A Completed Request and Reply, Annotated

One residents' association, one library decision, and every letter in between



Five pieces, each with notes on why it is worded as it is.

FOR:

resident groups, tenants' associations and community organizations who want to see a whole evidence request worked through before writing their own

INCLUDES:

a completed request letter, the institution's two replies, a follow-up letter, the closing record, and notes on why each piece is worded as it is

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A Completed Request and Reply, Annotated

The people, places, organizations and figures in this document's examples are fictional.

This document shows one exchange from start to finish, with notes. Copy any wording that fits your situation. The blank forms are in *Evidence Request Letter and Reply Log*; the reasons behind the approach are in the guide *Asking an Institution for the Evidence Behind a Decision*.

01 The situation

On 12 February 2026 the Ardenvale Public Library board approved a reduction in opening hours at the Kestrel Street branch, from 48 hours a week to 32, starting 1 May. Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons would close. The board report gave one reason: the branch had "the lowest visits per open hour of the system's nine branches."

Members of the Kestrel Street Residents' Association use the branch heavily on weekday evenings, after work and after school. Several said the evenings felt busy. Nobody had seen the figures. At its February meeting the association agreed to ask for them.

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02

What the group agreed first

Field	Entry
The decision, in one sentence	Library board cut Kestrel Street branch hours from 48 to 32 a week, from 1 May
Who made it, and when	Ardenvale Public Library board, 12 February 2026
What the group already has	The board agenda and the two-page board report, from the library website
The one question that matters most	Does the visits-per-hour figure reflect evening use, which is when members use the branch?
Records believed to exist	Visitor counts by branch; the definition of a “visit”; the options paper
Questions that would need new work	Whether evening use differs from daytime use
Route chosen	Formal records request to the city’s records office, after an informal email to the branch manager returned only the board report
Who signs	Association secretary, on behalf of the association

Note 1. The group separated the one question that mattered from the records that might answer it. That kept the letter short and gave them a clear test for the reply: did it tell them about evenings, or not?

Note 2. They tried the informal route first and moved to a formal request only when it returned material they already had. Both steps were logged.

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03

The request letter

Kestrel Street Residents' Association [contact email]
3 March 2026

To: Public Records Officer, City of Ardenvale

Request for the records behind the Kestrel Street branch hours decision

Dear Public Records Officer,

We are the Kestrel Street Residents' Association, representing residents of the streets around the Kestrel Street branch library. We are writing about the decision to reduce the branch's opening hours, approved by the Ardenvale Public Library board on 12 February 2026.

We make this request under the state public-records law.

We ask for copies of the following records, for the period 1 January 2024 to 12 February 2026:

1. Any report, memo or presentation given to the board about branch opening hours, in addition to the published board report.
2. The visitor figures for each of the nine branches used to calculate "visits per open hour," and the table or dataset they come from.
3. The definition of a "visit" and of "open hours" used in that calculation, including how visits are counted.
4. Any record of other options considered for reducing hours across the system.

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5. Any consultation summary or assessment of who would be affected by the change.

A spreadsheet would be most useful for item 2, if the data exists in that form.

We also have one question, which we understand may need to be answered separately: are visitor figures available by time of day for the Kestrel Street branch?

If any part of this request is withheld, please tell us which part and the reason, and whether a summary or redacted version could be provided instead. If the request is too broad, we are glad to discuss narrowing it.

Please let us know who is handling this request and when we can expect a reply.

Thank you for your help.

Secretary, on behalf of the Kestrel Street Residents' Association

Note 3. The heading names the decision, so the request can be routed without anyone reading further.

Note 4. Every numbered item describes a record. None says what the group expects it to show. "The visitor figures … used to calculate 'visits per open hour'" asks for exactly the number the board relied on, in the board's own words.

Note 5. Item 3 asks for definitions. Without it, a table of totals would leave the group guessing what was counted.

Note 6. The time-of-day question is set apart and labeled as a question, not a records item. The group knew it might need new work, and said so.

Note 7. The letter is signed by role, on behalf of the association. No individual member's name or address appears.

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04

The first reply

An acknowledgment arrived on 5 March, with a reference number and the name of the library's records liaison. The full reply came on 27 March.

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for your request of 3 March (reference PR-26-0412). Please find enclosed:

- Item 1: A staff memo to the board dated 29 January 2026, "Branch Hours Review."
- Item 2: A spreadsheet of monthly gate counts for all nine branches, January 2024 to January 2026, with scheduled open hours for each month.
- Item 3: Gate counts are taken by an electronic counter at each branch's main entrance and recorded as daily totals. "Open hours" are scheduled public hours. Visits per open hour is total gate count divided by scheduled open hours over the period.
- Item 4: Options are set out in section 4 of the enclosed memo.

Item 5: The library does not hold a consultation summary or impact assessment for this decision. Public comment was taken at the 12 February board meeting.

On your question: the counters record daily totals only. The library does not hold counts by time of day for Kestrel Street or any other branch.

Please note that the spreadsheet marks August and September 2025 at Kestrel Street as "estimated" because the counter was out of service.

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Records Liaison, Ardenvale Public Library

Note 8. This is a good reply, and the group said so when they wrote back. It answered every item, said plainly what was not held, and pointed out a limit in its own data.

Note 9. "Not held" is an answer with content. The board decided about evening hours without any count of evening use, because none exists. That is not a failing of the records office; it is a fact about the evidence the decision rested on.

Note 10. The memo's section 4 listed two options: reduce Kestrel Street hours, or reduce four hours a week at each of three branches. The group now knew an alternative had been considered, and could ask why it was set aside.

Note 11. The "estimated" months mattered. If the branch's ranking depended partly on two estimated months, the group needed to know how the estimate was made. The questions on the sheet *Reading a Public Number* helped them spot this.

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05

The follow-up letter

Thank you for your reply of 27 March (reference PR-26-0412) and for the records enclosed, which were clear and complete.

We have three follow-up questions, which we understand may go to library staff or the board rather than the records office:

1. How were the August and September 2025 figures for Kestrel Street estimated?
2. Was the branch ranking checked with those two months left out?
3. Section 4 of the memo also considered reducing four hours a week at each of three branches. Why was that option set aside?

We would also like to ask whether the board considered any way of counting evening use before the decision takes effect on 1 May.

Note 12. The follow-up thanks the records liaison specifically. A working relationship with the person handling requests is worth keeping.

Note 13. Each question is narrow and answerable. The first two ask how a number was made. The third asks for the reason behind a choice the memo itself records. None asks the library to defend the decision as a whole.

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06

The second reply

The August and September 2025 figures were estimated using the same months in 2024. The ranking was not recalculated without those months. Your question about evening counts has been passed to the library director, who will respond before the board's April meeting. Your question about the three-branch option is a matter for the board, and has been forwarded to the board secretary.

The director's later letter said a hand count of evening visitors could be run at Kestrel Street for two weeks in April, and that the board would be asked to review the hours at its November meeting.

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07

The closing record

Item requested	Outcome	Reason given	Follow-up and result	Still open?
1. Reports to board	Answered		None needed	No
2. Visitor figures	Answered	Two months estimated	Asked how; answered (prior-year months used)	Ranking without estimated months not recalculated; association to ask the board
3. Definitions	Answered		None needed	No
4. Options considered	Answered (memo section 4)		Asked board why the spread-hours option was set aside	Awaiting board reply
5. Consultation or impact assessment	Not held	None held for this decision	None	No
Question: counts by time of day	Not held	Counters record daily totals only	Director agreed a two-week hand count in April and a November review	Count results due before November meeting; secretary to request them

Summary field	Entry
What we now know	How the figure was calculated; that no evening count existed; that an alternative was considered; that two months were estimated
What we still do not know	Whether evening use differs from daytime use; whether the ranking holds without the estimated months
What the records show about the reason given	The reason rests on whole-day averages; they cannot show evening use one way or the other
What we asked the decision-maker to do	Publish the hand-count results; explain why the alternative was set aside; review at the November meeting as agreed

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Note 14. The hours change went ahead on 1 May. The exchange did not reverse the decision, and the closing record does not pretend it did. What changed is that the November review will have an evening count to look at, and that the association, the library and anyone reading the record can see what the original figure could and could not show.

Note 15. “Not held” and “answered” are kept in separate rows, and every open item has a next step. A new secretary could pick this up in November without asking anyone what happened.

RELATED: Asking an Institution for the Evidence Behind a Decision, for the reasons behind the approach; Evidence Request Letter and Reply Log, for the blank forms; Reading a Public Number, for spotting how a number was made.

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08 Further reading

1 Archon Fung, Mary Graham and David Weil, *Full Disclosure: The Perils and Promise of Transparency* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Why disclosed information changes decisions only when people can use it in the choices they actually make.

2 Archon Fung, "Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance," *Public Administration Review* 66, special issue (2006): 66–75. A framework for who participates, how they communicate and how much influence they have over a decision.

QUESTION IT

Found an error, or want to question this document? Contact Prova at hello@byprova.com.

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