# Northumberland County Council

## Libraries Consultation Report

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This report sets out the findings from the public consultation on the Northumberland Library Service. The findings of this report will be used by Northumberland County Council (NCC) to inform the future strategy of the library service. CIPFA C.Co was commissioned by NCC to undertake the public consultation.

## Consultation approach

The consultation took a variety of forms. In addition to the self-completion survey aimed at residents, the consultation originally planned to include face-to-face workshops with groups of residents, staff members and key stakeholders. These workshops were planned to take place during late March/early April 2020. However, given the impact of COVID-19, the decision was taken to replace these sessions with remote methods of engagement. The consultation and engagement activities that took place therefore include:

**Consultation and engagement with residents**

- A **self-completion survey** for individuals (including children and young people aged under 16 who could take part with parental permission) which was developed by CIPFA C.Co in partnership with Northumberland County Council. The survey was open for 12 weeks (closing on 16th March). The survey was available in both online and paper formats.
- A link to the online the survey, hosted by CIPFA C.Co was posted on the NCC website. Paper copies were made available at library buildings.
- The consultation was widely publicised in libraries, via council channels, media and social media and youth council etc.
- A total of 5,068 respondents completed the self-completion survey; of these over 1,400 responses were received as paper copies, with the rest online.
- The self-completion survey asked for demographic information from consultation respondents related to the protected characteristics to comply with the Equality Act.
- **Information drop-in sessions** held by Alison Peaden from Northumberland County Council at all 30 libraries across the county for people to find out more about the consultation. These sessions were provided for information purposes only and feedback was not gathered during these sessions.
- **Telephone interviews** conducted with **residents** to provide more in-depth views on factors driving some of the key findings from the self-completion survey. Twenty interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, were completed between Tuesday, 31st March and Friday, 17th April 2020.

A copy of the resident consultation documents can be found as an appendix.

**Staff and stakeholder consultation**

- **Self-completion booklets** circulated to **staff members** in early April to gather their views and opinions. 47 booklets were completed.
- **Self-completion booklets** circulated to 18 **key stakeholders** in late April to gather their views and opinions. Six completed booklets were received.

- **Formal responses** to the consultation were received from various organisations, including several Parish and Town Councils.

## Key findings from resident engagement

### The role of the library service

Survey respondents are very aware that many local library services have been much reduced over recent years and are concerned that changes may involve reducing the service further, in particular through the closure of smaller libraries.

Respondents feel libraries are more than just a place to pick up or drop off books, and should be:

- A place to introduce children to books and encourage reading
- A place of learning
- Somewhere safe to go/a place of sanctuary
- A place to work or study
- A community space for groups and events
- A place to access technology
- A place to meet people
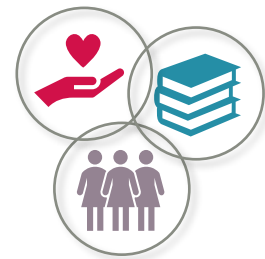
In order to meet these needs, residents feel the library service needs to provide physical spaces that are/have local, have sufficient space, have access to modern technology and are run by council staff.

There is evidence from resident engagement that the library plays an important role in the **mental health and wellbeing** of library users:

- For a third (34%) visiting the library is part of their daily/weekly routine
- 3 in 10 visit the library because it is a quiet place to visit, a quarter visit as it is a safe place to go, and 18% go as it is somewhere to pass time
- A fifth of library users find visiting the library helps them to feel less lonely or isolated, and 15% feel it is an important place to socialise.

Amongst users of the **mobile library service**, almost all (98%) look forward to the visit and 77% agree that the visit helps them to feel less lonely or isolated.

Other areas where the library plays an important role in residents' lives include:

- **Accessing technology:** For 1 in 10 library users, the library is the main way that they access computers or the internet, and this rises to 46% of those who are out of work and looking for work.
- **Spending quality time with children:** three-quarters of library users with a child under the age of 11 visit the library to spend quality time with their children.

### Library usage

Amongst all respondents, 6 in 10 use the library at least once a month, and this rises to almost three-quarters of library users. However, this does not appear to reflect the wider usage in the county

amongst all residents: the 2015 residents' survey showed that 30% had used a local library in the past 3 months.[1]

Many library users (those that have used a Northumberland library service in the past 12 months) use more than one library in the region, potentially more so if the nearest library to them is very small and/or doesn't offer a full range of services.  However, library users still value having a library that is local to them, i.e. within walking distance.

## The library service offer

Whilst lending physical copies of books is both the most important service and most used service amongst library users, all other services offered by libraries are considered important.  Library users feel it is particularly important that the library offers:

- A space that the community can use (85%)
- Local history or local studies resources (83%)
- Computers/internet access (80%)

Services that are considered less important and that less well used are:

- Offer information on healthy living
    - Considered important that this is offered by 57% of library users, but only used by 5% in the past 12 months
- Digital skills courses
    - Considered important by 61% of library users, but only used by 2% in the past 12 months

However, when looking at the awareness of the services offered by their local library, there is low awareness of the provision of both digital skills courses and information on healthy living.

## Strengths of the library service

The local library is rated very highly by library users, with 88% rating the service as either 'excellent' or 'good'.

Unprompted, the key strengths of the service are perceived to be:

- The library staff
- Free access to books and resources
- Reservation service

The library is performing particularly strongly on the following attributes (over 90% of library users agree with all these statements):

- The library staff are helpful
- I feel welcome in my local library
- My local library is a pleasant place to visit
- The staff at the library are knowledgeable
- It is easy to access my local library

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[1] https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20people/Resident%20Insight/Northumberland-CC-Residents-Survey-Report-January-2016.pdf

### Areas for improvement

Unprompted, the key areas for improvement are perceived to be:

- Range of books offered
- Size of library, the layout or the library environment
- Longer opening hours

Amongst the prompted areas, the library service is either not perceived to be performing well, or awareness is particularly low on:

- The libraries in the local area offer similar levels of service (26% agree; 49% don't know)
- My local library offers a good range of events/groups (49% agree; 37% don't know)
- The local libraries have modern IT facilities (65% agree; 25% don't know)

Awareness of digital services is also fairly low: only half (51%) of library users are aware that their library lends digital books (ebooks), and only 1 in 10 (11%) of library users say they have borrowed an ebook in the past 12 months.  Similarly, only 6 in 10 library users are aware that the library lends audio books, and 1 in 10 have borrowed an audio book in the past 12 months.

There is some evidence from the telephone interviews that the ebook online lending service is not particularly user-friendly, and some residents have tried to use both BorrowBox and the RB Digital and have given up either as it is too difficult to use, that they have not been able to browse through books, or that waiting times for ebooks are too long.

### Barriers to use

From the survey results, the most common library user is female and older (aged 55 and over). Libraries do not appear to be appealing to the younger sections of the population in the same way that they do older residents; a problem that exists nationwide.  There is some evidence from the consultation that younger people in the region would like to use the libraries as places to go and as places to work/study, but that many of the current library spaces do not have the required facilities for this to be a valid option and that the environment in which some libraries are situated are not conducive to quiet study.

The survey has identified the following key barriers amongst those that have not used the library in the past 12 months ('non-users') and those that do not use the library frequently:

- Too busy/opening hours of libraries are not convenient
- Buy own books/ebooks instead of borrowing (or use other online borrowing service)
- Poor range of books/resources in libraries
- Reduced service in libraries and environment is not appropriate/pleasant

This is reinforced by other findings from the consultation that suggests residents no longer use the library as frequently since their local service has reduced or changed, particularly since some services have been co-located.

In addition, there is some evidence that library users and non-users would use the service more if services were improved and certain changes were made, such as:

- **Opening hours:** 31% of users and 27% of non-users say they would use the libraries more frequently if they were open at different times, particularly if they were open weekday evenings.
- **Increasing awareness of services:** The awareness of the wider services offered by the library service is low, and in particular the awareness of the ebook lending service is low.
- **Issues with ebook borrowing:** There is some strong evidence from the telephone interviews that the ebook borrowing service is not user-friendly.

## Mobile library service

Library users who use the mobile library service most frequently are more likely than the average survey respondent to; be older (aged 65 and above): have no children living at home; or have a physical disability or impairment.

Mobile library users rate the service very highly, with 9 in 10 giving it an 'excellent' or 'good' rating overall.  Unprompted, the key strengths of the service are perceived to be:

- The staff
- Good selection of books
- Provides access to books
- Regular, reliable service

From the prompted statements, the mobile library service performs well on practical aspects such as stopping close to users' homes, stopping for a long enough time, visiting at convenient times and being reliable.

Unprompted, mobile library users feel the service could improve on:

- Selection of books offered
- The van is not suitable
- Frequency of visits

## Potential new ways of working

There is overwhelming support from the survey respondents for the library service to remain council-run.

The potential new ways of working were covered briefly in the in-depth telephone interviews.  The key themes from these discussions are:

- Hub libraries with smaller satellite libraries and co-locations are already models that the library service have adopted.
- There is concern that the hub library model will simply mean the closure of smaller libraries.
- Co-locating libraries can work if they are planned well, in particular if libraries are given dedicated rooms away from other services.
- Volunteers helping to run the library service is welcomed but only if it is in addition to paid staff, or if volunteers are used to either allow for extended opening hours or prevent a library from closure.  The preference is for the service to be run by trained, paid professionals.

- People would like to see more investment in the digital offer, but not at the expense of the physical library service.  The digital offer should be an addition to library buildings and physical resources.

## Key findings from staff engagement

The past few years have seen many changes to the library service in Northumberland and many staff members feel that the cuts and changes to the service over recent years have devastated the service and that not all changes have been as successful as they could have been.  A key learning from this experience is that both customers and staff should be consulted before changes were made.

Going forward, staff would like management to understand and value the service more, and base decisions on the views of staff and customers.

In particular, decreased budgets have led to:

- Poor book stocks
- Low staffing levels and reduced opening hours
- Lack of resources to put on events and activities
- Lack of investment in modern technology
- Poor buildings/lack of space in new locations

### Key challenges

For staff, the key challenge for the service going forward is balancing the needs of existing (often older) customers and innovating to attract new (potentially younger) customers; and to do both within an environment of a **lack of funding**.
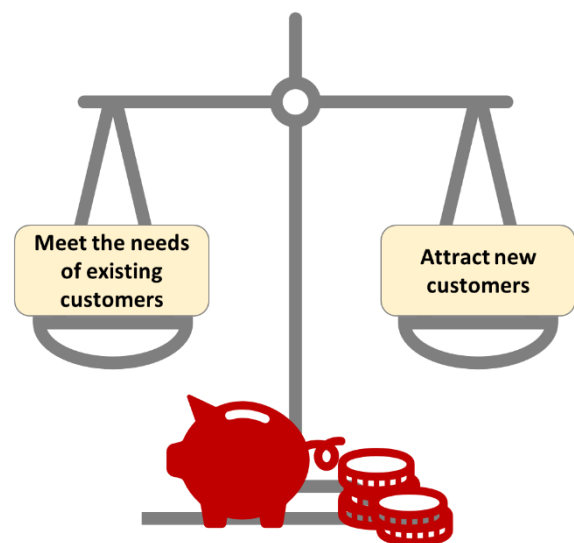
Additionally, staff feel the service faces the challenge of **remaining relevant** in an increasingly digital world, and there were also some comments from staff around the **lack of awareness of the library offer** and the need to market the service more effectively.

When asked how well they feel the library service is equipped to meet these challenges, many feel that although the lack of funding and reduction of service in recent years have left them in a poor position to be able to do so, staff are still passionate and resilient and will try to rise to this challenge as best they can.

Other staff members feel the service is fairly well equipped to meet these challenges due to the digital service already in place and feel positive about the direction from the new management over the past year.

### Staff know their community

Perceptions of staff around what their core customers and what their community values and needs from the library service are similar to those expressed by residents themselves.

In line with the findings from the resident consultation, staff feel that the community most value the fact that a **local library service exists**, providing not only **access to books** but also a **safe space** to visit, and the attitude and support from **staff members**.

Other key aspects staff feel the community value are:

- The inclusive, welcoming and safe space the service provides
- Access to computers and printing facilities
- Activities and events, both for children and adults
- Reservation service
- Mobile and home library services

## Current gaps in provision

The staff essentially feel the community would like to see an **investment** in the library service, and in particular in a **better range of books**.

Aside from improving the book stock, staff suggested many areas that they feel the community would like to see improved within libraries. These include:

- Improving library environments, particularly providing more space
- More groups and activities
- More staff
- More computer access and better IT facilities, such as wireless printing
- Free newspapers and journals in seating areas
- Longer/different/standardised opening hours
- Tea/coffee facilities
- More local information
- A better equipped mobile library service

In addition to the above, staff have many ideas and views on how the service could be improved and better meet the needs of the community. Staff feel the service could be **better managed** through:

- Listening to the residents more
- Increasing awareness of its services
- Engaging more/better with other organisations
- Less top-down management
- Increasing staff training, such as on newer technologies
- Opening hours that better fit the needs of individual areas
- New/improved stock management system
- Providing new mobile library vans that are fit for purpose and reliable

## The need for a clear vision

In order to continue to provide the best service they can and potentially to fill the identified gaps in provision, staff feel the service not only needs more funding but also **stable management** that understands the true nature and value of the service and a **clear strategy** informed by views of front line staff.

Staff feel that if their vision for the library service could be realised, the service could be:

- Modern, vibrant and dynamic

- Innovative and responsive to the changing needs of the community
- A truly inclusive community hub and meeting place
- Integral to the health of the community
- Valued and supported by the local authority
- A place where staff feel confident and secure in their role, challenged, supported, respected and part of the local authority

Staff were asked what they would include in the vision and values of the library service going forward, and whether these fit with the council wide values and vision. The most commonly used word to include in the **values** of and **vision** for the library service was **'inclusive'.**

Other often mentioned words or phrases include:

- Accessible for all
- Professional/efficient
- Respectful
- Reliable
- Community
- Knowledge and learning
- Safe and welcoming
- Well-resourced
- Interesting/exciting/inspiring
- Modern/progressive/innovative
- Digital/connected

### Views on change

The majority of staff members feel that change is needed and that they are committed to changes to the service. Of those that are less sure, the majority would like further clarity on potential changes, and assurances that changes will improve the service and not simply involve further cuts.

Key **concerns** amongst the staff about future changes include:

- Increasingly squeezed public budgets, particularly post Covid-19 will mean further cuts in spending on the library service
- The changes will simply be about saving money and reducing costs and will involve job losses and library closures
- A move towards an over-reliance on a digital service and the marginalisation of older or non-technological customers
- changes will not be well managed or well communicated to customers

### Views on potential new models

Staff were presented with some potential models (as suggested in a government report on libraries) and asked for their views on how these could work in Northumberland.

### Focussing the service into a number of hub libraries

The majority of staff members are largely in favour of this model, and many feel the service is already provided in this way. The key positive aspects of this potential model are that it frees up resources to better deliver services in the hub libraries and focuses on the needs of individual communities.

Staff do have concerns about adopting this model even further in Northumberland, in particular on the potential detrimental effect on rural communities where smaller libraries may be closed, that it may result in job losses and that offering too many services in one space can dilute the library offer.

### Improving and increasing the digital offer

Many staff feel that improving and increasing the digital offer is a much needed and natural way forward, and could encourage increased usage of library services, but that the digital service should be an additional service not a replacement for physical services.

Within the library buildings, staff would like to see more public access computers, more reliable wifi and the provision of tablets (both for adults and children, with book and literacy related apps).

With regard to the remote digital offer, staff recommend the development of an NCC library app and a focus on upskilling elderly or technologically reluctant customers to enable more use of the digital services, potentially introducing a tablet lending service.

The key **concern** is that investment in the digital offer will be at the expense of the physical offer, and that this would disadvantage many elderly or non-digital customers as well as those who rely on the free access to technology.

### More co-locations (and less stand-alone libraries)

Again, many staff feel that the Northumberland library service already works in this way, with many libraries located alongside other services.  Overall, co-location is seen as a positive move, as long as it is done well and with consideration for the staff, customers and different services involved.  Staff appreciate that co-locating services allows cost savings, the potential for increased footfall and potentially easier access to the public to both services.

It appears that the one key aspect to ensure co-location is a positive experience for both staff and customers is for the library to have its own **dedicated self-contained space**.

In addition, staff experiences suggest that **co-location works best** when the library is co-located with complementary services, such as the arts centres or tourist information, and that all services are respectful of each other, considered equal partners and work well together.

However, not all current experiences of co-locating have been positive so far. Learnings that can be taken from current experiences, or suggested improvements to current co-locations include:

- The lack of privacy is creating potential data protection issues and making customers of both services uncomfortable
- Being aware of different customers when choosing co-locating services, i.e. that the customers of some services are vulnerable and often challenging
- Leisure centre environments can be intimidating places for some people, and the hot and noisy environment is not always suitable for a library

### Increasing the number of volunteers helping to run the service

Perhaps not surprisingly, the key feedback from staff over the potential to increase the number of volunteers to help run the service is the potential for **job losses** amongst staff.

The suggestion that volunteers could run the service is also seen as **devaluing or misunderstanding the role** of professional librarians.

Other key concerns over volunteers helping to run the service include:

- Long-term commitment of volunteers to the role
- Time and resources to train and to provide on-going support
- Lack of knowledge and lack of accountability
- Can lead to extra workload for staff members and take focus away from customers and towards supporting volunteers
- Reliance on small pool of people from small communities
- Devalues service and will eventually lead to library closures

Staff do see **positive** aspects of using more volunteers, as long as they are an addition to paid staff, are used for specific tasks or activities, and are managed correctly. The key areas staff feel volunteers can be of help are:

- Helping staff to run one-off events
- Being used to run specific activities and courses that match their skillsets and knowledge
- Can allow for extended opening times
- Can take pressure off staff, particularly when libraries are staffed by lone workers

From experience, staff suggest that providing training and on-going support is most useful when managing volunteers, and ensuring volunteers are given appropriate tasks.

Staff members were also asked their views on the **'community book drop' model** (where books are left unattended in a location accessible to the public e.g. a community hall). Overall, staff are not in favour of this model as they feel it would be difficult to manage stock levels, maintain the quality of stock and that thefts would occur.

### Libraries becoming Community Partnerships

As this model relies on volunteers, staff views are very similar to those held on increasing the number of volunteers to run the service. Above and beyond the points raised when discussing volunteers (see above section), staff feel there are some additional, mainly positive aspects of libraries becoming Community Partnerships:

- Could increase community interaction with the library, and use of the library
- Could be used to extend library service, and open new libraries in more remote areas
- Preferable as a last resort to prevent library closures
- Communities are best placed to understand needs of communities
- Allows the possibility to apply for different pots of funding

The key concern is over how stock would be managed across the network of libraries.

In order to work well, again staff feel that volunteers need to be trained and on-going support provided with roles and responsibilities clearly laid out.

## Key findings from stakeholder engagement

The key findings from the stakeholder self-completion exercise are:

- The library service needs to better promote itself and increase awareness of its wider offers to both the public and other partner organisations

- The library service has good relationships with other organisations and more opportunities exist for the service to work more with other partners, however this may be hampered by a lack of staff and/or resources
- The strength of the service lies in its focus on supporting the community and the free access to both physical and digital resources
- The service is being held back from achieving its potential through the lack of funding and the lack of financial security and the uncertainty this creates for staff members

Key findings around co-location:

- The majority of co-location partners rate the relationship with the library service very highly
- The key **benefits of co-location** are the increased footfall it can bring, the access to wider service it provides and the support from the professional library staff.
- The key **disadvantages** to sharing a location are the lack of space and competing demands on the buildings and the potential for services to disturb customers from other services.
- Co-locations are seen as working well when they are matched with complementary services, such as the arts, and are not seen to be working well when matched with services that do not fit together naturally, such as in leisure centres.  Additionally, there needs to be sufficient space within the physical location for all services.

Views on potential new ways of working:

- NCC colleagues are in favour of **focussing the service on a number of hub libraries,** and feel that services working together is the right approach.
- **Increasing and improving the digital offer** is considered essential in the modern world, and the only concern about this approach is that older users lack digital skills.
- **Co-locations** is seen as an approach that works very well, particularly if the services are complementary.
- Stakeholders feel increasing the **use of volunteers to help run the service** can have some benefits such as allowing for extended opening hours and increasing community buy-in, but there are concerns around the unreliability of volunteers, the lack of professionalism and the need for volunteers to be managed and trained by paid staff.
- **Libraries as Community Partnerships** have similar benefits and concerns as using increased numbers of volunteers.

Stakeholders feel libraries offer an important service, in particular in bringing communities together, and feel that with investment, the service has huge potential.
In order to achieve the potential of the service, stakeholders feel the library service needs to:
- Demonstrate its value to local communities
- Learn from and connect with other sectors
- Work more with other organisations
- Be given financial security

## Stakeholder consultation: formal responses

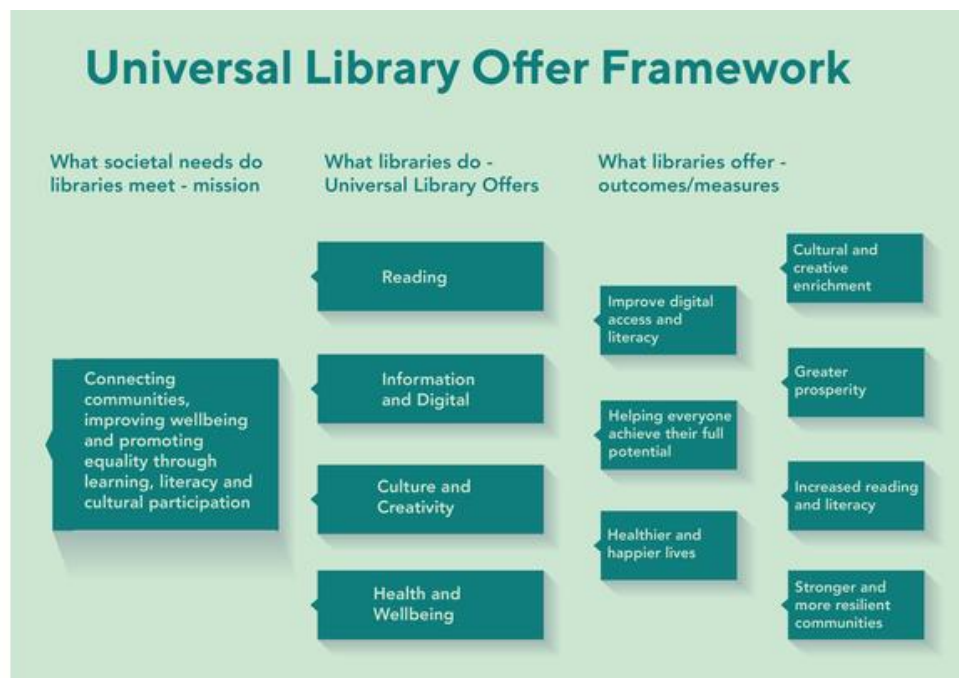Formal responses to the public consultation were received from several groups or organisations, including several Parish Councils.  All groups and organisations put forward their support for the library service to continue, in particular for the library service in their particular town or village to continue to be provided and for the mobile library service to both continue to be provided and to be improved.

An overarching theme from all the formal responses is the view that the local library provision is an essential, vital service for each area and provides so much more than access to books; it is often one of the only community spaces in the area and in particular is seen as providing an important place to decrease social isolation.

## The Universal Library Offers:

**How does the Northumberland library service perform on the 'Universal Offers'?**

The Universal Library Offer Framework was developed by the Society of Chief Librarians (SLC), Arts Council England and The Reading Agency in 2013, with the aim of clarifying the main service areas that modern users regard as integral to public libraries. The four key universal library offers are Reading, Information and Digital, Culture and Creativity, and Health and Wellbeing, as shown in this diagram[2]:

## Universal Library Offer Framework

| What societal needs do libraries meet - mission | What libraries do - Universal Library Offers | What libraries offer - outcomes/measures |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Connecting communities, improving wellbeing and promoting equality through learning, literacy and cultural participation | Reading | Improve digital access and literacy |
| | Information and Digital | Helping everyone achieve their full potential |
| | Culture and Creativity | Healthier and happier lives |
| | Health and Wellbeing | Cultural and creative enrichment / Greater prosperity / Increased reading and literacy / Stronger and more resilient communities |

From the consultation findings, it appears that whilst the Northumberland library service appears to be achieving reasonably well across all four offers, it is clear there is room for improvement.

**Reading**

The borrowing of physical copies of books is the most used library service and the service is achieving on this Offer in respect that it does offer free access to books and reading resources. However, there is much evidence that the physical stock of books offered by the Northumberland Library Service is considered insufficient and too narrow. Residents, staff and stakeholders would all like to see more investment in the book stock and better rotation of stock between libraries.

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[2] http://www.librarycampaign.com/scl-announces-universal-offers-for-libraries/

### Information and Digital

After borrowing books, using IT facilities is the next most popular service used and is particularly for those who are out of work and looking for work. Residents and staff would like to see an increase in the provision of IT facilities, and for facilities to be modernised (such as providing wireless printing, tablets and more up-to-date software).

The digital lending service is not particularly well used (although use is increasing during lockdown), however awareness of this service is generally low. Some users report that the lending services are not user-friendly.

### Culture and Creativity

Events and activities run by local libraries are well liked and appreciated. Whilst residents, staff and stakeholders would all like to see libraries hold more cultural and creative events and activities, this is hindered by a lack of funding, insufficient staff and insufficient space in some libraries.

### Health and Wellbeing

Libraries in Northumberland appear to play an important role in improving the mental health of library users, in particular through providing a safe and welcoming space for people to visit and through providing a space for the community to use.

However, library users do not generally access their local library for self-help information or information on healthy living, and most are not aware that libraries offer this type of information.

## And finally…

The results from the different consultation exercises across all audiences demonstrate the important role the library service plays in the lives of the Northumberland residents, in particular amongst the elderly population and those who use the service regularly.

In addition to the provision of books, computers and resources, the value of the library service is that it provides a safe, inclusive, social space for its community members.

Whilst it is not yet known how the coronavirus pandemic will impact the service going forward, the results of the consultation can continue to be used to inform the future provision of library services in Northumberland.

# Introduction

Northumberland is home to 316,000 people and covers an area of 5,013km[2]. 97% of its area is classed as rural and the county is sparsely populated with 63 people per km[2]. Half of the county's population live in 3% of urban land found in the south-east of the county. The county has a higher than average proportion of elderly residents with 24% of residents aged over 65 years old[3], compared to the UK average of 18%[4].

The library service in Northumberland is currently provided through:

- 30 libraries
  - Stand alone, integrated or co-located libraries
  - Of these, six are integrated with Visitor Information, two are Community Access Libraries and four are located within Leisure Centres
- Prison library services (delivered for HMP Northumberland)
- A Schools Library Service
- A digital library service
- A staffed mobile library service and a home library service run by volunteers.

Northumberland County Council is in the process of developing a future strategy for delivering the library service, and the consultation with both users and non-users of the library service is to be used to help inform this future strategy.

In 2019, NCC commissioned CIPFA C.Co to carry out a consultation with residents, staff members and stakeholders. This report sets out the findings from the consultation on the Northumberland Library Services.

### Understanding the findings in this report:

This report contains several charts to illustrate the consultation findings. In some charts, responses may not add up to 100%. There are several reasons why this might happen, such as:

- Only the most common or frequent responses may be shown in the table or chart
- The question allowed each respondent to give more than one answer
- Individual percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number so the total may come to 99% or 101%

The questionnaire was completed by respondents themselves (self-completion) and not all respondents answered all of the questions. Therefore, the number of people answering each question (the base size) varies by question. Percentages shown are based on the total number of people answering each question.

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[3] http://www.ca-north.org.uk/about/about-northumberland

[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/livinglongerhowourpopulationischangingandwhyitmatters/2018-08-13

Sub-groups with base sizes of less than 50 may have been omitted from the presentation of results and should be treated with caution.

In addition, some questions (filtered questions) were only asked of, or intended to be asked of, certain respondents depending on the answers given to previous questions. If some people chose not to answer specific questions on which filters were based, they may have been asked a filtered question which may have been irrelevant. The base size of filtered questions shown in this report only includes those people for whom the question was intended to be asked and who answered the question.

For the analysis of some questions, some response options have been grouped together to show an overall level of agreement, for example 'strongly agree' and 'slightly agree' have been grouped and shown as 'agree'.

All differences between two or more percentages mentioned in the commentary text are statistically significant according to the z-test at the 95% confidence level. The z-test is a commonly used statistical test used to highlight whether differences in results are 'significant'. By this we mean that we are 95% confident that the difference we have observed is a real difference, and not an error caused by randomness.

For the analysis of open-ended responses ('open text questions'), a code frame has been developed based on the key themes emerging within the comments. In questions where there are less than 300 comments provided, all responses have been coded. For questions where over 300 responses were recorded, a random sample of at least 10% or a minimum of 300, whichever is greater, has been coded in order to give a representative result of the overall sample.

# Engagement with residents: Analysis of results

## *Self-completion survey*

The resident survey received an impressive **5,068** responses, representing just over 1.5% of the population of the entire county.

## Profile of respondents

### Library usage and membership

87% are currently a member of a local library, representing 5% of the total members recorded on the Northumberland library management system.

Just over 8 in 10 respondents (83%) have used a Northumberland library service in the last 12 months ('library users'), and this rises to just over 9 in 10 (91%) of library members.

### Demographics

Male: 25%

**Female: 72%**

Prefer not to say: 3%

**Gender:** Almost three-quarters of survey respondents are female, which is much higher than in the total Northumberland area; ONS statistics show that the population estimate in 2017 for Northumberland is 49% male and 51% female[5].

Base: All respondents, n=4419

**Age:** 6 in 10 survey respondents are aged 55 and over, with 4 in 10 survey respondents aged 65 or over (see Figure 1). Although Northumberland does have an ageing population, ONS population estimates in 2017 show that around a quarter (24%) of Northumberland residents are aged 65 or over.  Whilst the views of elderly residents are over-represented within the total survey responses, answers to each question have been analysed at a sub-group level and any key significant

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[5] https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20people/Demographics/Older-people-age-profile-Northumberland-2017-docx.pdf
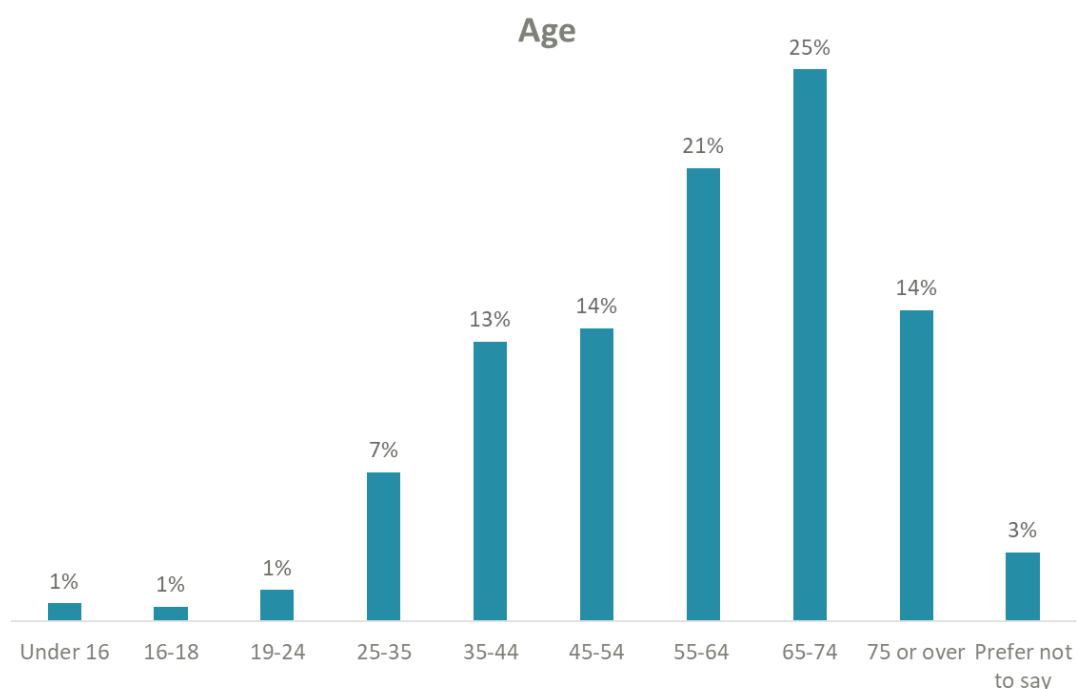
differences by age groups have been reported.

## Age



Figure 1: Age. Base: All respondents, n=4438

**Ethnicity:** According to the 2011 Census[6], 98% of Northumberland residents classify themselves as white.  In the self-completion resident survey, 91% of respondents classify themselves as white.  The breakdown of results for respondent ethnicity is:

- White:                                    91.13%
- Prefer not to say:                  6.17%
- Other:                                    1.07%
- Asian/Asian British:              0.84%
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups:    0.77%
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British:  0.02%

Respondents from an Asian/Asian British background are significantly less likely to be a library member than those who are white: 76% of Asian/Asian British respondents are members of a local library compared to 89% of white respondents.

**Employment status:** Given the age profile of survey respondents, it is perhaps not surprising that the majority of respondents, 45%, are retired. A further 23% are in full-time employment and 18% are in part-time employment:

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[6] https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Northumberland-Knowledge-and-JSNA/Our-People/People.aspx
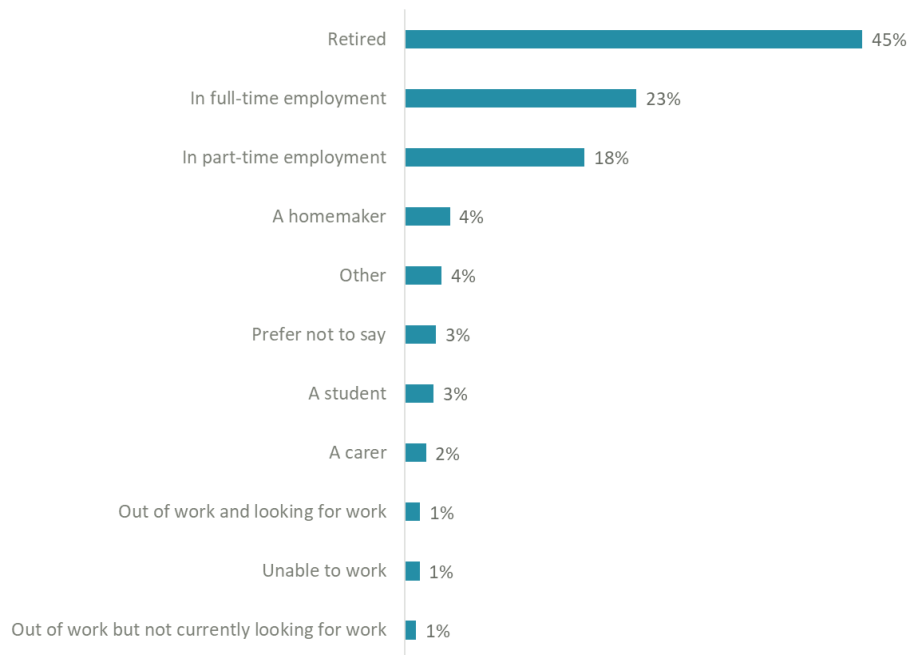
Figure 2: Employment status. Base: All respondents, n=4418

## Children:

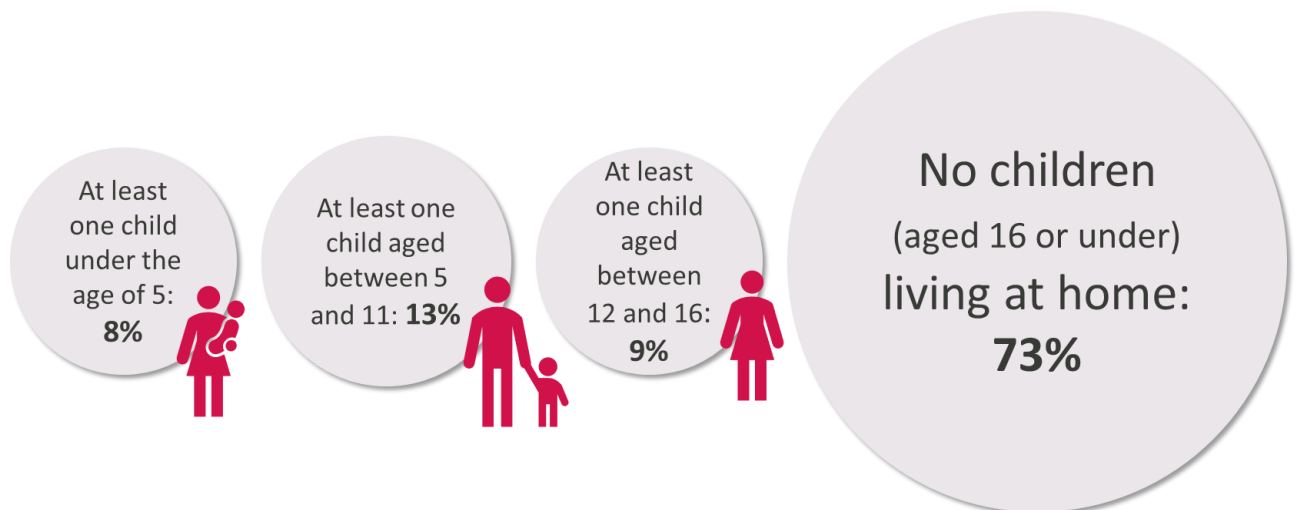Almost three-quarters of respondents do not have any children (aged 16 or under) living at home:



Figure 3: Base: All respondents, n=4412. *(Size of circles are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

**Disability:** Almost 8 in 10 of survey respondents do not consider themselves to have a disability or impairment. 16% of respondents do consider themselves to have a disability or impairment; a physical disability or impairment is most common, representing almost a tenth of survey respondents:

**Physical disability: 60% (9% of total)**
Sensory impairment: 22% (3% of total)
Mental health needs: 20% (3% of total)
Learning difficulty: 7% (1% of total)



No disability

Consider myself to have a disability/impairment
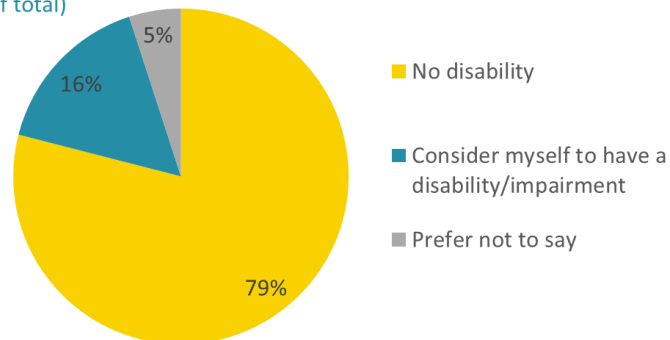
Prefer not to say

79%

16%

5%

Figure 4: Q: Do you consider yourself to have an impairment and/or disability? Please choose all that apply. Base: All respondents, n=4360

# In-depth telephone interviews

## Participant profiles

Quotas were set on different demographics, library usage and views (as expressed in the self-completion survey) in order to ensure a range of views amongst the telephone interview participants.

Minimum quotas were set based on the overall sample for each group. The following tables show the quotas set and number of interviews achieved amongst the four key user groups identified as being of interest:

### Younger users (5 interviews in total)

|  | Age 19-34 | Gender | Library used most frequently | Overall rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Quotas set | 5 | Minimum 1 male | Mix | Minimum 1 either 'very/quite poor' |
| Interviews achieved | 5 | Male: 1 Female: 4 | Alnwick Bellingham Berwick Cramlington Haydon Bridge | Excellent: 1 Good: 2 Quite poor: 2 |

### Parents (5 interviews in total)

|  | Gender | Age of children | Library used most frequently | Overall rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Quotas set | Minimum 1 male | Under 5: min. 1 5 to 11: min. 1 12 to 16: min. 1 | Mix | Minimum 1 either 'very/quite poor' |

| | | (can be in more than one group) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Interviews achieved | Male: 2 Female: 3 | Under 5: 3 5 to 11: 3 12 to 16: 2 | Bedlington Blyth Haltwhistle Ponteland South Beach | Excellent: 4 Quite poor: 1 |

**Older users: Aged 55 and over (5 interviews in total)**

| | Gender | Age | Library used most frequently | Overall rating |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Quotas set | Minimum 2 male | 55-64: min. 1 65-74: min. 1 75+: min. 1 | Mix Minimum 1 mobile library user | Minimum 1 either 'very/quite poor' |
| Interviews achieved | Male: 2 Female: 3 | 55-64: 2 65-74: 2 75+: 1 | Bellingham Corbridge Lynemouth Wylam Mobile library | Excellent: 2 Good: 2 Quite poor: 1 |

**Interested in volunteering group (5 interviews in total)**

| | Gender | Age | Library used most frequently |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quotas set | Minimum 2 male | Minimum 1 aged under 55 | Mix |
| Interviews achieved | Male: 3 Female: 2 | 45-54: 3 55-64: 1 65-74: 1 | Ashington Haltwhistle Hexham Morpeth Wooler |

The in-depth telephone interviews each lasted approximately 30 minutes, and covered the following topics:

- A description of their local library
- A typical library visit
- Strengths and weaknesses of their local library
- The ideal library
- Use of different library services
- Views on potential ways of working for the library service

Parents were also questioned about the provision for children at their local library, and those interested in volunteering were questioned about what they would expect volunteering to entail and what support they would need.

The feedback from the in-depth interviews has been analysed and is included in the following resident engagement sections where relevant and appropriate (and is indicated by this symbol):
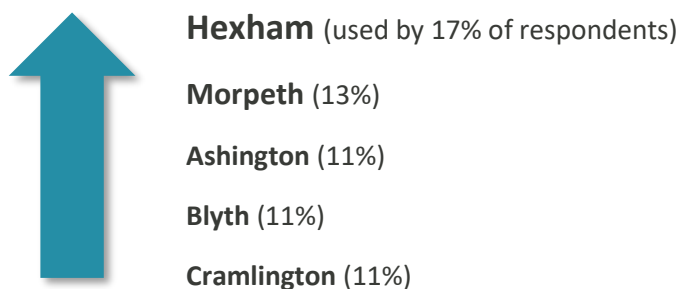
# Library Users

This section provides the analysis of results from survey respondents who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months and includes feedback from the in-depth telephone interviews were relevant.
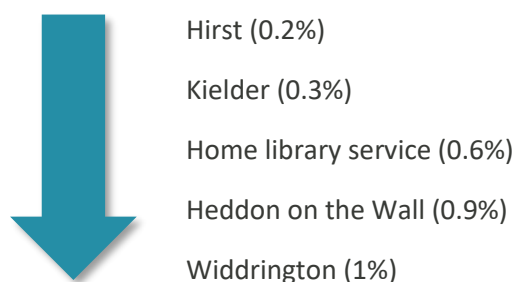
## Library Usage

### Use of individual libraries

Looking at the usage of individual libraries, the top 5 **most used** libraries in the county over the past 12 months by survey respondents are:

**Hexham** (used by 17% of respondents)

**Morpeth** (13%)

**Ashington** (11%)

**Blyth** (11%)

**Cramlington** (11%)

Q: Have you used any of the following libraries in the last 12 months or has someone used them on your behalf.  Please choose all that apply. Base: all who have used a Northumberland library in the last 12 months (n=4,111)

These findings are perhaps not surprising given that these libraries are all in areas of relatively high populations, are open every working day and also for some time over the weekend.

At the other end of the scale, the **least used** libraries amongst survey respondents, all used by 1% or less, are:

Hirst (0.2%)

Kielder (0.3%)

Home library service (0.6%)

Heddon on the Wall (0.9%)

Widdrington (1%)

Q: Have you used any of the following libraries in the last 12 months, or has someone used them on your behalf.  Please choose all that apply. Base: all who have used a Northumberland library service in the last 12 months (n=4,111)

Looking at library usage in more detail reveals that many Northumberland residents are visiting **more than one library**, suggesting that residents potentially visit smaller local libraries most frequently and then also visit larger libraries when different services are required or when visiting larger towns.

For example, amongst all those that have used Hexham library in the past 12 months, it is only the most frequently used library for 56%, with just over 4 in 10 visiting other local libraries more frequently.

Similarly, only 52% of those that have used Morpeth library in the last 12 months say Morpeth is their most frequently visited library; and 62% of those using Blyth library use Blyth library the most often.

Using more than one library is reflected in the findings from the telephone interviews, with some participants mentioning that if they want to go to a group or event, or if they need to do anything more involved than looking for or picking/returning up a book, they will visit the nearest 'larger' library, for example:

*"If I want to do anything more complex than borrowing a book, I have to go to Hexham library."*
*(Haydon Bridge user, Younger, Male)*

*"[Bellingham library] is only open two days a week. They are more likely to have events on at Hexham library, so I might be interested to go to an event there...although it is 18 miles away."*
*(Bellingham user, Older, Female)*

At the other end of the scale, of the ten respondents that have used the Hirst library in the last 12 months, none use Hirst library most frequently and all have also used Ashington library. Of the 14 respondents who have used Kielder library, 10 use Kielder library most often and nine have also used Hexham library.

*Note:* *For the remainder of this section, 'Library users' do not include those users who indicated that they use the mobile library service or home library service most frequently. These users were asked separate questions on their usage of the mobile/home usage and these findings can be found from page 48.*

## Frequency of use

Almost three-quarters of library users visit the library at least once a month on average:

At least once a month: 74%

Every two to three months: 16%

Once every 4-6 months: 6%

Less often than every 6 months: 4%

Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months (n=3,778). *(Size of circles are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

Whilst using libraries at least once a month is considered frequent usage, particularly given that library loans are generally 3-week loans and can be renewed online, it is clear that a significant proportion of library users are visiting more frequently than once a month. A third (34%) say that visiting the library is **part of their daily or weekly routine**, and several participants from the telephone interviews mention visiting once a week or once every couple of weeks on average.

The Northumberland residents survey shows that all residents generally use libraries much less frequently, and the high usage recorded in this survey does not match the overall picture provided by library usage figures. In the 2015 residents' survey, 30% had used a local library in the past 3 months and 51% in the last 12 months[7].

It is possible that the disparity between the resident survey and this consultation survey is driven largely by the fact that frequent library users are more likely to have participated in the survey than the 'average resident'. Library users are more likely to have been made aware of the survey as it was advertised in local libraries, and paper copies were made available within libraries, and are potentially more likely to feel invested in the future of the library service and therefore more likely to take part in the consultation.

### Barriers to more frequent use

Of those that visit less than once every four months, the most common reason for not visiting a library more often is a **lack of time.** However, the next three most often mentioned barriers relate to the **poor standards of the library service**, in particular the opening hours, lack of resources and the poor environment of the libraries (see Figure 5):

Key reasons for not going to a library more often

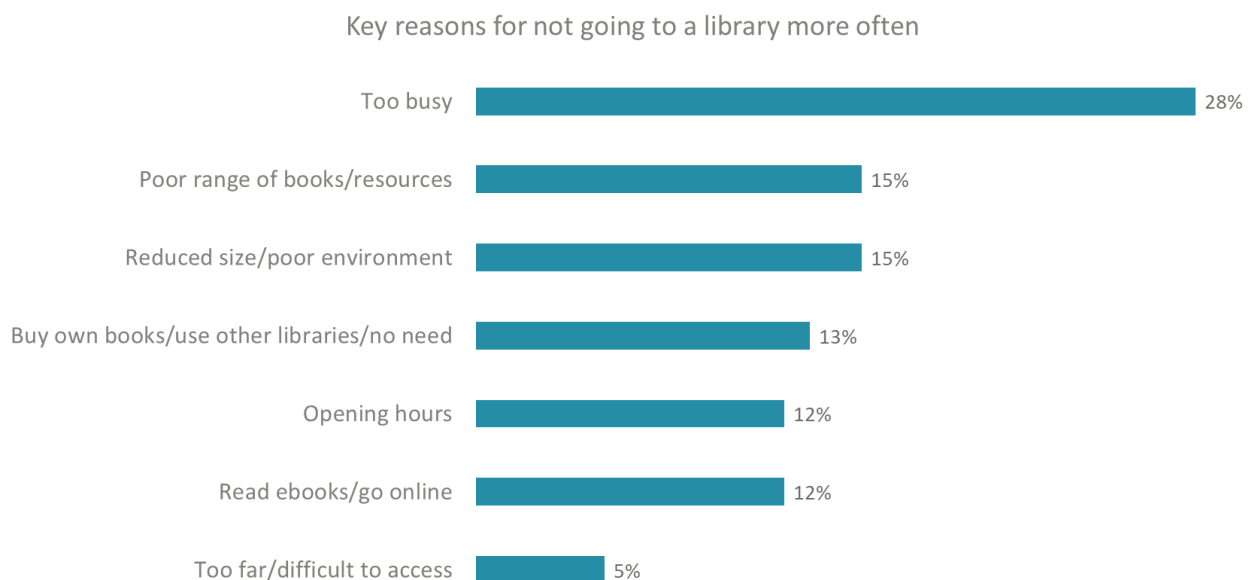| | |
|---|---|
| Too busy | 28% |
| Poor range of books/resources | 15% |
| Reduced size/poor environment | 15% |
| Buy own books/use other libraries/no need | 13% |
| Opening hours | 12% |
| Read ebooks/go online | 12% |
| Too far/difficult to access | 5% |

Figure 5: Q: "What are the main reasons that you don't visit a library more often?" Base: All those who use the library less often than every four months, n=316 (open text; all answers coded and more than one code possible per response)

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[7] https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20people/Resident%20Insight/Northumberland-CC-Residents-Survey-Report-January-2016.pdf

Examples of some of the comments made by survey respondents with regards to reasons for not using the library more often include:

*"Opening times - the library opens after I start work and shuts before I finish work. It is only open a few short hours on a Saturday. It would be so beneficial to open even one night a week later; a Thursday night would be a good night as there are so many people coming in and out attending classes."*

*"Has nothing to offer me other than the occasional item that I need to print. The facilities are too noisy for study, the computers are slow and unreliable, the book stocks are generally dated and there are no current periodicals of interest except those directed at older users. With customer services now occupying the space with benefits and other council departments, the space has become uncomfortable to use for any period of time. Additionally, many of the local homeless community use the space to shelter many of which have severe hygiene problems and some of which have approached me begging for money."*

*"Library is not as good as it used to be when it was in the previous building. Feels like there is less books. No science fiction section. Sunlight is so strong it sometimes makes looking at fiction books difficult. Shelving is very low, by the time I've looked at two sets of fiction shelving I start to get back pain from bending over so much and have to stop browsing. Non-fiction shelving is much better but not as much selection - little or no music books, much fewer foreign language books."*

*"I used to visit the library once a week but since it moved and became small the children's range is poor, therefore I don't go with the children as much."*

Several telephone participants already visit fairly often, and don't feel they need to visit more frequently. Amongst those that would like to go more often, the most common barrier is the **reduced service/poor environment**.

Other barriers mentioned are the opening hours, the lack of events and personal/health issues preventing people from visiting as often as they would like.

*"I would go more often if it was open on more days, it is only open twice a week.  If it is open and it is my day off I will go.  It would be good if it had better opening hours, maybe one evening a week or one weekend."*
*(Bellingham user, Younger, Female)*

*"[Bellingham library] is only open two days a week, so they are more likely to have events on at Hexham library, so I might be interested to go to an event there...although it is 18 miles away."*
*(Bellingham user, Older, Female)*

*"They are closing the libraries because they are not used enough, but they are not used enough because they are cutting the hours and the services."*
*(Morpeth user, Potential volunteer, Male)*

## Accessing library services

When asked how they get to the library, just over half (54%) of library users will usually go by car, 4 in 10 will walk to the library and 8% go by public transport:
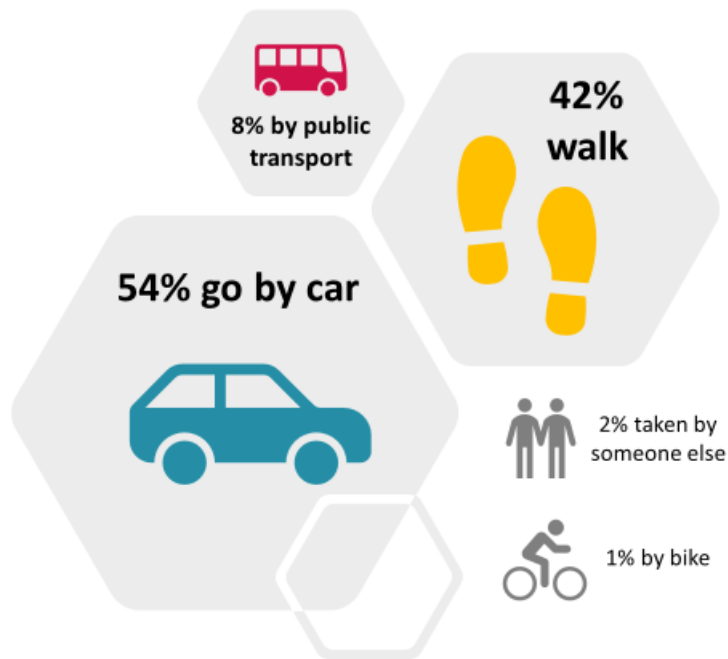
Figure 6: Q: "When you visit the library, how do you usually get there?" Base: All those answering and who have used a Northumberland library in the last 12 months, n=3586 (multiple answers possible). *(Size of shapes are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

## Accessing the library: Opening hours

85% of library users say they are aware of the library opening hours, although 6% say the library is not always open when it says it will be (9% are not aware of the opening times). Whilst different opening hours would not impact on frequency of use for just over half (53%) of respondents, 3 in 10 say they would use the service more often if it was open at different times than it is currently. Of those that would use their local library more often if it were open at different times, the most popular time they would use the library is weekday evenings (see Figure 7):
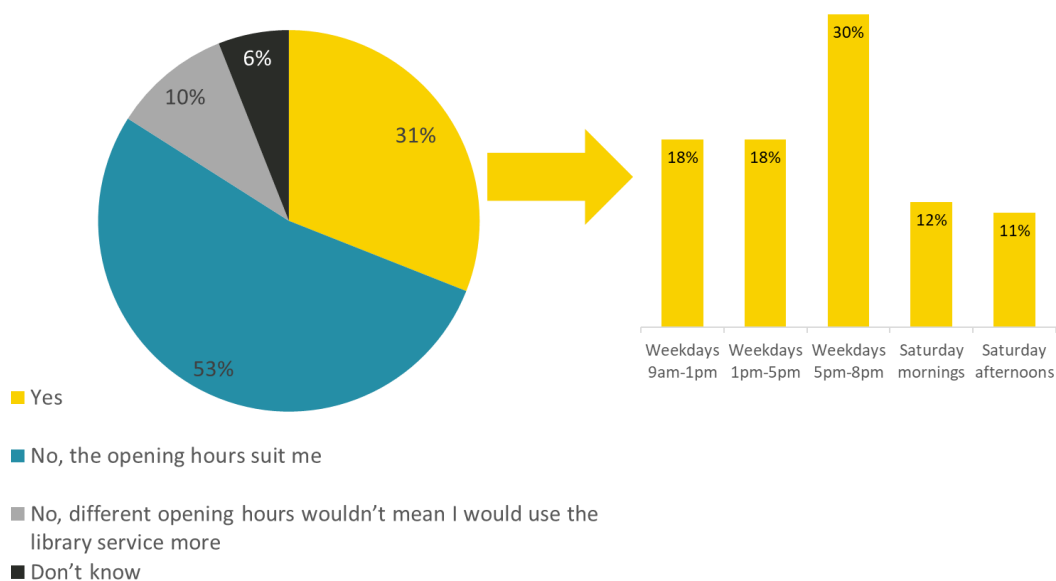
Figure 7: Q: "Would you use your local library service more often if it was open at different times than it is currently?" Base: All respondents who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months, n=3,488 / Q: "What time of day/week would you be most likely to visit your local library service if it was open at this time?" Base: All who would use their local library service more often if it were open at different times, n=1,071.

## The role and importance of the library service

From the overall analysis of both the responses to the survey and the telephone interviews, several key themes have emerged regarding the role the library service plays in the lives of residents and the key needs of residents from their library service.

Whilst residents have many ideas on how to improve libraries, a key concern and the most important aspect for many of those involved in the consultation is simply that their local library exists and that it continues to exist:

**It exists!**

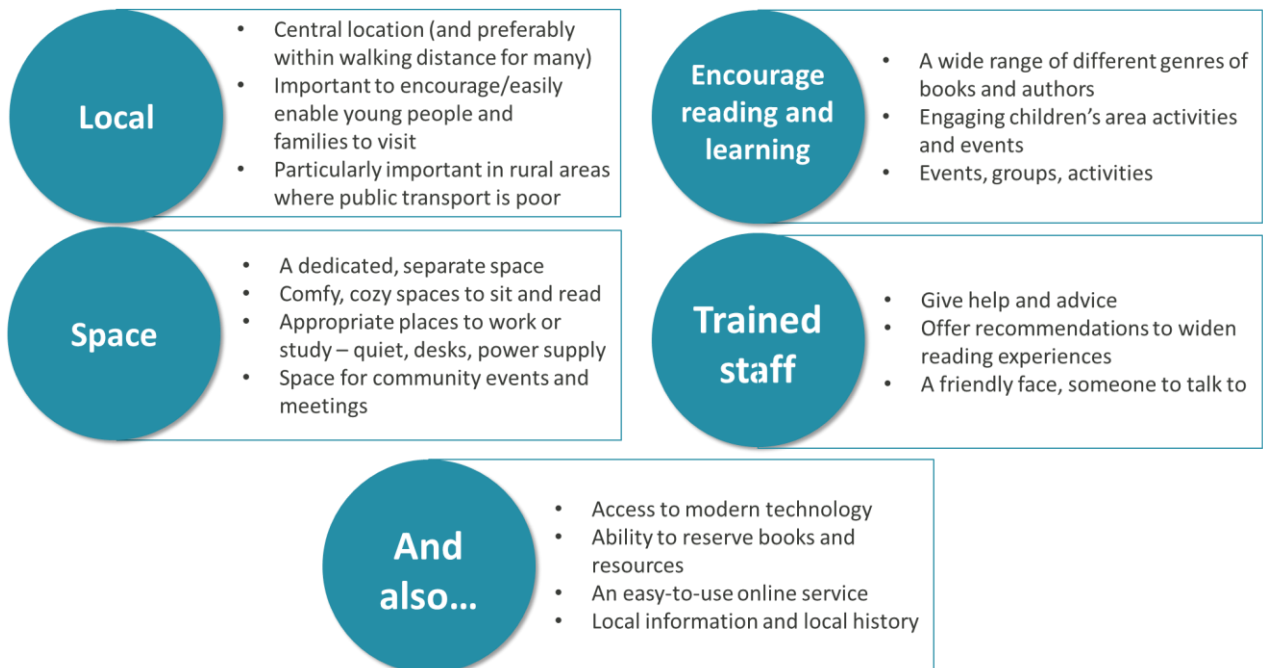Residents are aware that for many, their local library service has been much reduced over recent years.

Whilst many would like to see investment in and improvement of their local library, **above all they are just desperate to keep their library**, even if it is just a small room or some shelves in a corridor of a leisure centre…

**The key elements of the library offer**

In addition to keeping the libraries open, people feel libraries are or should be so much more than just a place to pick up or drop off books:

**Somewhere safe to go –** to pass time, to give purpose to their day, to take children/ grandchildren

**A place to meet people,** both formally and informally

**A community space for groups and events**

**The local library**

**A place to work or study**

**Introduce children to the world of books and reading**

**A place to access technology**

**A place of sanctuary –** a welcoming, relaxed atmosphere

**A place of learning to widen views and experiences,** both in terms of literacy and interests

In order to meet these needs, residents feel the library service needs to have physical library spaces that are local, have space, are run by trained staff and have the required resources and activities that will encourage reading and learning, for example:

**Local**
- Central location (and preferably within walking distance for many)
- Important to encourage/easily enable young people and families to visit
- Particularly important in rural areas where public transport is poor

**Encourage reading and learning**
- A wide range of different genres of books and authors
- Engaging children's area activities and events
- Events, groups, activities

**Space**
- A dedicated, separate space
- Comfy, cozy spaces to sit and read
- Appropriate places to work or study – quiet, desks, power supply
- Space for community events and meetings

**Trained staff**
- Give help and advice
- Offer recommendations to widen reading experiences
- A friendly face, someone to talk to

**And also…**
- Access to modern technology
- Ability to reserve books and resources
- An easy-to-use online service
- Local information and local history

## The wider role of the library in residents' lives

The survey responses suggest that the libraries play an important part in providing routine and structure to people's lives: visiting the library is part of the usual daily or weekly routine for a third of library users, and is often the main purpose of the outing for just over half (see Figure 8):
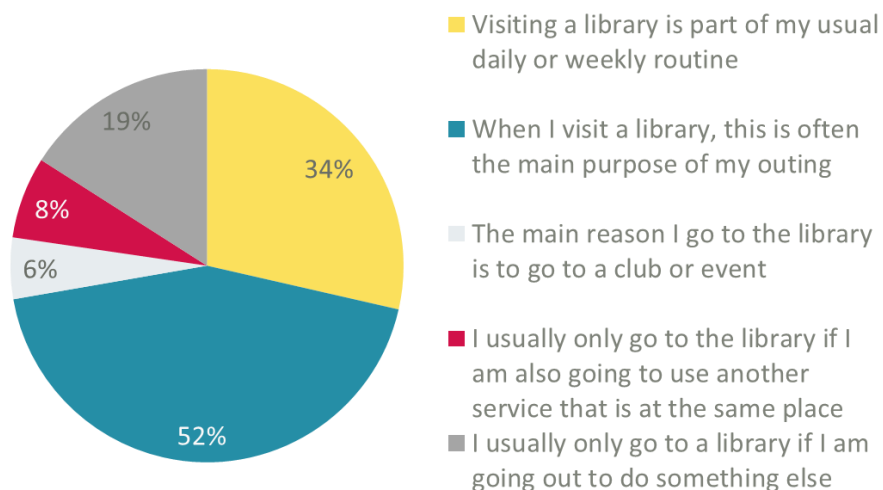


- 34% Visiting a library is part of my usual daily or weekly routine
- 52% When I visit a library, this is often the main purpose of my outing
- 6% The main reason I go to the library is to go to a club or event
- 8% I usually only go to the library if I am also going to use another service that is at the same place
- 19% I usually only go to a library if I am going out to do something else

Figure 8: Q: "Which of the following statements best describes how you use the library service?" Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the last 12 months, n=3,540

Library users who usually visit the library as a 'secondary activity' (i.e. they only go to use another service at the same place or only go if going out to do something else) tend to be younger, and tend to visit the library less frequently than those for whom visiting the library is part of their usual routine/primary activity:

- 65% of those who visit the library as part of their usual daily or weekly routine are aged 55 and over, compared to 32% who are aged 54 or younger
    - 5% are aged 25-34 and 11% are aged 35-44
- 6 in 10 of those who visit the library as a secondary activity visit at least once a month, compared to 73% for whom visiting the library is often the main purpose of their outing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, **accessing free books and resources** is by far the most popular reason for visiting the library, with almost all library users visiting the library for this reason (see Figure 9).

However, there is also evidence that libraries play an important part in the **mental health and wellbeing** of library users:

- The quiet, safe atmosphere of the library is clearly important amongst library users, with 3 in 10 visiting a library because it is a quiet place to visit, and almost a quarter visiting as it is a safe place to visit.
- A fifth find visiting the library helps them feel less lonely or isolated, and 15% feel it is an important place to socialise.
- 18% visit the library as it is somewhere to go to pass time

| | |
|---|---|
| I go to the library to access the free books and resources | 94% |
| I go to the library because it is a quiet place for me to visit | 30% |
| I go to the library because it is a safe place for me to visit | 24% |
| I use the library to spend quality time with my children | 21% |
| Visiting the library helps me to feel less lonely or isolated | 20% |
| I often visit the library as it is somewhere to go to pass time | 18% |
| I go to the library to attend an event (such as Story and… | 18% |
| The library is an important place for me to socialise with others | 15% |
| The library is the main way I access computers or the internet | 11% |
| I use the library to look for work | 4% |

Figure 9: Q: "Which of the following statements apply to your use of library services? Please choose all that apply." Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months (n=3, 543)

The role the library plays in people's lives also appears to be increasingly important as people get older:

- Of those that feel the library is an important place to socialise, 63% are aged 55 and over (31% are aged 54 and under)
- Of those that feel visiting the library helps them to feel less lonely or isolated, 61% are aged 55 and over (34% are aged 54 and under)

Several older residents participating in the telephone interviews spoke of the increased role of the library since they have retired, in particular how they visit the library more frequently now than when they were working and how it provides a chance to socialise:

*"The library is an important thing in our village. It is social, it gives people a purpose to go somewhere." (Corbridge user, Older, Female)*

*"I mainly go to take books out and also to chat to the librarian who I get on very well with. (Lynemouth user, Older, Male)*

*"It has a pleasant atmosphere, always people coming and going and everybody says hello. I feel very comfortable there." (Wooler user, Volunteering, Female)*

People who are **out of work** are also significantly more likely to say that visiting the library helps them to feel less lonely or isolated compared to people in either full or part-time employment:

- 44% of those that are out of work but not looking for work and 37% of those that are out of work and looking for work say that visiting the library helps them to feel less lonely or isolated compared to 19% of those in either full or part time employment.

### Libraries as a means of accessing technology

For 1 in 10 respondents, the library is the main way that they access computers or the internet and this is higher amongst those who are looking for work and also those who are aged 55 and over:

- For 46% of those that are **out of work and looking for work**, the library is the main way that they access computers or the internet, and 44% use the library to look for work.
- 6 in 10 of those who say that the library is the only way that they access computers/internet being are aged 55 and over

### The role in children's and families lives

Of those who go to the library to spend quality time with their children, 77% have a child under the age of 5 and 76% have a child between the ages of 5 and 11. This drops to 44% amongst those with a child aged between 12 and 16.

Several participants in the telephone interviews are parents and grandparents, and almost all who have children say they primarily visit the library with their children.

Some of the parents interviewed feel they would visit the library more often if the children's areas were larger or better equipped and if there were more activities put on for the children. Both of these circumstances often appear to be hindered by the small spaces available within local libraries, for example:

*"The main reason I go is take my son to the Lego club, to let him socialise with other children and also pick up books. There is some space to sit and read with the kids but if there are more than a couple of families in there, it gets a bit cramped. It can get very cramped at Lego club. It would be good if there was an area for craft or drawing, that would encourage more kids to go." (Bedlington user, Parent, Male)*

Several participants mention the importance of introducing children to reading through access to physical books, and how this is potentially becoming increasingly important in the digital age, e.g.:

*"There seems now to be a focus on everything being digital, and I do wonder where does this fit in with literacy for children. They need to be reading books." (South Beach user, Parent, Male)*

## Perceived importance of offering different library services

In the self-completion survey, library users were asked to rate how important it is that their local library offers particular services. All listed services are considered important for the majority of library users, although lending hardback or paperback copies of books is important to almost all library users, as shown in Figure 10:

### How important is it to you personally that local libraries offer the following services?

Legend: ■ Important ■ Not important ■ Don't know / not applicable

| Service | Important | Not important | Don't know / not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lending books (hardback or paperback) | 99% | | |
| A space that the community can use | 85% | 9% | 6% |
| Local history or local studies resources | 83% | 10% | 7% |
| Computers/internet access | 80% | 15% | 5% |
| Visitor information service | 79% | 14% | 7% |
| Printing facilities | 78% | 16% | 7% |
| Holding groups or events | 76% | 13% | 10% |
| A dedicated study area | 76% | 15% | 9% |
| Lending audiobooks (including eAudio service) | 72% | 17% | 10% |
| Lending digital books (eBooks) | 68% | 21% | 11% |
| Digital skills courses | 61% | 23% | 16% |
| Offer information on healthy living | 57% | 27% | 15% |

Figure 10: Base: All those who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months, n=3,516 (Net 'Important': Very/quite important; Net 'Not important': 'Not very/not at all important')

**The provision of paper books** is clearly considered much more important by library users than the provision of digital or audio books. In the telephone interviews, there were a mix of people who read only paper copies of books and those who read paper books and ebooks, but almost all prefer the experience of reading physical copies of books. A couple of people mentioned that they spend a

lot of time looking at a screen at work and so prefer to read paper copies of books to relax, and others mentioned that they can find ebooks difficult to read, particularly in the evening.

In the Youth Council engagement sessions, the lending of hardback and paperback books was also rated as the most important service by participants, followed by the lending of digital/ebooks.

**Community and local services** are of particular importance, with 85% saying it is important that local libraries offer a space that the community can use and 83% saying offering local history/local studies resources is important.

Although the majority of respondents do not use the computers or printing facilities, 8 in 10 respondents feel that it is important that libraries offer this **access to IT facilities.** This was reflected in the telephone interviews, with participants often mentioning how vital it is to provide access to such facilities for people who are looking for work or who cannot afford to have computers or printers at home. In the survey, printing facilities are of key importance to people who are out of work and looking for work, with three-quarters saying this is 'very important' (significantly higher than almost all other sub-groups).

There are some interesting significant differences in importance of offering different services amongst demographic sub-groups:

- Library users who consider **offering hardback/paperback copies of books** as 'very important' is lower amongst 19-24 year olds than those aged 25 and over – however 81% of 19-24 year olds do still consider this 'very important'.
- **Holding groups and events** is more important for those in the **25-44 year old** age group compared to those aged 45 and above (63% of those aged 25-44 consider it 'very important' that this is offered compared to 43% of those aged 45 and over), and is more important for **females** (79%, compared to 68% of males).

When asked if there are any services that local libraries do not provide that they would like them to provide, the majority of respondents (20%) said that they could not think of anything or that the library is fine as it is*. However, two notable services that respondents would like their local library to provide are **more events or groups** (17%) and **more space**, particularly quiet/study spaces (16%).

* Percentages are based on a random sample of 334, representing 25% of a total of 1360 answers; answers can occur in more than one category.

"Small" is one of the most common words used by participants in the telephone interviews when asked to describe their local library, and it is clear that the size of the space given over to many local libraries has been reduced over recent years, e.g.:

*"It is very small, just one big room. It used to be upstairs as well but the youth initiative now have that space." (Corbridge user, Volunteering, Female)*

*"It is not just about the resources and the services offered, it is about the space too…To do well at the reading offer and studying, you need quiet spaces to work and quiet spaces to sit and read – and the library needs to encourage this. Not just a walk through, drop off and pick up service, although this may be all that some people need." (Ashington user, Volunteering, Male)*

# Perceptions of the Northumberland library service
## Overall rating of local libraries

Library users rate their local library highly, with half (51%) giving it an 'excellent' rating overall and a further 37% rating the service as 'good' (see Figure 11):
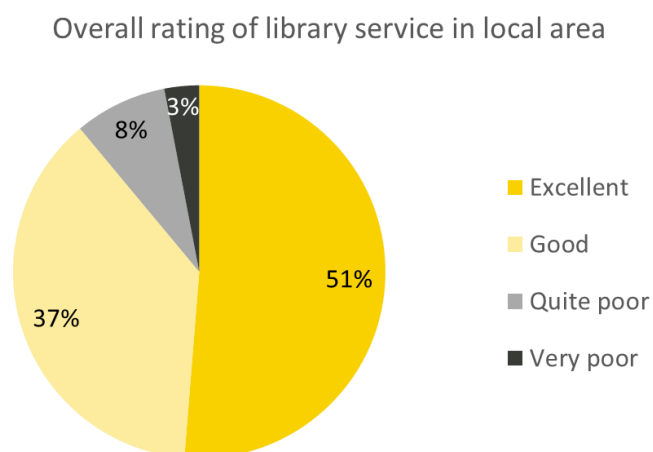
**Overall rating of library service in local area**



Figure 11: Q: "Overall, how would you rate the library service in your local area?" Base: All those who have used a local library service in the past 12 months, n=3,561

These satisfaction levels are much higher than those recorded in the 2015 resident survey, where 64% were satisfied overall with the local library service[8].

Library users aged over 75 are more likely to rate their local library as 'Excellent' than those aged between 35 and 74:

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[8] https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Northumberland-Knowledge/NK%20people/Resident%20Insight/Northumberland-CC-Residents-Survey-Report-January-2016.pdf

## Overall rating by age

Legend: Excellent · Good · Quite poor · Very poor

| Age group | Excellent | Good | Quite poor | Very poor |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Under 24 (n=81) | 56% | 31% | 5% | 6% |
| 25-34 (n=220) | 54% | 37% | 5% | 3% |
| 35-44 (n=462) | 48% | 39% | 10% | 3% |
| 45-54 (n=448) | 48% | 42% | 7% | 3% |
| 55-64 (n=705) | 49% | 39% | 10% | 2% |
| 65-74 (n=903) | 51% | 37% | 8% | 3% |
| 75 or over (n=484) | 61% | 32% | 6% | 2% |

Figure12x: Overall rating of local library service by age groupings.

**More frequent users** of libraries are more likely to rate their local library higher than those who use the library less frequently, as shown by Figure 13. Library users who visit at least once a month are significantly more likely to give an 'Excellent' rating overall than those who visit less often, whereas those who visit less often than every six months are more likely to give a 'Very poor' rating overall:

## Overall rating by frequency of use

Legend: Excellent · Good · Quite poor · Very poor · Don't know

| Frequency | Excellent | Good | Quite poor | Very poor | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| At least once a month (n=2673) | 56% | 34% | 7% | 2% | |
| Every two to three months (n=553) | 39% | 47% | 11% | 3% | |
| Once every four to six months (n=191) | 26% | 51% | 17% | 5% | 1% |
| Less often than every six months (n=132) | 26% | 42% | 11% | 11% | 10% |
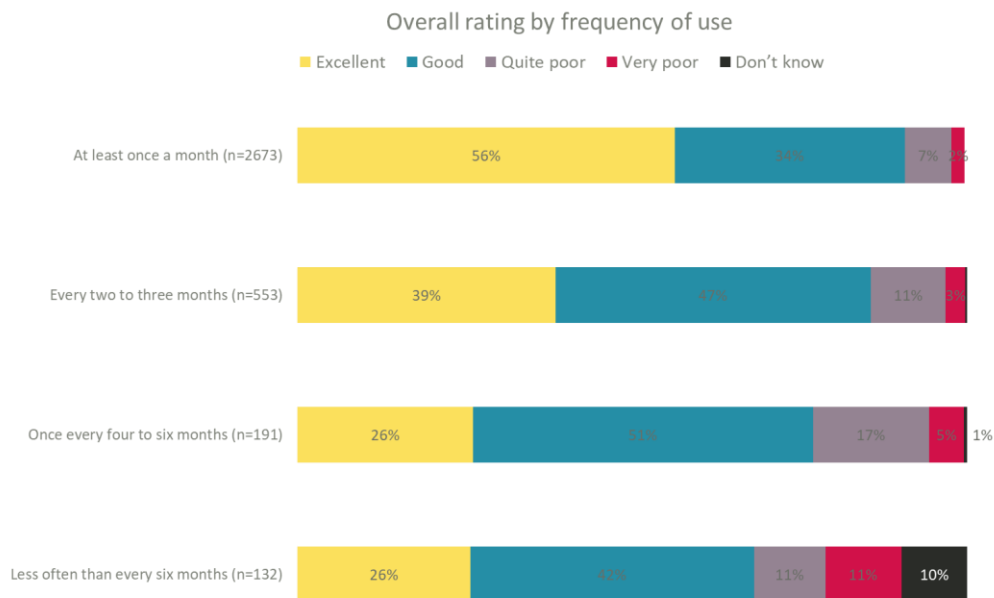
Figure 13: Overall rating of local library service frequency of use

Similarly, those who visit a library as part of their daily or weekly routine are significantly more likely to give an excellent rating overall (62%) than those who only go if using a different service (49%) or those who visit if they are doing something else (40%).

### Library service strengths

When asked what they feel the local library service currently does well, almost half of comments mention the **library staff** (see Figure 14), with staff frequently referred to as being 'helpful' and 'friendly', e.g.:

*Staff are helpful and courteous.*

*Excellent friendly and well-informed staff. Welcoming environment.*

*The advice from the librarian when she is there. She shares names of authors or books we would enjoy.*

The fact that the library offers free access to books and/or that the range of books, the reservation service and that it is an essential service and/or everything about the service is good are all in the top four most often mentioned strengths:
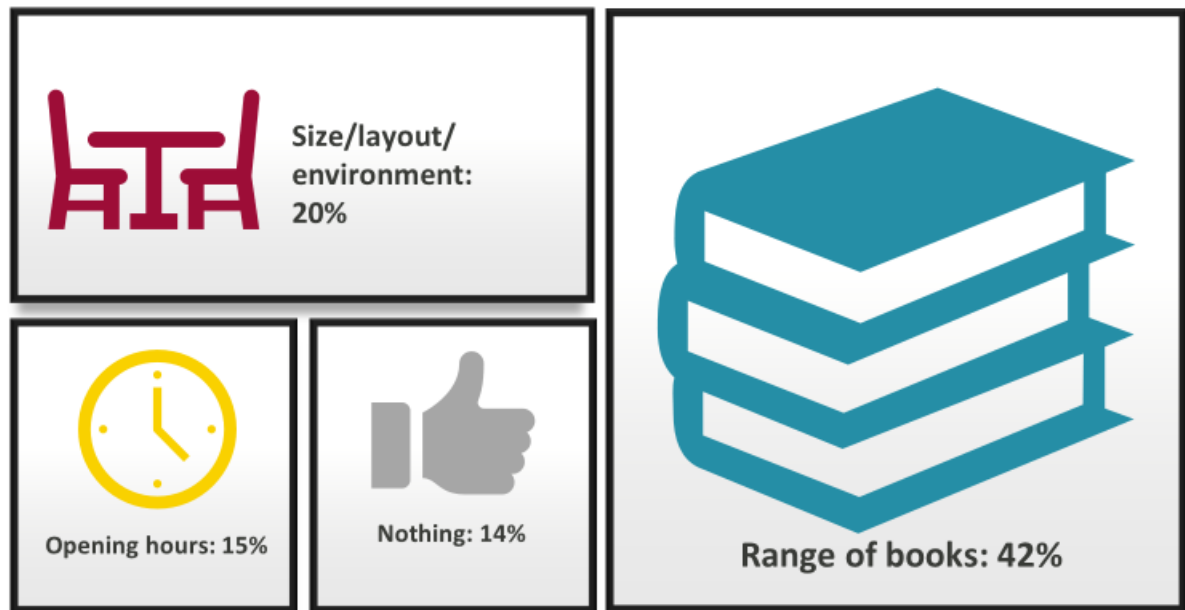


Figure 14: Top 4 most often mentioned areas where library service is performing well (open text box answer). *(Size of boxes/icons are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

Percentages are based on a random sample of 340, representing 11% of a total of 3,247 answers; answers can occur in more than one category.

Other strengths mentioned in more than 5% of coded answers include:

- The environment/atmosphere: 9%
- Access to internet/computers/printers: 8%
- Events/groups: 7%
- Children's services (books, activities, events): 7%

- Information service, esp. local information: 6%

The following infographic provides a case study of a library user who rates their local library as excellent:

**Views from a Haltwhistle library user:** a case study from the telephone interviews

## Frequent user of Haltwhistle library

**Profile:**
- Female
- Single parent
- Works full-time
- Visits Haltwhistle library about once every 2-3 weeks

The staff are brilliant. I often read books in a series and they will order the series in order for me. It is an organised, tidy, clean and friendly library.

**What does the library do well?**
- Staff are helpful
- Online order service
- Organised, clean and tidy
- Friendly, community atmosphere
- Always active and busy
- Seating area for children
- Good selection of books
- Public toilet
- Only good space for community events

**What could be improved?**
- Not much!
- Not always got books in large print

### Areas for improvement

When asked what they feel the local library service needs to improve on, the most often mentioned area is the **range of books** offered. Just over 4 in 10 comments relate to the need for the library service to improve their range of printed materials, e.g.:

*Wider range of books. Seems to concentrate on popular fiction especially crime at the expense of more literary & world fiction. Non-fiction looks dated.*

*Increase the range of books and authors- very limited at the moment.*

*Books - there has been a continual downsizing of the book stock. Many books are available to request but not enough promotion of new titles.*

A fifth of comments referred to the **size of the library, the layout, or the environment**, e.g.:

*Needs greater space to entice youngsters to return and to be able to hold activities in an attractive space. Space to advertise needed. Currently library just looks like a corner of the foyer of sports centre- message conveyed is that it's not an important place.*

*Having better, bigger, and appropriate environment for reading and learning. Having space for children and adults to work and research.*

*I don't think the library is now big enough since the council took over the area downstairs where the children's section used to be.*

Longer opening hours was mentioned by 15% of respondents, and a further 14% said that nothing needed to be improved (see Figure 15):



Size/layout/environment: 20%

Opening hours: 15%

Nothing: 14%

Range of books: 42%

Figure 15: Top 4 most often mentioned areas where library service needs to improve (open text box answer) *(Size of boxes/icons are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

Percentages are based on a random sample of 296, representing 10% of a total of 2926 answers; answers can occur in more than one category.

Increasing the opening hours and the size of the library space were also two of the most often mentioned suggestions for improvement during the telephone interviews, along with the environment or location of the library, e.g.:

*"In Ashington, the only thing is the noise. When they built it, they didn't put any doors on the library, so it is a bit of a walk through. There is a soft play area and sometimes it is very noisy." (Ashington user, Volunteering, Male)*

*"It would be good if there was a space with soft furnishings, or spaces for tables. It could do with a better stock of books, but there isn't much room." (Bedlington user, Parent, Male)*

*"The outside looks run-down, it looks like a derelict building and is not very inviting, but it is a hidden gem once you get past the exterior." (South Beach user, Parent, Male)*

The **range of books** is also seen as an area for improvement amongst the telephone interviewees. Whilst the reservation service is well liked, people would like to see a wider range of genres on offer and for book stocks to be changed or rotated more frequently. Several participants feel there is too much emphasis on particular fiction genres, such as crime and romance, and not enough variety of books on offer, e.g.:

*"I went into Berwick library and I was appalled by the selection of books. I was deeply shocked at how poor the book selection was. All the books are from the same genres: romance or thriller. There are no classics, it is so dumbed down. If you don't put something in front of people as an idea, you won't get people reading. People will take what they are given. I feel strongly that if you don't help people towards good, stimulating reading, they won't read it." (Mobile library user, Older, Female)*

The following infographic provides a case study of a library user who rates their local library as quite poor:

## Telephone interview case study: Suggestions for improvement

### Frequent user of Berwick library

**Profile:**
- Female, aged 25-34
- Employed and studying part-time
- Often uses Berwick library to study

The benefits desk is not screened off in any way. They have not even moved any bookshelves to try and screen it off. You can hear everything, people's financial details, their national insurance number. **There is no privacy.**

**What could be improved?**
- Screening off benefits desks
- Provide dedicated study areas with power supply
- Quiet spaces
- Timetable of activities/events to help know when it will be quiet
- Provide toilets
- Update software and have more modern computers
- Provide water
- Improve BorrowBox service – shouldn't have to wait for ebooks

I find it easier to study away from home. I have to take my own laptop as the **computers** at the library are really out of date and **old-fashioned**. But there are **no dedicated study areas**, and there are no plug sockets. I have seen a man sitting on top of a bookshelf so that he can charge his laptop at the information desk to carry on working!

**Overall rating of individual libraries**

By looking at the overall rating of their local library service by the individual library that each respondent uses most frequently, we can extrapolate the rating of the different individual libraries.

From this analysis, it is clear that some libraries are rated much higher overall than other libraries. The following chart shows the overall ratings for each library service as given by the respondents who use them the most often (note: libraries where the sample size of respondents is less than 50 are not included).

Key interesting findings from this analysis include:

- Almost all libraries are rated positively (rated either 'excellent' or 'good' overall by the majority), with the exception of Ponteland library.
- Those who use **Ponteland** and **Cramlington** libraries most frequently give significantly lower overall ratings for their local library service – both of which are housed within leisure centres.

In the Northumberland residents survey, Ponteland also scores the lowest satisfaction ratings (21% of Ponteland residents are either very/quite satisfied with the library) and Cramlington is also in the bottom quartile (37% very/quite satisfied).
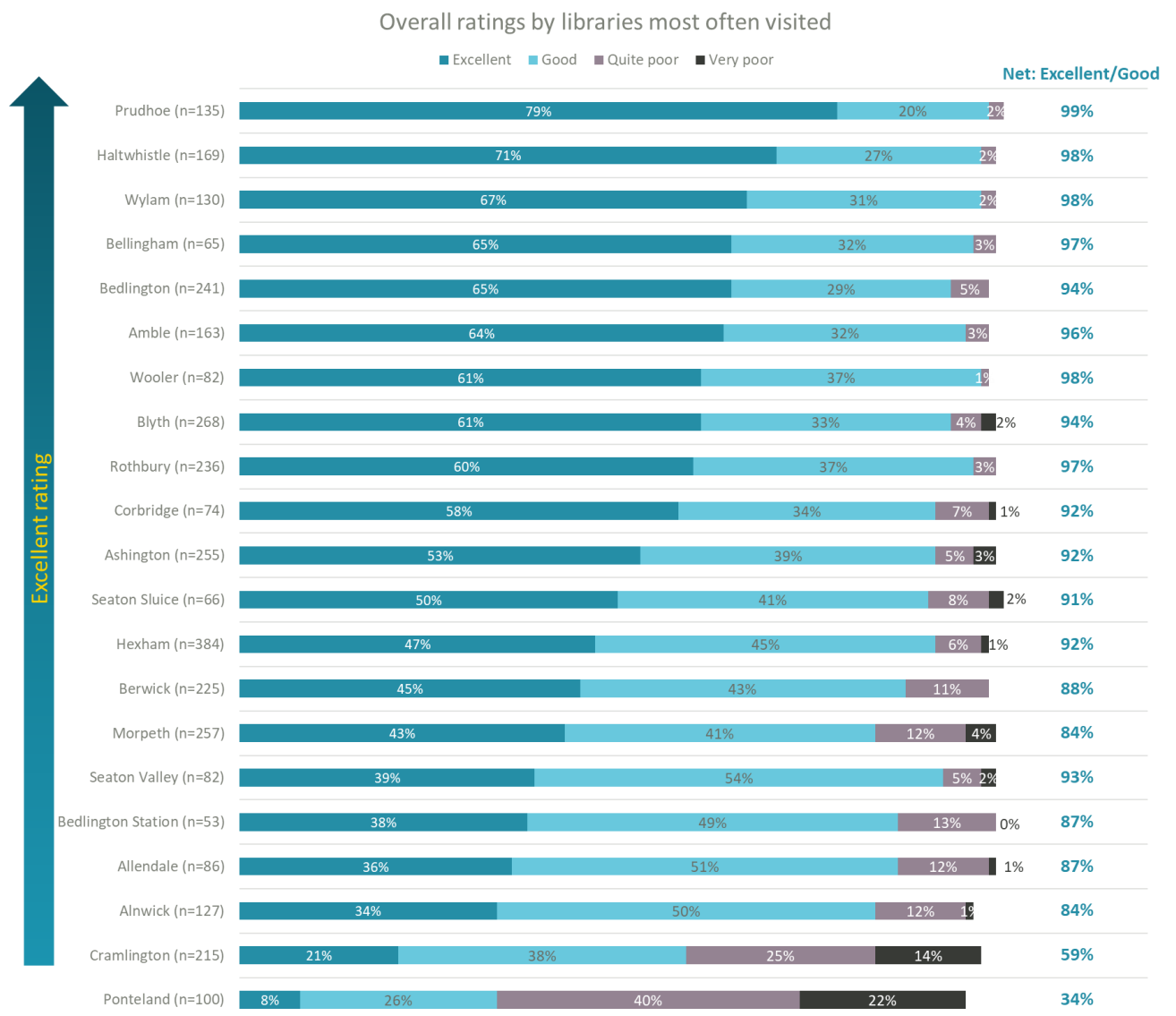


Figure 16: Overall rating of local library by library most often visited

The following infographics provide two case studies; one from a Ponteland library user and one from a Cramlington user:

**Views from a Ponteland library user:** a case study from the telephone interviews

## Frequent user of Ponteland library

**Profile:**

- Female, full-time mum of two small children
- Currently looking for work

**What does the library do well?**

- The online order service
- The self-service machine

**What could be improved?**
- A more welcoming environment
- Better range of books
- Have staff more often
- Places to sit and read with the children

It's **small**, it's in a leisure centre. It feels like an **after thought**... I tend to just reserve books and go in to pick them up. I don't spend much time in there, it is **not an environment that you want to spend time in with the kids**.

I would use the library more if the librarian was there more often, and if they had things on for the kids; story time, things like that. It would be good if there were comfy chairs to sit and read to the kids, but at the moment it is a bit of a **thoroughfare** for people walking through the leisure centre.

**Views from a Cramlington library user:** a case study from the telephone interviews

## Frequent user of Cramlington library

**Profile:**

- Female, aged 25-34
- Employed full-time

**What does the library do well?**

- The online order service
- Handy if going to the gym at the leisure centre
- Self-service always open

**What could be improved?**

- The building; the space
- Hard to find a book, hard to navigate
- Having library staff available

It's quite small, it's **not somewhere I really access to browse**, I just tend to order books online then pick them up and drop them back at the self-service... They have just shoved the library into the sports centre without thinking about it.

**It doesn't feel like a library.** It just feels like a drop off and pick up. I used to spend more time in the old library because you could browse and look at the books, there was more space. I think it would be **quite intimidating** if you are not used to going to the sports centre.

## Perceptions of library services

Library users rate the library staff particularly highly, with almost all (96%) agreeing that **staff are helpful**, and 92% agreeing that **staff are knowledgeable** (see Figure 17). This is consistent both with the findings from the open question on current strengths of the service and also from the telephone interviews.

Almost all the participants in the telephone interviews spoke very highly of the staff at their local library. It seems that many staff members know individual users well, and will give recommendations which library users very much appreciate:

*"The librarian is wonderful. She goes out of here way to help, she always greets me by name."*
*(Corbridge user, Older, Female)*

*"The staff all have a good demeanour; they are helpful and give advice but are not intrusive."*
*(Alnwick, Younger, Female)*

*"The staff know the regulars. Through talking to one of the staff members, they put me in touch with the netball club and now I volunteer at the netball club." (Wooler user, Volunteering, Female)*

The majority of library users responding to the survey also agree that their local library is a pleasant place to visit, and that it is easy to access.

However, just over a fifth (22%) do not agree that their local library offers a good range of books and 17% do not agree that it is useful to have libraries at the same places as other services.

There appears to be a lack of awareness around other libraries in the area, with almost half unaware of whether libraries in the local area offer similar levels of service. Awareness of whether local libraries offer a good range of events or groups, and whether they have modern IT are also relatively low:



| | Agree (Strongly/slightly agree) |
|---|---|
| The staff at the library are helpful (n=3,562) — 87% / 9% / 2% / 2% | **96%** |
| I feel welcome in my local library/libraries (n=3,577) — 85% / 11% / 2% / 1% | **96%** |
| My local library is a pleasant place to visit (n=3,570) — 78% / 15% / 4% / 3% / 2% | **93%** |
| The staff at the library are knowledgeable (n=3,542) — 79% / 13% / 2% / 5% | **92%** |
| It is easy to access my local library (n=3,553) — 75% / 17% / 5% / 2% / 0% | **92%** |
| My local library offers a good range of books (n=3,559) — 41% / 35% / 14% / 8% / 2% | **76%** |
| It is useful to have the library at the same place as other services (n=3,531) — 47% / 23% / 9% / 8% / 13% | **70%** |
| The local libraries have modern IT facilities (n=3,496) — 36% / 28% / 6% / 4% / 25% | **65%** |
| My local library offers a good range of events/groups (n=3, 486) — 25% / 24% / 8% / 6% / 37% | **49%** |
| The libraries in the local area offer similar levels of service (n=3,477) — 19% / 17% / 9% / 6% / 49% | **36%** |

■ Strongly agree  ■ Slightly agree  ■ Slightly disagree  ■ Strongly disagree  ■ Don't know / Not applicable

Figure 17: Q: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months.

Library users who rate their local library as 'excellent' or 'good' overall are more likely to agree with each of these statements than users who gave a 'very/quite poor' rating overall. Similarly, those who use the library the most frequently are generally more likely to give higher ratings to these statements than those who use the libraries the least often (with the exception of 'it is useful to have the library at the same place as other services').

Whilst the results paint a positive picture overall across the majority of these attributes, looking at individual libraries (based on libraries most visited), it appears that this is not the case for all libraries.

Library users who use **Ponteland library** are more likely to disagree with the following statements than the average:

- **I feel welcome in my local library:** 35% of those who visit Ponteland most often disagree with this statement compared to 3% of all library users
- **My local library is a pleasant place to visit:** 55% disagree compared to 7% overall
- **The local libraries have modern IT facilities:** 38**%** disagree compared to 10% overall
- **My local library offers a good range of books:** 68% disagree compared to 22% overall
- **My library offers a good range of events/groups**: 47% disagree compared to 14% overall
- **The staff are helpful:** 25% compared to 3% overall
- **The staff at the library are knowledgeable:** 24% compared to 3% overall

Library users who use **Cramlington library** are more likely to disagree with the following statements than the average library user:

- **My local library is a pleasant place to visit:** 38% disagree compared to 7% overall
- **My local library offers a good range of books**: 51% disagree compared to 22% overall
- **My library offers a good range of events/groups:** 28% disagree compared to 14% overall
- **It is useful to have the library at the same place as other services:** 34% disagree compared to 17% overall

In addition, those who use Allendale library most often are also more likely to disagree with 'My library offers a good range of events/groups' with a third disagreeing compared to 14% overall.

There are some interesting differences between sub-groups of respondents:

- Those that are out of work and looking for work are more likely to slightly disagree (20%) with 'The local libraries have modern IT facilities' than all other groups, with the exception of carers.
- 9% of library users who consider themselves to have a physical impairment/disability and 10% of those who consider themselves to have a sensory impairment slightly disagree with 'It is easy to access my local library', which is significantly higher than those with no disability (4%)

- Females are more likely to disagree than males with 'My library offers a good range of events/groups' (15% of females disagree compared to 9% males)

## Awareness of library services

The lending of books (hardback/paperback) and access to computers are by far the most known services provided by local libraries (see Figure 18).

At the other end of the scale, there appear to be some fairly significant gaps in either the provision of services and/or the awareness of services offered by local libraries amongst library users, particularly around offering digital skills courses, offering information on healthy living and the lending of digital books.

**Does your local library offer the following services?**

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

| Service | Yes | No | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lending books (hardback or paperback) | 99% | | 0% |
| Access to computers | 91% | 1% | 8% |
| Free internet access | 77% | 1% | 21% |
| Local advice or information service | 73% | 3% | 24% |
| Offering local history or local studies resources | 64% | 2% | 34% |
| Holds groups or events | 62% | 4% | 33% |
| Printing facilities | 61% | 2% | 37% |
| Lending audiobooks (including eAudio service) | 60% | 1% | 39% |
| Visitor information service | 58% | 8% | 34% |
| Lending digital books (eBooks) | 51% | 1% | 48% |
| Dedicated study areas | 49% | 16% | 35% |
| Offers information on healthy living | 25% | 5% | 70% |
| Digital skills courses | 13% | 6% | 81% |

Figure 18: Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months (n=3,552)

Survey respondents were given an open text box to include any other services that their library provides. 202 respondents entered a comment, and of these the majority (27%) refer to either council services being located in the same space, or other organisations (such as a museum, pre-school/play area, community bank) being located in the same building (14%).

## Usage of library services

Usage of library services follows a similar pattern to awareness of library services with the borrowing of physical copies of books being the most used service by far, used by 92% of library users in the

last 12 months. Aside from borrowing books, the next most popular service is accessing IT services (see Figure 19).

| Service | % |
|---|---|
| Borrowed a book (hardback or paperback) | 92% |
| Used a computer | 28% |
| Accessed the internet | 27% |
| Printing facilities | 24% |
| Used local history or local studies resources | 24% |
| Used the visitor information service | 24% |
| Attended a group or event | 22% |
| Used a dedicated study area | 12% |
| Borrowed a digital book (eBook) | 11% |
| Borrowed an audiobook (including eAudio service) | 10% |
| Accessed information on healthy living | 5% |
| Attended a digital skills course | 2% |

Figure 19: Q: And which of the following library services have you used in the last 12 months, either for yourself or on behalf of someone else? Base: All who have used a Northumberland library in the past 12 months (n=3,529)

There are some significant differences in the use of library services by **gender**.

Females are more likely than males to have:

- Borrowed a book (93% of females compared to 88% of males)
- Borrowed a digital book (12% compared to 9% of males)
- Borrowed an audio book (12% compared to 7% of males)
- Attended a group or event (24% compared to 15% of males)

Whereas, males are more likely than females to have:

- Used a computer (35% of males compared to 26% of females)
- Accessed the internet (31% of males compared to 25% of females)
- Used local history or local studies resources (30% of males compared to 22% of females)
- Used a dedicated study area (17% of males compared to 10% of females)

The library appears to play an important role in providing access to technology for people not currently in employment.  In particular, those currently looking for work are more likely to have used a computer, accessed the internet, used printing facilities and/or attended a digital skills course than users who are in full or part time employment (see Table 1):

|  | Used a computer | Accessed the internet | Used printing facilities | Attended a digital skills course |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **In full-time employment** (n=2,009) | 33% | 31% | 25% | 1% |
| **In part-time employment** (n=1,944) | 30% | 29% | 27% | 1% |
| **Out of work and looking for work** (n=236) | 68% ⬆ | 64% ⬆ | 53% ⬆ | 14% ⬆ |

⬆   Significantly higher than both those in full-time and part-time employment

Table 1: Usage of library service by work/life situation

A third of students have used a dedicated study area, which is significantly higher than those in employment.

At the other end of the scale, the **least used services** are accessing a digital skills course, accessing information on healthy living and borrowing either an audible book or digital book, which is potentially not too surprising given the low levels of awareness that local libraries offer these services.

Looking at the responses from the telephone interviewees, it is possible to uncover potential reasons for such low usage of these services:

**Digital skills courses:** Amongst the participants of the telephone interviews, the majority did not feel they would benefit from a digital skills course.  A couple of older participants did say they would be interested in such a course but were not aware whether their local library offered this.

**Healthy living:** Almost all telephone interview participants would look to sources outside of the library for self-help or healthy living information first; searching online in particular or looking in places such as GP surgeries or leisure centres.  When prompted, many would not expect libraries to provide this type of information, other than perhaps through providing access to the internet (to allow people to search for this information), or potentially in the provision of some relevant books.

**Borrowing ebooks:** The majority of telephone interviewees who have attempted to explore or use the ebooks service appear to have found this service both difficult to use and not as good as they had expected.   In particular, participants mention:

- The service is not intuitive, and is quite difficult to use – several mention trying to borrow books and 'giving up' as it was too difficult
- The books are often out on loan, and it is often not possible to borrow books instantly
- The inability to load ebooks from the library onto a Kindle

For example:

*"I tried to get online with the ebooks, but it is not straightforward at all, and I used to lecture in computing!  It was quite a chore." (Ashington user, Volunteering, Male)*

*"I have got Borrow Box but I was quite disappointed with it. I thought it would be like Audible or Kindle, where you can borrow whatever you want whenever you need it, but you still have to reserve a book and wait ages for it." (Berwick user, Younger, Female)*

*"I have not been able to get to grips with the RB Digital app. I tried it and found it hard to navigate. I thought I would have a browse for a book but it wasn't easy and felt like a bit of a chore." (Ponteland user, Parent, Female)*

Survey respondents were given an open text box to include any other services that they have used at their local library. 206 respondents commented, and of these the majority (15%) refer to using council services that are located in the same space.

However, more than 1 in 10 (13%) of comments refer to visiting the library to either read/browse and/or socialise.

## Mobile Library Service

In total, 8% of all survey respondents have used the mobile library service in the past 12 months, and of these, almost 8 in 10 (78%) use the mobile library most frequently of all library services.

9 in 10 mobile library users use the service at least once a month.

The remainder of this section on the mobile library service is based on the results from respondents for whom the mobile library is the library service they use the most often - a total of 255 respondents, representing 8% of the mobile library service users (the Mobile Library Service engages with 3,033 registered users).

**Profile of mobile library users:**

Mobile library users are more likely to:

- have **no children** living at home with them (93% compared to 73% of total)
- be **aged 65 or over** (74% compared to 39% of the total)
- consider themselves to have a **physical impairment/disability** (18% compared to 9% of total).

As in the total respondent population, 72% of mobile library users responding to the survey are female.

Male: 27%
**Female: 72%**

**93%** do not have any children living at home

**74%** are aged 65 or over

18% consider themselves to have a physical impairment/ disability
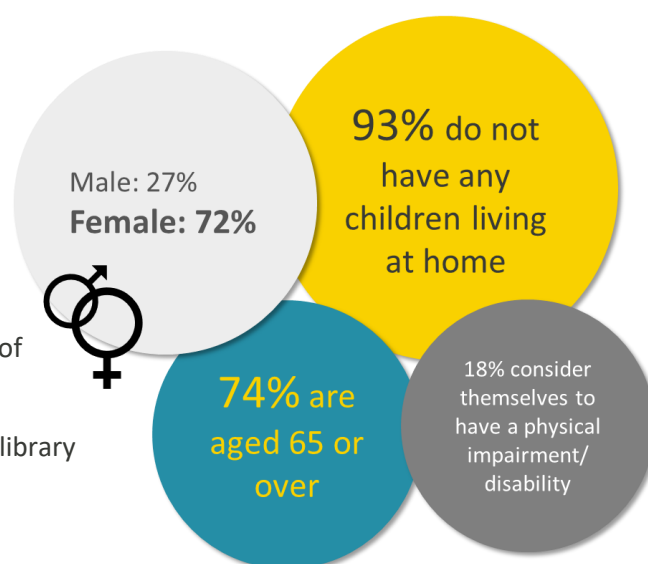
**Overall rating**

The mobile library service is rated very highly, with 9 in 10 giving a positive rating overall:

## Overall rating of mobile library service – by those who use the mobile service most frequently



- Excellent
- Good
- Quite poor
- Very poor

58%
32%
9%
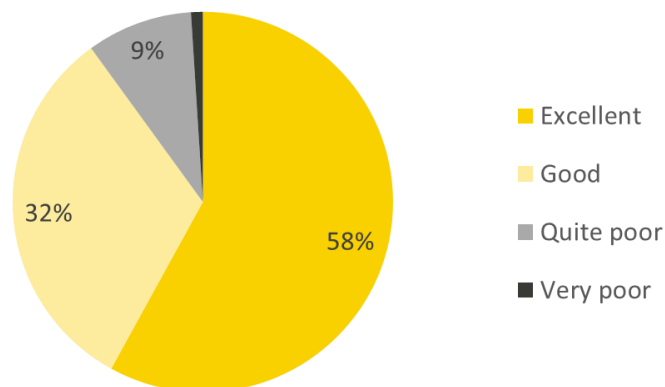
Figure 21 Q: "Overall, how would you rate the mobile library service?" Base: All those for whom the mobile library is the library service they use most frequently, n=250.

### Strengths of current mobile library service

When asked the main reasons for giving the mobile library service an 'excellent' or 'good' rating, over half of respondents mentioned the **staff**, particularly the helpfulness and friendly nature of the driver (see Figure 22), and a fifth commented on the **good selection of books.** Almost a fifth feel that a strength of the service is that it provides them with **access to books.**



Good selection of books: 20%

Accessible/difficult to get to a library: 19%

Reliable/regular: 14%

Staff: 53%

Figure 22: Q: "What are your main reasons for giving this rating?" Base: All those for whom the mobile library is the library service they use most frequently and who rate the service as Excellent/Good overall, n=227. *(Size of boxes/icons are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

Examples of some of the comments include:

*"Friendly, helpful staff, always willing to look for resources and hunt out books for us."*

*"Simon on the van is great, very helpful, the best library driver we have had, I have used the mobile library for many years. Selecting books is a social experience, I see people I don't usually have chance to talk to."*

*"We only have a bus service to Ashington and only three runs a day. I am 80 years old and this library service is a godsend."*

Similarly, when asked what the mobile library service currently does well, the majority of mobile library users point to the fact that it provides **access to books**, particularly to people in remote area or who cannot easily travel to a library, and that it is **reliable** and **regular:**

- **Provides library access** (esp. to remote areas): mentioned in 31% of all comments
- **Reliable/regular**: 31%
- **Staff:** 21%
- **Range of books:** 15%
- **Order service**: 10%

Q: "What do you think the mobile/home library service currently does well?" Base: All those for whom the mobile library is the library service they use most frequently, n=209.

## Areas for improvement

Of the 25 mobile library users who gave a 'very/quite poor' rating overall, the two key reasons for giving this rating are either the **poor selection of books** (mentioned by 12) or that the **van is not suitable** (mentioned by 10). In fact, several of those respondents who gave an 'excellent/good' rating also mentioned the poor selection of books and issues with the van: 10% mentioned the book selection is poor and 5% mentioned the van being unsuitable.

When asked what the mobile library service needs to improve on, the results are fairly similar, with almost 4 in 10 mentioning the poor selection/turnover of books, and just over a fifth commenting on the van being unsuitable or unreliable:
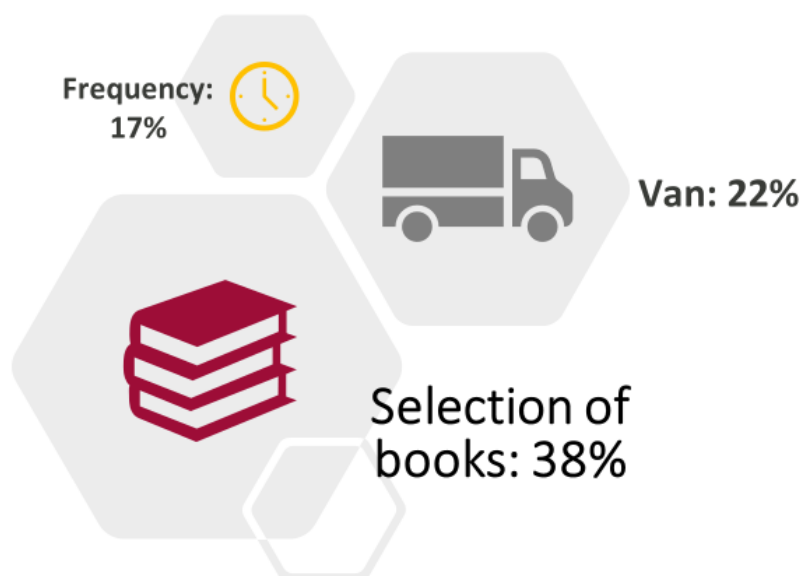


Frequency: 17%

Van: 22%

Selection of books: 38%

## Rating aspects of the mobile library service

Mobile library users were asked the extent to which they agree or disagree with a range of statements covering different aspects of the mobile library service. Once again, **staff** are rated very highly, with almost all (99%) of users agreeing that 'the mobile library staff are friendly and helpful' (see Figure 24).

The mobile library service appears to have a **positive social aspect**, with 98% of users agreeing that they look forward to the visit, and 77% agreeing that the visit helps to feel less lonely or isolated.

The mobile library service is also rated highly on **practical aspects**, such as stopping close to users' homes, stopping for a long enough time, visiting at convenient times and being reliable.

Although all aspects are rated well, it is worth noting that less than half of users (48%) agree strongly that the range of books offered by the mobile library is good.

Mobile library service: Agreement with statements

| Statement | Agree strongly | Agree slightly |
|---|---|---|
| The mobile library staff are friendly and helpful | 95% | 4% |
| I look forward to the moblie library visit | 87% | 11% |
| The visit is long enough to meet my needs | 92% | 4% |
| The main reason I use the service is to access the free books and resources | 88% | 8% |
| The mobile library service stops close to my home | 87% | 8% |
| The service visits at a time I find convenient | 83% | 11% |
| The service visits on a day I find convenient | 82% | 11% |
| The mobile library service is reliable | 72% | 20% |
| It is clear when the mobile library will visit | 76% | 15% |
| I feel comfortable providing feedback on the service | 70% | 17% |
| The mobile library service visits frequently enough | 63% | 16% |
| The range of books offered by the mobile library is good | 48% | 29% |
| The visit helps me to feel less lonely or isolated | 52% | 25% |
| It is easy to provide feedback on the service | 52% | 22% |

Figure 24: Q: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Base: All those for whom the mobile library is the library service they use most frequently, n=247.

**Views from a mobile library service user:** a case study from the telephone interviews

**Mobile library user**

**Profile:**

- Female, aged 55-64

- Lives alone in a remote rural area

**What does the library do well?**
- Friendly, helpful staff member
- Punctual, reliable service
- Sociable – nice way to catch up with neighbours
- Convenient

**What could be improved?**
- Range of books
- Display of books
- Slightly longer visit
- Provide public/local information leaflets

The service is very good, it is punctual, the driver is very friendly. He knows us all and gives us recommendations. For us, up here, it's a **vital service**.

I am aware that the driver's time is limited. We probably have about twenty minutes. By the time I have had a chat with the driver and a chat with my neighbour and a quick browse, I do always feel slightly under pressure to choose something. I tend to end up grabbing whatever is nearest!

## Home Library Users

Although 24 respondents have used the home library service in the past 12 months, only seven use this service the most frequently of all library services. Of these seven respondents:

- Five are female and one is male (one did not answer)
- Three are aged 65-74 and three are aged 75 or over (one did not answer)
- Three consider themselves to have a physical impairment or disability
- Five use the service at least once a month, one every two to three months and one once every four to six months
- Four rate the service as excellent overall, one as good and one as very poor (one did not respond)
- The service is rated highly across all aspects by all but one respondent.

Frequent home library users see the strengths of the service as:

*"A reliable service, friendly and helpful."*

*"Makes it possible for the elderly and disabled to read."*

One user feels that the service should be funded, and not run by volunteers.

# Non-users

## Profile

17% of respondents (842 in total) had not used a library in the 12 months prior to the consultation survey.  Of these 'non-users', a half are not currently a member of a local library (see Figure 25):
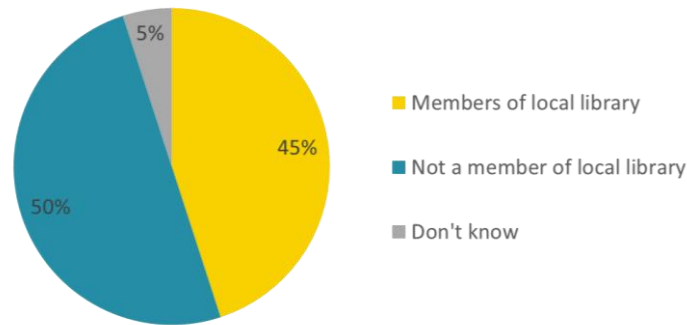


Figure 25: Q: "Are you currently a member of a local library?" Base: All those who have not used a local library in the past 12 months, n=841.

Comparing the demographic profiles of library users with non-users, age is the most notable difference between the two groups. Non-users are significantly more likely to be aged between 16 and 34, whereas library users are significantly more likely to be aged 65 and above, as shown in Figure 26.



Figure 26: Library users vs Non-users by age.

**Perceived barriers to using libraries**

Buying their own books rather than borrowing books is the key reason amongst 'non-users' for not using a library service (38% choosing this option). For around a fifth, library opening times (22%), and/or not knowing what wider services the libraries offer (19%) are a barrier to usage, as shown in Figure 27:

### Barriers to use amongst non-users

| Barrier | % |
|---|---|
| I tend to buy books instead of borrowing them | 38% |
| The library is not open at a time that is convenient to me | 22% |
| I don't know what wider services the libraries offer | 19% |
| I don't have time to go to the library | 17% |
| I don't read books very often | 12% |
| I borrow books from a different online service instead | 12% |
| I would be worried about potential fines for overdue books | 10% |
| I do not want/need any of the services offered by libraries | 8% |
| There is no parking near to the library | 5% |
| The library is not easy to get to by public transport | 4% |
| Public transport is too expensive | 2% |
| I have never visited a library before | 1% |

Figure 27: Q: "What are the main reasons that you don't use a library service? Please select from the reasons below and/or give your own reason in the text box provided." Base: All those who have not used a local library in the past 12 months, n=778.

26% of non-users gave their own reason or further explanation in the open text box provided. Of these, almost 4 in 10 relate to the **unpleasant/inappropriate environment** or atmosphere, with many mentioning that they no longer visit since the library has moved to a new location. Just over a third (35%) said that they do not use the library because the **service is too poor**, in particular that the range of books is too limited or that the library service has been reduced. Example comments include:

*"I'm a member of Morpeth library, and used to use the old one frequently. Since it moved to the new tiny building it doesn't stock anything I'd be interested in reading. Part of the joy for me is browsing through shelf after shelf of non-fiction and reference books, as well as the CDs and DVDs, and picking up cheapies from the stock sales. All gone."*

*"I used to use it every two weeks or so, for many years, but the service got so bad that I have given up."*

*"I haven't visited a library for over a couple of years and that was because it was at Ashington Leisure Centre when I visited the leisure centre for a swim. I have lost the habit because for many years now, library opening times have been more and more reduced and I wasn't able to rely on the library service being available so gradually it became less of a feature in my life."*

When asked if there are any services that they would like the local library to provide that they don't currently provide, two-thirds of non-users did not answer. Of those that commented, the majority (45%) said either 'no' or 'don't know'. Following this the top three most often mentioned services would be an increased/better range of books, events or groups and/or better services for children:



Figure 28: Q: "Are there any services your local library doesn't provide that you would like them to provide?" Base: All who haven't used a Northumberland library in past 12 months (n=280)

Examples of comments include:

*"I actually have no idea what services are provided by libraries apart from lending books."*

*"Sufficient quantity of books for browsing - being able to order books isn't enough, I want to discover books I haven't heard of. I found most of my favourite authors this way as a child and teenager in Cramlington library, when it existed."*

*"Cramlington does not have a proper library anymore, a few book shelves in Concordia is not the same. I would like to take my child to a library in the town with a children's area and get her excited about going to the library like I used to do with my mam. I do not know of any children's book programmes or activities at Concordia, and the fact there is a soft play and swimming pool there does not help, as it is not a dedicated relaxing space where we can sit and really enjoy the children's books."*

**Impact of opening hours**

Almost 6 in 10 non-users are not aware of the opening hours:
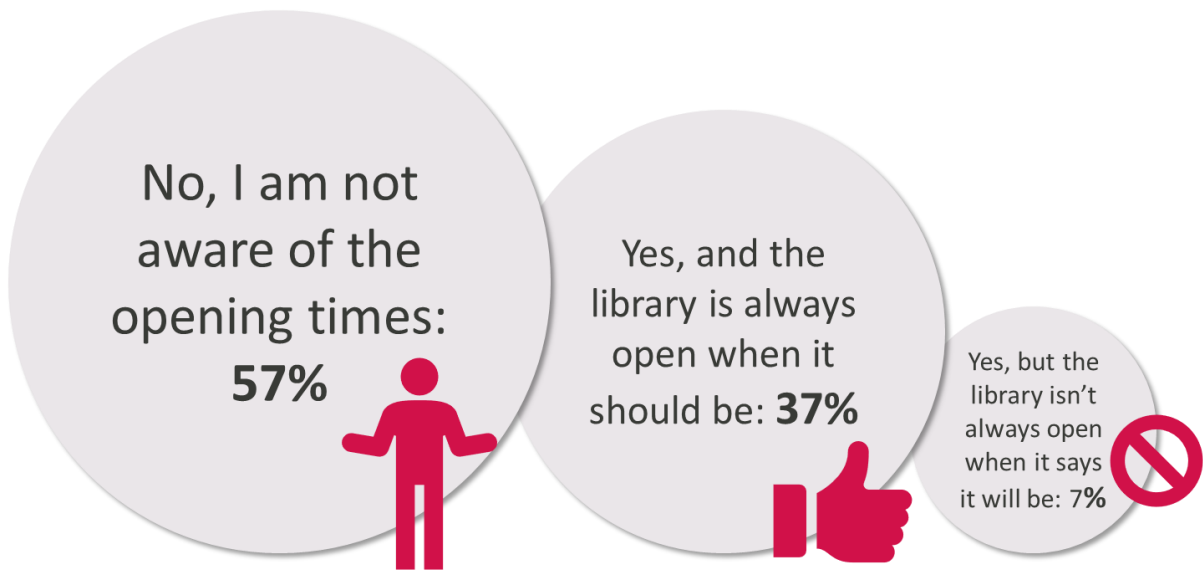
Figure 29: Q: "Are you aware of the opening times at the library?" Base: All those who have not used a local library in the past 12 months, n=607. *(Size of circles are for illustrative purposes only and are not accurately proportionate).*

Over a quarter (27%) of non-users feel they would use the library more if it were open at different times and as with the library users, the most popular time would be weekday evenings. However, just over a third of non-users (35%) are unsure whether different opening times would encourage them to use the library more:
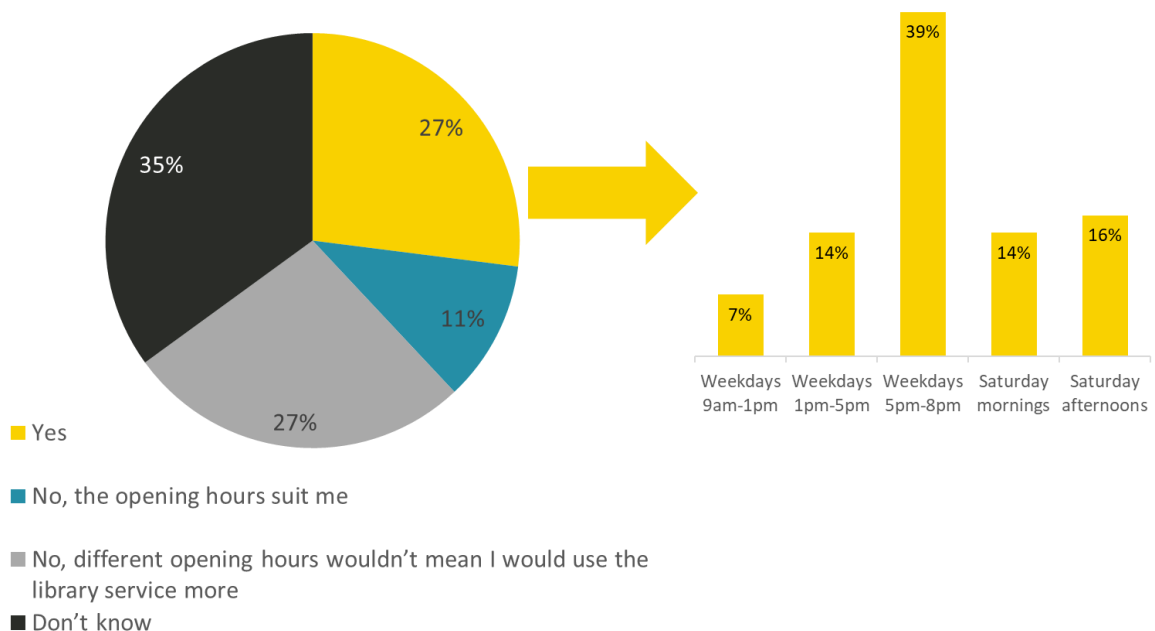


Figure 30: Q: "Would you use your local library service more often if it was open at different times than it is currently?" Base: All respondents who have not used a library in the past 12 months, n=604/ Q: "What time of day/week would you be most likely to visit your local library services if it was open at this time?" Base: All who have not used a library in the past 12 months and who would use their local library service more often if it were open at different times, n=161.

# Potential new ways of working

The final question of the survey (asked of all respondents) asked for any other feedback and included a prompt on *'including whether you feel the service should be kept as a Council-run service or whether an external organisation should run the service'.* 2810 answers were given, of which 10% (291) were coded.

**Keep it council run:** The vast majority of survey respondents, both library users and non-users, want the library service to be run by the council. 73% of respondents said that they want the library service to remain council run.

1 in 10 (unprompted) comments also refer to how essential the service is, the importance of the service and/or how it needs further investment.

**Volunteers helping to run the service:** All survey respondents were asked whether they think it is a good idea to have local volunteers to help deliver the services. Opinions are divided, with 38% saying yes, 37% saying no and 25% not sure.

12% of all respondents (529 residents) said that they would be interested in volunteering to help deliver the library service.

In the final question of the survey, 16% of 'other feedback' comments refer to the preference or need for the library to be run by **paid staff members.**

Amongst the participants of the telephone interviews, the general consensus around volunteers is:

- Volunteers should be in addition to paid staff and should not replace paid staff
- Whilst volunteers are much appreciated, the job of a librarian is recognised as a skilled job and therefore professional staff are considered essential
- There is some concern that it is always the 'same people' that are called on to volunteer, particularly in rural areas with ageing populations.
- Volunteers could be used to enable longer opening hours of libraries and using volunteers to run the service is preferable to the service closing altogether.

## Volunteering

Five of the telephone interviews were conducted amongst participants who had indicated in the survey that they would be interested in volunteering for the library service. The key findings from these discussions are:

- Volunteers would not want to volunteer if this is to replace paid staff members.
- From their previous experiences, volunteers may have specific skills sets that should be considered when giving volunteers roles or tasks.
  - For example, some people have worked in the area of computing and would be happy to run digital skills courses, and others are retired teachers so would be happy to run children's groups and activities.

- The majority of potential volunteers feel they would only need training on the library systems and procedures.
- Although some people feel they might struggle to commit to regular hours as a volunteer, others did not see this as an issue.
- People can see the personal benefits of volunteering, such as the social interaction, giving people a purpose, satisfaction of helping people, giving back to the community etc.
- No-one had any issues with needing to provide references or being DBS-checked.

Participants in the telephone interviews were also asked their views on potential different ways of running the library service, in particular:

- Having hub libraries providing all services, and satellite libraries as and where the need is greatest
- More co-locations, and less stand-alone libraries
- Increasing and improving the digital offer
- Running libraries as Community Partnerships, with increased use of volunteers

### Views on the hub library model

The majority of telephone interviewees feel this is **already the model that is being used in Northumberland**, as there are bigger libraries in areas such as Hexham that provide more services, then small libraries with limited opening hours and limited services situated in more rural areas.

The biggest concern with this model is that in practice it may just mean closing some of the smaller libraries. Some participants feel quite strongly that while this model may work well in more densely populated areas, this is not a model that will work in Northumberland and particularly not in the north of the county where towns are far apart and the public transport provision is too sporadic, for example:

*"I don't know if this would work because Northumberland is such a big county and towns are so far apart. After Berwick, my nearest other library is more than 20 miles away. Buses are few and far between." (Berwick user, Younger, Female)*

*"Most of these things that the government suggest are thought of by people who live in cities and towns. Northumberland has a lot of scattered villages. The nearest town might have a big library, but it might be twenty or more miles away. We don't have a good bus service. We need a library in the village. It is important to be able to walk there. Libraries are especially important in rural areas." (Lynemouth user, Older, Male)*

*"How are people going to get there if it is not in the local town or village? There are a lot of older women in our area who don't have access to a car. They can't get easily get anywhere that they can't walk to. This might suit other places, but not here." (Bellingham user, Older, Female)*

There is also the concern that removing libraries from rural areas will not only have a negative impact on older residents, who often rely on local services, but will mean that less children will access the library:

*"Each town needs its own library for kids to access books really easily.  You need to get them into reading really early on.  Even if it is very small, every place needs its own library." (Cramlington user, Younger, Female)*

*"I can't see that working, we wouldn't travel to take the kids to the library.  You need it on your doorstep." (South Beach user, Parent, Male)*

## Views on more co-locations

Again, the majority of participants feel that **the Northumberland library service is already working to this model**, as many of the libraries in the area are already co-located with other services.  The co-location of libraries is not seen as an issue in itself as long as it is done well, and that libraries are housed in a dedicated space, for example:

*"It depends on the location.  There are buildings that lend themselves to this and then there are places like Cramlington that don't lend themselves to this.  In Bedlington, the library has been half taken over by other services.  From current experience, I don't think this is a good idea." (Cramlington user, Younger, Female)*

*"I appreciate that co-location saves on the cost of buildings, but for children the library should b e a sanctuary.  When you bring in other council services, you dilute the benefits of the library." (Hexham user, Volunteering, Female)*

## Views on libraries as Community Partnerships

Views on having libraries as Community Partnerships match the views of increasing the number of volunteers to run the service (see above).

# Staff consultation: Analysis of results

The original consultation plan was to involve staff in face-to-face workshops during late March/early April 2020. However, given the impact of COVID-19, the decision was taken to cancel the workshops and replace these with a remote method of engagement, namely **self-completion booklets.** Booklets were circulated to **staff members** in early April to gather their views and opinions, and 47 booklets were received.

## Key learnings from past experiences

Staff were asked what the service can learn from previous experience of change.  Overall, many staff members feel that the cuts and changes to the service over recent years have devastated the service and that as customers and staff were not consulted before changes were made, changes have not always been as successful as they could have been.

The impact of these cuts has had a **negative impact on both the service and on the staff**.  Going forward, staff would like management to understand and value the service more, and base decisions on the views of staff and customers:

### The service has been de-valued
- True nature of library service not appreciated
- Short-term nature of cuts have devastated service
- Libraries sometimes squeezed into inappropriate locations
- Difficult to provide core statutory service with such reduced book stock and staff levels

### Morale amongst many front-line staff is low
- Not consulted about changes
- Not communicated with
- Many do not feel valued
- Expectation to become 'jack of all trades' devalues their skills and profession

### Make changes, and base these on feedback from those who know the service
- Customers need to be put first
- Customers need to be listened to
- Management need to consult and listen to front-line staff

Example comments include:

*"I think a lot of the changes in recent years were based on a misconception of the role of the service. I think there needs to be a much better understanding of how the service is used in order to guide future decisions. The service is as much about human interaction as it is about offering books and other resources. Libraries are an integral part of communities."*

*"Value the staff who have been dragged through that time.  Employ management who are library based and focused. Listen to frontline staff concerns, worries, ideas etc.  Think before rushing into building changes and combining services that do not work."*

## Key challenges

The key challenge for the service going forward is perceived to be balancing the needs of existing (often older) customers and innovating to attract new (potentially younger) customers; and to do both within an environment of a **lack of funding**.



In particular, decreased budgets have led to the following, all of which make rising to this challenge very difficult:

- **Poor book stocks** and therefore a lack of choice and long wait times for books
- **Low staffing levels** reducing opening hours and making it difficult to run events and offer wider services
- **Lack of resources** to put on events and activities
- **Lack of investment in modern technology** making it difficult to keep up with digital changes
- **Poor buildings/lack of space in new locations**, which have led to decreased usage in some areas
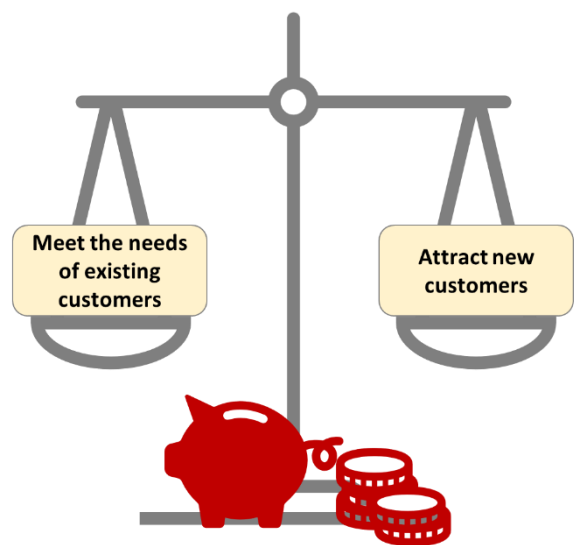
Additionally, staff feel the service faces the challenge of **remaining relevant** in an increasingly digital world, with increasingly cheaper and more varied 'competition' (e.g. for ebooks and cheap books).

There were also some comments from staff around the **lack of awareness of the library offer** and how libraries have changed, and the need to market the service more effectively.

For example, comments include:

*"Our budget has been cut so much we rely on donations of books by customers because so few are bought for stock.  We are asked to run events and come up with ideas to promote libraries and a lot of staff fund these themselves."*

*"Making the service relevant to the community to encourage more people to use the library. Having enough financial support to purchase more book stock to reduce waiting lists for books. Recruit more staff to keep libraries open when they should be."*

*"There are more ways than ever to buy books - digital, print, audio - and these can be bought cheaper than ever. How do we keep people borrowing these from a library rather than just buying them? People still see libraries as strict places where you have to be quiet - how do we show people that this has changed? How do you persuade a younger audience (who aren't children) that libraries are for them?"*

When asked how well they feel the library service is equipped to meet these challenges, many feel that although the lack of funding and reduction of service in recent years have left them in a poor position to be able to do so, staff are still passionate and resilient and will try to rise to this challenge as best they can.

Other staff members feel the service is fairly well equipped to meet these challenges due to the digital service already in place and feel positive about the direction from the new management over the past year.

## Staff know their community

Perceptions of staff around what their core customers and what their community values and needs from the library service are similar to those expressed by residents themselves.

Reflecting the usage of services as reported by library users, staff say that the book stock, particularly adult fiction books, and public access computers are the most often accessed services within their library. Following this, printing or photocopying is also popular. Other most accessed services include accessing co-located council services and speaking to staff.

Perceptions amongst staff of the least regularly accessed services are more varied, and include:

- Reference/non-fiction section
- Teenage/young adult fiction
- Local history section
- Spoken word

When asked to describe the typical customer in their library in three words, the most commonly used words by staff are:

- Older/retired
- Friendly/chatty/looking for social interaction
- Loyal/regular
- Appreciative/grateful

Other words mentioned by several staff include 'diverse', 'challenging', 'book lover' and 'computer user'.

Again, in line with the findings from the resident consultation, staff see that the community most value the fact that a **local library service exists**, providing not only **access to books** but also a **safe space** to visit, and the attitude and support from **staff members**.

Overall, the key aspects staff feel the community value are:

- Local and free access to books
- Interaction with and help and support from staff members
- The inclusive, welcoming and safe space the service provides
- Access to computers and printing facilities
- Activities and events, both for children and adults
- Reservation service
- Mobile and home library services

For example, comments include:

*"We are a safe place to visit, it can add structure to more mature customers' days. Staff are friendly and helpful. It enhances peoples' lives and that of their communities. We are there for everyone. In deprived areas, we give children/people a chance, they can access resources that they could not afford. We are community hubs. Jobseekers value the PC's as well as staff who help with IT problems and also the Digital Champions who offer free tuition. Different communities value different things."*

## Current gaps in provision

The staff essentially feel the community would like to see an **investment** in the library service, and in particular in a **better range of books**.

Aside from improving the book stock, staff suggested many areas that they feel the community would like to see improved within libraries. These include:

- Improving library environments, particularly providing more space for seating, working and for the community to use
- More groups and activities
- More staff
- More computer access and better IT facilities, such as wireless printing
- Free newspapers and journals in seating areas
- Longer/different/standardised opening hours
- Tea/coffee facilities
- More local information
- A better equipped mobile library service

For example, comments include:

*"I work in an NCC library and am not infrequently embarrassed by yawning gaps in our collection, tired of hearing myself say "Sorry, we used to have some…, but now…"."*

*"We are constantly asked for more new books. We have been told to throw out all out of date non-fiction but there is no money to replace it, so our shelves look empty which makes it look like we have nothing to offer. I feel we meet the needs of the community as well as we can with the resources available. We go above and beyond to put on events with no money and to provide a first-class customer service experience. We would do better with a budget for events, new stock and improvements to our buildings to make them look modern and appealing."*

*"Accepting that a great proportion of library users are not online, are resistant to computer use, and tailoring a proportion of advertising, signage, and information provision for those who are not online. In view of the number of forms, applications, etc that need to be completed online, smaller branch libraries need to have significantly more computers available to the public - at Seaton Valley we currently have three, and we find it woefully inadequate."*

## Meeting the needs of the community

In addition to the above, staff have many ideas and views on how the service could be improved and better meet the needs of the community.  Staff feel the service could be **better managed** through:

- Listening to the residents more
- Being more proactive in increasing awareness of its services amongst residents (and not exclusively through social media)
- Refreshing and rebranding the service
- Engaging more/better with other organisations to promote service, such as schools, community groups and health providers
- Recognise that not all users borrow books (and therefore not to rely too heavily on these numbers when evaluating the service)
- Less top-down management: allow staff to use and share their knowledge better; co-ordinate ideas, give more autonomy, gather regular feedback and act on this feedback
- Increasing staff training, such as on newer technologies
- Opening hours that better fit the needs of individual areas
- New/improved stock management system (several would like to dispense with Collection HQ specifically)
- Providing new mobile library vans that are fit for purpose and reliable (and that include digital access)
- Commercial use of buildings out of hours to increase revenue

For example:

*"Brand the service so that it attracts new users, rather than attempting to look 'official' by following NCC guidelines, which just makes the service appear institutional and unattractive."*

And some specific ideas that staff have around services the library could do/provide include:

- Extend the digital offer, for example:
  - Computer games library
  - Tablet booths where customers can read ebooks at leisure
  - Virtual book clubs and other virtual activities to engage non-attending readers
  - Specific e-library area of the webpage dedicated to the promotion and provision of assistance, resources and tutorials
- Provide ability to take card payments
- Remove fees, such as spoken word charges for under 60s
- Some would remove self-service machines
- Provide archive of 'classic' DVDs and CDs
- Makerspaces, Imagination Station Room Touch Screen Tables More coding equipment to run sessions: micro-bits, floor robots etc.

- Board game lending library

For example:

*"A computer games library and maybe a film library, possibly in an online format. Better furniture in libraries and maybe tea and coffee facilities to make it a hub of the community where people can meet and talk. This would combat loneliness. We used to provide daily newspapers and should do so again as it encourages men in particular to sit and debate. We have been told often that this is badly missed by our older customers. Not everyone wants to read a paper online or is able to."*

## The need for a clear vision

In order to continue to provide the best service they can and potentially to fill the identified gaps in provision, staff feel the service not only needs more funding but also **stable management** that understands the true nature and value of the service and a **clear strategy** informed by views of front line staff.

Staff feel that if their vision for the library service could be realised, the service could be:

- Modern, vibrant and dynamic
- Innovative and responsive to the changing needs of the community
- A truly inclusive community hub and meeting place
- Integral to the health of the community
- Valued and supported by the local authority
- A place where staff feel confident and secure in their role, challenged, supported, respected and part of the local authority

For example:

*"I would like it to provide a warm and welcoming space where people could fulfil whatever need they had; be it creative, practical, educational or emotional. Easy-to-access information in a variety of formats, groups to join and events to attend, knowledgeable staff on hand to guide and facilitate. Modern yet not remote, equipped with reliable IT supported by the advice needed to use it independently. A place to keep in touch with the world and its events and to feel a part of it. For everyone, no justification needed, and free."*

### The values and vision of the library service

Staff were asked what they would include in the vision and values of the library service going forward, and whether these fit with the council wide values and vision. The most commonly used word to include in the **values** of the library service was **'inclusive'.**

Other often mentioned words or phrases include:

- Accessible for all
- Professional/efficient
- Respectful
- Reliable
- Community
- Knowledge and learning
- Safe and welcoming
- Well-resourced

These values are seen as being a good fit with the council-wide values of 'residents first; excellence and quality; respect; keeping communities safe and well'.

The most commonly used words to include in the **vision** of the library service was again **'inclusive',** or **'for all'**.

Other often mentioned words or phrases are similar to those suggested for the library service values, e.g. accessible, community, safe and welcoming.  In addition, several staff members would include:

- Interesting/exciting/inspiring
- Modern/progressive/innovative
- Digital/connected

Again, the staff see this vision as fitting well with the council-wide vision of 'One county that works for everyone', particularly with regards to inclusivity.

## Views on change

The majority of staff members feel that change is needed and that they are committed to changes to the service.  Of those that are less sure, they feel they would need the following to feel more positive about changes:

- More clarity on what the potential changes would entail
- Honest and regular communication on changes
- Assurances that any changes will improve the service and not simply involve further cuts
- Assurances that changes will be based on what customers want and on the views of frontline staff
- Clarity on job security and roles

For example, comments include:

*"I feel that it is important for any changes to be very clearly communicated so there would be no cause for misunderstanding and confusion. It is much easier to cope with change when you can see the outcome you are working towards."*

*"Supportive line management, good communication and assurances (and action) that changes will be seen through and not abandoned half way through, as seems to happen very frequently. I also think management should listen to front line staff, rather than just going through the motions of 'listening'."*

Key **concerns** amongst the staff about future changes include:

- Increasingly squeezed public budgets, particularly post Covid-19 will mean further cuts in spending on the library service
- The changes will simply be about saving money and reducing costs
- Potential job losses
- Libraries will close
- A move towards an over-reliance on a digital service, therefore losing the vital face-to-face nature of the service
- The marginalisation of older or non-technological customers
- Changes will not be well managed or well communicated to customers
- Decisions being based on views of people within NCC and senior management who do not wholly support the service or appreciate the value of the service

For example:

*"That cuts mean there are fewer services to offer the public, therefore library use falls and the service is vulnerable to further cuts in a self-perpetuating downward spiral."*

## Views on potential new models

Staff were presented with some potential models (as suggested in a government report on libraries) and asked for their views on how these could work in Northumberland.

### Focussing the service into a number of hub libraries

The majority of staff members are largely in favour of this model, although some feel the service is already provided in this way and some expressed concern that rural communities could end up being abandoned.

Several feel the smaller rural libraries should be either replaced by much improved mobile library services or should be community-run libraries, thus freeing resources to be invested in providing a better service in fewer, larger hubs.   For example:

*"We urgently need to consolidate and streamline our offer. Continuing to run 30 service points many of them tiny and VERY part-time has stretched the staff almost to breaking point. I envisage a much tighter organisation which can offer better value for money to residents by really focusing effort into key sites."*

*"As a rural county, Northumberland faces more challenges than more urban library authorities. There are too many small local libraries with very limited opening hours, static stock and little in the way of events.  Perhaps there should be a focus on having fewer, strategically placed large, dynamic libraries with outreach to more local communities through a mobile service."*

The key positive aspects of this potential model include:

- Improving staffing in larger hubs
- Increased ability for staff to share knowledge and ideas, and a decrease in lone working
- A focus on need of individual communities
- Pooling of resources to better deliver service in hub libraries
- Potential to increase usage through providing a better service in fewer libraries

Staff do have concerns about adopting this model even further in Northumberland, in particular:

- Potential detrimental effect on rural communities if smaller libraries are closed
- Residents in areas where libraries are closed feeling angry and neglected
- Impact on limiting access to library services for the elderly, those on low incomes and children, including impact on mental health and social isolation
- That it will result in job losses
- Having too many services in one space would dilute the library offer
- Dilution of the librarian role (and insufficient training provided on new roles and responsibilities)
- That this will not work unless hub libraries are given dedicated library space
- That this is essentially a cost cutting exercise, and will not mean hub libraries and outreach services are given more funding

Example comments include:

*"I feel this would only work well only if libraries were situated in suitable accommodation. I think the idea of having hubs is a good idea but not to shoehorn in many services together but to focus on less libraries but do it well."*

*"Many of our customers are elderly and live in isolated communities - Kielder / Bellingham for example Even for younger more able customers, going from Bellingham back to Hexham would be unrealistic. It is not only the elderly that are isolated in these communities.  On the other hand, in the central area of Northumberland, we have some libraries that are not that distant, for example, Bedlington, Bedlington Station & Guidepost.  Do we need all three?"*

*"I think there is a danger this would be seen as a lessening of service provision – but I think this could be overcome if the new structure was presented as "we're now offering….(with the addition of services) rather than "we're stopping doing…". Consultation and flexibility is key – what suits one village may not suit another, and consideration would have to be given to transport links, location demographics, distance from hubs and other services available in the village elsewhere i.e. maybe there is a photocopier people can use in the post office, but nowhere else providing public access PCs. Some communities are already quite organised in providing themselves with communal services – other do not have this infrastructure in place already and that would make a difference."*

## Improving and increasing the digital offer

Many staff feel that improving and increasing the digital offer is a much needed and natural way forward, and could encourage increased usage of library services, but that the digital service should be an additional service not a replacement for physical services.

Within the library buildings, staff would like to see more public access computers, more reliable wifi and the provision of tablets (both for adults and children, with book and literacy related apps).

With regard to the remote digital offer, staff recommend the development of an NCC library app and a focus on upskilling elderly or technologically reluctant customers to enable more use of the digital services, potentially introducing a tablet lending service.

*"The current and totally unexpected closure due to Coronavirus has highlighted the growing importance of our digital offer and we have seen a huge upsurge in the take up of our online loan services through Borrow Box and RB digital. Increasing use of these services can overcome one of our*

*problems i.e. reaching out to isolated residents in remote rural communities. Increasing our capacity to upskill older people in the use of IT is a vital development."*

The key **concern** is that investment in the digital offer will be at the expense of the physical offer, and that this would disadvantage many elderly or non-digital customers as well as those who rely on the free access to technology.  For example:

*"[Concerned] that less physical books and audio books will be available in branches as a result and the older customers who are not interested in using digital services and do not want to learn, will be alienated."*

*"Many people would welcome (indeed expect) the opportunity to access things without travel – but a lot of people who come to the library come because they don't have IT access at home; either they can't afford it, couldn't maintain it or just don't want it and these people mustn't be forgotten. They currently cope in an increasingly digital world exactly because they can come and use our PCs which are free, managed and kept working by someone else and, most importantly of all perhaps, come with all the help needed to use them and access content that library staff are able to give."*

If this model involves increasing the technology offer within physical libraries, staff will want further training and more staff to cover IT support queries from customers.

## More co-locations (and less stand-alone libraries)

Again, many staff feel that the Northumberland library service already works in this way, with many libraries located alongside other services.  Overall, co-location is seen as a positive move as long as it done well and with consideration for the staff, customers and different services involved.  Staff appreciate that co-locating services allows cost savings, the potential for increased footfall and potentially easier access to the public to both services.

It appears that the one key aspect to ensure co-location is a positive experience for both staff and customers is for the library to have its own **dedicated self-contained space**.

In addition, staff experiences suggest that **co-location works best** when:

- Co-locating with complementary services, such as the arts centres or tourist information
- All services are respectful of each other, considered equal partners and work well together
- Ideally separate services are staffed by own trained professionals, however if library staff are expected/needed to assist with any aspects of co-located services, they need to be suitably trained

Specific libraries where staff feel these are taking place and therefore that co-location is working well include Blyth, Morpeth, Prudhoe and Hexham.

*"Hexham library works well in an arts centre because they share similar goals and outlooks. We have had great success recently in working together on joint themes and it has felt lovely to be a part of a whole building effort. The café provides a similar compatible element of the building and tourist information is a good fit for a library, especially in a relatively small town. Having council customer services in the same space works well in that it is all about access to information, and problems*

*which one might imagine could have occurred actually haven't been as much of an issue as might have been anticipated."*

*"The services offered have to sit comfortably together – a library works well in an arts centre because they share a desire to further creativity, it also sits very well with tourist information because they both seek to inform. However some things clash and thought would need to be given to how practically it would work when you have a group of children involved in a lively library activity, whilst someone else is making what could be stressful enquiries at the council desk. Privacy and dignity of service users is very important – yet it would be sad to stifle other activities because of this need. So I think it would depend very much on the physical layout of a building and how services could carve up the space in order to work harmoniously together."*

*"Prudhoe - it works well because the agencies within the building all work very well with each other. There is open communication and trust between the building and everyone who works within it."*

However, not all current experiences of co-locating have been positive so far.  It is clear that there are two clear examples of where co-location is not working well are in certain leisure centres (in particular Ponteland and Cramlington) or where the council services are in the same room with no or little privacy.

Learnings that can be taken from current experiences, or suggested improvements to current co-locations include:

- There is an important and pressing issue around privacy and data protection: the lack of privacy and/or proper soundproofing for some co-located services means that conversations of people using the council customer services are overheard by library customers
- Being aware of different customers when choosing co-locating services, i.e. that the customers of some services are very vulnerable and often challenging, and this may not be ideal for the library customers in the same space
- Leisure centre environments are often hot and noisy and can detract from the relaxed, welcoming atmosphere some customers want from a library (and are not the best environment for books)
- Leisure centres can be intimidating places for some people
- The library service is not considered an equal partner by staff and management of co-located services
- Libraries should not be reduced to largely unstaffed shelves of books in corridors or spread around different areas around a building

Example comments include:

*"I feel privacy is a huge issue with customer services, as it would be with some other services – there must be people who are made to feel uncomfortable conducting their business with the council in the same space where people come just to sit. It can feel uncomfortable to be working in the same space as it is impossible to not hear what is said and though I know I will always respect confidentiality that must still make some users feel uncomfortable too, especially in a small town where lots of people are known to each other, and this would be even worse in a village setting."*

*"The colocations in leisure centres have been a mixed experience due to inadequate space (Cramlington) and noise from soft play (Ashington). Newbiggin and Ponteland haven't worked for the*

*core library users because of the lack of dedicated staff and the situation out of the centre of the respective villages. Attempts to merge the roles of the leisure centre staff and libraries staff at Ashington was not successful and has been reversed following the move back to NCC from Active Northumberland. Clear agreements about use of meeting rooms need to be agreed at the outset as currently we have to pay for room hire at some sites e.g. Spetchells Centre."*

Suggestions for other possible co-locations or appropriate services include:

- Community centres
- Combined with a café
- Post office and/or banking services (particularly in rural areas where these are at threat of closure)
- A separate library space in a community hub is generally preferred over being part of a 'one stop shop'

*"If starting from scratch I would have a dedicated library space in a mixed building, in the centre of the community, a bit like a shopping mall e.g. different offices/services in the same building. This could be a Leisure Centre but it wouldn't have to be open the same hours as a Leisure Centre, it could be closed on at times and made accessible using your library card. Trafford Libraries already use an Open + system which allow people to access the library without staff being present. Under the system, customers gain entry to the library via a keypad using their library card and PIN. The technology enables customers to use the library every evening 24 hours a day, seven day a week. Customers can borrow, return and renew books via the self-service kiosks, use computers, printers and photocopiers and hold community meetings without the assistance or presence of staff. This does not mean that library staff should be replaced, it means that the community gains in the access to the library being flexible."*

### Increasing the number of volunteers helping to run the service

Perhaps not surprisingly, the key feedback from staff over the potential to increase the number of volunteers to help run the service is the potential for **job losses** amongst staff.

The suggestion that volunteers could run the service is also seen as **de-valuing or misunderstanding the role** of professional librarians.

Other key concerns over volunteers helping to run the service include:

- Long-term commitment of volunteers to the role
- Time and resources to train and to provide on-going support
- Lack of knowledge
- Lack of accountability
- Can lead to extra workload for staff members and take focus away from customers and towards supporting volunteers
- Reliance on small pool of people from small communities
- Devalues service and will eventually lead to library closures

For example:

*"Volunteers would see the job as a hobby and if they did not feel like it that day the library would not open. They do not have the skills and knowledge library staff have. If customers come in for help and advice and do not get it, they will stop coming and the library just becomes a white elephant."*

*"Quite often quite a bit of work and effort is put into getting volunteers up and running, only for them to change their mind. Library volunteers don't appreciate the range of tasks they are being asked to do and have needed training over a very long period of time. Reliability and sustainability is an issue. However, there have been a couple of CALs where it has worked, however the cost of senior staff going out repeatedly to train volunteers was surely not a saving in the short-medium term."*

Staff do see **positive** aspects of using more volunteers, as long as they are an addition to paid staff, are used for specific tasks or activities, and are managed correctly. The key areas staff feel volunteers can be of help are:

- Helping staff to run one-off events
- Being used to run specific activities and courses that match their skillsets and knowledge
- Can allow for extended opening times
- Can take pressure off staff, particularly when libraries are staffed by lone workers

From experience, staff suggest the following is useful when managing volunteers:

- Proper application and screening process, including DBS checks if appropriate
- Providing comprehensive training and ongoing support (and ensure staff have the capacity to do this)
- Having more formal contracts with volunteers to establish an understanding regarding the levels of commitment required
- Appointing Lead Volunteers in libraries with several volunteers
- Having paid staff as volunteer co-ordinators
- Providing more training for staff who will need to train and support volunteers
- Allowing volunteers who run specific events the freedom and autonomy to do so
- Ensuring volunteers are given appropriate tasks, and are not being asked to carry out the daily running of the library
- Providing a feedback mechanism for staff and volunteers


Staff members were also asked their views on the **'community book drop' model** (where books are left unattended in a location accessible to the public e.g. a community hall). Overall, staff are not in favour of this model as they feel it would be difficult to manage stock levels, maintain the quality of stock and that thefts would occur. It is also not considered an appropriate replacement for a library service, and some suggest it would be better to deliver a comprehensive and modern mobile library service rather than a book drop model.

However, some can see the benefits of using this to provide books to remote areas that have little or no library service provision and feel it may be a good use of decommissioned stock.


## Libraries becoming Community Partnerships

As this model relies on volunteers, staff views are very similar to those held on increasing the number of volunteers to run the service. Above and beyond the points raised when discussing

volunteers (see above section), staff feel there are some additional, mainly positive aspects of libraries becoming Community Partnerships:

- Could increase community interaction with the library, and use of the library
- Could be used to extend library service, and open new libraries in more remote areas
- Preferable as a last resort to prevent library closures
- Communities are best placed to understand needs of communities
- Allows the possibility to apply for different pots of funding

The key concern is over how stock would be managed across the network of libraries.

In order to work well, again staff feel that volunteers need to be trained and on-going support provided with roles and responsibilities clearly laid out.

### Other suggestions for different ways of working

Other potential different ways of working staff mention include:

- A very advanced, digitalised mobile library service
- A virtual library run by home workers
- A more comprehensive outreach service
- New roles within the library service, such as IT assistants and marketing/promotional assistants
- Providing more effective training for specific aspects of the role, such as running specific events and activities

## Meeting the universal offers

A government report on libraries identified seven outcomes that relate to the universal offers.  For each outcome, staff were asked to indicate the extent to which they feel the library service in Northumberland is achieving each outcome, on the following scale:

1. Achieving this
2. Achieving this to some extent
3. Not achieving this

The majority of staff feel that the library service is achieving each outcome to some extent, as detailed in the following table:

| Outcome | Extent to which staff feel the service is achieving the outcome | Examples of where this is working well and suggested areas for improvement |
|---|---|---|
| Cultural and creative enrichment | Achieving: 24% **Achieving to some extent: 66%** Not achieving: 11% | Positive examples: <br><br> • Activities and events such as knitting, creative writing, Lego Club, craft and reading groups for adults and children <br><br> • Author and poetry events |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Working with partners to develop this offer, such as arts providers<br><br>Areas for improvement:<br><br>• Would be able to do more with more funding, more space and more staff<br><br>• Increase links with wider organisations, such as community groups and businesses |
| Increased reading and literacy | Achieving: 26%<br><br>**Achieving to some extent: 61%**<br><br>Not achieving: 13% | Positive examples:<br><br>• Children's Summer Reading challenge, Book Festival, Storytime<br><br>Areas for improvement:<br><br>• Increase book stock<br><br>• Work more with schools<br><br>• Funding for more groups and courses such as homework clubs, adult reading challenges, teaching adults to read, Scrabble clubs etc. |
| Improved digital access and literacy | Achieving: 38%<br><br>**Achieving to some extent: 59%**<br><br>Not achieving: 3% | Positive examples:<br><br>• Borrow Box, RB Digital and public access PCs<br><br>• Free access to Ancestry, British Newspaper Archive, Find My Past<br><br>• Digital champions<br><br>• Desktop refresh<br><br>• Code club<br><br>Areas for improvement:<br><br>• Provide more public access PCs and provide tablets<br><br>• More reliable wifi and more up-to-date technology<br><br>• Provide more IT courses and more Digital Champions<br><br>• Digital access via mobile library service<br><br>• Staff training in specific areas |
| Helping everyone to achieve their full potential | Achieving: 8%<br><br>**Achieving to some extent: 63%**<br><br>Not achieving: 29% | Positive examples:<br><br>• Accessible and inclusive service<br><br>• Staff support<br><br>Areas for improvement:<br><br>• Need more funding and more staff<br><br>• Improve library spaces and resources to encourage learning<br><br>• IT in all branches; more public access PCs overall<br><br>• Offer more courses |

| | | • Increase outreach work |
|---|---|---|
| Healthier and happier lives | Achieving: 27%<br>**Achieving to some extent: 60%**<br>Not achieving: 5% | Positive examples:<br>• Welcoming and inclusive space<br>• Groups and activities provide social interaction<br>• Reading is good for mental health<br>• Provide recreational materials<br>• Work with NHS partners and other local groups<br>• Reading Well initiative<br>Areas for improvement:<br>• Extend initiative across County, such as Reading Well, Social Fridays, Talking Tables etc.<br>• More health-focused events<br>• Increase outreach work |
| Greater prosperity | Achieving: 23%<br>**Achieving to some extent: 54%**<br>Not achieving: 23% | Positive examples:<br>• Encouraging reading and learning which leads to understanding and opportunity<br>• Signposting to wider services<br>• Support smaller businesses through IT support<br>Areas for improvement:<br>• More digital courses<br>• Increase access to IT<br>• Increase outreach work<br>• Increase support for the unemployed, e.g. with job applications |
| Stronger, more resilient communities | Achieving: 21%<br>**Achieving to some extent: 68%**<br>Not achieving: 12% | Positive examples:<br>• Focus on offering services to communities<br>• Groups and events bring communities together<br>• Offer help to those in need<br>Areas for improvement:<br>• Provide seating area and free daily newspapers<br>• Keep smaller libraries open<br>• Use library spaces for more community groups and events<br>• Link up to more community schemes |

## And finally…

Staff were asked to say (ideally without mentioning people or money) what one small change they would make to improve the library service, and what one big change they would make.

### Small changes

The top two most often mentioned small changes that staff would like to see are a **change in attitude towards the library service from those in authority**, and for the service to be **promoted** more and better.

Other mentions (some single mentions) include:

- Environment: staff room, toilets, recycling facilities, better signage
- Consistent opening hours across the service
- Provide newspapers
- Community notice boards
- Increase communication to staff
- Library card key fob
- Email newsletters
- Ability to take card payments

### Big changes

The majority of 'big changes' involve investing heavily in the library service both in terms of resources, staffing and the library spaces. Other mentions include:

- Define a clear vision
- Re-locate libraries to more suitable buildings and/or locations
- Consolidate service to smaller number of better resourced libraries
- New and modernised library vans for the mobile library service

*"As a council we really need to value our libraries and the role they play within our community. For a number of years now, libraries have not been valued and this has been shown by how staff members have been treated and in the way that libraries have been moved into inappropriate locations, often to the detriment of the library. Other services have been given more space and better resources, and sometimes it does feel as if we are the poor relation. Please, please value this service. We have a lot to give our community but if we don't value it our communities won't."*

# Stakeholder consultation: Analysis of results

The original consultation plan included a face-to-face workshop with a group of key stakeholders. Due to COVID-19, this was replaced with a remote consultation method - a self-completion booklet was sent out to 18 key stakeholders from the following organisations:

- Co-location partners
- Partners, or potential partners from the Charity and Voluntary Sector
- Key contacts/partners within Northumberland County Council

A total of six booklets were returned.

## Key findings

### The Library Service needs to promote itself better

The majority of stakeholders who took part in the consultation exercise do not feel very knowledgeable about all the different library services, only feeling they know about the specific areas of the service in which they come into regular contact service they come into contact. For example:

> *"I see what work is undertaken in Berwick Library, but I don't feel I have a full understanding of all the services they offer."*

The main area in which the stakeholders feel the library service could improve is to **better promote itself** and **increase awareness** of its wider offer, both amongst the public and amongst other partners. For example:

> *"My knowledge is limited to my own personal area of work. If Northumberland Archives staff were all more knowledgeable about what the Library Service offer, we could promote the Library Service. Likewise. Greater dialogue would allow Library staff to promote the work of Northumberland Archives."*

Other than promotion, stakeholders feel **the library service could be improved** by:

- Working more with other organisations
- Increasing the digital offer, e.g. offer remote access to wider services
- Securing increased funding
- Employing more staff
- Giving library staff more decision-making authority and encouraging innovative thinking

### Strengths of service

Stakeholders feel the key strengths of the service lie in its **focus on supporting the community** and the free access to both physical and digital resources.

## Challenges

Stakeholders feel the **lack of financial security** and the uncertainty that this creates for staff members is the key challenge for the service going forward.

Other key challenges include the need to break down the barriers around misconceptions of the service, and the need for the library service to prove its value to the council and to the community (which is again linked to increasing awareness of the services offered by the library).

There is also some uncertainty over whether the library service currently holds the necessary skills sets to tackle the challenges it will face in future, for example:

*"The Library Service has suffered year on year budget reductions. The service is under-resourced and it needs staff members with particular skill sets – digital skills, local/family history knowledge, staff who can advocate or the service etc. I imagine that there are currently gaps in these skills."*

## There are many opportunities for increased collaboration

Stakeholders are keen to collaborate further with the library services, although this is often hampered by a lack of staff. For example:

*"We enjoy a very good relationship with the Library Service. We have plans to develop a joint project but there are other opportunities for joint working. Both services – Libraries and Archives are hampered by lack of staffing capacity to work together as effectively as we might."*

*"I think the service realises it has these challenges, but it doesn't have the resources – staff or funding - to address them."*

## CVS (Charity and Voluntary Sector) Stakeholders:

Both stakeholders from CVS organisations feel they have a good relationship with the library service, and both point to the good levels of communication and co-operation.

## Co-location Partners:

The majority of co-location partners rate the relationship with the library service very highly.

There are mixed views from co-location partners on how positive their users feel about the co-location of services:

- One CVS partner feels their users are happy they can come to one place to take part in activities and have access to library facilities, and one co-located partner does not feel that users differentiate between the organisations due to the positive attitude of the staff
- However, another co-located partner feels they lack space in their co-location, and the noise from other services can create problems for their customers who require a quiet space.

They key **benefits of co-location** are the increased footfall it can bring, the access to wider services it provides and the support from the professional library staff.  For example:

*"Users have access to printed sources and can be directed to the computers to access online resources. Library staff and tourism staff can direct people to us and vice versa. We could run joint events but that hasn't really been pursued because of lack of staff. Part of our remit is similar and so there is a crossover."*

There are some **disadvantages** to sharing a location however, namely:

- The lack of space and the competing demands on the buildings
- Running events and activities (by all partners) disturbs customers from other services
- Some issue around paying to use spaces and meeting rooms

To **improve** the co-location arrangement, partners would like to have more space and to have regular meetings to discuss upcoming events and initiatives and the possibilities for more joint working.

*"We need more dialogue. We have good working relationship with staff on the ground but there needs to be more done strategically."*

## NCC stakeholders – views on potential new ways of working

NCC colleagues are in favour of **focussing the service on a number of hub libraries,** and feel that services working together is the right approach. One also points to the need to be involve in strategic conversations at the NCC to ensure there is a joined-up approach. The key concerns around this approach is that there may be too strong a focus on the larger towns and that all partners involved need to be equally valued.

**Increasing and improving the digital offer** is considered essential in the modern world, and stakeholders feel "libraries need to be 21st century information centres and be leaders in the field of digital communication". The only concern about this approach is that older users lack digital skills.

**Co-locations** is seen as an approach that works very well, particularly if the services are complementary. Existing co-locations that are perceived to be working well are those where services are complementary, such as the arts, where partners have common goals and are flexible and supportive of each other. For example:

*"Definitely works well within an Arts Centre model as literature is an Art and this can be explored through the Universal offers. It works well too in the fact that libraries are under Arts Council's remit."*

*"In a rural context, it's marrying the best fit within a community. Wooler's library within the Glendale Trust building works well as they are both community focused."*

Existing co-locations that are not perceived by stakeholders to be working well are those where services are not complementary, in particular when libraries are based within leisure centres, for example:

*"I have not experienced successful partnerships / relationships when libraries are based within leisure facilities. They deliver two very different activities and it is not likely that you would use both together. The music and fitness activity does not complement the quiet space of study or group*

*activity / reading or writing groups. The gym is about body fitness and library is mental stimulation / learning and information."*

*"If a library is placed in a building where the is not a natural relationship e.g. in a leisure or sports centre then this will not help the library build new customers. This model doesn't work well."*

The key **benefits** of more co-locations are that it saves money by sharing overheads, can protect vulnerable services (particularly in rural areas) and can bring in new audiences to co-located services.

Stakeholders feel increasing the **use of volunteers to help run the service** can have some benefits, in particular:

- Ability to open libraries for extended hours
- Can work well in areas with high numbers of educated, community-focussed retirees
- Good local knowledge of volunteers
- Efficiency of resources
- Increases community buy-in

However, there are some concerns over this model, namely the unreliability of volunteers, the lack of professionalism and the need for volunteers to be managed and trained by paid staff.  For example:

*"This works well in some areas, for example, Jesmond, where there is a large number of active, educated, community focussed retirees. Here, residents have been very successful in sourcing funding but not all communities have this skill set. Volunteers can pick and choose when to work and cannot always be relied upon and it may not therefore be possible to guarantee opening hours."*

*"I feel that having some professional input is essential to any library. Very few completely volunteer led libraries operate successfully."*

### Libraries as Community Partnerships

Similar to using more volunteers to run the service, stakeholders feel this can work well in areas where there are high numbers of well-educated retired people, however volunteers will still need to be managed and supported by paid staff.

### Meeting the Universal Offers

Stakeholders generally feel that the library service is currently achieving each Universal Offer outcome (as identified in the government report) 'to some extent'.  Suggested improvements to improve on each area include:

| Outcome | Suggested improvements |
|---------|------------------------|
| Cultural and creative enrichment | - More joined up working with cultural organisations in Northumberland. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • More proactivity in seeking external and additional sources of funding for projects<br>• Staff need the ability to make creative decisions and know that there is a small budget to support activity; enrichment<br>• Libraries could be more strategic and joined up with what the cultural sector is doing |
| Increased reading and literacy | • Organising things with schools is of great value |
| Improved digital access and literacy | • I would like to see more emphasis on remote learning and access to services digitally through Skype/Zoom/ Google Hangouts particularly in more remote areas<br>• I imagine this is happening to some extent, but the library service could be leaders in the field with investment |
| Helping everyone to achieve their full potential | • By having a network of accessible libraries and organising activities within them; My impression is that there is not a wide demographic of library users. Activities need to increase this; I think this is the core focus of libraries |
| Healthier and happier lives | • More activities that increase well-being and greater access to services via digital |
| Greater prosperity | • Work more closely with employment providers and businesses<br>• As learning enablers, the libraries support and provide opportunities for people to gain skills / learn in career development and in turn this leads to greater prosperity. Perhaps there needs to be some way of capturing this in case studies |
| Stronger, more resilient communities | • More community focussed activity could be planned<br>• Make people aware of all the services the library can provide and make it a community hub<br>• The Library is a place of knowledge, stories, people to help that doesn't have the barriers of other organisations and sectors. A community with good access to a quality service would contribute to stronger and more resilient people. |

## Potential future of service

Stakeholders feel libraries offer an important service, in particular in bringing communities together, and feel that with investment, the service has huge potential.
In order to achieve the potential of the service, stakeholders feel the library service needs to:
- Demonstrate its value to local communities
- Learn from and connect with other sectors
- Work more with other organisations
- Be given financial security

## Stakeholder consultation: formal responses

Formal responses to the public consultation were received from several groups or organisations.  A summary of each of these is included below:

| Organisation or group | Summary of points raised |
|---|---|
| Amble: Elected representatives | • Support continued provision of a library in Amble<br>• Library is vital community resource in Amble, offering variety of uses<br>• Key source of digital connectivity in area of social deprivation<br>• Provides an important place for social interaction<br>• Library staff are an asset<br>• Aware that change may be necessary but vital this resource is retained |
| Bamburgh Parish Council | • Support continued provision of the mobile library service<br>• Support for continuation of Seahouses Development Trust |
| Bardon Mill Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of Haltwhistle library<br>• Services, staff and computer facilities all appreciated<br>• Issues to consider: lack of new books/choice of books; length of wait for requested books; library is often under-staffed |
| Bavington Parish Council | • Support continued provision of the mobile library service – vital service for community and particularly elderly and vulnerable residents |
| Beadnell Parish Council | • Library facilities in Beadnell, Seahouses/North Sunderland and Bamburgh have been severely degraded in recent years<br>• Loss of lending library in Seahouses has been a loss to the community; interim library no longer supported by NCC<br>• Mobile library service is valuable link but does not visit frequently enough and van is needs replacing<br>• Investment in hubs should not be at the expense of providing library service to rural communities<br>• There is a finite and small pool of willing volunteers in small rural areas and relying on volunteers to provide the service in rural areas is likely to be at the expense of supporting other local activities<br>• Views of the public on the post-consultation recommendations should be sought prior to Cabinet considerations and final decisions are made |
| Russ Wallace, Independent County Councillor, Bedlington Central | • Support for continued provision of the library at Bedlington<br>• Vital service for the town which has positive impact, particularly through its many events and activities<br>• Provides only real social meeting place in the town<br>• Key source of support to residents |
| Blyth Town Council | • Support continued provision of a library in Blyth Town Centre<br>• Library is busy, vibrant community space offering variety of services, activities and events, many of which help to overcome social isolation<br>• Also offers well-used computer suite, Local Studies and Home Library service |
| Coquetdale Arts Centre | • Support continued provision of a library in Rothbury<br>• Studio and gallery located in library building<br>• Charity providing unique gallery and tourist attraction<br>• Concerned over potential library closure |
| Corbridge Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of library and tourist information centre in Corbridge<br>• Parish Council would like to input into discussions following consultation period<br>• Accept changes to service are necessary, and would like to see the library building expanded into a real community base |

| Organisation or group | Summary of points raised |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Greenhead Parish Council | • Support for continued of current library service provision<br>• Members are impressed with service and staff<br>• Staff having to also run Tourism service can result in lengthy waits |
| Haltwhistle Town Council | • Support for continued provision of Haltwhistle library<br>• Issues to consider: cost of hiring room on first floor is prohibitively high; the library is often under-staffed; upper floors are under-used and should be used for council office. |
| Hedley Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of the mobile library service – vital service for community and particularly for elderly residents and children<br>• Mobile service needs improving from current provision – unsuitable van has led to decreased use of service in recent years |
| Hedgeley Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of the mobile library service – vital service for community and particularly elderly and vulnerable residents |
| Hexham Local History Society | • Support for continued provision of free public library service in Northumberland<br>• Local Studies Collection in Hexham is of particular importance, and has lacked appropriate attention from NCC in past years<br>• Library service is more than a loan service, in particular offering access to information that cannot easily be found online<br>• Access to qualified librarians is becoming increasingly rare |
| Kirkwelphington Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of the mobile library service |
| Plenmeller with Whitfield Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of Haltwhistle library<br>• Services, staff and computer facilities all appreciated<br>• Issues to consider: lack of new books/choice of books; length of wait for requested books; library is often under-staffed |
| Seaton Valley Community Council | • Support for continued provision of the libraries at Seaton Sluice Community Centre and within Astley Community High School<br>• Feel Seaton Sluice needs new investment, in particular interior refurbishment<br>• Would like to see provision of library services to continue within any new school |
| Tarset and Greystead Parish Council | • Support for continued provision of the mobile library service<br>• Support for continued provision of the library at Bellingham |
| Thirlwall Parish Council | • Parish Council has agreed local library services should be protected<br>• Services are considered vital for local communities for variety of reasons and for both residents and visitors<br>• Important that services are manned by professional staff, not volunteers, and should be open and accessible at all hours |

# Appendix

Note: the print version of the survey is included here for ease of reading.  The questions are identical to the online version.

## Northumberland
### County Council

# Library Services Consultation
# Resident Survey

This survey is about how residents currently use library services in Northumberland, and the results of this survey will be used to inform decisions about future library services in Northumberland.

The survey is open for 12 weeks and closes on 16th March 2020.

It can be completed by individuals.  If you are under 16 years of age, please ensure you have your parent or guardian's permission.  Please answer as many questions as you can.

**Data Protection and Your Privacy**

By completing this survey, you will be consenting to your data being used to inform decisions about future library services in Northumberland.

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 we have a legal duty to protect any information we collect from you.

The information will only be used for the purposes described above and will not be kept longer than is necessary to do so, up to a maximum of two years.

We will not share your personal details with any other agency unless we have concerns that you or another individual may be at risk of harm or if it is required by law.  We will not use the information you give us in this survey for commercial purposes.

## Section 1: About your use of Northumberland Library Services

Q1.  Are you currently a member of a local library?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Don't know

Q2.  Have you used any of the following libraries in the last 12 months, or has someone used any of them on your behalf? Please tick all that apply.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Allendale | ☐ Cramlington | ☐ Newbiggin |
| ☐ Alnwick | ☐ Guidepost | ☐ Ponteland |
| ☐ Amble | ☐ Haltwhistle | ☐ Prudhoe |
| ☐ Ashington | ☐ Haydon Bridge | ☐ Rothbury |
| ☐ Bedlington | ☐ Heddon on the Wall | ☐ Seaton Sluice |
| ☐ Bedlington Station | ☐ Hexham | ☐ Seaton Valley |
| ☐ Bellingham | ☐ Hirst | ☐ South Beach |
| ☐ Berwick | ☐ Kielder | ☐ Widdrington |
| ☐ Blyth | ☐ Lynemouth | ☐ Wooler |
| ☐ Corbridge | ☐ Morpeth | ☐ Wylam |

☐ Home library service

☐ Mobile library service

☐ Don't know……...**SKIP TO Q4**

☐ I have not used any of these libraries in the past 12 months……...**SKIP TO Q4**

Q3.    And which library do you use the most frequently?

<div style="border:1px solid #000; min-height:150px;"></div>

☐ Home library service or Mobile library service…..**Please fill in the separate survey for Mobile and Home Library service**

☐ Don't use any library more than others

**NOW SKIP TO Q5**

Q4.    What are the main reasons that you don't use a library service?  Please select all that apply from the statements below and/or give your own reason in the text box provided.

☐ The library is not easy to get to by public transport

☐ Public transport is too expensive to get there

☐ There is no parking near to the library

☐ The library is not open at a time that is convenient to me

☐ I tend to buy books instead of borrowing them

☐ I borrow books from a different online service instead (such as Kindle lending library)

☐ I do not want/need any of the services offered by libraries

☐ I don't read books very often

☐ I would be worried about potential fines for overdue books

☐ I don't have time to go to the library

☐ I don't know what wider services the libraries offer

☐ I have never visited a library before

Other (please tell us):

[    ]

**NOW SKIP TO Q17**

Q5.　On average, how often do you visit a library?

☐ At least once a month…………………..**SKIP TO Q7**

☐ Every two to three months…………….**SKIP TO Q7**

☐ Once every four to six months…………**GO TO Q6**

☐ Less often than every six months……. **GO TO Q6**

Q6.　What are the main reasons that you don't visit a library more often?

[    ]

Q7.　When you visit the library, how do you usually get there?

☐ By car　　　　　☐ By public transport　　　　　☐ Someone else will take me

Other (please tell us):

[    ]

Q8.    Which of the following statements best describes how you use the library service?

☐ Visiting a library is part of my usual daily or weekly routine

☐ When I visit the library, this is often the main purpose of my outing

☐ The main reason I go to the library is to go to a club or event (such as Story and Rhymetime, Lego club, Knit and Natter and Crafts, Writers Group or Readers Group)

☐ I usually only go to the library if I am also going to use another service that is at the same place, such as the visitor information services

☐ I usually only go to a library if I am going out to do something else, such as shopping or running errands

Q9.    Overall, how would you rate the library service in your local area?

☐ Excellent        ☐ Quite poor        ☐ Don't know

☐ Good             ☐ Very poor

Q10.   What do you think the local library service currently does well?

Q11.  What do you think the local library service needs to improve on?

<br><br><br><br><br><br><br>

Q12.  To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*Please tick one box per statement*

| | Agree strongly | Agree slightly | Disagree slightly | Disagree strongly | Don't know/ Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel welcome in my local library/libraries | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| My local library is a pleasant place to visit | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The libraries in the local area offer similar levels of service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The local libraries have modern IT facilities | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| My local library offers a good range of books | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It is easy to access my local library | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| My local library offers a good range of events/groups | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The staff at the library are helpful | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The staff at the library are knowledgeable | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It is useful to have the library at the same place as other services (such as visitor information centres or leisure services) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

**Q13.** Which of the following statements apply to your use of library services?
*Please choose all statements that apply.*

☐ I go to the library to access the free books and resources

☐ I go to the library to attend an event (such as Story and Rhymetime, Lego club, Knit and Natter and Crafts, Writers Group or Reader's Group)

☐ The library is the main way I access computers or the internet

☐ The library is an important place for me to socialise with others

☐ I use the library to spend quality time with my children

☐ I often visit the library as it is somewhere to go to pass time

☐ Visiting the library helps me to feel less lonely or isolated

☐ I go to the library because it is a safe place for me to visit

☐ I go to the library because it is a quiet place for me to visit

☐ I use the library to look for work

**Q14.** Does your local library offer the following services?

*Please tick one box per statement*

| | Yes | No | Don't know/ Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lending books (hardback or paperback) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Lending digital books (eBooks) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Access to computers | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Free internet access | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Printing facilities | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

| (Q14 continued) | Yes | No | Don't know/ Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|
| Offering local history or local studies resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Lending audiobooks (including eAudio service) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Digital skills courses | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Holds groups or events | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Offers information on healthy living | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Local advice or information service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Dedicated study areas | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Visitor information service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Any other services (please tell us) | | | |

Q15. And which of the following library services have you used in the last 12 months, either for yourself or on behalf of someone else?

*Please tick all statements that apply*

☐ Borrowed a book (hardback or paperback)

☐ Borrowed a digital book (eBook)

☐ Used a computer

☐ Accessed the internet

☐ Used printing facilities

☐ Used local history or local studies resources

☐ Borrowed an audiobook (including eAudio service)

☐ Attended a digital skills course

☐ Attended a group or event

☐ Accessed information on healthy living

☐ Used a dedicated study area

☐ Used the visitor information service

Any other services (please tell us)

Q16.  How important is it to you personally that local libraries offer the following services?

*Please tick one box per statement*

| | Very important | Quite important | Not very important | Not at all important | Don't know/ Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lending books (hardback or paperback) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Lending digital books (eBooks) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Computers/internet access | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Printing facilities | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Local history or local studies resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Lending audiobooks (including eAudio service) | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| A local advice/information service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Digital skills courses | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Holding groups or events | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Offer information on healthy living | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Q17. Are there any services your local library doesn't provide that you would like them to provide?

<br>

Q18. Are you aware of the opening times at the library?

☐ Yes, and the library is always open when it should be

☐ Yes, but the library isn't always open when it says it will be

☐ No, I am not aware of the opening times

Q19. Would you use your local library service more often if it was open at different times than it is currently?

☐ Yes…………………………………….……..**GO TO Q20**

☐ No, the opening hours suit me……………..……..**SKIP TO Q21**

☐ No, different opening hours wouldn't mean I would use the library service more …………………………………………...… **SKIP TO Q21**

☐ Don't know…………………….……………….**SKIP TO Q21**

Q20. What time of day/week would you be **most likely** to visit your local library service if it was open at this time? Please choose one option only

☐ Weekdays 9am-1pm      ☐ Saturday mornings

☐ Weekdays 1pm-5pm      ☐ Saturday afternoons

☐ Weekdays 5pm-8pm
Other (please tell us)

[ ]

Q21. Do you think it would be a good idea to have local volunteers help deliver the library service?

☐ Yes, and I would be interested in volunteering      ☐ No

☐ Yes, but I would not be interested in volunteering      ☐ Not sure/Don't know

Q22. If you have any other feedback, including whether you feel the service should be kept as a Council-run service or whether an external organisation should run the service, please tell us this here.

[ ]

## Section 2: About you

Q23.  What is your postcode?

[                    ]

Q24.  Do you identify as:

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Prefer to self-describe (open text box)

Q25.  What is your age?

☐ Under 16

☐ 16-18 years old

☐ 19-24 years old

☐ 25-34 years old

☐ 35-44 years old

☐ 45-54 years old

☐ 55-64 years old

☐ 65-74 years old

☐ 75 or over

☐ Prefer not to say

Q26.  Do you have children living at home? Please select all that apply.

☐ Yes, including a child/children under the age of 5

☐ Yes, including a child/children aged 5 and 11

☐ Yes, including a child/children aged 12 – 16

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

Q27. Are you currently…?

*Please choose the option(s) that best describes your current situation.*

☐ In full-time employment

☐ In part-time employment

☐ Out of work and looking for work

☐ Out of work but not currently looking for work

☐ A homemaker

☐ A carer

☐ A student

☐ Retired

☐ Unable to work

☐ Other (please tell us)

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☐ Prefer not to say

Q28.  To which of the following ethnic groups do you feel you belong:

☐ Asian/Asian British

☐ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

☐ Mixed/multiple ethnic groups

☐ White

☐ Other ethnic group (please tell us)

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☐ Prefer not to say

Q29.  Do you consider yourself to have an impairment and/or disability?
*Please choose all that apply.*

☐ Yes – a physical impairment/disability

☐ Yes – a sensory impairment

☐ Yes – a learning difficulty or disability

☐ Yes – mental health needs

☐ Yes – other impairment/disability

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

If you would like Northumberland County Council to keep you up-to-date on the library service, volunteering opportunities or to take part in a workshop on potential changes to the library service, please tick the box(es) below and enter your details:

Q30.  I am happy for Northumberland County Council to contact me about:

☐ Updates to library services

☐ Volunteering opportunities at a library

☐ The library service consultation

Name _____

Email _____

Telephone number _____

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey – your feedback is important for us**

Note: the print version of the survey is included here for ease of reading. The questions are identical to the online version.

Northumberland
County Council

# Library Services Consultation
# Resident Survey: Mobile or Home Library Service

This survey is about how residents currently use the **mobile library and home library services** in Northumberland, and the results of this survey will be used to inform decisions about future library services in Northumberland.

The survey is open for 12 weeks and closes on 16th March 2020.

It can be completed by individuals. If you are under 16 years of age, please ensure you have your parent or guardian's permission. Please answer as many questions as you can.

**Data Protection and Your Privacy**

By completing this survey, you will be consenting to your data being used to inform decisions about future library services in Northumberland.

Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 we have a legal duty to protect any information we collect from you.

The information will only be used for the purposes described above and will not be kept longer than is necessary to do so, up to a maximum of two years.

We will not share your personal details with any other agency unless we have concerns that you or another individual may be at risk of harm or if it is required by law. We will not use the information you give us in this survey for commercial purposes.

## Section 1: About your use of Northumberland Library Services

Q1.    Are you currently a member of a local library?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Don't know

Q2.    Which library service do you use most frequently?

☐ Mobile library service              ☐ Home library service

**Thinking about your usage of the home or mobile library service:**

Q3.    On average, how often do you use the mobile or home library service?

☐ At least once a month…………………….. **SKIP TO Q5**

☐ Every two to three months………………..……**SKIP TO Q5**

☐ Once every four to six months…………..…….**GO TO Q4**

☐ Less often than every six months………..……**GO TO Q4**

Q4.    What are the main reasons that you don't use the mobile or home library service more frequently?

Q5.    Overall, how would you rate the mobile/home library service?

☐ Excellent          ☐ Quite poor          ☐ Don't know
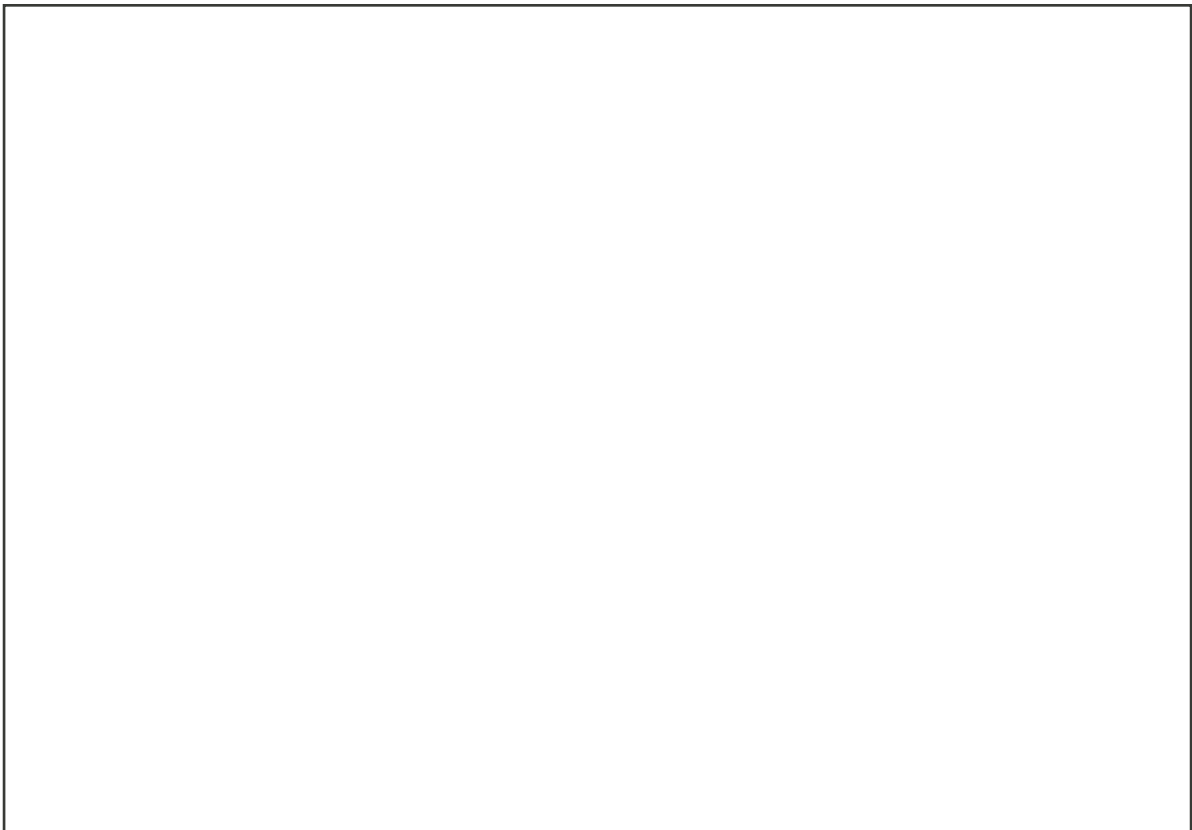
☐ Good               ☐ Very poor

Q6.    What are your main reasons for giving this rating?

Q7.    What do you think the mobile/home library service currently does well?

Q8.    What do you think the mobile/home library service needs to improve on?

Q9.    To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*Please tick one box per statement*

| | Agree strongly | Agree slightly | Disagree slightly | Disagree strongly | Don't know/Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The main reason I use the mobile/home library service is to access the free books and resources | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I look forward to the mobile/home library service visit | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It is clear when the mobile/home library service will visit | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The home/mobile library service is reliable | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The home/mobile library service visits on a day I find convenient | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The home/mobile library service visits at a time I find convenient | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The mobile library services stops close to my home | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The mobile/home library visit is long enough to meet my needs | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The home/mobile library services visits frequently enough | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The mobile/home library visit helps me to feel less lonely or isolated | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The mobile/home library staff are friendly and helpful | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The range of books offered by the mobile/home service is good | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It is easy to provide feedback on the service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel comfortable providing feedback on the service | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Q10. If you have any other feedback, including whether you feel the service should be kept as a Council-run service or whether an external organisation should run the service, please tell us this here.

## Section 2: About you

Q11. What is your postcode?

Q12. Do you identify as:

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Prefer to self-describe (open text box)

**Q13.** What is your age?

☐ Under 16      ☐ 35-44 years old      ☐ 75 or over

☐ 16-18 years old      ☐ 45-54 years old      ☐ Prefer not to say

☐ 19-24 years old      ☐ 55-64 years old

☐ 25-34 years old      ☐ 65-74 years old

**Q14.** Do you have children living at home? Please select all that apply.

☐ Yes, including a child/children under the age of 5

☐ Yes, including a child/children aged 5 and 11

☐ Yes, including a child/children aged 12 – 16

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

**Q15.** Are you currently…?

*Please choose the option(s) that best describes your current situation.*

☐ In full-time employment      ☐ A homemaker

☐ In part-time employment      ☐ A carer

☐ Out of work and looking for work      ☐ A student

☐ Retired

☐ Out of work but not currently looking for work      ☐ Unable to work

☐ Other (please tell us)

[text box]

☐ Prefer not to say

Q16.  To which of the following ethnic groups do you feel you belong:

☐ Asian/Asian British

☐ Black / African / Caribbean /
Black British

☐ Mixed/multiple ethnic groups

☐ White

☐ Other ethnic group (please tell us)

```

```

☐ Prefer not to say


Q17.   Do you consider yourself to have an impairment and/or disability?

*Please choose all that apply.*


☐ Yes – a physical impairment/disability

☐ Yes – a sensory impairment

☐ Yes – a learning difficulty or disability

☐ Yes – mental health needs

☐ Yes – other impairment/disability

☐ No

☐ Prefer not to say

If you would like Northumberland County Council to keep you up-to-date on the library service, volunteering opportunities or to take part in a workshop on potential changes to the library service , please tick the box(es) below and enter your details:

Q18.   I am happy for Northumberland County Council to contact me about:

☐ Updates to library services

☐ Volunteering opportunities at a library

☐ The library service consultation

Name _____

Email _____

Telephone number _____

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey – your feedback is important for us**

**3. Copy of Discussion guide used for the in-depth telephone discussions with residents**

# Northumberland County Council: Libraries Consultation

### Discussion guide: User telephone interviews

**<u>Introductions</u>**

**Respondent introductions** –

- Please can you tell me a little bit about yourself – who you live with (if anyone), what you do for a job if you are working?
- In the survey, you put that the library service you use most frequently is <LIBRARY FROM SURVEY>. Is this correct?
- If you were to describe the library in a couple of sentences, what would you say?

**Usage:**

- How often do you visit the library on average?
- Has this changed over time – is this more or less than a few years ago?
    - *If yes:* What do you think is the reason for this change?
- What are the main reasons you visit the library?
    - What do you tend to do when you are there?
    - What do you use the library for?
        - *Prompt on:* Books, use PCs/internet, local information, groups/events etc.

*If don't use library at least weekly, ask:*

- Would you like to visit/use the library more often?
- Is there anything preventing you from using it more often?
- What are main reasons that you don't go to the library more often?
- What could the library do or offer that might encourage you to visit more often?


**Perceptions of current service**

In the survey, you rated your local library services as <RATING> overall.

- Can you tell me a little bit more about why you gave this rating?
- What do you think the library service currently does well?
- What improvements would you like to see?


**Typical visit**

I would like you to imagine you are visiting the library, so just thinking of a typical visit. Please can you walk me through each step.

*Discuss*:

Thinking first about what time and day you go to the library and your journey there:

*Prompt on:*

- Reasons for visit (e.g. part of regular routine, to borrow/return books, use PCs etc)
- Who do you go with/when?
- How do you get there?
- What day/time you go?

Once you are at the library, please can you tell me:

- What it feels like, what is the atmosphere?
- What you do tend to do?
- What do you see, what do you look at?
- What other people are using the library – what is a typical library user that you see?
- How long do you spend there?
- Who do you interact with?
- Anything else you would do?

**Perceptions of others**

If you had a new neighbour who had moved from a different area, what do you think they would say after making their first visit to your local library?

- What first impressions do you think they would have?
- How are they likely to have heard about/found out about the library?
- What would they think about the library after their first visit?
- What might they say to others about it?
- What services do you think they would notice that the library offers?

**PARENTS GROUP ONLY: Children's services**

*If not already mentioned, establish which children's services accessed and with what frequency, and then ask:*

- How would you rate the provision for children at the library?
- What could the library do to improve its offer for children and young people?
- *If younger children in house:*
  - How do you think your usage of the library will change over the next few years?
    - In what way?  What makes you say that?
  - How well do you feel the library caters well for teenagers and young adults?
    - What makes you say that?
    - How do you think the library could improve their offer to older children?
- *If older children in house:*
  - Do your older children use the library? If so, what for?
  - In what way has your usage of the library changed over the years?
  - How well do you feel the library caters for teenagers and young adults? What makes you say that?
  - How do you think the library could improve their offer to older children?

**Services**

*Ask of areas not already mentioned:*

- How do you tend to read – hard copies, digital versions etc?
  - How would you rate the provision of reading materials at your local library?
  - How do you think this could be improved?
  - Do you read large print books?
  - Do you listen to talking books on cd or mp3?
    - If not – is this something you would go to the library for?
- How do you access the internet?
  - Do you ever specifically go to the library to access the internet?
- Do you have computers and printers at home or work that you can use?
  - Is this something you ever go to the library to use?
- Do you take part or have an interest in cultural or creative activities or events?
  - Where would you tend to look for information on cultural or creative activities or events?
    - Is this something you would expect to find at the library?
  - Have you ever taken part in any cultural or creative activities or events at a local library?
    - *If yes:* Please can you briefly tell me a little bit more about this – what would you say is/was good about this activity, is there anything that could be improved?
    - *If no:* Would you expect these kinds of activities or events to take place at your library?  Would you be interested in going to the library to take part in cultural or creative activities?
- If you were looking for information on healthy eating or self-help information, where would you tend to look for this information first?
  - Is this something you would expect to find at the library?
  - Have you ever accessed this type of information at the library?
    - *If yes:* How useful did you find this?
    - *If no:* Would you go to the library for this type of information?
- If you were looking for information on studying or further education courses for example, where would you look for this information first?
  - Would you go to the library for this information?
  - Are you aware that libraries offer some courses, such as digital skills courses?  Is this something that would interest you?
  - Have you ever gone used the library as a place to study or work?
    - *If yes:* How did you find this?
    - *If no:* Would you ever consider this?

**VOLUNTEERING GROUP ONLY - Volunteering**

You indicated in the questionnaire that you would potentially be interested in volunteering at a local library.  I would like to understand a little bit more about what you think this could involve, and what support you think volunteers would need.

- What kind of tasks do you expect volunteers would be asked to do if volunteering at a library?
- What opportunities would you like to see offered to volunteers?

- If you were to become a volunteer, what support would you need in order to help at the library?
    - *Probe on:* What training would you need – IT training, training on dealing with enquiries, how to run a group, customer care etc?
- What do you think volunteers could personally gain from helping to run the library service?
- How would you feel if volunteers would need provide personal references and to be DBS checked (a government check to ensure people are suitable for certain roles, e.g. checking for any criminal convictions)?
- How would you feel about volunteers being asked to commit to regular hours at the library service?
- Would you expect volunteers to attend regular meetings?
- Do you have any concerns about using volunteers to help run the library service, or how this would work in practice?

**Ideal library**

If we lived in an ideal world, and you could travel forward 5 years from now, what would you like the library service to look like?

*Prompts:*

- Where would the library be located?
- Describe what the space would look like?
- What would it feel like?
- What services would be on offer?
- Who would be using the service?
- What would local people be saying about the service?

**Likelihood to use in future**

- If the local library service did not change, how do you think your usage of the library might change in the future?
    - What makes you say that?
- If the local library service made some or all of the improvements that you mentioned earlier, would this impact on your usage? In what way?
- If you were in charge of the library service, what would you do to encourage people to use it more?

**Reactions to potential new ways of working**

The government has published a report on library services and in the report there are some potential ways of working for our library services of the future. We would like to understand your views on some of these. Please understand that the council has not made any decisions whatsoever on what will happen to the library service; this is just to understand people's views on the suggestions from the government report, and whether people think any of these options could work in your area.

- Focussing the service on a number of hub libraries

- o This would provide a full range of services, activities and events through a network of satellite facilities, as and where the need is greatest.
- Improving and increasing the digital offer – to ensure that communities have access to quality digital services and information, to learn new skills and feel safe online
- More co-locations (and potentially less stand-alone libraries)
- Increasing the number of volunteers to help run the service
- Libraries becoming more of a community partnership
  - o Community Partnership - Satellite libraries that may be Council operated but with significant community support (Volunteers) or community-led where volunteers operate on a day to day basis but with professional support.

For each:

- What is your reaction to this?
- Do you think this would work in your area?
- What concerns would you have about this?

**Any other comments**

Do you have anything else you would like to add or feedback on?

**Thank and Close**