

Equality Impact Assessment - Weston-super-Mare Library

Directorate	Corporate Services
Service area:	Libraries
Lead Officer:	Emma Wellard
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Equality Impacts

This EIA is effectively a work in progress and represents an initial assessment with impacts being explored prior to the consultation with stakeholders, community groups, and other relevant parties. It is intended to identify potential areas of impact. Any mitigations, adjustments, or final outcomes will be shaped by the feedback and insights gathered during the consultation phase. This document will be reviewed and updated accordingly to reflect a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the impacts post-consultation.

Service User Impact

Before mitigating actions	High	Medium	Low	No
After mitigating actions	High	Medium	Low	No

Staff Impact

Before mitigating actions	High	Medium	Low	No
After mitigating actions	High	Medium	Low	No

1. The Project

Background to project

The [North Somerset Libraries Strategy](#), adopted in 2021, outlined the need for libraries to keep evolving to maintain a quality service provision in the context of changing demand and budget challenge whilst still meeting statutory duties. It flagged that any future restrictions on the Library Service budget would require services to be run in a very different way to maintain a much-valued level of service across North Somerset. It was hoped that this approach would minimise the requirement for service reductions, whilst enhancing the local offer at the same time.

However, the challenging [financial context](#) in which North Somerset Council (NSC) is now operating led to a planned reduction in Library Service budget of 19% being included in the Council's approved Medium Term Financial Plan from April 2026 (which equates to £433k). The savings target was based on a planned 20% reduction in the service's 2024–2025 financial year revenue budget. The Council therefore needs to consider how best to meet the needs of communities within the reduced resources available.

The council is committed to fulfilling its statutory obligations and maintaining a quality library service that reflects the strong value our community places on it, designed around an analysis of needs. To ensure the sustainability of library provision in North Somerset, a range of options has been explored to meet these targets, including alternative delivery models, enhanced outreach services, and a potential reduction in the number of library sites.

The council is currently facing significant financial challenges, requiring £44 million in savings over the next three years. Rising demands for services, coupled with increasing costs, have necessitated a thorough review of all areas of council spending.

By focusing on outreach opportunities, we aim to adapt the service to meet the diverse needs of users while delivering these essential savings. This will help ensure that any future service delivery continues to meet both statutory responsibilities and the needs of those who live, work or study in North Somerset, whilst being financially sustainable.

To meet these savings targets, the option agreed to go to public consultation in summer 2025 includes a proposal to close the North Somerset local studies library (Frederick Wood room) at 12.30 instead of 16.00 on Saturdays and to close 2 days per week. This aligns the local studies service with comparable facilities who do not operate 6 days a week. In addition, the proposal is to close Weston-super-Mare library at 12.30 instead of 16.00 on Saturdays and close at 17.00 instead of 18.00 on weekdays. The feasibility of extending self-service hours between 17.00

to 18.00 will be explored. This document is designed to assess the equalities impacts this will have on the local community, library service provision and staff.

Please detail below how this proposal may impact on any other organisation and their customers.

- **Public Access to Technology:** Many individuals rely on libraries for free internet access, public computers, printing, online learning, and communication and the library also delivers face to face council services for those who are digitally excluded. The reduction in opening hours will marginally limit digital inclusion and make accessing essential online services and Council services more difficult for the most disadvantaged.
- **Local Cultural Organisations:** Organisations have access to local history archives and resources to carry out research for projects and exhibitions. Access to these collections will be limited. There will be delays to working collaboratively with organisations. Organisations also use the space in the wider library to promote their work and to undertake engagement activities with residents, in support of corporate and library strategic objectives. Reduced opening hours will reduce the time available for this activity and potentially the reach and impact.
- **Education Providers:** Local schools often rely on libraries for curriculum support, extracurricular activities, and student study spaces. Should the library close, this could limit students' access to books, research materials and technology. The local studies library provides a valuable source of information which schools access on visits to the library and this access would be reduced in the options proposed.
- **Social & Health Services:** Libraries often serve as informal access points for health information, social service referrals, and mental health support programs. They provide access to information and support, promote health and wellbeing, signpost to professional support and enable residents to maintain independence for longer. They often lend equipment to support health and wellbeing initiatives. Reducing the opening hours of Weston Library will therefore impact on this type of programme.
- **Employment & Skills Training:** Reduction in the hours that access to free public wi-fi, printing and online resources is available will impact on delivery of council employment services. It will make it harder for unemployed or under-skilled individuals to access job support. There library may also be able to deliver fewer local volunteering opportunities.
- **Local Arts & Cultural Organisations:** Libraries often host arts-related events, writing groups, and cultural activities, enriching community life. Reducing opening hours may reduce opportunities for cultural engagement.
- **Public Access to Technology:** Many individuals rely on libraries for free internet access, public computers, printing, online learning, and communication. The library is also a key location in North Somerset for the delivery of face to face council services for those who

are digitally excluded. If library opening hours are reduced, this will make accessing essential online services and Council services more difficult for those lacking their own internet access or the skills to engage online.

Section 2 – What do we know?

Who is likely to be affected by this project?

Community across North Somerset

Libraries are central to community cohesion, providing access to resources for education, employment, and social interaction. The reduction in opening hours could disproportionately affect individuals who rely on free internet access, books, and quiet study spaces. Those who experience financial hardship may struggle to access information and recreational reading elsewhere, widening inequalities.

Libraries in North Somerset operate on a district wide basis and are part of the wider LibrariesWest partnership which operates across 7 authorities in South West England (145 libraries, lending 2.5 million items). Libraries therefore offer residents free access to resources across a wider community than in their local area.

Community in a specific area (Weston-super-Mare)

Council Partners

Libraries collaborate widely with other council services and deliver activities supporting a wide range of corporate objectives. They act as information hubs and act as venues for the delivery of community outreach programs and council engagement activities. Libraries provide support and signposting to North Somerset residents who are unable to access council services online. For complex enquiries, staff direct residents to a dedicated council services phone located within the library, ensuring access to the appropriate specialist support. Planning and Heritage officers make regular use of the unique resources held in the North Somerset Studies Library and the reduction in opening hours will affect their ability to access this information and staff expertise. Customers wishing to view planning documents held on microfiche will also be impacted by the reduction in opening hours in the same space.

North Somerset Council Employees

Library staff are appointed to the district, rather than to specific libraries. North Somerset Council are not seeking to make the required savings through redundancies, although it is likely that there will be an impact on staffing. The likely impact on staffing will not be known until after outcome of this initial consultation which focuses on service and sites is known. Depending on the outcome, a specific staffing consultation is likely to follow at that point which will affect the whole service. This period of uncertainty could impact employee morale and increased stress.

Service Users

Regular users of the local studies library, including students, and researchers, would have reduced opportunities to engage with local heritage, which can weaken cultural identity and pride. Regular users of library services, including students, job seekers, and families, would have reduced opportunities to engage with education and development. Customers using the North Somerset Studies Library as a quiet space to study (which may be due to disability or neurodiversity) will have access to this space reduced significantly.

Commissioned Services

The South West Heritage Trust provides a quarterly archivist visit to the North Somerset Studies Librar. Reduced hours may mean fewer casual visitors or walk-ins who might otherwise discover and benefit from the historic archives service. This may result in decreased community awareness and underutilisation of a valuable specialist resource.

Voluntary/Community Groups

Local voluntary groups often use library spaces for meetings, training, and outreach. A reduction in opening hours could limit their ability to function effectively, reducing opportunities for community engagement and collaboration. Reducing the opening hours of the North Somerset Studies Library will impact on the community facing work of the local Family History Society and their volunteers.

Reducing the opening hours of Weston Library may impact on the volunteers who support library services in this location.

What data or evidence do you have to inform this Equality Impact Assessment?

To inform this Equality Impact Assessment, we have gathered a range of data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of library usage and community needs. Specifically, we conducted a library survey that ran from Monday, 24 March 2025, until midday on Friday, 18 April 2025. This survey was carried out across all branches, including Winscombe, to collect insights directly from library users.

In addition to the survey findings, we have leveraged historical membership data from our library management system, which provides valuable information on past and present library usage trends within the Winscombe branch and other locations. Furthermore, we have drawn data from council planning teams and broader area demographic statistics to ensure our assessment reflects the wider community context.

This combination of survey responses, historical usage statistics, and strategic planning data ensures that our Equality Impact Assessment is informed by a well-rounded evidence base, allowing us to make decisions that best serve the diverse needs of our library users.

The feedback received through the libraries consultation will feed into a thorough analysis of need, which will be used to update this impact assessment and inform the final options development.

Who have you consulted with as a part of this project OR who do you plan to consult with?

As part of this project, we are running a public consultation for twelve weeks, from 31 July 2025 until 24 October 2025 to explore users needs and identify potential impacts of the options proposed on protected groups . The consultation will provide an opportunity for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including library users, staff, community partners, volunteers and local communities. The consultation will help us gather valuable feedback and ensure that different perspectives are considered in our decision-making process.

Ahead of the consultation we have also gathered a range of data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of library usage and community needs. Specifically, we conducted a library survey that ran from Monday, 24 March 2025, until midday on Friday, 18 April 2025. This survey was carried out across all branches, including Winscombe, to collect insights directly from library users.

Are there any gaps in our evidence to support this Equality Impact Assessment? If so, what are the plans to gather this information?

We are aware that our recent survey was not aimed at children and so there may be gaps in understanding how young people engage with library services and how any potential changes might affect them. To address this, we plan to explore additional ways to gather insights from children and young people, ensuring their perspectives are considered in the wider public consultation in the summer. The service is planning to collect information from under 16's as part of the consultation by engaging with families during the Summer Reading Challenge.

Note we have not made any attempts to gather data in relation to customer's religious views as this does not have any impact on how people access our libraries.

Section 3 – Assessment of Impact

Will the project have a disproportionate impact (or bias) on any of these groups?

Insert X into one box per row, for impact level and type.

H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, N = None | + = Positive, - = Negative

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Protected or significant group	Impact Level				Impact type		Please explain impact giving examples from data and consultation information to support your assessment
	H	M	L	N	+	-	
Disabled people (including consideration of neurodiversity)		x				x	In the 2021 Census , 25.76% (27.36%+24.16%) of people in Weston-super-Mare identify themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act, having day to day activities limited a little or a lot. At Weston library 25% (59) of library survey respondents identified as having a physical or mental health condition which impacts their day-to-day life. Therefore, reduced library opening hours library will have a disproportionate impact on people with disabilities.
People from different ethnic groups		x				x	87% of library survey respondents identified as White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British. According to the North Somerset JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) 95.7% of the overall population is White. This is notably lower than the North Somerset population average and differs from the average across all other library sites, where 96% of respondents identified within this group.
Men or women (including pregnant women or those on maternity leave)		x				x	49% of library survey respondents were female and 5% of survey respondents identified as being protected under the Equalities Act due to pregnancy or maternity. In North Somerset, Census data indicates that 51.4% of the population is women (and 50.12% in Weston), therefore men

						will be disproportionately affected by reduced opening hours at this branch.
People who are LGBTQ+		x			x	5% of library survey respondents identified as being protected under the Equalities Act, due to sexual orientation. The North Somerset Census average was 2.61%, which would indicate a higher impact on LGBTQ+ communities. This is higher usage rate is likely a result of community partner use of library space, rather than a reflection of the average library user.
People on a low income		x			x	While we don't hold data on the deprivation level of Weston library service users, we know that 17% of library survey respondents come to the library because they cannot afford internet access at home. Others may not be able to buy books or heat their homes and therefore the closure is assessed to have a negative impact on more deprived groups. In the 2021 Census 58.41% (63.42% + 53.41%) of households in Weston-super-Mare had one or more dimension deprivation.
People in particular age groups		x			x	Children and older people are more likely to use the library and are therefore disproportionately impacted by the closure of this site. 15% of Weston library survey respondents indicated they were over 75 years of age.
People in particular faith groups				x		30 respondents at Weston library indicated that their religion, belief (or none) needed to be

						considered under the Equalities Act. Overall survey responses were 6% and therefore impacts are considered negligible.
People who are married or in a civil partnership			x			Only 10 respondents at Weston library indicated that being married or in a civil partnership needed to be considered under the Equalities Act. Overall survey responses were 3% and therefore impacts are considered negligible.
People who are undergoing gender reassignment			x			Library survey responses indicate that only 1% of library users identified as being a different gender to the one assigned at birth, with 3% preferring not to say. At Weston library, 11 respondents identified their gender as being different to the one assigned at birth and therefore any impacts are deemed negligible.

Protected or significant group	Impact Level				Impact type		Please explain impact giving examples from data and consultation information to support your assessment
	H	M	L	N	+	-	
<p>Other significant groups, for example: Armed Forces Community, care experienced young people, carers, parents.</p> <p>Please specify:</p>				x			<p>We do not hold data for these groups; however, knowledge of the local community would indicate that these groups are not highly represented in this area. As part of the consultation process, we intend to gather more detailed data and better understand the potential impact on these groups—particularly unpaid carers—to ensure their needs and perspectives are fully considered.</p>

Could this proposal have a cumulative impact with any other budget savings?

Yes

The options for Weston library form part of a wider public consultation for overall library services in North Somerset and any mitigations implemented to reduce the equalities impacts of the proposed changes to opening hours may increase costs in other areas of the library and council services (for example outreach costs).

Section 4 – Options

What other options have been considered?

The changes at Weston Library form part of the wider options for change for the service that are being consulted on. It is highly likely that up to three libraries could close if no alternative way to deliver services in those areas can be found. The proposed changes to opening hours at Weston library have not been confirmed.

We are exploring:

1. Community-managed libraries: in some areas, the Council may no longer run a library directly. Instead, local community groups could be supported to take on management. Libraries could remain open in areas where a Council-run model is no longer sustainable - but this would depend on local capacity and interest.
2. Alternative service delivery: in places where libraries may close or change, services could be offered differently (e.g. via mobile library, drop-off points, partner venues, or the Home Library Service). People would still have access to library services, but in new formats or locations. Some may have to travel further or use services differently.
3. Changes to opening hours: Staffed hours may be reduced in some libraries, based on usage patterns. In some cases, self-service access could be extended so libraries remain open without staff present. Libraries would still offer access to a range of services but with fewer staffed hours. Customers may need to visit at different times than currently or visit during self-service hours
4. Reducing central budgets: savings could be made in areas like central staffing, the new book and digital resources budget, management, IT systems, equipment and stationery. Libraries would still make a range of books available to customers but spending on new books would reduce. The way services are supported behind the scenes would be affected.

5. Income generation: increased promotion of library spaces for hire, advertising, or partnerships with local organisations. Could bring in income to help support core services — but may reduce space available for community use in some locations.

Residents' feedback, views and local knowledge will help us shape how - and where - savings are made, and how library services are delivered in the future.

Section 5 – Action Plan

Issue Identified	Planned Action	Lead Officer	Time for review
Disabled people (including consideration of neurodiversity)	Promote the home library service. Provide training in using digital resources. Explore the feasibility of extending self-service hours between 17.00 to 18.00 on weekdays. Advocate for the provision of alternative quiet study spaces in the library. Continue to engage with the Disability Access Group around the consultation and promote it so that impacts and needs can be captured through the consultation.	Emma Wellard	TBC
People from different ethnic groups	The survey results suggest a comparatively more diverse user base at Weston library site, which may reflect differing patterns of library engagement. Further exploration may	Emma Wellard	TBC

	help to understand and support the needs of this community		
Men or women (including pregnant women or those on maternity leave)	The feasibility of extending self-service hours between 17.00 to 18.00 will be explored.	Emma Wellard	TBC
People who are LGBTQ+	Ensure that the library continues to be visibly inclusive, with signage, displays, and resources that affirm LGBTQ+ identities, even if physical access is reduced.	Emma Wellard	TBC
People on a low income	Continue to offer free access to Wi-Fi, computers and the council services telephone.	Emma Wellard	TBC
People in particular age groups	Promote the home library service. Provide training in using digital resources. Explore the feasibility of extending self-service hours between 17.00 to 18.00. Advocate for the provision of quiet study space elsewhere in the library for students	Emma Wellard	TBC

If after planned actions you anticipate negative impacts remain, please provide an explanation below.

The proposed reduction in opening hours will reduce the time that face to face support for access to Council services for digitally excluded customers is provided in Weston-super-Mare, which is the location with the highest level of usage.

The reduction in opening hours may result in an increase in social isolation, loneliness, and digital inclusion levels in the local community.

Please set out how you plan to communicate these changes with those effected?

A public consultation will take place from 31 July 2025 to 24 October 2025, followed by a staff consultation in 2026. Links and partnerships with the local town council and community partnerships in the area will be strengthened and our outreach and mobile library programmed strengthened in the area to help support the change. Once the results of the consultation have been analysed and the assessment of need updated, a report recommending a way forward will be presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2026. Once the outcome is known, a full communication plan will be put in place to make communities aware of changes which affect them.

Section 6 – Monitoring

What are the governance arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actions listed above and the actual impact on protected or significant groups?

We will monitor visitor number to the local studies library, and Weston library. We will also use qualitative feedback from local community partners and other council teams operating in the town hall to inform and evaluate service provision.

A full plan will be put in place once the outcome of the consultation is known and a decision made on a way forward.

Section 7 – Publish the Assessment

How will you publish this Equality Impact Assessment?

A comprehensive version of the Equality Impact Assessment will be made available on a dedicated webpage. This will include downloadable documents and contact information for further inquiries or feedback.

Hard copies will be distributed to local libraries to ensure that individuals without internet access can review the materials.

These measures are intended to provide broad public access and encourage informed participation in the consultation process.