

## Notice of Motion on Reductions to Library Opening Hours

This Council acknowledges that Devon County Council (DCC) has currently committed to keeping Devon's libraries open, but notes that proposed changes to the branch libraries within the Exeter City Council area are being disproportionately affected by the current proposal. This Council believes that fully funding our libraries is a choice rather than a necessity given that DCC will no longer have to find funding for Special Needs and Disability education, which is widely known to have been exhausting DCC finances.

Within DCC's rationale for the proposed changes is the assertion that 70.63% of the current staffed opening hours across the service will be retained, this is *not* the case in the branch libraries that serve Exeter. In fact, the opposite is true with:

- Pinhoe library being reduced from 15 hours to 6 hours (40% RETENTION, 60% REDUCTION)
- St Thomas library being reduced from 38 hours to 15 hours (39.47% RETENTION, 60.53% REDUCTION)
- Topsham library being reduced from 17.5 hours to 6 hours (34.3% RETENTION, 65.7% REDUCTION)

Given that a recent Freedom of Information request indicates no significant change in the usage of these branch libraries pre- and post-COVID, there seems to be no case for such dramatic cuts to these opening hours. Therefore, this Council believes that this can only be a deliberate effort to deteriorate services in Exeter to the extent that they become unviable, which will ultimately lead to their closure. This appears to be a plan for the closure of Exeter's branch libraries by stealth.

This Council notes that libraries perform multiple roles that go beyond the very important activity of book lending, for instance, by providing access and assistance with using computers and printing services, early years learning activities, knit and natter groups, reading groups, assistance with job searching and other valuable community activities that bring people together. As such, reducing the branch library opening hours to the extent proposed will overly affect people who rely most on libraries, including children and young families, older residents, jobseekers and those in need of IT support. We also note the important role that branch libraries play in providing safe spaces for residents to gather and connect with one another<sup>i</sup>. According to research from the University of East Anglia<sup>ii</sup>, through the activities of the type outlined here, a branch library typically delivers £1 million in value which is far below its cost. In Libraries Unlimited own literature they argues that '[t]he value for money spent on the library service is enormous, with every £1 spent generating £3 of social impact value for the county.<sup>iii</sup> Decisions about library services should fully consider their social and cultural value, not only the financial pressures.

In the preamble to their consultation survey, DCC emphasise an anticipated increase in reliance on volunteers to extend staffed hours. While we recognise the value that volunteers bring to libraries, this serves to diminish the skills and expertise of library workers and librarians, who are experts in the management of library stock, retrieval of information and promotion of information literacy – an important skill in this age of misinformation. The proposed cuts to library services along with an increase in dependency on volunteers serves to 'deprofessionalise' the library sector. Volunteers, such as the 'Friends of' groups, are highly valued and very important to the library service, but they are not a substitute for staff.

Furthermore, it is troubling that there appears to be no plan for the direct consultation of staff during the consultation period, which ignores their expertise.

This Council resolves to:

- Request that the Leader of the Council write to Devon County Council urging them to reconsider its proposed severe reduction in branch library opening hours that adversely affect Exeter's residents, especially given the recently-announced county council multi-year settlement.
- Now that the survey consultation has closed, request that Devon County Council consult directly with the staff at Exeter's branch libraries, before any decisions are made, to explore more modest changes to opening hours based on firsthand knowledge of the way the libraries are used.
- Encourage Devon County Council to explore options to protect and/or enhance library access and services, for example, by drawing on existing case studies such as those published by Independent Mind<sup>iv</sup>. This should also involve an exploration of collaborative opportunities with existing public services, such as the arrangement St Thomas Library has with Theatre Alibi.
- Request that DCC provide a full Equalities Impact Assessment to decision makers before the decision is made to cut this key public service. It is not enough to simply ask for views on the proposed changes, as stated in the introduction to the consultation.

Mover: Cllr Deborah Darling

Seconded: Cllr James Cookson

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<sup>i</sup> Hawkins, B. et al (2019). *Unlimited Value: Leading Practice in Unlimited Value Creation*. Available at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Unlimited-Value-Report.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> University of East Anglia (2023). *England's public libraries generate value every year*. Available at: <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/news/article/englands-public-libraries-generate-value-every-year>.

<sup>iii</sup> Libraries Unlimited (2025). *Devon Libraries at the Heart of Communities*. Available at: <https://www.librariesunlimited.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Devon-Libraries-at-the-Heart-of-Communities-1.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Independent Mind (2025). *Libraries loan review - case studies*. Available at: <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/news/libraries-connected-publishes-new-report-library-loan-trends>