

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead

Public library opening hours consultation

www.rbwm.gov.uk



This consultation was originally set to commence on 23 March 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown on that date, it was not felt appropriate to launch a consultation into a service which had to be closed. Not only was the service itself closed at this time but it was also recognised that many customers would not have been able to access the hard copy version of this consultation thereby disadvantaging those considered digitally vulnerable. This consultation is not however, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis and has not changed from the original proposals.

We are seeking your views on proposals to maintain a sustainable and resilient library service, which will continue to meet the needs of Royal Borough residents, as required by the 1964 Public Libraries Act, while delivering essential savings for the council.

We are committed to diversifying the services the library offers, and we have introduced a range of digital options that can be accessed 24 hour, 7 days a week for library users with a library card. We also offer digital support to library users, across the borough, if they need additional help to access digital resources. Free reservations for any book in the Royal Borough collection can be placed online or from any borough library location. The homes and mobile service ensures those who are housebound are also able to benefit from a library service.

However, we are proposing a change to the opening hours of all our libraries and we are seeking your views on these proposals. The following proposed options for opening hours for each library are based on usage data, knowledge of the local community, staff input, groups who regularly meet in the library, cost per hour and equality considerations.

The results of this consultation will be reported to Cabinet in January 2021. Consultation feedback will be available on our website and at borough libraries. If you would like to have your say on the hours our libraries are open, please complete this consultation form here online at: <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk> or return this paper form to any of our libraries by 30 November 2020.

 <https://www.rbwm.gov.uk>

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How to respond to this consultation:

1. Review the information pack below
2. Review current and proposed opening hours for each library
3. Make a note of any comments you may have
4. Propose alternatives on the consultation response page

Information pack

The borough library service is valued by Royal Borough residents and the council with 98% satisfaction ratings reported in 2019 by customers who borrowed almost 750,000 items and visited over 986,000 times. 110 committed volunteers assist library staff to deliver 475.5 opening hours per week across 14 libraries, 36 regular activities and a range of special activities and events across the borough. The digital service continues to grow in popularity. It includes a digital music and film library, E-books, digital audio books, E-magazines, thousands of the world's most popular newspapers and a high quality selection of online reference resources which are available 24 hour, 7 days a week. Digital support is offered across the library service for residents who need additional help to access digital resources.

A number of efficiency savings have been made

These include reductions in the supervisor, digital and outreach teams, deletions of a number of posts (including the head and deputy head of library services), efficiencies as a result of a full merger with customer services and parking admin, generating income from a number of sources and maximising the support of the Friends of the Library service to assist with funding for additional and extended library activities. Library staff now also deliver taxi licencing, Town Hall reception and a full range of face to face council services.

What is being proposed

Table one compares the number of borough library opening hours to other nearby local authorities and demonstrates that the borough offers significantly more opening hours per week as well as more opening hours per week per head of population. The proposal is to reduce opening hours to bring them more in line with other library authorities while maintaining an appropriate library service and delivering the required savings for the council.

Table one

Local authority	Total library opening hours	Population	No of opening hours per 100,000 population
Reading	166	162,700.00	102
Slough	286	149,400.00	191
West Berks	240	156,000.00	153
Wokingham	253	154,380.00	163
Milton Keynes	407	255,700.00	159
Royal Borough	475.5	147,700.00	322

The proposal is to reduce the physical library offering by 123 hours per week. However, even with this reduction, the borough will still offer residents more opening hours per head of population than the local authorities listed above.

Analysis of footfall in library buildings has identified that there are times when some libraries are very quiet. Therefore, we believe that our ability to provide a sustainable library service would continue to be maintained even if opening hours were reduced during the quietest times and if the least used library locations were closed altogether, as long as alternative provision was available.

It should be noted that take-up of the 24 hour, 7 days a week digital library offer has increased by 150% in the past year. These services do not rely on extended opening hours and are available to all residents in the Royal Borough. Staff and volunteers offer free sessions to residents during opening hours to assist them to make full use of the digital offer. There is already a 24 hour, 7 days a week phone line option as well as an online option for residents to renew their items. There are also out of hours return facilities at all library locations.

To further mitigate against the proposed reduction in physical opening hours it is proposed that the homes library service is developed further and promoted to ensure those who can't get to a library due to health, disability, caring or age issues are given the opportunity to be visited at home on a regular basis by volunteers who will deliver library books to them.

In addition, the library reading development inclusions post will continue to deliver targeted reading development services to the most disadvantaged areas in the borough.

What are the alternatives?

In order to maintain funding for Royal Borough Libraries, there would be a significant financial cost to the council which would have to be met elsewhere.

This could mean:

- raising additional funding e.g. through increased levels of Council Tax; or
- reducing council services elsewhere and using compensatory savings; or
- using the council's one-off reserves which does not resolve the underlying funding requirement; or
- a combination of the above

If you use any library services, please ensure you tick ALL the relevant boxes on page 11.

Efficiencies and savings options already reviewed and rejected

The council is aware that alternative delivery methods for library services have been developed including:

- Mutualisation.
- Outsourcing.
- Open access (unstaffed libraries).
- Community-run (volunteer-led) libraries.
- Stock fund.

However, none of these options offer significant savings opportunities without either:

- putting at risk the council's ability to deliver the statutory requirement to provide a "comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof"; or
- removing the ability of the service to respond to council priorities, fluctuating resident demand and a professional, agile approach in line with wider council developments; or
- offering a fundamentally unstable and unsustainable solution.

Where these options have been implemented by other authorities they have, on many occasions, been reversed.

The Public Libraries Act 1964

Due regard must be given to the requirements of the law as set out in the Public Libraries Act 1964 as well as the long-term effects on the library service.

The Act sets out to make provision "to secure the proper discharge by local authorities of the function in relation to libraries" and that "it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof".