

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL**  
**COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Council Meeting</b>		
<b>MEETING DATE AND TIME</b>	<b>10 August 2023</b> <b>7.00pm</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>Town Hall, Bridestones</b>
<b>REPORT FROM</b>	Jackie MacArthur, Communities and Marketing Manager & Deputy Chief Officer		
<b>AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE</b>	<b>Agenda item 17</b> Cheshire East Libraries' next step		
<b>Background</b>	<p>At an Emergency Council Meeting on 29 June 2023, Councillors considered its response to a Cheshire East Council's consultation regarding the <a href="#">reduction in library hours (click this link for the original paper)</a>. CEC was proposing to reduce the opening hours of Congleton Library from 46 hours to 34 hours (a reduction of 12 hours). The saving was to be done by closing half a day on a Wednesday and all day on a Friday. Similar cuts were being made to libraries across the borough.</p> <p>Congleton Town Council, like other towns and parishes across the borough, was given the option to top up the service by paying for one, two or three of the half-day closures.</p> <p><b>The decision taken at the Emergency Council on 29/6/23 was:</b></p> <p><i>CTC/28/2324 Resolved that the Town Council's response to the CEC Library Consultation should be as follows:</i></p> <p><i>Congleton Town Council rejects the need for Congleton's library to be closed for 1.5 days per week based upon the vital support this service provides for our growing community, as stated within the information that Cheshire East Council has provided.</i></p> <p><i>With Cheshire East Council and other potential partners, Congleton Town Council wishes to explore mutually beneficial ways in which we can keep Congleton Library fully functioning across the 6 days per week. Our ambition is to protect the benefits for our community but also support the CEC officers who work within the library service in Congleton.</i></p> <p>Following the consultation, which ended on 9 July, CEC amended its plans. This was discussed at <a href="#">CEC's Community and Environment Committee on 27 July. (click this link for the Cheshire East Committee Paper)</a></p> <p>Following further research and comments from the towns, CEC has amended the proposed closing hours for Congleton and the four other largest libraries. At its Community and Environment Committee on the 27 July CEC accepted proposals to reduce the closing hours for Congleton from 46 hours to 37-</p>		

reinstating 3 hours from the original proposal. This would see the reduction in closing hours in Congleton reduced by 9 hours of service per week with the opening hours amended as shown on the table below.

At a meeting with the Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer and Cheshire East Officers we were advised that CEC would begin the negotiations with staff about the new hours unless there was a serious intention from the Town Council to enter into a three-year contract to boost the opening hours. This contract would need to be in place by early October.

*Table taken from the Cheshire East Community and Environment Paper*

Group	Library	Opening Hours	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Proposed Hours Reduction
B	Congleton	<b>Current</b>	09:00 - 19:00	09:00 - 17:00	09:00 - 17:00	09:00 - 17:00	09:00 - 17:00	N/A
		<b>Consultation</b>	09:00 - 19:00	09:00 - 17:00	09:00 - 13:00	09:00 - 17:00	CLOSED	12 hours
		<b>Final Proposal</b>	10:00 - 19:00	10:00 - 17:00	10:00 - 17:00	10:00 - 17:00	10:00 - 13:00	9 hours
		<p><b>Consultation proposal</b> to close full day Friday and Wednesday afternoon would have impacted 2 out of 14 regular activities</p> <p>Mitigations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Crafternoon tea currently alternate Wednesdays 2.00-3.30pm could move to Monday, but would clash with another event</li> <li>2. Crafty natter currently alternate Wednesdays 2.30-3.30pm could move to Tuesday, but would clash once per month with another event</li> </ol> <p><b>Final proposal</b> to open at 10am and close at 1pm on Fridays doesn't impact any of the regular activities.</p>						

**Next Steps**

**Cheshire East Council is planning to make the 9 hour savings in Congleton by**

1. Opening an hour later each day – saving five hours per week
2. Closing on half day Friday – saving four hours per week.

CEC's research indicated that the first hour of the day tends to be the quietest in numbers using the library. ([data showing times and usage for Congleton Library can be downloaded here](#))

The considerations raised in the initial paper in the Emergency Town Council meeting when Congleton Town Council discussed its response are still relevant, although the scenario for the town is slightly better with 9-hour reduction (20%) rather than 12-hour (26%) reduction and the library will still be accessible for six days per week. It is not clear if all the services delivered via Congleton library can be condensed into 80% of the opening times.

In the paper to the Emergency Council CTC consideration was given to:

- **Impact on the Well-being of the Community.**
- **Impact on learning of young people**
- **Impact on Equality and Inclusion**
- **Impact on the Town Centre**
- **Long-term viability of the Building**
- **Is Friday the best day to close? (now refers to half day not full day)**
- **Growing and Expanding Town**

<p><b>Options</b></p>	<p>Councillors need to decide what actions they wish to take on behalf of Congleton and report back to Cheshire East Council on the actions proposed.</p> <p>CEC will start staff consultations in October about the reduced hours to put the new hours in place as soon as possible. If CTC does wish to 'buy back' some or all of the hours a funding agreement will need to be in place by early October. Cheshire East would cover the additional hours agreed until the start of the new financial year, when the Town Council would start to pay for the additional hours.</p> <p>The cost to the Town Council is £20,413 for the Friday afternoon and circa £5k for each weekday morning that we wanted the library to open at 9am rather than 10am. This will increase in years 2 and 3 to reflect staffing costs.</p> <p>Adding £25k to the budget, for a comparison, based on current year budgets would equate to an extra 2.4% on the Precept, an additional 4p per year to each Band D household.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accept CEC's new proposed opening hours for the library. This sees the library opening hours reduced by 9 hours.</li> <li>2. CTC agreed to fund the additional hours on a Friday afternoon. This would be a three-year agreement which starts in April 2024 but contracts would need to be in place by October 2023. Cost £20,413 for the first year with pay increases added to the following 2 years to enable the library to open on a Friday afternoon.</li> <li>3. CTC investigates funding the Friday afternoon, as in option 2, but seeks funding support from the surrounding parish councils and other partners.</li> <li>4. CTC looking to fund the Friday afternoons plus an additional hour per weekday to enable the library to open at 9am rather than 10am. Note the cost per day per year will be approximately £5k. (three-year contract). This could be looked at for 1,2,3,4 or 5 days. Eg/ Councillors may believe it is worth opening up early on a Tuesday as people come into town early for the market?</li> <li>5. Option 4, (with an agreed number of additional mornings) but include seeking support from surrounding parish councils and other partners to support the additional hours.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Financial Implications</b></p>	<p>The figure for the half-day closure is £20,413 (22 hrs of staff time). This would be for a 3-year period starting in the financial year 2024/25. The following 2 years will be increased and take into account national pay increase.</p>

	<p>The figure for each additional hour of library time is approximately £5k per year (subject to increases for year 2 and 3).</p> <p>Adding £25k to the budget, for a comparison, based on current year budgets would equate to an extra 2.4% on the Precept, an additional 4p per year to each Band D household.</p>
<b>Environmental Implications</b>	<p>Minimal environmental footprint saving by closing for 1.5 days as the building is still heated and the resources are still purchased for the service. Loss of facility for the Community is the main issue.</p>
<b>Equality and Diversity Impact</b>	<p>The closure is likely to disproportionately affect those with the greatest needs. The library is the town's biggest warm space and safe space for people. Many people rely on the computers for form filling, job searching and the advice given by the staff acting as the 'one-stop-shop' for all Cheshire East related enquiries. Congleton library is one of the busiest libraries per head of population.</p>
<b>Decision Required</b>	<p>For Councillors to agree how it would like to proceed based on the options above, or potentially a new option, they wish to follow so that Cheshire East can be advised.</p> <p>If Council accepts option one – which is accepting the new opening hours that CEC is prepared to fund – then CEC will start discussions with staff so that the new hours can start asap in the Autumn.</p>