



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>LIBRARIES NI CONSULTATION – Review of Library Opening Hours</b>
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 18 <sup>th</sup> November 2011
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
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### 1.0 Purpose of the Report

To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee a draft response to Libraries NI consultation document and EQIA on the Review of Opening Hours. The closing date for consultation responses is Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2011. A copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix One and EQIA Executive Summary is attached at Appendix Two

### 2.0 Relevant Background Information

Libraries NI was created in 2009 to take responsibility for the public libraries service across Northern Ireland. One of the first tasks that the new authority carried out was a strategic review of its library provision across the Province.

The first phase in March 2010 included a review of the Greater Belfast area. The Council's response to the consultation was approved by the Committee at its meeting on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2010 and was subsequently submitted to Libraries NI. The points highlighted in this response will be included in the draft response to be considered.

The response highlighted that the Council would be keen to explore the co-location of library services within Belfast City Council owned buildings. Particularly where Belfast City Council buildings are located in the proximity of libraries facing potential closure. The response also stressed the need for an assessment of the population needs of the areas where service withdrawal was proposed.

#### Future of Belfast's Libraries

At its meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the Libraries NI Board scrutinised the findings of the review and the public consultation process. The review encompassed 32 libraries in total, 19 of which are located in the Belfast City Council area. The board determined that of the 19 libraries in Belfast City:

- Finaghy, Grove, Holywood Arches and Whiterock meet the key criteria for future use and are well placed to provide 21<sup>st</sup> century library services.
- Plans should be taken forward, subject to the availability of funding, for capital investment in Ardoyne, Chichester, Falls Road, Lisburn Road, Ormeau and Shankill Libraries.
- Ballyhackamore and Woodstock Libraries originally proposed for closure should remain open, in relation to Woodstock Library the situation should be reviewed in 2 years.
- Suffolk Library, originally proposed for amalgamation with Colin Glen Library, should remain open, pending investigation of further developments in the area
- The remaining libraries should close and alternative provision be made, particularly for those users who are unable to access an alternative static library. The libraries which will close are

Andersonstown, Ballymacarrett, Ligoniel, Oldpark, Sandy Row and Whitewell.

The Board also decided that the following libraries within the Greater Belfast Area should also close:

- Belvoir Park, Braniel, Dunmurry, Gilnahirk

### 3.0 Summary of the Consultation Document

Libraries NI has had significant reduction in the Libraries NI budget for the coming years resulting from the 2010 Budget process. The consultation paper says that this has created a need to find substantial savings by reducing opening hours of libraries. Libraries NI have therefore, reluctantly, had to review library opening hours across Northern Ireland.

The principal aim of the policy review is to deliver savings as required by the NI Executive. The document emphasises that Libraries NI Board considered a range of options for making the required savings and selected reduced opening hours as one of several initiatives as the reduction can be reversed at a later date if the economic position improves.

The report proposes that libraries should be grouped into four bands and that there should be consistency in terms of the total number of opening hours within each band. Libraries have been allocated to bands mainly on the basis of the historic level of use which is detailed in Appendix One of the document. Appendix Two highlights the exceptions to the process for recently refurbished libraries.

The table below depicts the reduction of opening hours for libraries within Belfast City Council district area. The impact on Belfast is minimal with the most impact in rural areas. Appendix one of the consultation document illustrates the overall reduced opening hours for Northern Ireland.

Library	Total Hours Opened	Proposed Hours	Hours variance
<b>BAND 1</b>			
Belfast Central	60	57	-3
<b>BAND 2</b>			
Ardoyne	37	37	0
Ballyhackamore	40.5	40	-0.5
Chichester	40.5	40	-0.5
Falls Road	40.5	40.5	0
Finaghy	40.5	40	-0.5
Grove	40.5	40	-0.5
Holywood Arches	40.5	40	-0.5
Lisburn Road	40.5	40	-0.5
Ormeau	40.5	40	-0.5
Shankill	40.5	40.5	0
Suffolk	40.5	40.5	0
Whiterock	37	37	0
<b>Band 3</b>			
Woodstock	30	30	0

In the document Libraries NI stresses that they intend to engage with customers in respect of each library where hours are to be reduced. This engagement will take place in January 2012 after the Libraries NI Board has made a decision on the review proposals. Libraries NI have highlighted that they aim to provide a spread of opening hours across libraries which are geographically close to each other, as far as possible, to enable users to access library services for as many hours as possible

### EQIA

Libraries NI agreed that the proposals resulting from the policy review should be issued for consultation and

the potential equality impacts should be assessed through an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA).

The EQIA acknowledges that people in certain section 75 categories may suffer an adverse differential impact, although the extent of that impact will depend on each individual and cannot be defined for an entire section 75 category. Libraries NI have identified mitigating measures to reduce the adverse impact.

#### **4.0 Resource Implications**

N/A

#### **5.0 Equality Implications**

The EQIA acknowledges that people in certain section 75 categories may suffer an adverse differential impact. Libraries NI have identified mitigating measures to reduce the adverse impact

#### **6.0 Recommendations**

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is asked to consider the consultation document & EQIA attached at appendix 1 & 2 and to consider if it wishes to either:

a. Authorise the corporate response to be submitted to Libraries NI

or

b. Refer to the Party Groupings on the Council for individual consideration and comment.

#### **7.0 Documents Attached**

Appendix One – Consultation Document – Libraries NI - Review of Opening Hours

Appendix Two – Libraries NI - Equality Impact Assessment – Executive Summary

Appendix Three – Draft Consultation Response