

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING  
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Maria Heslop**

Cabinet Member for Community  
Services

Borough Councillor for Vauxhall

Mr Mike Hill OBE  
Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services  
Kent County Council  
County Hall  
Maidstone  
ME14 1XQ

Wednesday 23 January 2019

Dear Mike,

**KCC Library Review**

I wish to respond, as the Borough Council's Cabinet Member for Community Services, to the latest review of the Libraries undertaken by the County Council. I recall that a similar, previous library review directly engaged with District Council members via a number of joint meetings and also involved visits to all of our local Libraries. I therefore believe I am well placed to comment on this latest review and wish to make the following representations.

Firstly, I welcome the proposals to increase the proposed opening hours for East Peckham and Hadlow libraries to 23 hours per week for both. These two libraries are well used and serve rural catchments where local library provision is important for both communities.

I am concerned that significant reductions in opening hours for our two largest (Tier 2) libraries in the Borough, Tonbridge and Larkfield, would be a retrograde step. These two libraries serve significant urban populations and act as 'hubs' for wider catchment areas. There has been recent investment in the Tonbridge Library and an opportunity to co-locate the Larkfield Library within a wider redevelopment proposal sadly was not taken forward. Given the importance of both of these libraries and their wide catchment areas, I believe that both should be treated as Tier 1 facilities rather than Tier 2. This would then justify at least 42 hours opening time per week for each of these important facilities rather than the proposed reduction to 37 hours. The proposed reduction for Tonbridge Library of 18 hours is particularly severe and unjustified.

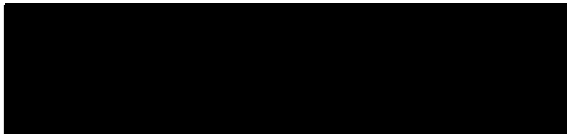
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With regard to Tier 3 libraries, which includes Borough Green and Snodland libraries in Tonbridge and Malling, I note that many libraries are proposed to have significant reductions in opening hours whilst there are some significant increases in opening hours for others which do not seem to be justified by their size and locations. This seems to be based on an arbitrary target of setting 28 hours per week for all Tier 3 libraries. We believe that Borough Green and Snodland libraries deserve to have additional opening hours awarded them above the 28 hours now proposed. This should be at the expense of some smaller libraries within this Tier that now have significantly high proposed increases in their opening hours which together total a significant 66 extra opening hours. I believe these 'additional' hours should be distributed out within this Tier on a fairer basis.

For Tonbridge and Malling's Tier 4 libraries, Tonbridge North and West Malling, I recognise that these occupy smaller premises and thus may attract lower footfall. I can accept the small reduction of two hours for the Tonbridge North library but feel the significant reduction of 17 hours for West Malling library is of key concern. Such a significant reduction might, in my view, result in the eventual closure of the library completely as there would likely then to be significantly less footfall. There would then be no library services for the both the West and East Malling local communities. A smaller reduction of working hours, of say, 7 hours would enable the Library to retain a decent level of service and protect it from any possible future closure.

In conclusion, whilst I understand fully the need for this review, I believe the proposed reductions in working hours for the Libraries located in Tonbridge and Malling are too severe and that some lesser reductions, as I have set out above, would protect our local library services for the longer term.

Yours sincerely,



Maria Heslop  
Cabinet Member for Community Services  
Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council