

Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group

Statement from the Smart Libraries Task & Finish Group

Background

The Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group was invited by Leicestershire County Council to comment from an equalities perspective on the introduction of Smart Libraries and reductions in staffed opening hours at libraries where Smart technology has been introduced.

LECG set up a Task & Finish Group to this purpose, which met with County Council officers on the 13th September 2018 at Glenfield Library.

The Group explored the details of the proposals, feedback from engagement with service users and equalities considerations relevant to ensuring Smart Libraries are accessible to as many people as possible as well as the plans for reducing staffed opening hours.

Following the meeting on 13th September 2018, the following statement was agreed by members of the Group:

The Group recognises that Smart Libraries will enable longer opening hours which will significantly expand access to library services for a large proportion of service users. We also appreciate that staff are fully aware that for some people visiting a library in Smart mode is not suitable, whilst others may be hesitant to use the service. The group recognise that the staffed opening hours have been chosen to accommodate these groups and that they take into account current visiting patterns for older, disabled and young people.

With regards to ensuring Smart Libraries are accessible to as many people as possible, we have the following comments and suggestions:

- The induction process should be made accessible to people who don't speak much English. This would especially be the case in the Main Libraries which serve a multi-ethnic community, including recent arrivals to the UK. We suggest this could be done by offering the induction video (and application form) in a range of languages. Equality Action Charnwood, may be able to offer advice.
- We note staff are working with Vista to improve accessibility for visually impaired people.
- Although we note that various measures are being introduced to try and ensure the personal safety of Smart library service users, we would encourage LCC to look at additional measures to deter anti-social behaviour and offending.
 - o It would be desirable for CCTV operators to be able to communicate to people inside the library via the PA system
 - o It would be desirable for CCTV operators to have live information available about the number of people present in the library
 - o It may be desirable to install 'tailgating sensors/ counters' in the library

- It would be desirable for CCTV operators to receive guidance and regular training re spotting offending behaviours, such as ‘upskirting’
- The Group suggest that it would be beneficial to consider the use of volunteers and/or to develop a customer reference group (or ‘Friends of the library’) for each library to liaise with staff about ways the operation and use of the (Smart) library can be improved – and perhaps keep an eye out. This liaison could be through or include virtual channels of communication.
- It may also be beneficial to report regularly to local stakeholders, such as schools and parish councils about what is happening at the local library.
- We would encourage the provision of signs that make it clear that breastfeeding is allowed inside the library. Consideration should also be given to providing nappy changing facilities.

With regards to the EHRIA around the reduction of staffed opening hours, we note that the EHRIA format does not capture or identify equalities issues in relation to the reduction of staff itself. We appreciate this is a general issue with the EHRIA format, but would encourage LCC to look into this.

The Group want to thank County Council officers for their time.

LECG Task Group Members

Peter Lewis	LECG Chair
Tadeusz Stenzel	Leicester & Rutland Minority Ethnic Forum
Mina Rodgers	Older Persons Engagement Network
Samantha Smith	Transactive
Colin Norman	Social Housing
Lynne Woodward	Leicestershire Police
Liz Blackshaw	Young Family Education
Carine Cardoza	LECG Engagement Officer