authorities) and over one quarter of Halton's population, live in areas classified as the 10% most deprived in England. Coupled with Halton having below the national average for England in the following areas:

- 33.7% of pupils in Halton obtain grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSE
- 60% of pupils meet the expected standard for reading in Halton at the end of KS2

5.3 A cost saving analysis has been carried out with the services' Finance Officer to determine cost savings of the recommendations.

5.4 Please see below for the cost savings of the proposals and vehicle acquisition costs:

Cost savings of proposals per year			
Initiate proposed more consistent opening hours	25.6 % of total savings		£37,917.10
Closing Runcorn and Ditton on Saturdays	16.1 % of total savings		£23,766.61
Amend late nights to 6pm from 7pm	20.3 % of total savings		£29,916.26
Total:			£91,599.97

Estimated costs of vehicle acquisition	
Purchase cost of vehicle	£39,000
Custom livery and branding	£3,000
Total Capital Outlay:	£42,000
Estimated annual running costs of vehicle	
Annual vehicle maintenance costs	£2,000
Part-time courier at HBC3 18.5 hrs p/w	£ 15,996
Total:	£17,996
RMU costs per annum, to be deducted from total above (not required if own vehicle and courier in library service)	-£15,330
Total annual cost difference: £17,996-£15,330	£2,666

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Delivering a service directly to individuals in their homes, promoting independence, supporting good mental health, and offering dementia boxes and a variety of other reading and support materials.

The Home Library Service caters to carers, individuals with mobility challenges, those facing illness, and those with caregiving responsibilities.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Enhancing residents' skills and development through signposting, IT support, online resources and specialist book stock. Fostering stronger partnerships and collaborative relationships with local businesses, charities and organisations.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families
Delivering high-quality services to children, young people, and families, while strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders, and enhancing children's literacy levels. Empowering children to achieve their full potential.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need
Providing accessible advice, information, and services to support individuals in our community facing the greatest need. Offering resources, guidance, and assistance to those dealing with poverty, inequality, and vulnerability.

Acknowledging the diverse needs of the local community.

Enhancing digital inclusion by offering access to essential tools and fostering the development of skills and confidence necessary for success. Empowering individuals to improve their digital abilities and connect to the internet.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future
Using an electric vehicle will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality contributing to the Council's ambitions set out in the Climate Action Plan.

The proposed changes to Halton Libraries opening hours will reduce energy and utility consumption in library buildings.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community
Halton Library Service is a vital resource for Halton's community, offering access to books, educational opportunities, cultural activities, as well as information, events, and various opportunities for all members of the community.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 The risk of not implementing these proposals in continuing inconsistent service provision across the library sites and a limited mobile provision lacking future adaptability for the service.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 A thorough Equality Impact statement and Needs Assessment has been completed and both of these reports can be accessed here:-
Equality Impact statement - [Equality-for-website.docx](#)
Halton Libraries Needs Assessment - [Halton-Libraries-Needs-Assessment-2024.docx](#)

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Halton library service is committed to supporting climate change.
- 9.2 Pledging to be a part of the Green Libraries Campaign, which is a UK-wide, cross-sector programme focused on the contribution of librarians, information and knowledge professionals to the sustainability agenda. With the aim to encourage libraries to actively reduce their carbon footprint and increase awareness of environmental issues for the wider public by providing accessible resources of which Halton library service endorses, provides and highlights regularly with focused stock collections, our e-resources and on our social media channels and at focused events such as information stands, and partnership work.
- 9.3 The Green Libraries Partnership was developed in response to COP26 and the long-term climate commitments made by local authorities across England with the aim to place libraries at the heart of environmental change and enable libraries to build environmental action within their communities.
- 9.4 The library service is seeking to acquire an electric vehicle to replace the existing non-electric vehicle that is used for all library deliveries. Also reducing the amount of carbon pollution generated by the needs of the library service along with the proposed opening hours resulting in lower energy and utility consumption by the buildings.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’

Appendix A: Public consultation survey including proposed opening hours and results analysis from the Councils, Research and Data team



Halton Library Service Consultation



How people use our libraries is changing. We need to consider how best to provide a library service that responds to the changing library user needs, that continues to meet our statutory duty and is mindful of reduced resources.

A review of Halton Borough Council's library service may result in budget savings for the council while still keeping all four of the borough's libraries open. The council must make significant efficiencies over the next 3-year period. This means the council will have to make tough budgetary decisions around the delivery of services.

However, the council is clear that it does not want to close libraries and is considering making some changes which would help make libraries more sustainable and cost effective. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires the council to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all those who live, work or study and want to access the service in the Borough.

We are looking at the services offered by our libraries and how they work, to see if there are ways to reduce costs while providing a comprehensive and efficient service for our users.

We are now consulting on our library service opening hours to provide a more consistent offer across the library sites. Information, along with data on local needs will be used as the basis for a review by the council.

Cllr Nolan (Executive Board Member Employment, Learning and Skills and Communities) said:

"I'm proud to have libraries within my portfolio, they offer a great service to our users, from libraries within our communities to the Home Library Service. I'm very supportive of the library service and everything it offers. As with all council services, the library service has to ensure it can continue to meet the needs of the community and provide best value for money.

The consultation is important to ensure that any decisions are informed by the views of the community. All responses to the consultation will be analysed and no decisions will be taken until after all the findings have been considered."

We want to hear your views on the proposals and also any alternatives to be more efficient.

The consultation takes the form of a short questionnaire which will be available in all four Halton libraries, Direct Links, community centres, the

library service and the council's websites and will be circulated as widely as possible.

The consultation opens on 27th August and closes on 8th October 2024. If you require any further information please contact hlelib@halton.gov.uk

Proposed Opening Hours Information

Ditton Library, Queens Avenue, Widnes:
changes to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday



Existing Hours	Proposed Hours
Monday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Tuesday 10-6pm	10-5pm
Wednesday closed	closed
Thursday 9.30-5pm	10-5pm
Friday 10-2pm	10-2pm
Saturday 10-2.30pm	closed

Runcorn Library, Granville Street, Runcorn:
changes to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday



Existing Hours	Proposed Hours
Monday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Tuesday 10-6pm	10-5pm
Wednesday closed	closed
Thursday 9.30-5pm	10-6pm
Friday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Saturday 10-2.30pm	closed

Halton Lea Library, Runcorn Shopping City, Runcorn:
changes to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday



Existing Hours	Proposed Hours
Monday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Tuesday 9-5.30pm	10-5pm
Wednesday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Thursday 9-5.30pm	10-5pm
Friday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Saturday 10-2.30pm	10-2pm

Widnes Library, Victoria Square, Widnes:
changes to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday



Existing Hours	Proposed Hours
Monday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Tuesday 9-7pm	10-6pm
Wednesday 10-5	10-5pm
Thursday 9-7pm	10-5pm
Friday 10-5pm	10-5pm
Saturday 10-2.30pm	10-2pm

How you use Halton Libraries

1. **Do you use Halton Libraries? Please select ONE answer**

Yes (Please go to Q3)

No (Please go to Q2)

2. **If you do NOT use Halton Libraries please tell us why in the box below**

If you do NOT use Halton Libraries please go to q6

3. **Which Halton Libraries do you use? Please select all that apply**

Ditton Library

Runcorn Library

Halton Lea Library

Widnes Library

4. **What times of the day do you use the library? Please select all that apply**

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Weekend

5. **Why do you use the library? Please tell us in the box below**

6. Do you agree with the proposed opening times? **Please select ONE answer**

Yes

No

7. If we made the proposed changes to the opening hours how would this impact you? **Please tell us in the box below**

8. What improvements or changes, if any, would you like to see in Halton Library Service? **Please tell us in the box below**

Halton Library Service Budget

The Library Service budget for 2024/25 is £2,180,740. This equates to £16.91 per person, per year based on the current Halton population.

9. What are your thoughts on this? **Please tell us in the box below**

Further Ideas to Reduce Cost

10. Do you have any suggestions for how Halton Library Service can make cost savings? **Please tell us in the box below**

Further Comments

11. If you have any further comments about Halton Library Service please tell us in the box below

**Thank you for completing.
Please hand in at the venue you received the questionnaire or
return to any one of Halton's libraries.**

Data Protection

The information you are entering will be held processed hosted on a web platform with <https://www.snapsurveys.com/>.
Further information on snapsurveys please visit <https://www.snapsurveys.com/gdpr/gdpr-snap-xmp/>
For information on the Halton Library Service privacy notice please visit <https://library.haltonbc.info/policies/>

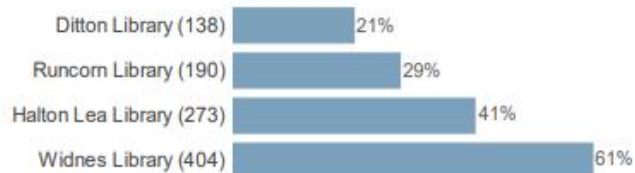
Halton Libraries Consultation

Number of responses: 718

Do you use Halton Libraries? **Please select ONE answer**



Which Halton Libraries do you use? **Please select all that apply**



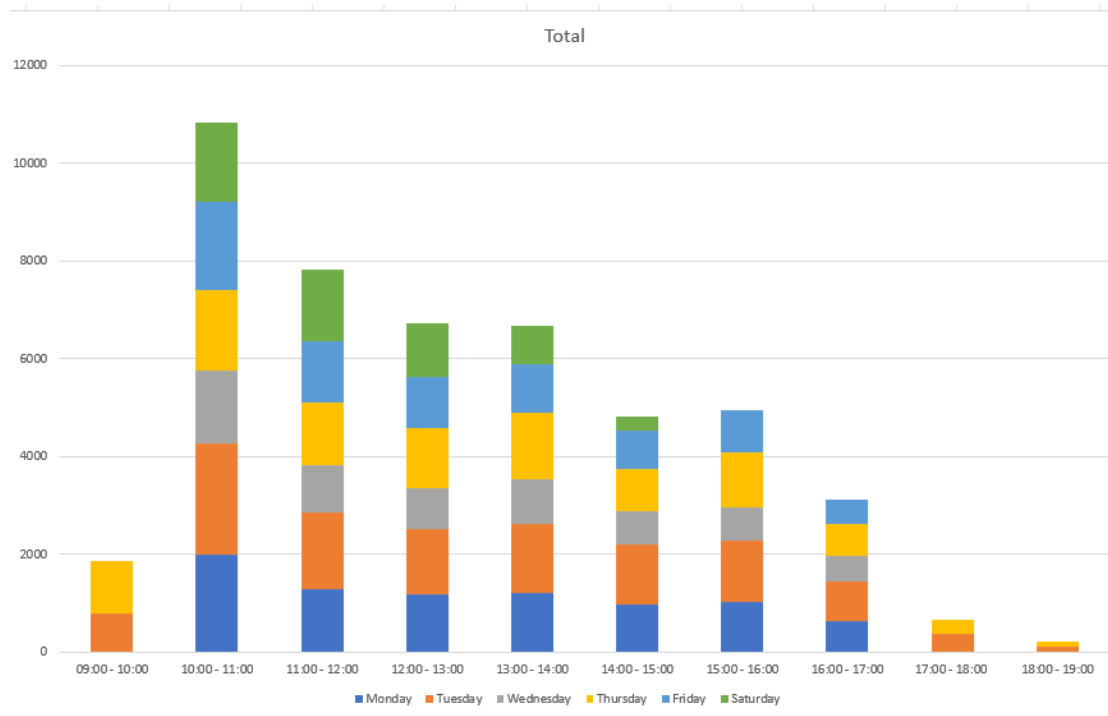
What times of the day do you use the library? **Please select all that apply**



Do you agree with the proposed opening times? **Please select ONE answer**



Appendix B: Footfall Data charts showing hourly, total library service footfall during current opening hours.



Total											
Day	09:00 - 10:00	10:00 - 11:00	11:00 - 12:00	12:00 - 13:00	13:00 - 14:00	14:00 - 15:00	15:00 - 16:00	16:00 - 17:00	17:00 - 18:00	18:00 - 19:00	Total
Monday	0	1983	1288	1194	1205	976	1034	624	0	0	8304
Tuesday	789	2287	1565	1331	1425	1220	1258	823	362	101	11161
Wednesday	0	1490	976	830	912	695	682	522	0	0	6107
Thursday	1086	1654	1279	1235	1343	868	1123	663	293	104	9648
Friday	0	1799	1244	1043	1011	775	858	487	0	0	7217
Saturday	0	1612	1466	1099	780	280	0	0	0	0	5237
Total	1875	10825	7818	6732	6676	4814	4955	3119	655	205	47674