

Committees:	Dated:
Department of Community and Children's Services – For Information Culture, Heritage and Libraries – For Information	06/03/2020 23/03/2020
Subject: Extended opening hours at Barbican Library	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

This report summarises the impact on service provision at Barbican Library following the extension of opening hours on Fridays. From 2003, the Library had closed at 2.00pm on Fridays. In January 2019, the closing time was changed to 5.30pm in response to customer demand. This has resulted in a 5.5% increase in visitors to Barbican Library. Many new customers have joined the library on Friday afternoons and the new hours are now accepted as the norm. Expanding the service without increasing staff numbers has been challenging but it has been well-received by customers. Customer satisfaction will be thoroughly explored in our next survey in June 2020.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. In 2003 the Barbican Library extended its opening hours to include services on Thursday evening and Saturday afternoon. As this change was made with no increase in staff resources, stakeholders were consulted. It was agreed to close the library at 2.00pm on Friday afternoons so that staff rotas could be adjusted.
2. Dissatisfaction with the open hours has been a theme of subsequent public consultations. A new generation of customers has been baffled by our inability to provide a service during what appears to be core hours.
3. The report by the Head of Service on the 2017 customer survey, which came to committee in September 2017, noted:

“Customers at all libraries requested longer opening hours with opening on Friday afternoon at Barbican Library being the most popular suggestion (176 comments). The decision to close on Friday afternoons was taken some years ago in order to open later on Saturdays. Full consultation with customers was carried out and the current pattern of opening hours proved the most popular.”

4. Despite further reductions to the establishment since 2003, we felt compelled by public opinion to revisit this matter. In the intervening years, the library has introduced better self-service options (in library and online) and, during 2018, we created revised rotas to provide adequate frontline staffing during extended opening hours.
5. After consultation, staff were issued with variations to their contracted hours, which came into effect on 1 January 2019 in line with the extended opening hours. All Barbican Library staff understood the need for this change and no objections were raised.

Current Position

6. Since 1 January 2019, there has been an increase of opening hours in a standard week from 47 to 50.5 (7.5%).
7. Barbican Library now opens at 9.30am Monday to Saturday and closes at 5.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 7.30pm on Tuesday and Thursday, and 4.00pm on Saturday.
8. During the period January to December 2019, Barbican Library recorded 5.5% more physical visitors than the same period in 2018.
9. Footfall remained at an average of 66 visitors per hour.
10. Introducing this change has been very challenging. We operate a basic service on Friday afternoons with no special events or activities offered. Improved self-service will take away some of the pressure on staff and we are currently re-procuring for the self-service machines.

Proposals

11. We shall continue to maintain the current opening hours for as long as this is viable and regularly consult with our customers to ensure that the most useful opening hours are offered.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

12. Improvement work is relevant to the following of the City's Key priorities (Corporate Plan 2015–2019):
 - To provide modern, efficient and high-quality local services, including policing, within the Square Mile for workers, residents and visitors

- To provide valued services, such as education, employment, culture and leisure, to London and the nation.

13. It is also relevant to the following Department of Community and Children's Services Strategic Aims:

- Priority Potential: People of all ages can achieve their ambitions through education, training and lifelong learning
- Priority Independence, Involvement and Choice: People of all ages can live independently, play a role in their communities and exercise choice over their services
- Priority Community: People of all ages feel part of, engaged with and able to shape their community
- The 'Ambition' of Barbican and Community Libraries is: To support and promote learning, reading and literacy, facilitate participation in community and cultural life and meet the needs of all our customers – current and potential.

Implications

14. This increase in hours is contained within the Barbican Library budget and has not necessitated any increase in spending.

Conclusion

15. The decision to increase Barbican Library's opening hours was taken in response to customer demand. It has not been easy to implement but it has been successful with a 5.5% increase in visitor numbers recorded.

Appendices

- None

Background Papers

- Barbican and Community Libraries Customer Survey presented to Committees in September 2017.

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