

Councillors demand quicker reopening of libraries

Next month The City of Edinburgh Council will open six libraries Central, Kirkliston, McDonald Road, Fountainbridge, Stockbridge.

But for councillors on the Culture and Communities Committee this is not quite soon enough, and council officers have been put on notice that they 'must try harder'.

Meantime, today council officers say they are working hard to open Central Library more quickly than others, and perhaps even before mid October. One officer said that they are trying to accelerate the opening of Central Library to send out the message that Edinburgh libraries are back in business.

He continued: "It will take corporate commitment, and a huge effort is being made. We are keen to get libraries open, but it has to be done in a managed, safe way."

Cllr Hal Osler who raised the matter said: "We are behind the curve on this. We are a capital city and it is embarrassing that our libraries are not yet open."

She pointed out to the Culture and Communities Committee that there are so many vulnerable residents who depend on the libraries in Edinburgh, and her fear is that if more

restrictions are introduced then it is unlikely the libraries will open at all this winter. Cllr Osler explained that for her to advise residents in her Ward appropriately: “We need proper information about this.”

Culture Convener, Cllr Donald Wilson, said: “We want all stops to be pulled out to open libraries in the city.”

Cllr Susan Webber said that the list of libraries to be reopened is not fair and inclusive. She also said that a direction for residents in Ratho to go to the library in Kirkliston has been made by someone who does not know anything about travel between the two villages. Cllr Webber said: “We are behind every other local authority in the UK. We need to try harder.”

The council has said that the reopening of libraries is directed by Scottish Government guidance, and that each library has its own specific considerations. At today’s meeting Craigmillar Library was mentioned which is also a Resilience Hub, making it more complex to reopen the building.

When libraries open again in October there will be limited access to browsing and lending, public access computers, support for national entitlement card applications, photocopying and printing services, collection of Hey Girls free sanitary protection and hearing aid batteries. There will be restrictions on the number of visitors allowed access to the library at any one time, and physical distancing will be in place as well as booking systems for some services.

