



CHANGING THE SCHEDULES

A Survey of Public Library
Opening Hours

2004

Contents

<i>Executive Summary and Recommendations</i>	1
<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Background</i>	5
<i>2004 survey results</i>	7
<i>Lunch time opening</i>	9
<i>Evening opening</i>	10
<i>Weekend opening</i>	10
<i>Additional services</i>	12
<i>Archives / Local Studies</i>	12
<i>Mobile libraries</i>	12
<i>Prison library services</i>	12
<i>Services to council members and staff</i>	12
<i>Other facilities</i>	12
<i>Planned changes since September 30, 2004</i>	13
<i>Summary of changes since 1998</i>	14
<i>Table 1: Number of service points open to the public, 1998-2004</i>	8
<i>Table 2: Aggregate hours of opening</i>	8
<i>Table 3: Number of hours branch and mobile libraries are open to the public (per week)</i>	9
<i>Table 4: Number of branch libraries open during lunch time</i>	9
<i>Table 5: Number of branch libraries open after 6. p.m.</i>	10
<i>Table 6: Number of branch libraries open at weekends</i>	10
<i>Chart 1: Increases in the number of branch libraries open at lunch time, evenings and weekends.</i>	11
<i><u>Appendix 1: Recommendations from Extending Our Welcome (2002)</u></i>	16
<i><u>Appendix 2: 2004 questionnaire</u></i>	18

Executive Summary and Recommendations

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna is pleased to publish the results of the survey which library authorities have completed of the opening hours of their public library services as recorded on September 30th, 2004. This is the third survey undertaken by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government since 1998, when *Branching Out* was launched.

All 32 library authorities participated in the three surveys. Library authorities have increased their schedules in the six year period under review. The County and City Librarians have provided details of a larger number of services than in previous returns. An Chomhairle Leabharlanna has received information on 351 branch libraries provided by the library authorities in Ireland, this represents an increase of 25 branch libraries since 1998. Mobile libraries bring a service to 722 locations from the combined national fleet of 27 vehicles. In addition, the survey highlights details of the services provided in the Local Studies and Archives sections, the prison library service and the specialised services to the members and officers of local authorities, where these services are provided in separate locations to the branch or central libraries. The local authorities together provide a combined weekly total of some 10,500 hours of service to the public through these facilities.

An Chomhairle commends the library authorities on extending the level of access to services and in particular, notes the improvements since 1998 in the following areas:

- There has been an overall 20% increase in the opening hours of branch libraries since 1998, from 7,761 to 9,344 per week.
- The number of libraries open during lunch time has increased from 100, or 31% of the total, to 162 or 46%.
- The number of libraries offering a service at the weekend has increased from 208 (64%) to 262 (75%).
- 295 or 84% of the libraries are open at least one night per week. This represents an increase of 34 libraries, from 261 or 80% of the 1998 total.
- The combined evening and weekend hours of opening account for 2,403 or a quarter of the total branch library schedules.
- 17% of the branch library schedules cater for usage after 5.00 p.m. 12% of the hourly schedules cater for services after 6.00 p.m.

A number of authorities are planning an increase in the access hours in 2005. An Chomhairle draws the attention of library authorities to the following matters:

- 30% of users surveyed in the 2002 *Public Library User Survey (PLUS)* rated existing hours of opening as inadequate.
- Many medium to large sized urban areas are poorly served by weekend and / or evening openings.
- One third of libraries which provide a service to the public at weekends are open for three hours or less during this period.

The enhancement of opening hours was one of the main developments that non-users stated would encourage them to use libraries.

Recommendations

Having regard to the findings of the following reports:

- *Branching Out (1998)*¹
- *Extending Our Welcome (2002)*²
- *Public Library User Survey (PLUS), 2002*³
- *A Public Space for All: Use and Non-use of Public Libraries (2004)*⁴ and
- the survey results of this report,

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna commends library authorities on the improvements made to date and recommends that in order to increase public access to library services:

1. Local authorities should continue to review their schedules of library opening hours and provide appropriate staff levels in order to increase the hours of opening at times suitable to the public. These reviews should be undertaken in the context of library authority strategic plans.
2. Library authorities should examine in particular the scope for further weekend service, including a Sunday service.
3. In the context of the programme of decentralisation of local government services local authorities should consider how to integrate the information services provided by each authority in the best interest of their clienteles. Maximising the potential of the library service and increasing hours of opening presents further opportunities for growth in meeting the communities' needs.
4. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should continue to survey the opening hours of library authorities every three years. Future surveys should provide for the examinations of the schedules in detail.
5. *The Branching Out* Steering Committee should investigate in 2005 options to ascertain the requirements of the wider community (including lapsed, potential and non-users).
6. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should undertake a national Public Library User Survey (*PLUS*) in 2006 and every three years thereafter.

¹ *Branching Out*: a new public library service. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1998

² *Extending Our Welcome*: public library opening hours in Ireland. Dublin: An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, 2002

³ *Public Library User Survey, 2002*: a summary report. Dublin: An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, 2002

⁴ *A Public Space for All*: use and non-use of public libraries. Dublin: An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, 2004.

Introduction

This publication considers the results of three opening hours surveys undertaken by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government since 1998 in which local authorities provided details of weekly schedules of public library services throughout Ireland. Recommendations on this key indicator were outlined in *Branching Out*. Local authorities have cooperated with central government in expanding the development of public library services in line with these recommendations.

Opening hours are but one measure in the targets set for a better library service. Local authorities have invested in the staff, infrastructure and stock of the service also. With the support of increased local and central government investment, new and refurbished libraries have opened their doors to the public providing enhanced facilities and services. Such improvements have also been facilitated, in no small part, through improvements in staffing levels. Extended hours of opening are a major contributor to the improved accessibility to the diverse range of services available through the public library service.

The data contained in this report are based on returns received from the 32 public library authorities in September 2004. Some comparisons are drawn between the results of previous surveys and point to further changes which library authorities are planning between September, 2004 and the end of 2005.

The increase in availability of services has taken place against a backdrop of unprecedented infrastructural development arising from the recommendations of *Branching Out* and the commitment of public library authorities to rise to the challenges through innovative and inclusive mechanisms.

The national *Public Library User Survey (PLUS)* which took place in 2002 revealed that the concern that hours of opening received one of the lowest satisfaction ratings amongst library users. 37% considered existing hours of opening *Very Good* while 30% rated the opening hours as being *Poor* or *Very Poor*. Students and self-employed respondents were particularly dissatisfied with the level of service in this area.

Library users' opinions on this, and other aspects of the service, were widely distributed. All participating library authorities received a copy of the PLUS report for their administrative area, and a number of authorities requested and received, individual reports for a number of their service points.

In the 2004 national survey on non-users, 19% of respondents cited the introduction of more user friendly hours of opening as one improvement that might encourage them to use public libraries.

The 2004 opening hours survey can be summarised, as follows:

The numbers of branches surveyed has increased from 326 to 351. Aggregate opening hours for branch libraries have increased by 20% since 1998 from 7,761 to 9,344 per week.

There has been a positive response to user requirements for an increase in the percentage of hours libraries are open outside of office hours and more availability during the evening and weekend periods.

The completed returns for 2004 reveal that while some authorities have made dramatic improvements in the enhancement of opening hours, others have remained as they were and one authority has reported a slight decrease in opening hours for branch libraries since 2001.

Many medium to large urban centres are still poorly served by limited evening or weekend opening hours.

While the national aggregate of overall opening hours has increased quite considerably, there is further progress to be made. It is at local level that the success of changes in schedules can be best assessed by users, and non-users alike. Improved arrangements will be assessed in future user and non-user surveys to gauge satisfaction.

Background

Branching Out: A New Public Library Service is the baseline document which reviewed public library policy in 1998. The report examined the potential of the service to be socially inclusive while supporting the development of the Information Society in Ireland. The combined recommendations arising from the review form the agenda for achieving this potential in the 8 year programme which concludes its present phase in 2006.

As part of the overall review of services, *Branching Out* addressed the need for enhanced public library opening hours as a key strategy to be addressed from 1999 onwards. As the title of the report implies and as formulated in the recommendations, the public would, following the implementation of this agenda, expect to receive expanded services in a greater number of locations at times that were sufficient, suitable and sustainable.

Branching Out stated that significant improvement in the availability of library services could be achieved through enhanced opening hours, particularly in terms of lunch-time, evening and weekend opening.

The relevant recommendations in *Branching Out* are that:

- Library Authorities should immediately commence work on developing a programme of enhanced opening hours. These should begin to be implemented during 1999.
- In particular libraries should develop greater flexibility in their opening hours.
- The report also recommends to the Minister that the funding for capital projects should be linked to the local development measures for improving the service, such as better opening hours.
- In order to move as quickly as possible it is recommended that each library authority should immediately begin to assess the need for adjusting opening hours and to investigate ways in which it might be achieved.
- Each library authority should also research the cost of implementing enhanced opening hours in their area. They should also commence a process of staff consultation and negotiations to ensure that agreement on better opening hours can be agreed as early as possible.

Since publication of *Branching Out*, 31 branch libraries co-funded by local authorities and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government have opened their doors to the public with expanded services, staff and hours of opening. Local authorities

have also funded through their own resources the improvement of library services. These new and refurbished facilities have contributed to the improvements in hours of opening.

Following on from recommendations in *Branching Out*, a survey of public library opening hours was undertaken in 2001. The survey compared the 1998 and 2001 positions and the results were published by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna as *Extending Our Welcome* in November, 2002. Following its ratification by the *Branching Out Steering Group*, the report was circulated to all library authorities. A summary of the findings is outlined below.

The 2001 survey was designed to highlight the total hours of opening per week of each branch, and the extent of lunchtime, evening (after 6.00p.m), and weekend opening with comparative data for 1998.

The surveys showed that opening hours had improved by 6% overall since 1998 and that the majority of libraries – 270 or 82.5% were open after 6.00 p.m. Most libraries - 234 or 71.5% - offered a weekend service. 127 or 39% of libraries offered lunchtime opening which was an overall increase of 27% since 1998.

Extending Our Welcome stated that library authorities should make further improvements in opening hours. A series of recommendations contained in the report were aimed at local authorities and the Department with regard to future service requirements, referring in particular to staffing and user considerations and opportunities for partnership, sustainable opening hours and the addition of other services to be surveyed. These recommendations are listed in *Appendix 1*.

The latest personnel figures available relate to 2002 and record that the national aggregate for library authorities was 1,645. This represented an increase of 23.5% over the 1998 level. A minimum of 68% of the public library staff can be categorised as “front line” staff, having direct contact with the public on a daily basis. This increase has enabled local authorities to increase their opening hours.

Public perception of the value of the library staff was highlighted in the 2002 Public Library User Survey. *Staff Knowledge* and *Staff Assistance* received high satisfaction ratings, with 97-98% of respondents rating this service as *Good* or *Very Good*.

2004 survey results

In 2004, questionnaires were sent to the 32 public library authorities requesting an update to the opening hours of branch libraries. In addition to data collected in the earlier survey, information was sought on additional aspects of the service, including the number of vehicles and their use and the number of stops and the average duration of stops and the following targeted services:

- Services to schools.
- Services to the housebound.
- Archive services open to the public.
- Local Studies services.
- Services to the county/city council members and staff.
- Services to prisons.

Where similar data were provided for earlier years, comparisons have been made with the 2004 data. Where data were collected for the first time in 2004, they have been recorded separately and will be used to enhance future surveys of opening hours. This report represents the growing availability of library services to the general public in the sixth year of the present *Branching Out* programme in each county/city council.

Infrastructural growth, particularly in static branches but also through the mobile services which resulted from the recommendations of *Branching Out* has provided a number of new and enhanced service points which has, *inter alia*, increased the number of hours.

Public library service points in 2004:

- Central and branch libraries: 32 library authorities providing 351 service points;
- Mobile library services: 16 authorities servicing 722 communities through 27 mobile library units;
- Archives / Local Studies; ¹
- Prison libraries; ²
- Library services to council members and staff and
- Other Facilities: (includes administrative headquarters³, school delivery van services, housebound services)

¹ Includes local studies facilities housed with existing branch library services. Where local studies centres are housed and staffed separate from the branch library they have been included as service points in their own right and counted as 'branch libraries'

² Not all authorities maintain details of opening hours for the prison library service.

³ Some, but not all, of the 32 library authorities gave details of opening hours for their administrative headquarters

Table 1 shows the number of static service points covered by the survey data. Service points cover the primary service locations i.e. branch libraries and central libraries. The table charts the continuous growth in the service to the public reflecting the increased investment in public library services.

	1998	2001	2004
Branches	326	327	351
Mobile libraries			27

Table 1: Number of service points open to the public, 1998-2004

Table 2 details the total recorded hours for each category of service in 2004. Some 10,000 hours per week are allocated to the standard public library services. Further details of the additional categories are given on page 12.

HOURS AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC	
Branch Libraries	9,344
Mobile Libraries	538
ADDITIONAL SERVICES	
Administrative HQ	222
Archives / Local Studies	260.5
Prison Libraries	58.75
Services to Council Members & Staff	63
Other facilities*	67.5
TOTAL	10,553.75

Table 2: Aggregate hours of opening in 2004

* See page 7 for further details

Growth in weekly hours of opening since 1998:

Number of hours open to the public (p.w.)	1998	2001	2004
Total number of branch library hours open	7,761.5	8,249.5	9,344
Increase in hours		488	1,094.5
% increase on previous survey		6.3	13
% increase on 1998			20
Mobile libraries			27
Access hours			538
Number of stops			722

Table 3: Number of hours during which branch and mobile libraries are open to the public (per week)

The returns record that an additional 1,582 hours have been provided since 1998. This represents an increase of 20%. Some of these additional hours are contained in the schedules of new and expanded library services. The branch libraries which were included in the survey of 2001 have increased their weekly schedules of opening time by a combined 7% in the 2004 survey.

The 13% improvement since 2001 is particularly significant and is a recognition of the commitment of library authorities to meeting their users' and lapsed, or potential or non-users' needs.

Lunch time opening

In 1998, 31% or 100 libraries opened at least one day per week during the lunch period. By 2001 this facility had increased to 127 branch libraries.

The 2004 survey records that now 46% or 162 libraries provide lunch time opening to the public at some time during the week.

The number of libraries opening at lunch time has accordingly increased by 62 since 1998.

Lunchtime opening	1998	2001	2004
No. of branches open at lunchtime	100	127	162
Increase (nos.)		27	35
% increase on previous survey		27	28
% increase on 1998		27	62

Table 4: Number of branch libraries open during lunch time

Evening Opening

Evening opening hours	1998	2001	2004
No. of libraries open after 6. pm	261	270	295
Increase (nos.)	-	9	25
% increase on previous survey	-	3	9
% increase on 1998	-	-	13
No. of hours (after 6 p.m.)	503	533	1,133
As % of total hours	6.5	6.5	12.1
% increase on previous survey		6	112.6
% increase on 1998			125

Table 5: Number of branch libraries open after 6p.m.each week and the total number of hours

In previous surveys, library authorities were asked to indicate the number of libraries which provided services to the public after 6.00 p.m. In 1998 this figure stood at 261 (80%) and in 2001 this had risen to 270 (83%) of the total number of branch libraries. This year, the number of libraries which have increased their access on at least one night per week reached 84% of the 351 surveyed. The number of hours has grown by 125% to 1133 in the six year period. The increase of 600 hours since 2001 represents 55% of the total increase in the hours of opening of all branch libraries recorded in the 2004 survey. The total evening times represent one eighth of the weekly national aggregate.

Weekend opening

In 1998, 208 libraries (64%) opened for some period of time on the weekend, the vast majority on Saturday. In 2001 this figure had risen to 234 (72%). Returns for 2004 record a further increase of 28 libraries providing this access. This brings the total of all branch libraries providing a weekend service, to a total of 262 or 75% of all branch libraries.

Weekend opening	1998	2001	2004
No. of branches with weekend opening	208	234	262
Increase (nos.)		26	28
% increase on previous survey		12.5	12
% increase on 1998			26
Total no. of w/e hours			1,270
As % of total branch libraries			14%

Table 6: Number of branch libraries open at weekends

Weekend opening periods contribute 1,270 hours per week or 14% of the total number of hours the public has access to branch libraries during the week.

The combined week-end and evening hours account for a quarter of the total hours surveyed. (It is not possible to quantify the aggregate lunchtime hours. This will be treated further under recommendation 4.)

This pattern of the continued improvements in the availability of services since 1998 in the number of branch libraries is to be commended. This is particularly noteworthy in the week-end opening hours increased by 26%, the lunchtime opening by 28%, and the evening opening hours by 125%.

Chart 1 outlines the increases in the number of branch libraries offering lunchtime, evening and weekend opening for the period 1998-2004:

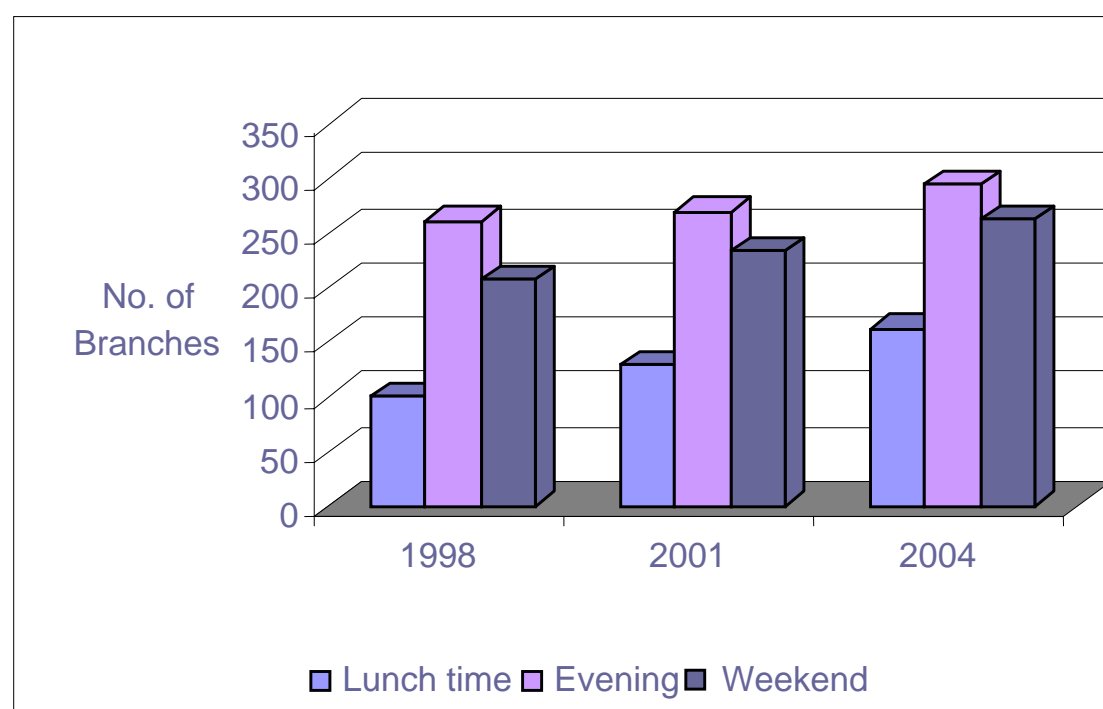


Chart 1: Increases in the number of libraries open at lunch time, evenings and weekends.

Additional Services

Archives / Local Studies

As with previous surveys, Archive and Local Studies services which are housed with other branch library services have been considered with the branch library analysis above.

9 authorities recorded opening hours for archive and local studies services which are housed separately i.e. not in an existing branch library. These services are open for 260.5 hours per week.

Mobile libraries

16 authorities recorded the provision of mobile library services serving a total of 722 communities with a total weekly schedule of 538 hours from 27 vehicles.

Prison library services

4 authorities reported the provision of services within prisons. Hours of opening are often flexible and it is difficult to quantify the total weekly hours of opening. Where hours were reported they totalled 58.75 per week.

Services to council members & staff

3 authorities reported the provision of a library service to members and staff of the local authority, with a total availability of 63 hours per week.

Other facilities

5 authorities recorded opening hours for their administrative headquarters, with a total of 222 hours per week.

Reported additional services (School Library Delivery Vans; IT Centre) add a further 67.5 hours.

Planned changes since September 30, 2004.

A number of authorities indicated that extended opening hours were being considered as part of their strategic reviews but were unable to put a figure on proposed changes.

Of those authorities reporting specific plans, the total number of hours would increase by 264 hours for public access.

A planned service for council staff and members in one authority would add another 15 hours to its schedule.

A number of authorities are planning an expansion of their mobile library services.

Summary of changes in schedules since 1998

Notable improvements:

The number of branches surveyed has increased from 326 in 1998 to 351 in 2004. There has been an increase in the total weekly schedule of 20% in the opening hours of branch libraries, from 7761 to 9344.

- The number of libraries open during lunch time has increased from 100, or 31% of the total, to 162 or 46%.
- The number of libraries offering a service at the weekend has increased from 208 (64%) to 262 (75%).
- The number of libraries open at least one night per week has increased from 261 or 80% in 1998 to 295 or 84% of the 2004 combined schedules.
- Evening and weekend hours accounts for a quarter of the total schedules.
- 17% of the schedules cater for usage after 5.00 p.m.; 12% of the hourly schedules cater for services after 6.00 p.m.

Further attention is drawn to the following issues with a view to increasing the use of public library services:

- One third of libraries which provide a service to the public at weekends are open for three hours or less during this period.
- Many medium to large sized urban areas are poorly served by weekend and / or evening openings.
- 30% of users surveyed in the 2002 *Public Library User Survey (PLUS)* rated existing hours of opening as inadequate.
- The enhancement of opening hours was one of the main developments non-users said would encourage them to use libraries.

Recommendations

Having regard to the findings of the following reports:

- *Branching Out* (1998)
- *Extending Our Welcome* (2002)
- *Public Library User Survey* (PLUS), (2002)
- *A Public Space for All: Use and Non-Use of Public Libraries*, (2004) and
- the survey findings of this report:

An Chomhairle commends library authorities on the improvements made to date and recommends that in order to increase public access to library services:

1. Local authorities should continue to review their schedules of library opening hours and provide appropriate staff levels in order to increase the hours of opening at times suitable to the public. These reviews should be undertaken in the context of library authority strategic plans.
2. Library authorities should examine in particular the scope for further weekend service, including a Sunday service.
3. In the context of the programme of decentralisation of local government services local authorities should consider how to integrate the information services provided by each authority in the best interest of their clienteles. Maximising the potential of the public library service and increasing hours of opening presents further opportunities for growth in meeting the communities' needs.
4. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should continue to survey the opening hours of library authorities every three years. Future surveys should provide for the examinations of the schedules in detail.
5. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government should undertake a national *Public Library User Survey* in 2005 and every three years thereafter.
6. The *Branching Out* Steering Group should investigate in 2005 options to ascertain the requirements of the wider community (including lapsed, potential and non-users).

Appendix 1: Recommendations from Extending Our Welcome, 2002.

A number of important factors have implications for the continuing development of the library service in terms of access and opening hours. The following recommendations are proposed as a means of ensuring the continued enhancement of the service for the benefit of the users.

1. Local Authority Service Recommendations

1.1 Local Authorities need to pay close attention to the outcomes of the *Public Library User Survey, 2002* and to incorporate relevant findings into their plans for existing services.

1.2 As 62% of the public library staff deal directly with the public, the availability of replacement staff for frontline activities is crucial to the continuity of the service. In addition there should be recognition of the need for higher staffing levels in a number of both existing and developing services.

1.3 The demands being placed on the library service necessitate continuous availability of efficient, well-trained, service oriented, local authority library staff.

1.4 Staffing levels should be continually monitored to provide an optimum service for all.

2. Sustainable Opening Hours

2.1 There has been an overall improvement in the hours of opening of public libraries within Ireland between 1998 and 2001. However, there is a need for individual authorities to evaluate the suitability and sufficiency of hours in the light of the needs of their users.

2.2 In order to establish and maintain a sustainable service, the evaluation must take into equal consideration:

- the results of user surveys, this survey and informal feedback
- the local demographic, economic, social and cultural factors
- the specific characteristics of the individual library service

2.3 On the basis of this survey and on the statistical returns to An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the scope for more appropriate and better hours in a number of authorities to meet the needs of the general public, needs to be examined by library authorities.

3. Survey Procedures

3.1 A nationwide survey of library authorities' opening hours should be undertaken biennially.

3.2 The opening hours of Local Studies Services should be recorded separately in future surveys in order to accord the appropriate weight to this facility.

3.3 Library services to prisons, which are provided on an agency basis, should also be recorded separately by the relevant library authorities in future surveys.

4. Service Development

4.1 Library authorities should take the opportunities afforded by the recent trend towards the one-stop-shop, providing holistic local authority information, heritage, library and cultural services, to expand the user base and add value to each personal experience.

4.2 For this to happen it is vital that local authorities ensure that the library service is open when the public calls.

Appendix 2: 2004 Questionnaire

SURVEY OF PUBLIC LIBRARY OPENING HOURS

The purpose of this survey is to record the actual opening hours as of 30th September, 2004 and the estimated opening hours for 2005. Library authorities are requested to list the hours that the service is available to the public.

A service point is any library, static or mobile, through which the public library authority provides a service to the general public and which is run by staff employed by the authority.

The following services should be listed separately where such services are provided separately from the central or branch library:

- Branch libraries
- Mobile service(s)
- Agency services to prisons, hospitals, etc.
- Local Studies Services,
- Library Services to Local Authority Staff, Members, etc.

Library authority	No. of service points	Name of service point	Hours open per week	No. days open per week	Open at weekends? Please specify day(s) and times.	Open during lunch time?	Evening opening (i.e. after 5pm). Hours x No. evenings per week.	No. of mobile library stops per week	Average duration of stops	Planned closures (No. of days, other than public holidays per annum)	Comments
Anywhere UDC	3	Central	52	6	Sat. 9.30-17.00	Yes	5-8pm x 4				
		Mobile A	3.5	5	No	No	0	35	30 mins.	Service suspended for 2 weeks during August	
		Prison	35	5	No	Yes	0				Agency service

Template for returning questionnaire