

Equality Impact Assessment



Hampshire
County Council

Library Service – COVID-19 Tier 2 Restrictions - Service User Impacts

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Department: Culture, Communities and Business
Services

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Description of current service/policy

This EIA considers the provision of public library services within an area of 'High' Tier 2 restrictions, updated to take account of new guidance and learning as it is available. Normally the Library Service operates 48 Libraries and 4 community Libraries, with a range of face-to-face provision including browsing and lending of books, events, activities and learning.

Geographical impact: All
Hampshire

Description of proposed change

In reopening services post lockdown, Hampshire Libraries developed a phased recovery plan and risk assessments for each branch, based on a generic Library Service risk assessment. These documents were written to ensure that customers were accessing a safe environment, in line with HCC protocols and the Government COVID-19 Secure guidance, and considering the unique circumstances of each location. Guidance shows that libraries within an area of 'High' risk can open for browsing as well as various other services, provided the premises are COVID-secure.

Impacts of the proposed change

This impact assessment covers Service users

Engagement and consultation

Has engagement or consultation been carried out?

No

HCC has followed government guidelines to best deliver library services in an emergency response situation. Risk assessments have been carried out in each library to ensure that all library buildings are COVID-secure and as safe as possible for all customers and staff.

Statutory considerations	Impact	Mitigation
	<p>Library services are traditionally accessed more by older people, and by children and families. As such these groups were affected more by the closure of branches during lockdown, and there are potential age-related impacts for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i) Older people are less likely to be digitally connected or may have additional needs in accessing digital contentii) Children may have been adversely affected by a lack of access to reading materialiii) Older people and families with young children may feel increasingly isolated without their normal support networks in place. <p>In accordance with guidelines and risk assessments, a decision was made to open the largest and busiest branches from w/c 14th December for limited browsing to enable those who wished to visit a physical branch to visit.</p> <p>All service users have been encouraged to use digital and online content which has been enhanced to include a broader range of titles with increased children's stock. Significant risk management measures (including information posters, signage, cleaning regimes and social distancing</p>	

measures) were implemented to ensure that libraries remained COVID-secure and minimise risk. Guidance and requirements on the wearing of face coverings were adopted in line with evolving government advice.

Age:

Low

The Home Library Services accepts new members, enabling vulnerable and isolated residents, including older people, to borrow physical stock, particularly where they are unable or unwilling to visit a physical branch. Existing members have been welcomed back and people shielding, self-isolating long term or unable to travel safely to a branch have been encouraged to become new members of the Home Library Service.

For those who are without access to the internet and uncomfortable in spending time in a physical branch, the Ready Reads Service was maintained (accessible by telephone and operating as an Order and Collect Service).

Our bookable public access computers in each library are distanced 2 metres from other customers and wiped down with anti-viral spray or wipes after each use. The cleaning is recorded in a cleaning log that is available on request for customers to review. All users of the public computers are required to book allocated time slots of 60 minutes to allow additional time between users to clean the terminals and also facilitate effective Test and Trace procedures if required.

Additional time can be provided for customers that require reasonable adjustments.

The School Library Service supports the majority of Hampshire schools with high quality stock and has maintained support for schools throughout the lockdown period.

It has not yet been possible to resume groups and/or activities. However, a comprehensive digital offer has been developed.

Much of what has been written under the 'Age' protected characteristic also applies to people with disabilities.

It is recognised that some disabilities and chronic conditions place certain individuals at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 than they would be otherwise.

To minimise risk for people who want to visit physical libraries, significant risk management measures (including information posters, signage, cleaning regimes and social distancing measures) were implemented to ensure that libraries remained COVID-secure and minimise risk. Local arrangements have changed in line with government advice e.g., when face coverings were required.

It is recognised that in some cases these measures may have an adverse impact on those with disabilities as follows:

- i) To facilitate visits and one-way systems, furniture, such as chairs and tables, have been removed where necessary. Capacity limits may mean that queuing is required.
- ii) Face coverings became mandatory for staff (from 24/09/20) in public areas of the library and for all library customers (from 08/08/20) unless exemptions apply.
- iii) Customers with mental health challenges or those who are neurodiverse may struggle with the changing processes and practices in their local library.
- iv) Some disabilities may mean that

customers may have higher anxiety than others around the safety of premises or may not be able to comply with other requirements (for example using specific hand sanitisers).

v) It has not yet been possible to resume groups and/or activities. This may have had a significant impact on the wellbeing of vulnerable individuals, particularly those that are socially isolated or lonely.

vi) Some customers may not wish to, or be able to, visit a physical library.

Staff are aware that some people may not be able to stand or queue for extended periods and staff have been advised to act with sensitivity – including offering chairs or fast-tracking customers through queues where necessary.

It is recognised that face coverings can compromise effective communication and cause disadvantage to people with certain disabilities. Advice on exemptions and guidance on printing exemption 'badges' was introduced shortly after the requirements were introduced. The Service has installed Perspex screens at all help points to protect staff and customers. It has also provided Perspex visors that can be used by staff as an additional mitigation where staff were required to provide limited time close support (within 2m) to customers, e.g. with photocopiers. It is permissible for staff to remove face coverings for a limited time to assist with communication, e.g. lip reading. Customers who are exempt from wearing a face covering can do so without being challenged or questioned by members of staff.

The signage in all libraries has been updated to reflect the changes. Staff duties now included meeting and greeting customers to explain the

Disability:

Low

current practices, such as one-way systems, using hand sanitiser, which have been implemented to reduce the risk of transmission. Staff carrying out these roles have been asked to support those customers that may struggle with the changes.

Staff are encouraged to act with tolerance and understanding to ensure that measures are fully explained – there may be a need for reasonable adjustments to be made on a case-by-case basis.

A comprehensive digital offer has been developed. This includes online learning and support for health and wellbeing, including supporting good mental health. Some face-to-face learning has been reintroduced.

The Home Library Services enables vulnerable and isolated residents, including older people, to borrow physical stock. Existing members have been welcomed back and people shielding, self-isolating long term or unable to travel safely to a branch have been encouraged to become new members of the Home Library Service.

Sexual orientation:

Neutral

<p>Race: Low</p>	<p>The Service acknowledges that government research has shown that BAME citizens are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others. The Library Service is adhering to government guidance on maintaining clean and safe areas alongside social distancing policies to try to minimise the impact on this group and will continue to implement further measures and mitigations where they exist. All the mitigations described above for people who do not wish to visit physical branches apply.</p>	
<p>Religion and belief: Neutral</p>		
<p>Gender reassignment: Neutral</p>		
<p>Gender: Neutral</p>		
<p>Marriage and civil partnership: Neutral</p>		
<p>Pregnancy and maternity: Neutral</p>		
<p>Other policy considerations</p>	<p>Impact</p>	<p>Mitigation</p>

<p>Poverty: Low</p>	<p>It is recognised that people in poverty are more likely to be digitally excluded and have poorer access to online services. A priority has been to enable bookable access to Go-online terminals, as it is recognised that online access has a key role in supporting groups that are digitally deprived. This will allow people to access the internet and print in a safe, socially distanced way.</p>	
<p>Rurality: Low</p>	<p>Vulnerable and isolated residents, including older people, who are unable to travel to an alternative library could choose to use digital services, apply for the Home Library Service or the Good Neighbours Scheme. This group also includes individuals who would normally use public transport.</p>	

Neutrality statement (if all considerations have a neutral impact)

Any other information

The Library Service Senior Management Team review the COVID-19 Recovery Plan on a regular basis. They have worked with national library colleagues and members of the DCMS to develop sector-specific guidance and were guided by national and corporate guidance as consistency has been and continues to be essential. They continue to engage in regular communications with Library Service staff to ensure they understand the concerns being raised by the customers and the solutions being suggested at a local level. This EIA will be updated as and when changes, or appreciation of additional issues, arises.

Tier 2 guidance indicates that Library Services can resume browsing. Hampshire Libraries were in the vanguard of libraries reopening after the first lockdown, with a swift return of services. However, to ensure Library Service venues remain COVID-safe and to enable Hampshire Libraries to provide additional services such as Ready Reads for people who are less comfortable coming inside library buildings, there is a need for more staffing than usual. At this point in the year, with seasonal illness, some staff away from the workplace due to self-isolation and others taking much needed leave in December, staffing levels are lower than normal.

Where services are reopened, it is important that for everyone that there is confidence that these service levels can be maintained. Business continuity plans include a triage system – the first priority is to ensure all customers across Hampshire have access to bookable PCs and physical books (through Ready Reads and Reservations). The second is then to reintroduce browsing – this

requires additional staffing Hampshire Libraries is opening the busiest branches first on the w/c 14th December and, when there is assurance that these levels of service can be sustained browsing will be resumed in all other branches.