

The future of Swindon's Libraries

Report on engagement work, 2016

**A report by Phil Back Associates Ltd
for Swindon Borough Council
May 2016**

Executive summary

1. This report sets out the results of an engagement process undertaken online and on paper, in the early part of 2016, to which 2,688 responses were received. The questionnaire was accompanied by an informative leaflet and sought views on an 'emerging model' for the future of the library service.
2. Although people of all ages have responded, there is a predominance of older people, and disproportionate numbers of women in the response. As a result of the age profile, there are also more disabled people than might be expected from their presence in the population, and a large proportion who have no children at home. Very few respondents are gay, lesbian or transgender; most are white, and speak English as a first language.
3. There has been a strong response to the survey in some areas, most noticeably from Highworth but also from North Swindon, Wroughton and Covingham; response is patchier from South Marston, Penhill, Pinehurst and Parks/Walcot.
4. Almost all respondents are users of Swindon libraries. Three quarters used their local library within the week prior to completing the survey, and half say they visit every week; most of the rest visit at least once a month. The libraries most often used by respondents are Central, Highworth, North and West, but all libraries are represented to some extent.
5. Book lending by adults is the principal transaction undertaken by respondents or their families at libraries, well ahead of any other activity, but finding information and children's lending are also well-used services. Computers are mainly used for research and homework. Use of the library for social networking or game-playing, or for IT help, are very limited. Several library activities are only used regularly by quite small proportions of customers.
6. A fairly substantial minority of customers use e-services, including renewals online and ordering items through the catalogue, but very few stream media or download e-books electronically.
7. The service is regarded as very important both to respondents and even more so for their wider communities. The service areas regarded as most important include book lending, information and children's lending; among services regarded as less important are newspapers and magazines, and minority language publications.
8. All times of the week appeal to at least some respondents, but weekday afternoons and weekend mornings are the most favoured times, with weekend evenings by far the least popular.
9. Over half of respondents see possible advantage in co-location; relatively few reject this approach. Half are willing to at least consider volunteering, with many willing to help serve customers or in administrative support.

10. Age is a significant factor in the way people respond. Younger adults are the most frequent visitors to libraries, make far more use of e-services, and are less likely to use libraries for newspapers or information. Older adults are more likely to be participants in community activities based at the library, and place a higher importance on its social dimension. Older people also prefer weekday opening, whereas younger adults are more positive about weekend opening. Older people are very much more likely to offer as volunteers.
11. Although there is some backing for the emerging model, and support for elements of it (especially the ideas of co-location and expansion of the mobile service), the predominant response is a strong and vehement opposition to the proposals. People do largely recognise the financial benefit of the model, but nevertheless urge the authority to reconsider.
12. The main objection to the emerging model is the loss of local libraries in favour of a Central Library service that people believe will be difficult to access, especially for less mobile users, parents with young children, and older residents. Many people draw attention to the distance between town centre bus stops and the library. Others raise the difficulty of parking in the vicinity of the Central Library. Many people say they are unlikely to use this alternative.
13. There are also questions about the capacity of the Central Library to handle the volume of traffic the model suggests would have to go there. Respondents ask whether the library has sufficient seating, desks or computers to meet the expected demand, and whether the quality of service will be damaged.
14. A large number of people note the reliance of the emerging model on e-services, and suggest that there are large numbers of older users in particular who have no internet access at home. Some add that they are in fact dependent on the local library for their internet access. Several people welcome the convenience of e-services, but others emphasise the importance of browsing 'real' books, especially for children, and draw attention to the difficulties some e-readers have with illustrations.
15. There is a recognition that co-location could have advantages, not least in containing costs and enabling local service to be maintained, as well as in possible cross-fertilisation between services. However, others question the possibility of inappropriate co-location that may threaten comfort and safety of users.
16. The reliance on volunteers is challenged. Some see advantages in giving communities responsibility for local provision, but a majority are nervous about reliance on volunteers who will not have the training or professional expertise, and who may be unreliable in the longer term.
17. Many respondents highlight adverse impacts from the proposals. In particular, they are concerned about the loss of a facility that acts as a focal point for the community, providing social benefits for otherwise isolated people as well as formal library services. There is a widespread belief that children will be disadvantaged by these proposals, with

consequences for future literacy, and that older people, who use the service extensively, will also be impacted negatively. There are also concerns about the impact on well-being, and potential consequences in health and mental health.

18. Several respondents campaign for the retention of their own local library. Particularly prominent among these are people responding in support of Highworth library, which they believe is too far from the Central Library to make the model workable, and too important to the local community to be lost. They also point out that the library benefits from a peppercorn rent arrangement. Other libraries, including (but not limited to) Wroughton, North and West Swindon, also have their advocates. Some people suggest a compromise which allows retention of some larger libraries, allowing others to close or become dependent on volunteers.
19. Suggestions as to alternative approaches are very limited; a large number of responses call for no change, and many admit they don't know what might work. The most frequent suggestions are key elements of the emerging model - co-location and e-service expansion - alongside reduced opening hours, or charging for some services (PCs are the most often mentioned, but some are willing to pay for book loans, or to pay an annual membership fee).
20. The key considerations the service should take into account focus on impacts on different groups of people who, respondents believe, will be disadvantaged by the proposals. These include children and older people, but also the vulnerable, isolated and disabled. It is suggested that inequalities may be deepened by the proposed approach, and that the service should be one that is provided on an equitable basis to all the Borough's residents. The Council is also asked to take travel costs, times, and practical difficulties (such as children in pushchairs, or carrying bags of books) into consideration.
21. There is also a view that Swindon will be diminished by this proposal, with damage to the Borough's wider reputation as well as to its cultural life. Several respondents urge the authority to look at approaches taken by other authorities facing the same difficulties but without the severity of this solution.

1 Introduction and methodology

Swindon Borough Council operates a total of 15 libraries in the Borough, and is aware that these are valued and widely-used services. But the Council is also aware that the way in which people use services like those provided by libraries is changing, with an increased use of new technology to support fundamental activities including access to information, downloading books for electronic readers, and the streaming of music and films.

At the same time, the Council is under severe pressure to reduce the amount it spends on providing public services, and has therefore had to review its library budget proposals in the light of these pressures. A new library strategy is being drawn up that will reflect both the need to respond to technological change and the reduced levels of funding available for the library service. To inform the development of this strategy the Council has undertaken a programme of engagement with citizens, aiming to provide information about the circumstances facing the library service and to allow people to express their views about the ways in which the Council might respond to these pressures.

The engagement process has included:

- the preparation of an FAQ leaflet seeking to explain the background to the need for changes in the way the library service is provided, and discussing an 'emerging model' which the service is keen to obtain views on. This information has been circulated both in paper form and electronically through the Council website;
- a series of drop in sessions at libraries, and public meetings, in which people were given an opportunity to give their views on the fundamental questions about the library service, including by writing them on post-its and placing them on posters developed for this purpose;
- a questionnaire survey, made available online and also on paper, through which people were invited to provide information about their use of the service, their priorities for its future, their views on the 'emerging model' and its impacts, and suggestions for other models the Council might usefully explore.

In addition, several letters and emails have been received expressing opinions on the issues raised in this engagement process.

This report sets out the results of the questionnaire survey in some detail, and also reports on the opinions expressed in post-its and in other correspondence.

The survey was made available online and on paper, and ran from 22nd February 2016 until 29th April 2016, a timescale of almost ten weeks. Questionnaires were made available in local libraries and at other main Council outlets, whilst the online version was promoted through the Council website. By the end of the survey interval, a total of **2,688** questionnaires had been submitted; 619 of these were submitted online, with 2,069 completed on paper.

The methodology used was designed to be as inclusive as possible in enabling a wide range of people, including library users as a particularly important group, to participate in the engagement process. Not everyone answered every question, and each data tabulation therefore includes information about the level of response being examined. Readers may also wish to note that some questions allowed respondents to give more than one answer, and the results of these do not add up to 100%. No weightings have been applied to the data. Where a total represents less than half of 1%, an asterisk (*) is used to signify this.

The public meetings generated a total of 198 post-its, and a further 25 letters and emails from groups and from individuals are also included in the analysis that follows.

The questionnaires used in the engagement were designed jointly by Council officers and by myself as an independent research professional; the online version was created using Survey Gizmo software. The data analysis and the report have been undertaken from a completely independent perspective. As with any engagement exercise of this nature, the report presents the views and perspectives of respondents, regardless of how well-informed or justified these opinions may be.

All the data presented in this report is subject to a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, and care has been taken not to allow any person participating in the engagement to be identifiable from their response.

2 Respondent Profile

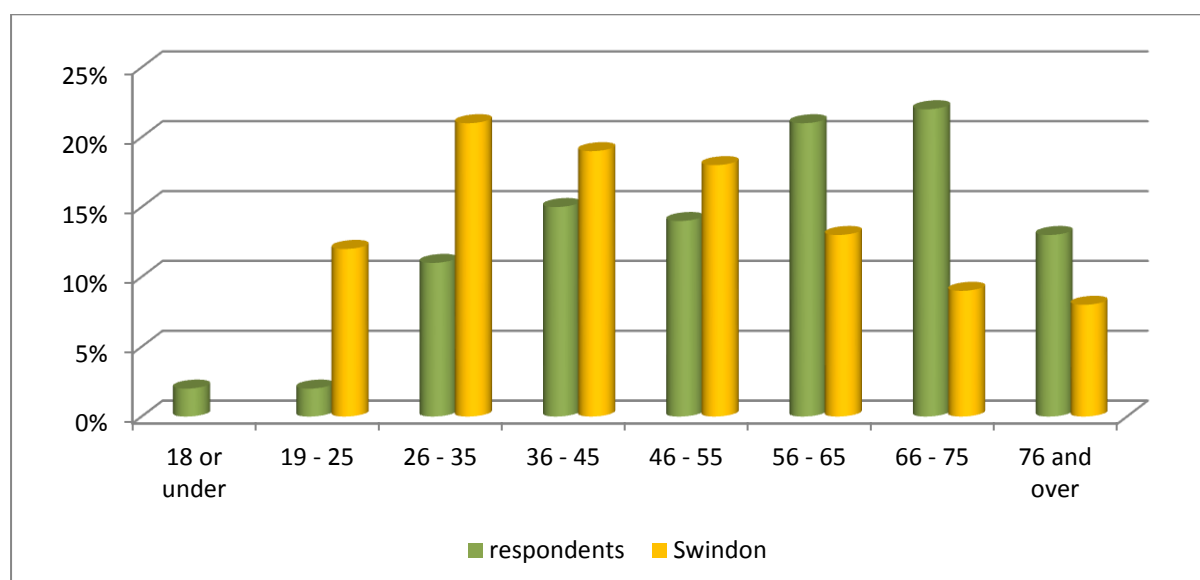
2.1 Age

Respondents were asked to disclose their age, and the results have been grouped into broad age bands, as in this table:

Table 1: Respondent age

Age-group	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adults in Swindon ¹
18 or under	2%	
19 - 25	2%	12%
26 - 35	11%	21%
36 - 45	15%	19%
46 - 55	14%	18%
56 - 65	21%	13%
66 - 75	22%	9%
76 and over	13%	8%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,470</i>	<i>162,633</i>

Chart 1: Respondent age



Although there are respondents from all age-groups, there is a clear preponderance of response from older sections of the library community. A third of those taking part in the survey are aged 66 or over, and two-thirds are over 46 years of age. Although there are

¹ All population data in this chapter are drawn from Neighbourhood Statistics, 2011 Census, for the Borough of Swindon.

participants from younger age-groups, including a small number of responses made from, or on behalf of, children, just 15% of those taking part are under 35 years of age.

Comparison with the proportions of adults in Swindon's population indicates a disproportionate response from the older age-groups within the local community. The proportions of people in the survey aged over 55 are significantly higher than their presence in the community as a whole, and this is especially true among younger retired people, who are between two and three times more likely to be present in the survey database than their presence in the population would suggest. In contrast, the participation of under 35s is much lower than a representative figure would be, and this is especially the case among under 25s.²

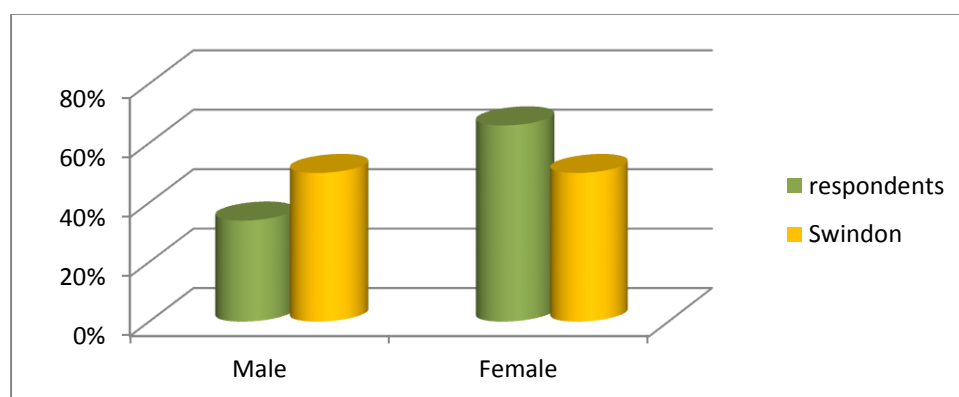
2.2 Gender

This table shows the split of response by gender:

Table 2: Respondent gender

Gender	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population
Male	34%	50%
Female	66%	50%
Transgender	*	
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,510	162,633

Chart 2: Respondent gender



A third of respondents are male, while two-thirds are female. In the adult population, there is an even split between males and females in the Borough, so the survey response includes a much higher proportion of females than might be inferred from population data. A small

² This comparison is not strictly accurate, due to the presence in the survey response of a small number of non-adults; but the picture of uneven response across adult age-groups is nevertheless clear.

number of transgender people have identified as such in the survey, less than 1% overall; no data exists to assess how representative this proportion may be of the wider population.

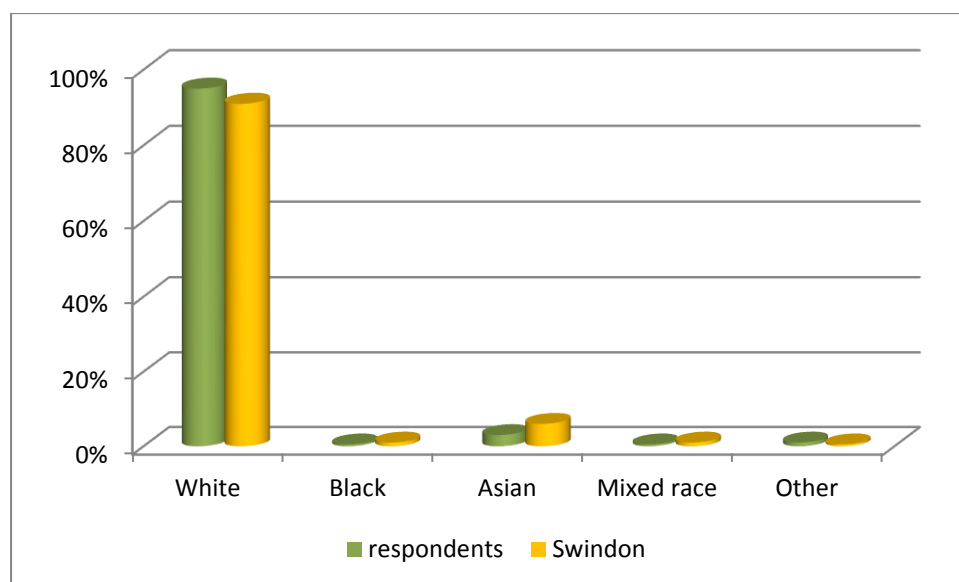
2.3 Ethnicity

The ethnic origin of respondents is shown here:

Table 3: Respondent ethnicity

Ethnicity	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population
White	95%	91%
Black	*	1%
Asian	3%	6%
Mixed race	*	1%
Other	1%	*
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,388</i>	<i>162,633</i>

Chart 3: Respondent ethnicity



The response is heavily concentrated in the white population of the Borough; nineteen of out twenty responses come from this part of the community. Other ethnicities are represented, nevertheless, although the comparison indicates that non-white respondents are proportionately fewer than might have been expected from their presence in the local population.

A closer analysis of responses in this regard indicates a small but highly diverse BME population in the Borough, with people from a wide range of different backgrounds, cultures and languages. Although most ethnically white people are native British, there are also small population groups who identify as Irish, as well as people from elsewhere in Europe and from the Old Commonwealth. Similarly, the Asian community includes both Indian and Pakistani elements alongside Goans and Bangladeshis. Most of the small black community response is from Caribbean or other black individuals, whilst the small group identifying as 'other' are primarily ethnic Chinese.

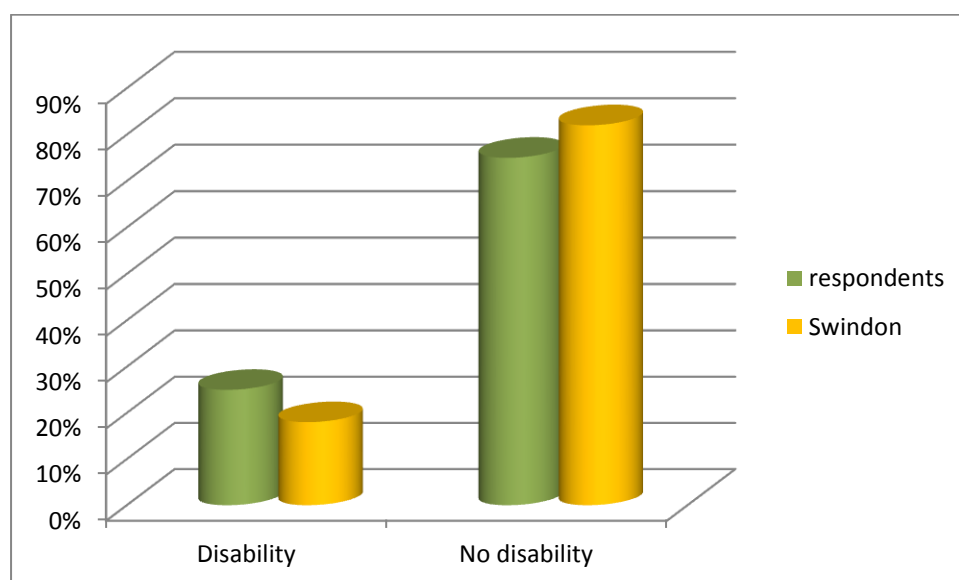
2.4 Disability

Levels of disability in the response are shown in this table:

Table 4: Respondent disability

	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population ³
Disability	25%	18%
No disability	75%	82%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,266	167,774

Chart 4: Respondent disability



³ Because of the way Government statistics on disability are presented, this column actually includes 16 and 17 year olds as well as adults, hence the slightly higher base number than in other comparisons we have made.

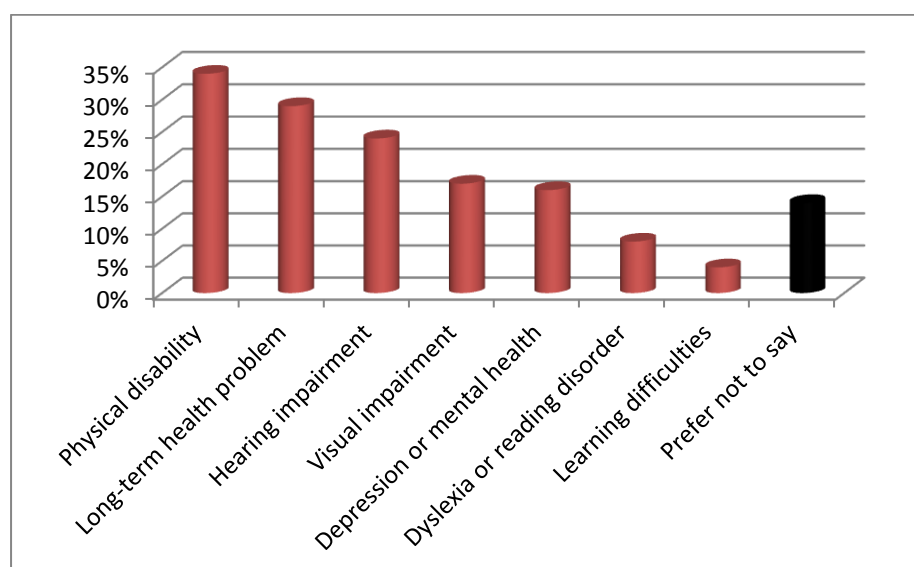
One in four respondents identifies themselves as having some form of disability. The proportion of people with disabilities is higher than would be expected from the general population data, but this is certainly influenced to some extent by the age profile of respondents, as older people are more likely to be experiencing disability.

This table explores the different dimensions of disability among respondents:

Table 4a: Respondent disability by type of disability

Disability	Proportion of respondents who have a disability	Proportion of all respondents
Physical disability	34%	8%
Long-term health problem	29%	7%
Hearing impairment	24%	6%
Visual impairment	17%	4%
Depression or mental health	16%	4%
Dyslexia or reading disorder	8%	2%
Learning difficulties	4%	1%
Prefer not to say	14%	4%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>561</i>	<i>2,266</i>

Chart 4a: Respondent disability by type of disability



Several respondents have more than one area of disability or impairment, so the proportions add up to more than 100%. The most common aspect of disability among respondents is a

physical disability, which affects around a third of all those who declare themselves as disabled. Just under a third report long-term health problems (which include diabetes), while a quarter have hearing issues and one in six struggle with eyesight. One in six are currently experiencing mental health problems including depression. Respondents also include smaller numbers of people with dyslexia, or with learning difficulties.

Respondents to the paper questionnaire were asked to indicate how their disability affects their use of the library. The responses here vary widely and range from the obvious issues of mobility for those with physical impairment, and reading difficulties for those with visual impairment, to less obvious issues such as anxiety which limits the capacity to go outside the home at times, fear of crowds that is a factor in choosing destinations, or extreme tiredness which worsens over the course of the day, making evening use difficult. Some individuals have to use libraries with level access, whilst others find their carrying capacity limited, meaning they visit the library more often. For some respondents, their disability mandates the use of local facilities that do not require a long walk or a bus ride they may not feel confident about, or alternatively a location where nearby parking can be found. Others are unable to visit the library without an escort, or require public transport to be able to access the service.

Specific issues within libraries include the ability to stand, and the related difficulties of browsing books on the higher shelves from a wheelchair or mobility scooter. Chairs are also important in providing places for people to rest during their visit.

Some people see disability and access issues as an important part of the case for local library provision, and some use their library to access information about their disability. Alongside these issues, though, it must be noted that a large number of disabled people say their disability has no effect at all on their use of the library.

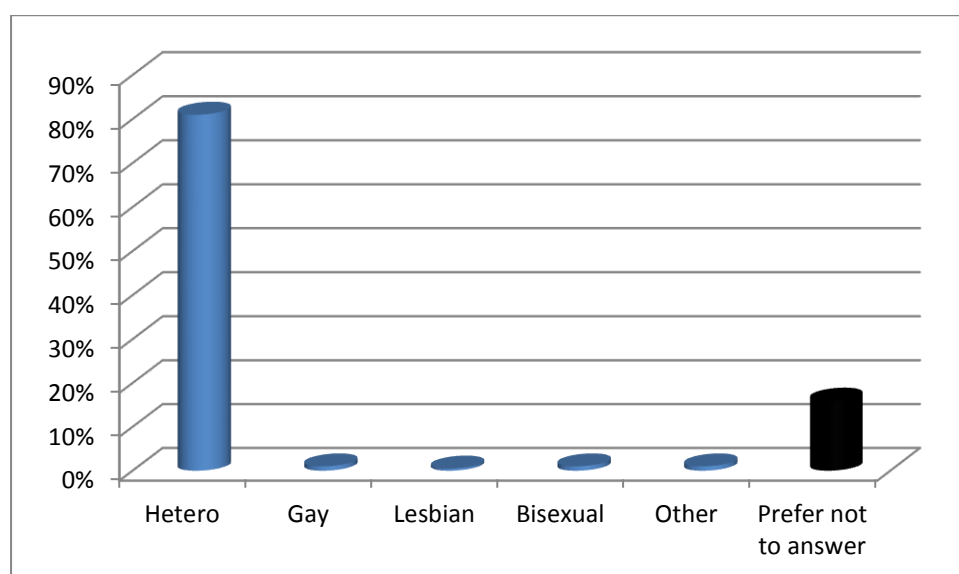
2.5 Sexual identity

Respondents were asked to indicate their sexual identity, and answer as follows:

Table 5: Sexual identity

Sexual identity	Proportion of respondents
Heterosexual/straight	81%
Gay	1%
Lesbian	*
Bisexual	1%
Other	1%
Prefer not to answer	16%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,336

Chart 5: Sexual identity



The overwhelming majority of respondents are heterosexual in terms of their sexual identity; 97% of those willing to disclose this characteristic identify as heterosexual. Whilst there are no national data that would allow a precise assessment of the representativeness of this result, there is a strong suggestion that gay, lesbian and bisexual people are a relatively low proportion of the response to this survey compared to their presence in their population.

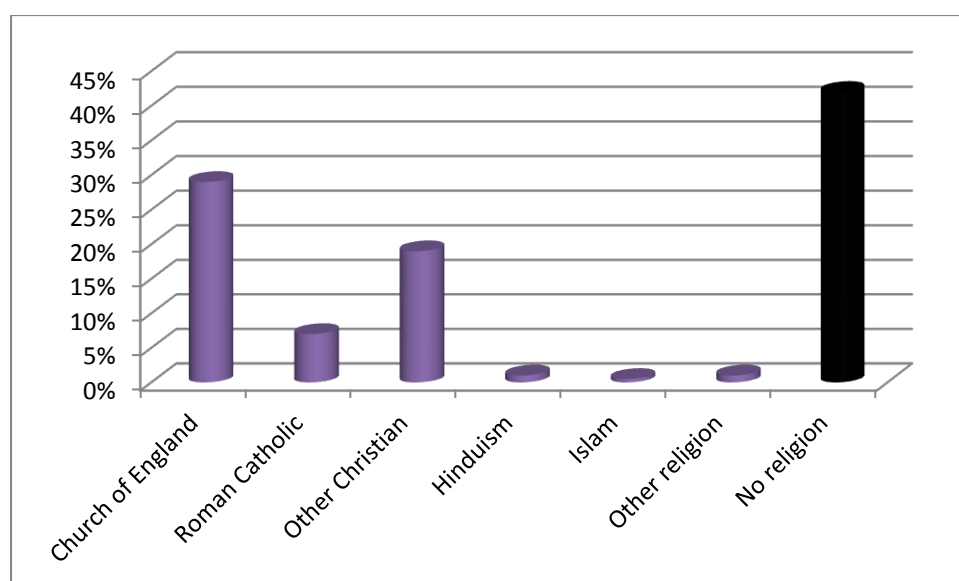
2.6 Religion

Asked to indicate their religion, respondents answer as follows:

Table 6: Religion

Religion	Proportion of respondents
Church of England	29%
Roman Catholic	7%
Other Christian	19%
Hinduism	1%
Islam	*
Other religion	1%
No religion	42%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,386

Chart 6: Religion



Over half of all respondents to the survey have some religious affiliation, though it is clear that this is stronger for some than for others. The largest single group among these are in Christian denominations, who account for 55% of all respondents; over half of these are adherents of the Church of England, while the rest spread across a range of religious preferences that include Catholicism, Methodism, Evangelicalism and Baptists, as well as several who simply describe themselves as 'Christian'.

There are adherents of other religions in the response, but their numbers are very small. Hinduism is the largest, but there are also small numbers of Muslims, and also some Buddhists, Pagans and Pantheists in the dataset. Three in seven people claim no religious affiliation at all.

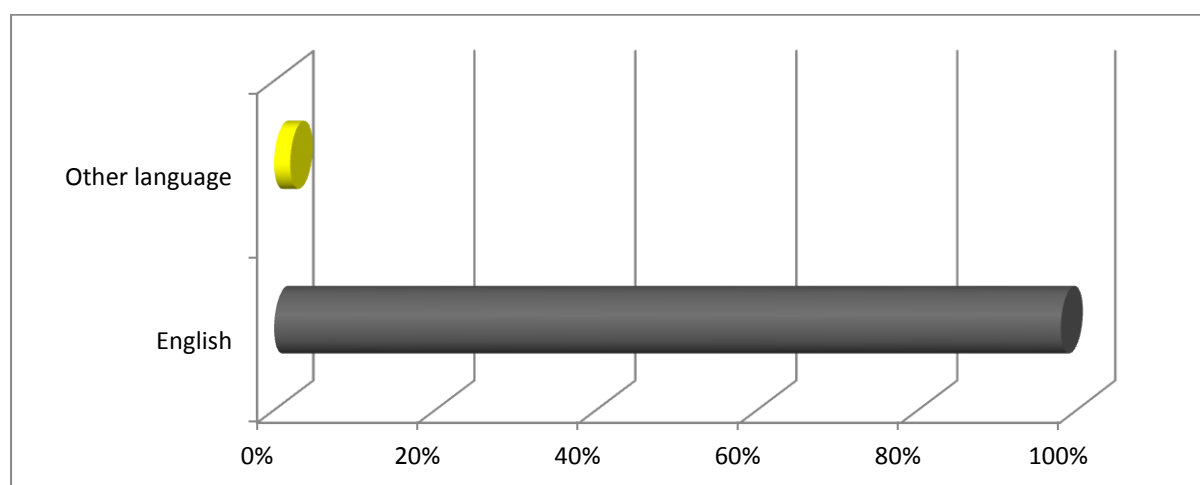
2.7 Language

Respondents were asked to provide their main language, and answer thus:

Table 7: Language

Language	Proportion of respondents
English	98%
Other language	2%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,456

Chart 7: Language



The vast majority of respondents have English as their main language.

Among the very small proportion whose main language is not English, there are around 35 different main languages, indicating an enormous degree of diversity; the most frequently mentioned are the main European languages of French, Spanish, German and Italian, with many other European languages (including Welsh and Irish) mentioned. There are also speakers of Asian languages including Tagalog, Sinhala, Gujarati, Tamil and Urdu as well as Mandarin Chinese, Arabic and Japanese.

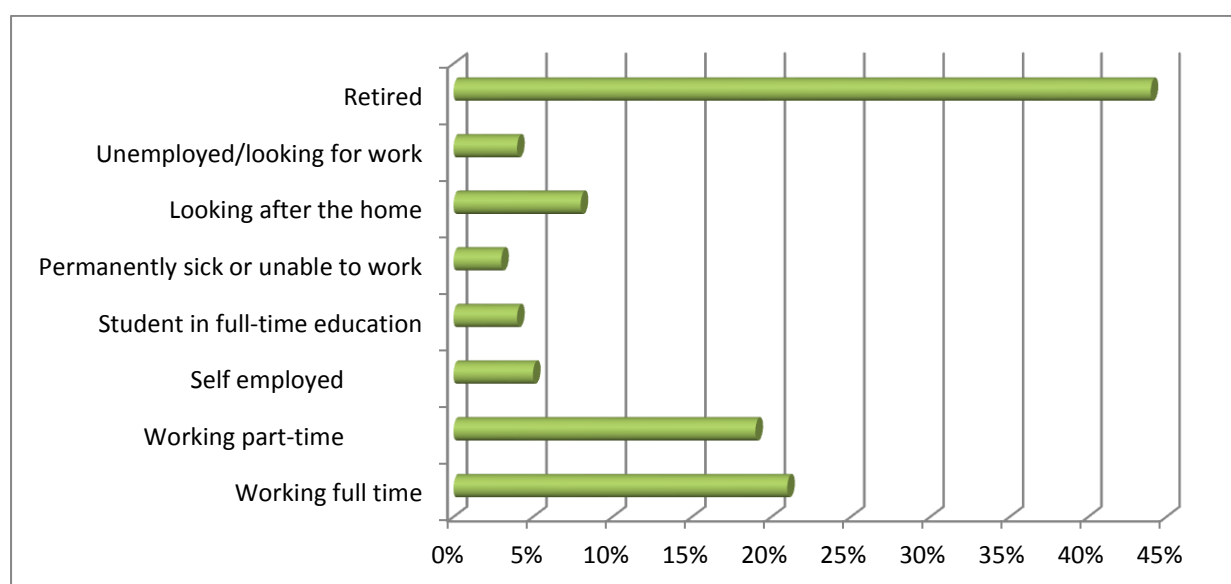
2.8 Working status

The working status of respondents is shown in this table:

Table 8: Working status

Employment status	Proportion of respondents
Working full time	21%
Working part-time	19%
Self employed	5%
Student in full-time education	4%
Permanently sick or unable to work	3%
Looking after the home	8%
Unemployed/looking for work	4%
Retired	44%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,486</i>

Chart 8: Working status



Almost half the respondents to the survey are working in some form; the proportions who work full-time or part-time are almost equal, with a small group of self-employed people making this group add up to 45% of respondents. Almost all the remainder are retired people, who account for an almost equal proportion of the response. Although there are people from the other employment status groups in the survey, their numbers are relatively small in comparison.

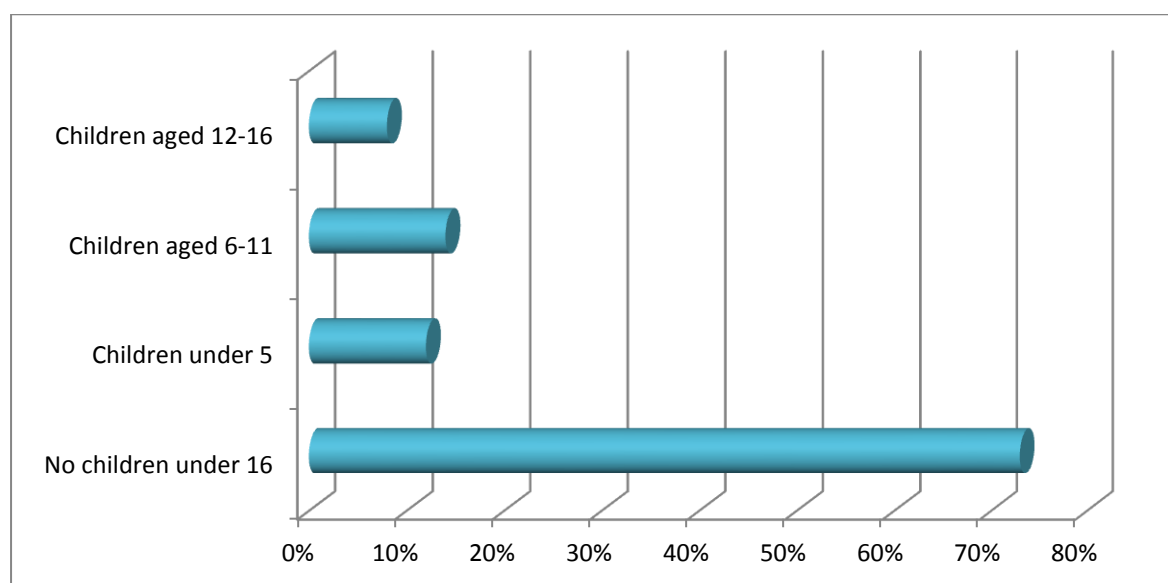
2.9 Household composition

The composition of respondents' households is shown in this table:

Table 9: Household composition

Household with...	Proportion of respondents
No children under 16	73%
Children under 5	12%
Children aged 6-11	14%
Children aged 12-16	8%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,441</i>

Chart 9: Household composition

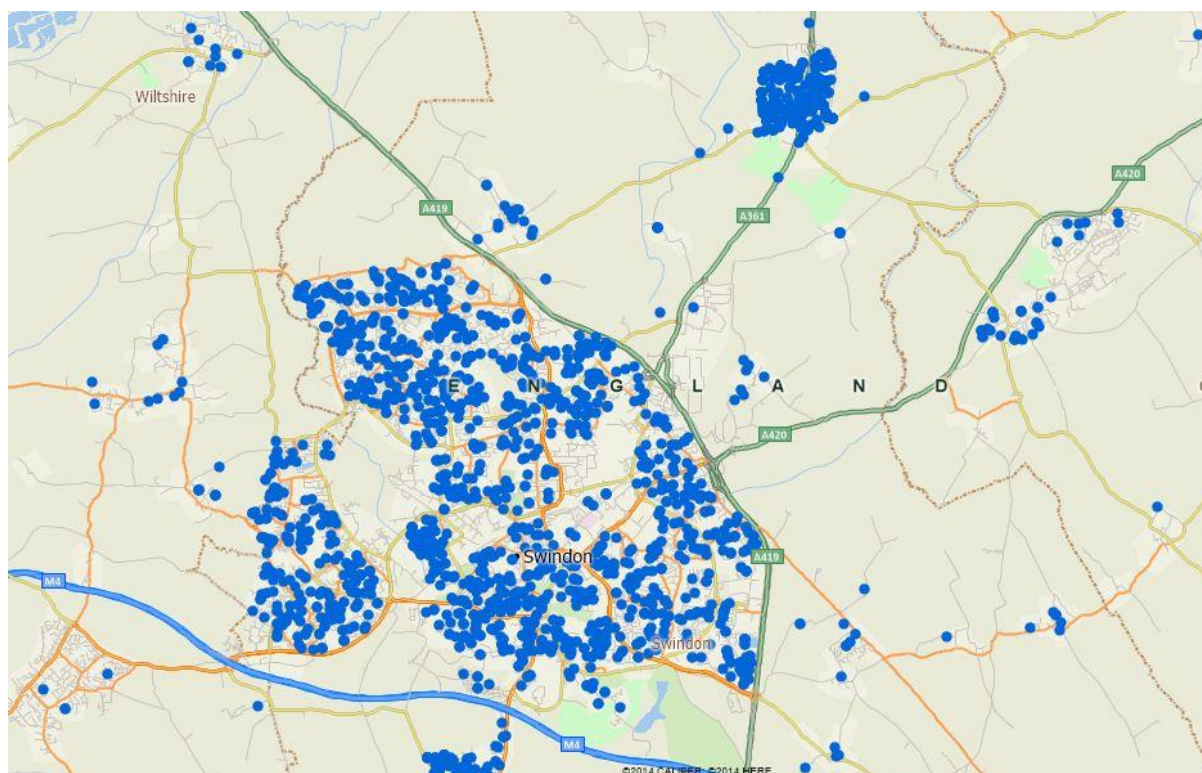


Some households have children in more than one category, so the totals exceed 100%. Three-quarters of the households represented in the survey are 'empty nests' with no children living at home, leaving just over a quarter where children are present. This reflects the age profile of the response, where older people predominate. Half of the households with children have under fives at home, and a similar proportion have children of primary school age. About a third of those households that have children in them include one or more teenagers.

2.10 Geography

Respondents were asked to supply a postcode, and those who gave enough information in this respect (1,466 respondents) have been included in the map below:

Map 1: Geography of response



The distribution of response shows participation from most of Swindon, albeit with differences in the concentrations of response. The concentrations are especially marked in Highworth, and in Wroughton, while there are also high volumes of response from North Swindon and Covingham. In contrast, response is more patchy (but still present) from Penhill, Gorse Hill, Pinehurst, Walcot and Parks, and South Marston, and from Swindon town centre. It is also noticeable that the survey has attracted interest from outside the Borough, with a scattering of responses from villages outside the boundary but for which Swindon or Highworth might represent a local library, especially for those residents who work, study or shop in Swindon. A smaller-scale map would also reveal a small number of individual contributions from as far away as Nailsworth, Stonehouse, Winchester and Evesham.

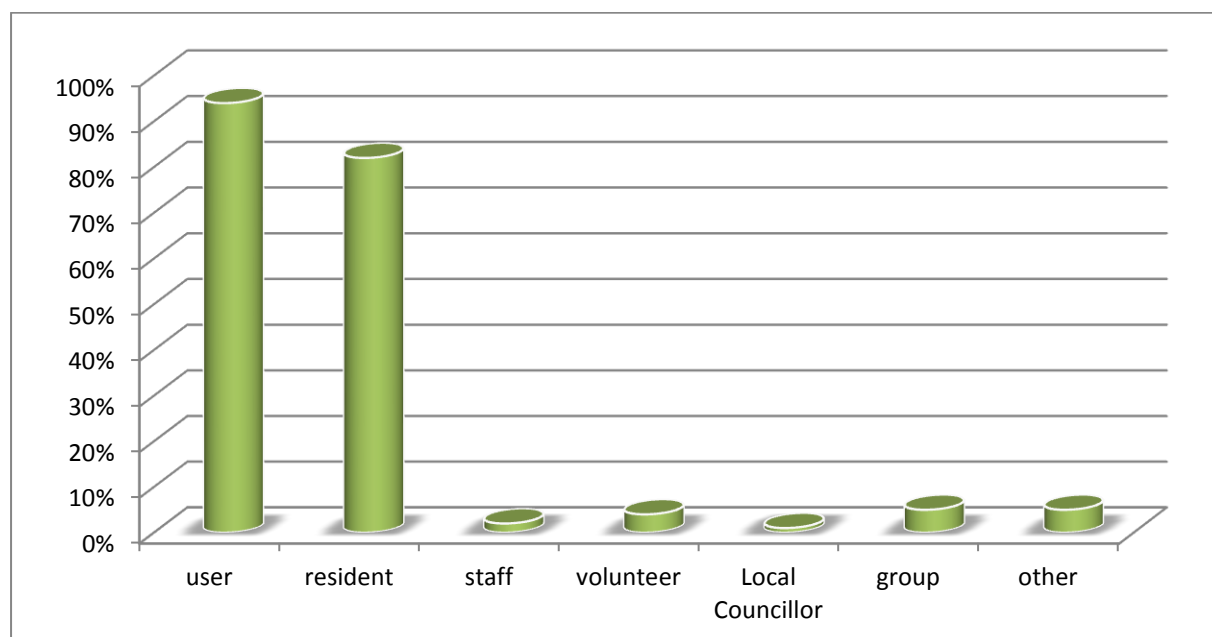
2.11 Nature of interest in the survey

Respondents were invited to indicate the nature of their interest in the survey, and respond as follows:

Table 10: Nature of interest in library survey

Interest	Proportion of respondents
User of Swindon's libraries	94%
Local resident	82%
Library staff	2%
Library volunteer	4%
Local Councillor	1%
Representative of a group/organisation	5%
Interested in some other way	5%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,677</i>

Chart 10: Nature of interest in library survey



The response is dominated by library users; very few people who do not use libraries have taken part in the survey. This is at least partly due to the distribution method chosen, which relied on local libraries, but also reflects the likelihood of greater interest in the topic from those most likely to be affected by any decision about the service.

Four-fifths of respondents identify themselves as local residents, and the map shows that not all participants live in the immediate area of the Borough. However, comparison with postcodes indicates that most of those who do not identify as local residents are, in fact, resident within the Borough.

Other groups are much less well represented in the survey. Staff, volunteers and local Councillors (Council and Parish) are all present, but in nothing like the same proportions. The organisations taking part include Parish Councils, residents' and community groups, political parties, faith groups, charitable bodies in a variety of fields, and several friends groups of individual libraries.

Those who declare other interests in the subject include several taking the opportunity to make known their concerns about the future of the service and the availability of its facilities. They also include people whose family members use the service, and group leaders/members who use space in the libraries for their activities, as well as others who express issues with the threats posed to library services across the country.

3 Using the library service

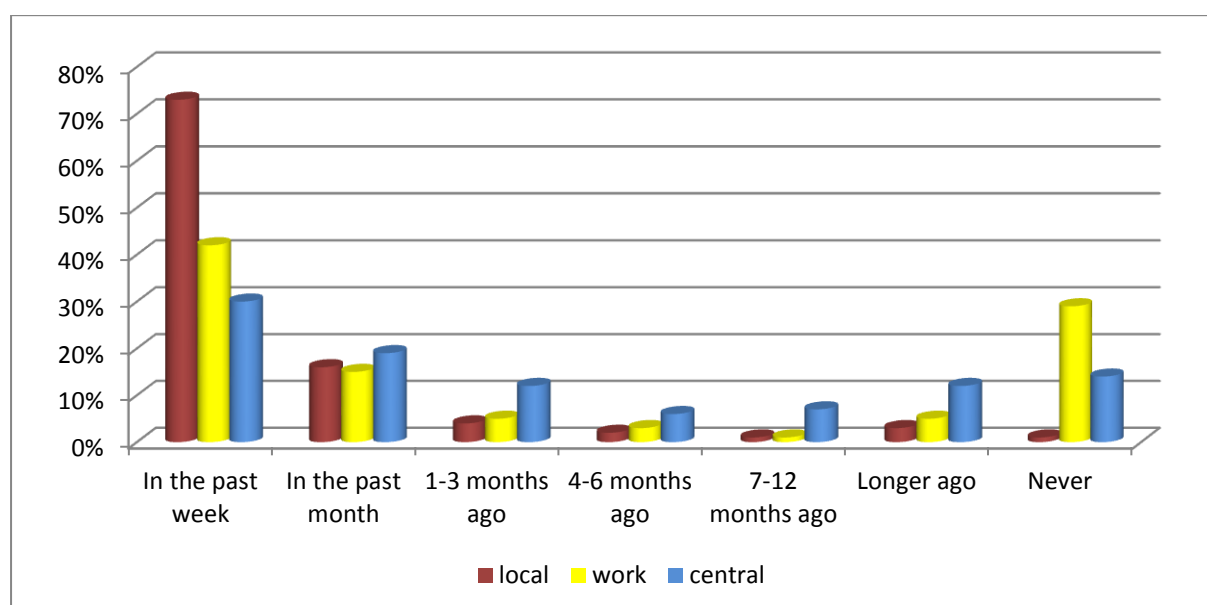
3.1 Frequency of use of libraries

Respondents were asked when they last visited the library local to their home, and also the library nearest to their workplace, if any, and the Central Library in Swindon. The results are shown here:

Table 10: Last visit to libraries

Last visit	Proportion of respondents		
	Local library	Library near workplace	Central library
In the past week	73%	42%	30%
In the past month	16%	15%	19%
1-3 months ago	4%	5%	12%
4-6 months ago	2%	3%	6%
7-12 months ago	1%	1%	7%
Longer ago	3%	5%	12%
Never	1%	29%	14%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,526	1,311	2,131

Chart 10: Frequency of using libraries



Most respondents have relatively recent experience of the library nearest their home. Three quarters have visited within the week prior to completing the questionnaire (many will have filled in the survey during a visit to the library) and nine out of ten have been to their local library within the past month. Very few people say they have never visited their local library,

and there are also relatively few people taking part who have only occasionally visited. The views in this survey are thus largely those of people who use their local library regularly.

The numbers who regularly use a library near their workplace are much lower. A large proportion of respondents did not answer this part of the question; of those who did, only two in five use the library near their workplace in the past week, and around three in five visited in the past month. A large proportion, over a quarter, say they have never visited the library nearest to their workplace.

As for the Central Library, although half of all respondents have been there in the past month, and just under a third have visited in the past week, a quarter of respondents say that they have not been there in the past year, and half of these have never visited the premises.

The older a person is, the more likely they are to have visited the library in the past week; the proportion rises from 67% of under 18s in the survey to 80% of those aged 76 or over. Women were more likely than men to have visited in the past week, while those households with teenagers present were slightly more likely to have visited in the past week. People with disabilities were also a little more likely to have visited in the past week.

Visits to a library near the workplace were, naturally, more likely among those of working age, but men and women were equally likely to have visited in the past week, and again the parents of teenagers were more likely to have visited in that interval.

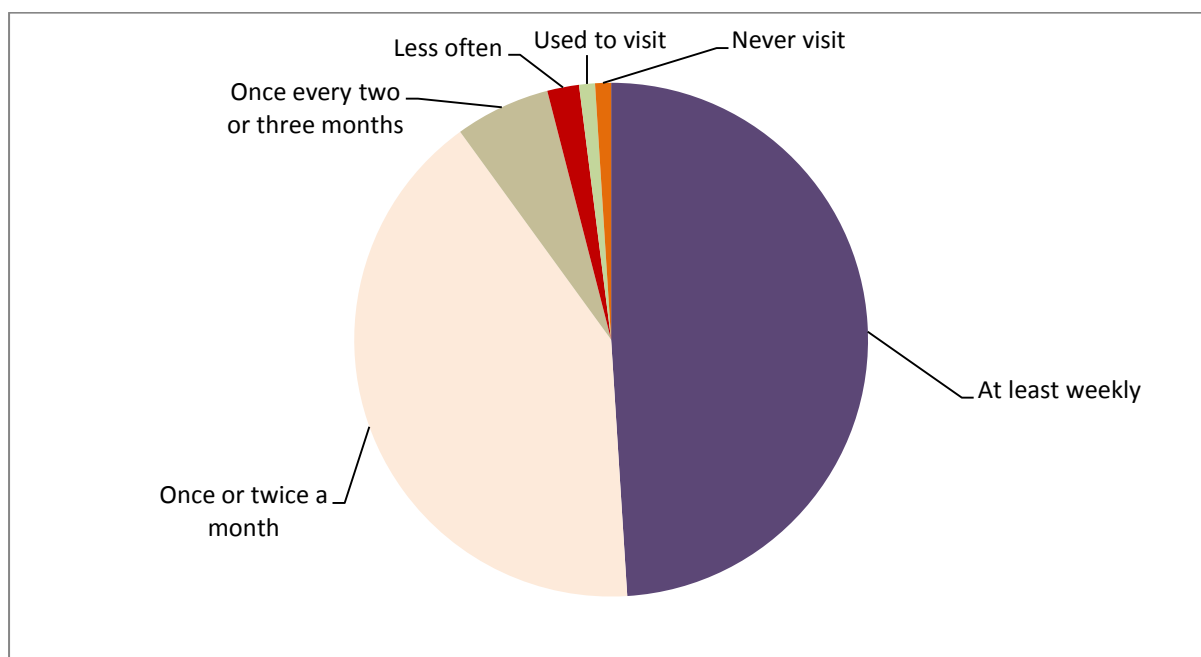
Use of the Central Library was rather different. The most likely age-groups to have visited in the past week were under 25s, and especially 19-25 year olds, 43% of whom had visited in the that time. Visiting the Central Library fell to just 21% of those aged 36-45. Men were much more likely to have visited the Central Library in the past week, as were those with no children at home; people with disabilities were also more likely to have been in the past week.

This table shows how often respondents visit a Swindon library of any type:

Table 11: Frequency of visiting

Frequency	Proportion of respondents
At least weekly	49%
Once or twice a month	41%
Once every two or three months	6%
Less often	2%
Used to visit, but no longer	1%
Never visit	1%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,640</i>

Chart 11: Frequency of visiting



Half of those taking part in the survey are frequent library users, visiting at least once a week; some evidently visit more often than this. Almost all of the remainder use their preferred library at least every month. More occasional library users do exist, but most of those taking part in the survey are regular patrons of the service.

Although over 75s are the most likely age-group to have visited in the past week, they are not the most frequent visitors; these are the 19-25s, 55% of whom visit weekly. The least frequent are those aged 18 or under, who are more likely to visit fortnightly or monthly than to do so weekly. As this age pattern suggests, the most frequent visitors are also those who have under-fives at home, with over half of these visiting at least weekly. Men and women tend to visit with similar levels of frequency, and people with disabilities visit a little more often than their counterparts with no disability.

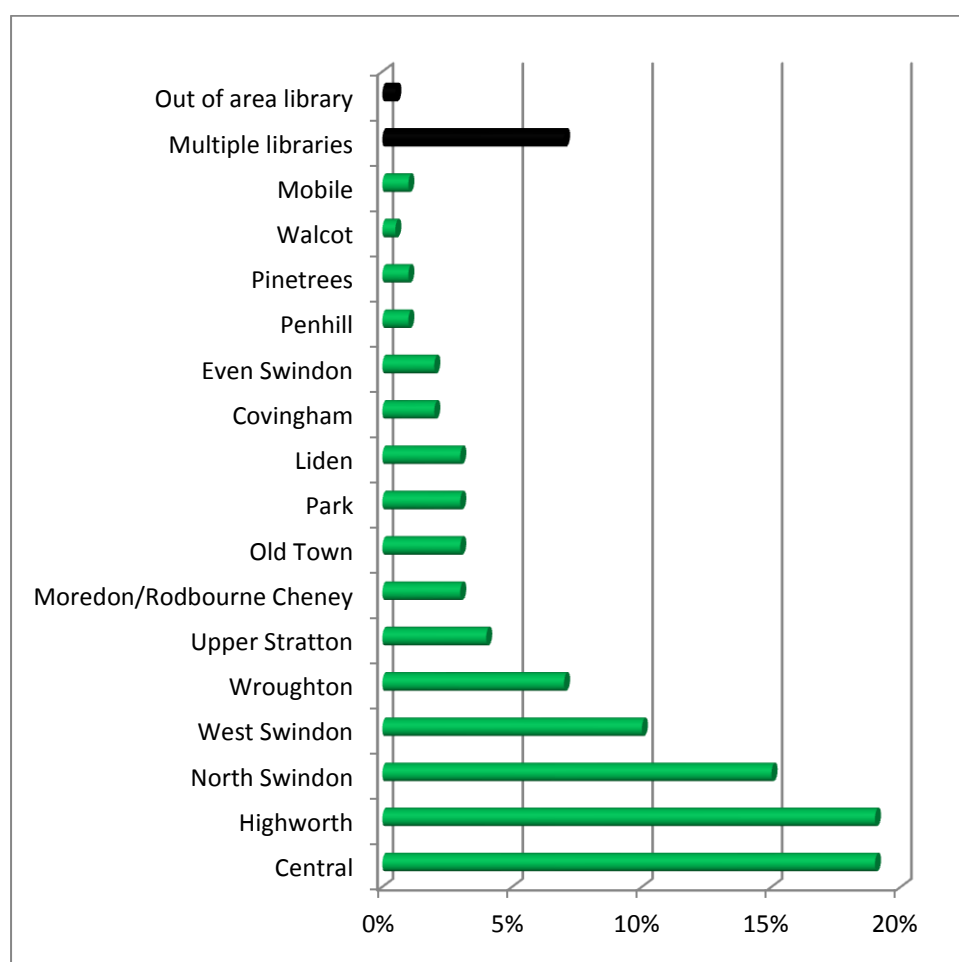
The libraries people use are listed here:

Table 12: Individual libraries visited most often

Library	Proportion of respondents
Central	19%
Highworth	19%
North Swindon	15%
West Swindon	10%
Wroughton	7%
Upper Stratton	4%
Moredon/Rodbourne Cheney	3%
Old Town	3%
Park	3%

Library	Proportion of respondents
Liden	3%
Covingham	2%
Even Swindon	2%
Penhill	1%
Pinetrees	1%
Walcot	*
Mobile	1%
Multiple libraries	7%
Out of area library	*
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,571</i>

Chart 12: Individual libraries visited most often



This table indicates patterns of response, rather than patterns of use; no doubt the service can make comparisons with its own usage figures to see the extent to which the survey mirrors actual levels of take-up at individual premises. In this study, there is some evidence of campaigning on the behalf of some libraries, with high levels of response from users of Highworth and Wroughton relative to their populations, and perhaps also from North and West Swindon. There are in contrast several other libraries where users have not participated to any significant extent.

Although the question asked people to record the one library they most often use, several respondents were unable to do this and mention multiple libraries; these amount to 7% of the total, and a variety of different combinations are covered. The most frequent are combinations of a local library with the Central Library, but there is also evidence that some people use two local libraries in different parts of town on a more or less equal basis.

Highworth library seems especially favoured by older people; overall, 19% record this as their preferred library, but this rises to around a quarter of those participants aged over 60. In contrast, under 35s were rather less likely to prefer Highworth, with only around one in eight under 35s in the survey naming Highworth as their preference. Wroughton is more evenly spread but again is more popular with respondents aged over 60. At North Swindon, this picture is reversed; whilst popular with all age-groups, North Swindon is more likely to be preferred by those aged 26-45 and is correspondingly less popular with older people in the survey.

As this would suggest, Highworth library is also more likely to be utilised by those with no children, while North Swindon is less popular with such households and more popular among those with children, especially those with under 5s at home. Just 12% of homes with no children prefer North Swindon, compared to over 20% of those homes with children, and 22% of those with under 5s.

Differences as to gender in this respect are not especially marked, other than for Old Town which is almost twice as popular for women than for men, and at Central Library, which is twice as popular with men.

Differences as to disability suggest that Covingham, North Swindon, and Old Town are less popular with disabled people, while Moredon and Park appeals more to those with disabilities than to their counterparts.

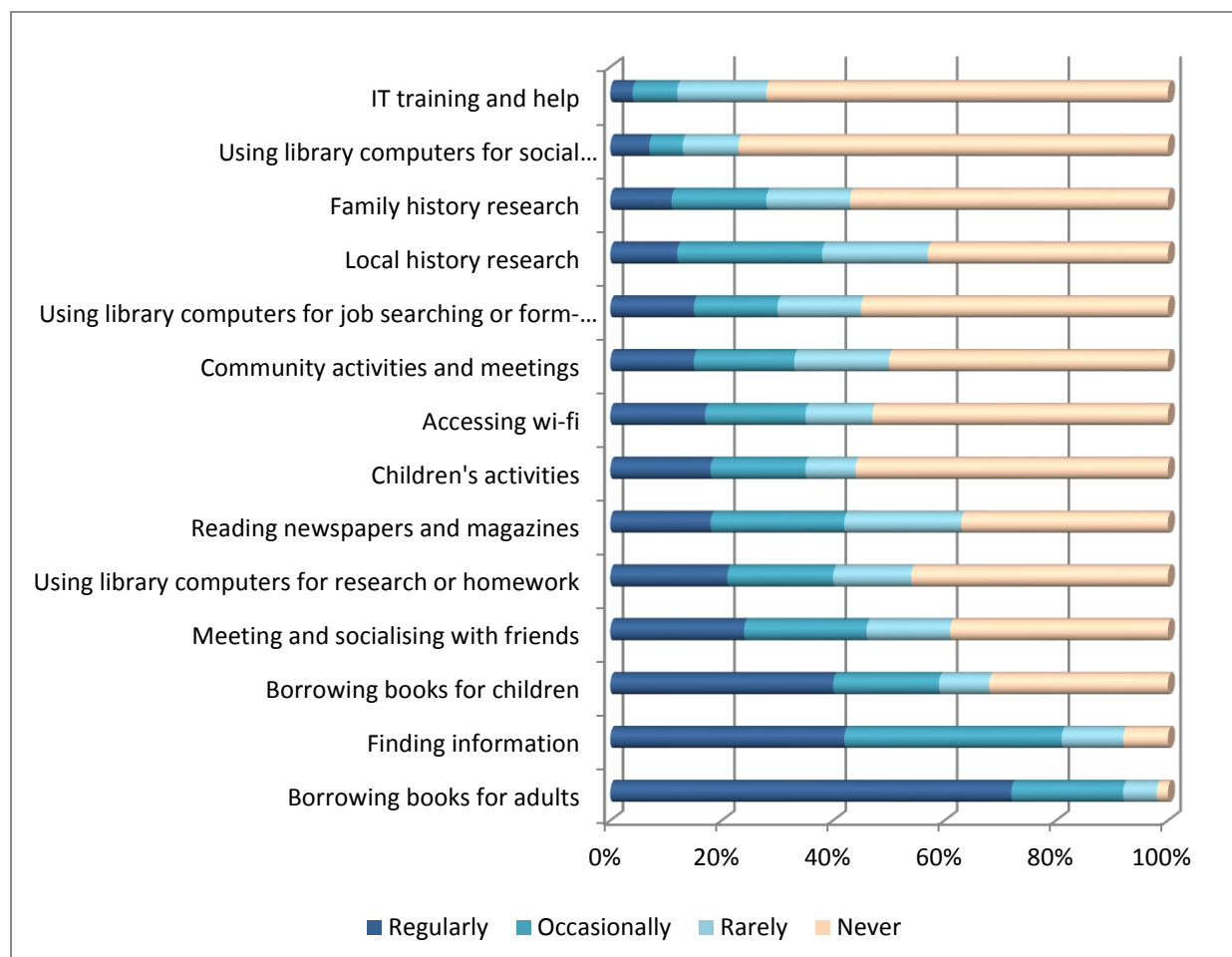
3.2 Library services used

The table below shows the frequency with which different library services are used, by the respondent or by members of their family.

Table 13: Library services used

Service	Proportion of respondents			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Borrowing books for adults	72%	20%	6%	2%
Finding information	42%	39%	11%	8%
Borrowing books for children	40%	19%	9%	32%
Meeting and socialising with friends	24%	22%	15%	39%
Using library computers for research or homework	21%	19%	14%	46%
Reading newspapers and magazines	18%	24%	21%	37%
Children's activities	18%	17%	9%	56%
Accessing wi-fi	17%	18%	12%	53%
Community activities and meetings	15%	18%	17%	50%
Using library computers for job searching or form-filling	15%	15%	15%	55%
Local history research	12%	26%	19%	43%
Family history research	11%	17%	15%	57%
Using library computers for social networking/games	7%	6%	10%	77%
IT training and help	4%	8%	16%	72%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>Ranges from 1,791 to 2,533</i>			

Chart 13: Library services used



The most frequently used service, by a considerable margin, is the **borrowing of books by adults**. Three quarters of respondents to the survey say they, or their family members, use this service regularly, and most of the remaining respondents use it at least from time to time. Very few library users take no interest in the book stock. **Borrowing books for children** is much less prominent in this table, but even so two in five library users make use of this service regularly, and another one in five use it occasionally; however, a third of users and their family members never borrow children's books.

The library's traditional role as a source of **information** remains a strong feature of its service. Two in five respondents make regular use of this service, and a similar proportion use it from time to time; just one in five respondents say they only rarely, or never, use this service. Respondents also emphasise the **social importance** of the library, with a quarter of them saying they use it regularly as a meeting place, and a similar proportion doing so occasionally, although two in five people say the library does not fulfil this role in their lives.

As far as these respondents are concerned, library computers are most likely to be used for **research and homework**; one in five people say they, or family members, use the library for

this purpose regularly, and a similar proportion do so occasionally. Almost half of respondents never use library computers for this purpose however. Use of computers for **form filling or job searching** is much more limited, although no doubt important for the 15% of respondents who use the PCs regularly for this purpose. Over half of respondents never use the PCs for this type of activity. When it comes to **social networking**, three quarters of library users never use the computers for this, and just one in eight use the PCs regularly or occasionally. Taking these three uses together, two in five respondents say they never use library computers for any of these purposes.

One in six respondents say they, or their family members, make use of **free wi-fi** in the libraries on a regular basis, indicating that they use their own PCs rather than those provided by the service. A similar proportion make occasional use of this service, but over half say they never use this. Take-up of **IT training and help** among respondents is very limited, and three-quarters say they never use this service.

Several library activities are only used regularly by quite small proportions of customers. One in five respondents read **newspapers or magazines** regularly in the library, and a quarter do so occasionally, but over half of respondents do this rarely at most. **Children's activities** are used regularly by one in five respondents, and occasionally by a further one in six, but are never used by over half of respondents. Accessing children's activities is thus much less regular than borrowing books for children. Around one in seven respondents is a regular attender at a **community meeting** in the library, and a similar proportion attends occasionally, but half never do so.

Using the library for research is more likely for those interested in **local history** than for **family history**. Although the proportions making regular use of the service are similar, more people make occasional use of local history resources than of family history materials.

Not surprisingly, age is a factor in the use of different services. Adult book borrowing is more frequent among those over 55 years of age, and is highest among those aged over 65. Children's book borrowing, on the other hand, is much more likely among under 45s, and falls away rapidly among older people. Storytime, unsurprisingly, follows the same pattern. Using the library as an information source is much less likely for those under 45, as is the use of newspapers and magazines.

Take-up of PCs shows no particular pattern by age, except that those aged over 65 are much less likely to be making use of these facilities. IT training is limited regardless of age-group, but wi-fi access is more important to people of working age, and especially to the younger adults in the survey.

The **informal social aspect** of the library is similarly important regardless of age, but involvement in **community activities** is much more likely among older respondents, especially among those aged over 65. **Research** is a more frequent activity for older respondents than among their younger counterparts.

Men and women borrow adult books with a similar frequency, but women are rather more likely to be borrowing children's books. Men make a little more use of newspapers and magazines, and use library PCs more often; the difference is less marked when it comes to using wi-fi, however. Meeting friends, and attending community activities (including children's activities) are more frequent features of female use of the library.

Borrowing children's books is similarly frequent regardless of the age of the children, but children's activities are much more frequently taken up by parents of under fives than by those of older children. People with disabilities are a little more likely than their counterparts to be using library computers and related services.

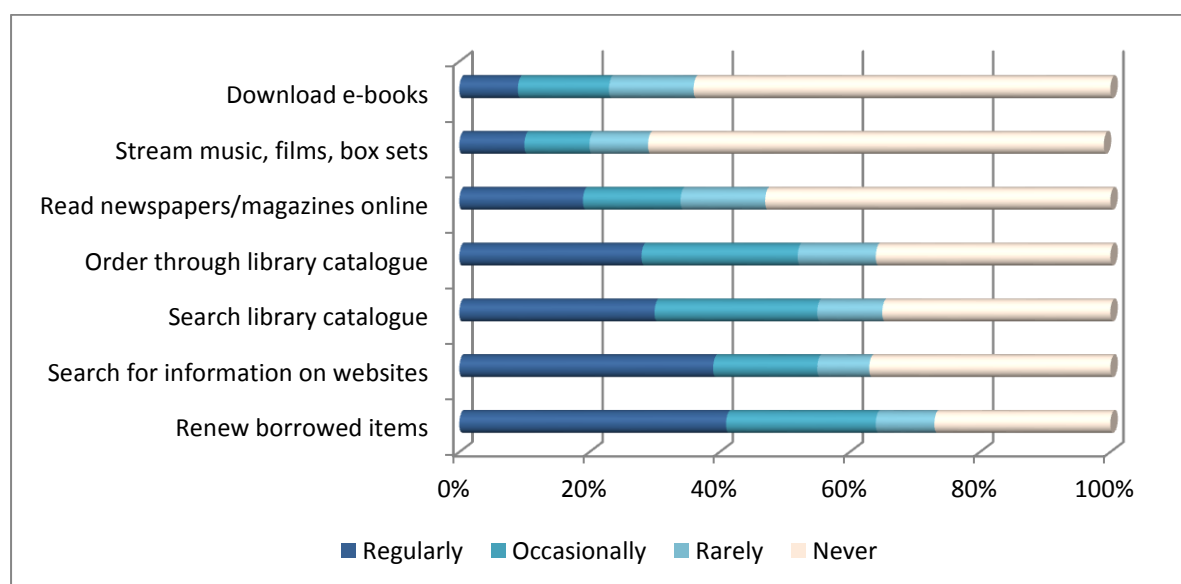
3.3 Online access

Some of these services are available online, and the table below shows how often respondents access them using computers, tablets or smartphones, but not in the library.

Table 14: Online access to services

Service	Proportion of respondents			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Renew borrowed items	41%	23%	9%	27%
Search for information on websites	39%	16%	8%	37%
Search library catalogue	30%	25%	10%	35%
Order through library catalogue	28%	24%	12%	36%
Read newspapers/magazines online	19%	15%	13%	53%
Stream music, films, box sets	10%	10%	9%	70%
Download e-books	9%	14%	13%	64%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>Ranges from 2,167 to 2,398</i>			

Chart 14: Online access to services



The most frequent use of online facilities is for **renewal of borrowed items**, and two in five say they use this service regularly, with two thirds of respondents making at least occasional use of this service. Use of the internet to **search for information** is also a regular activity for two in five people, but occasional use of this outside the library is much less frequent, and two in five respondents say they never use the internet for information gathering.

Use of the online **library catalogue** for searching and for ordering attracts a similar level of use, and both activities show regular use by over a quarter of all respondents, and non-use by just over a third.

Other online activities are pursued by a minority of respondents. One in five regularly reads **newspapers or magazines** online, but only half this proportion use online services to **access media or e-books**. Well over two-thirds of respondents say they never download books or media online.

Age is again a major determining factor here. Use of all the e-services is more frequent among younger respondents, although the catalogue and the online renewal service attract a following across all age-groups. E-book take-up is significantly higher with younger respondents, and media streaming especially so. Women are a little more likely to be using the e-catalogue, but gender differences are not especially marked. People with disabilities are less likely to use e-services than their non-disabled counterparts.

3.4 Not using the library

Relatively few people taking part in the survey never visit the library, but those who say they never go were asked why this is. The numbers involved here are small and must therefore be treated with circumspection, but the reason most commonly given is that the people concerned find the library inconveniently located, and that they prefer to buy their own books, music or films. Lack of time and unsuitable opening hours are less significant factors in non-use. Few people avoid the library because the PCs are inadequate in either quantity or quality, and fines also seem to have little deterrent effect on take-up. Other reasons given for non-use include excessive age disability, distance or travelling difficulties, bad experience with the service, and the noisy environment they encounter in libraries.

4 The future of the service

The engagement process looked not only at current patterns of use, but also explored respondents' perceptions of the likely importance of the service as a whole, and the different components of the service, for the future, as regards themselves, their families and their wider community.

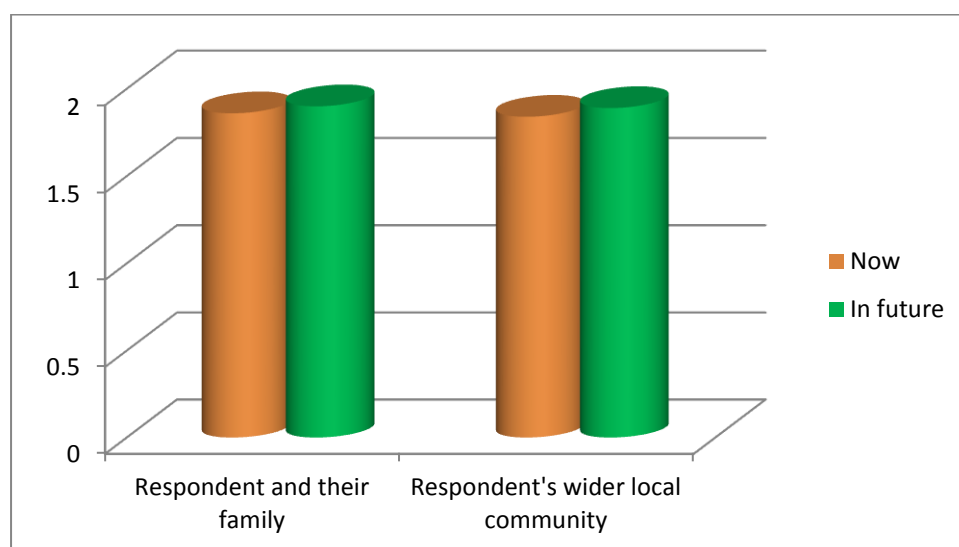
4.1 The importance of the service

This table explores the perceived importance of the service both now and in the future. The answers people gave have been converted into mean scores for ease of comparison.⁴

Table 15: The importance of the service

Importance to...	Mean score	
	Now	In future
Respondent and their family	1.86	1.90
Respondent's wider local community	1.84	1.89
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>Ranges from 2,357 to 2,433</i>	

Chart 15: The importance of the service



⁴ The mean score assigns a value to each answer, and then uses the value to generate an average score for each question. It can also be used to compare the responses of different groups of people. In this case, a response of 'very important' is assigned a score of +2, and a 'fairly important' response is given a value of +1. 'Not very important' and 'not at all important' are assigned scores of -1 and -2 respectively, with don't knows and blank answers removed from the base. The result is a score which lies between +2 and -2 and which can be interpreted both in terms of the direction of opinion (positive or negative) and the strength of the view.

Given a possible maximum score of +2, it is clear that the service is regarded as very important both now, and into the future, and both for the individual and their family and for the wider community. The scores for the wider community are a little higher, indicating a view that the service is even more important to others than it is for the user themselves; this is a highly valued service, at least as far as these respondents are concerned.

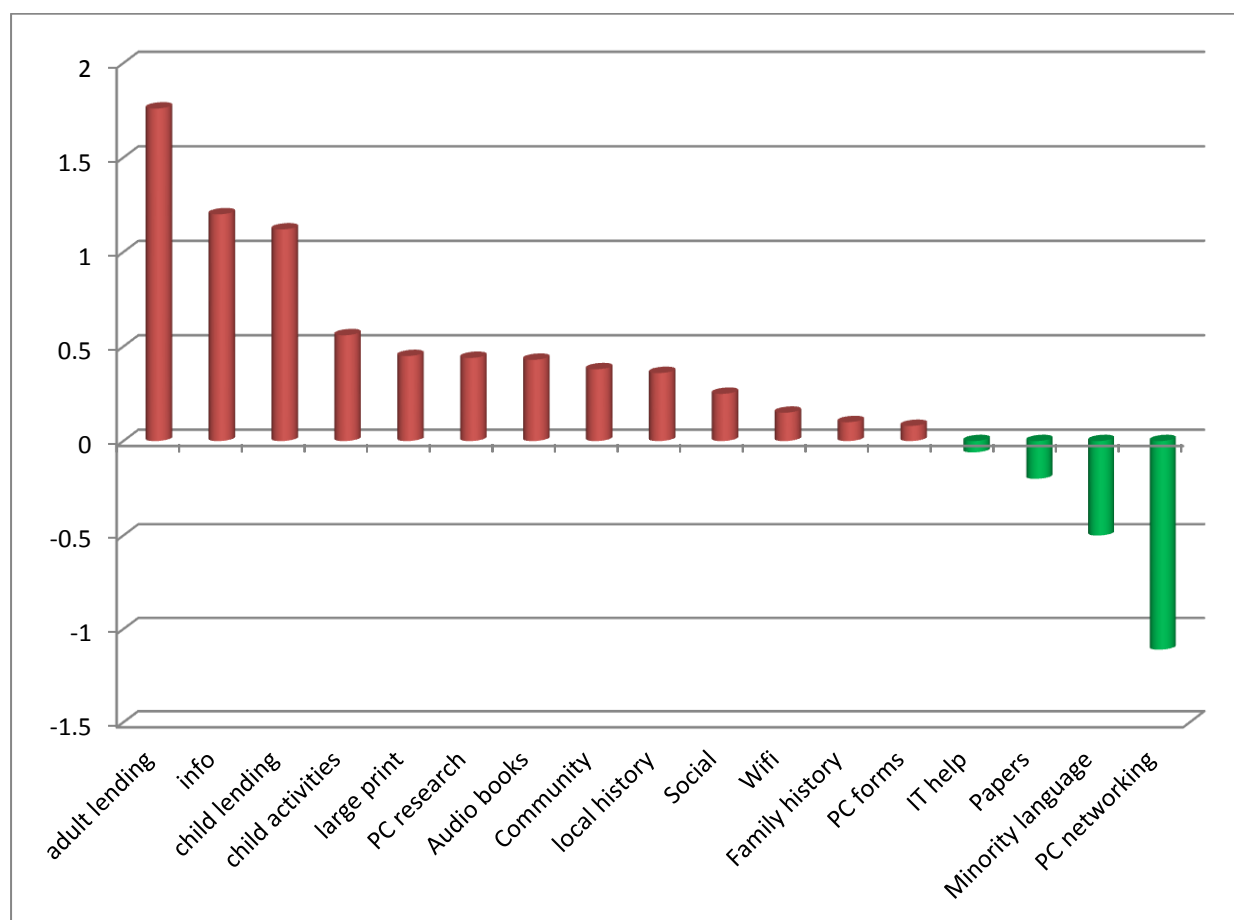
This high value pertains across all age-groups, both for the present value and also for the future, and for both men and women, although women place a slightly higher importance on the service than men do.

The table below shows the relative importance for the future, again using mean scores, of the different components of the service:

Table 16: Future importance of service components

Service area	Mean score
Borrowing books for adults	1.76
Finding information	1.20
Borrowing books for children	1.12
Children's activities	0.56
Large print material	0.45
Using library computers for research or homework	0.44
Audio books	0.43
Community activities and meetings	0.38
Local history research	0.36
Meeting and socialising with friends	0.25
Accessing wi-fi	0.15
Family history research	0.10
Using library computers for job searching or form-filling	0.08
IT training and help	-0.06
Reading newspapers and magazines	-0.20
Books etc. in minority languages	-0.50
Using library computers for social networking/games	-1.11
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>Ranges from 1,792 to 2,400</i>

Chart 16: Future importance of service components



Book-borrowing is set to remain the most important service provided by the library into the future; almost everyone in the survey rates this as very important, enabling it to achieve a very high score overall. No other library service approaches this in significance, but information and children's book-borrowing both attract a score that averages out close to 'fairly important' for the future.

Most of the remaining services score positively, but there are four services which are regarded by the respondents as unlikely to be important to them in the future. These include IT training, newspapers/magazines, and books in minority languages, all of which attract low negative scores. However, the use of library computers for social networking and games is scored very negatively and is assessed as being relatively unimportant to respondents for the future.

Age is of course a major factor in the scoring of these different service components. **Book borrowing for adults** attracts a high score in all age-groups, but especially among older respondents; **borrowing for children**, however, is much more important to those respondents below 45 years of age. **Information** scores highly in all age-groups, but is most important to those aged over 55.

In the mid-ranking services, **children's activities** are given a positive score in all age-groups, but are especially important for those aged 26-35. **Local and family history** are both a little more important to older respondents, while **audio and large print** services are considered more important by those who are older, while still given some importance by their counterparts. The **social aspect** of the library gets a higher score from younger respondents, as is less highly rated by those who are older. **Computer use** is negatively rated by older people, and given modest positive ratings by those who are younger.

Among the lowest scoring service areas, **newspapers** score poorly in all age-groups, but especially so among younger respondents, while **minority languages** are also unimportant to most respondents regardless of age, other than the youngest adults in the sample. **IT training** is positively scored for the youngest and oldest respondents, but is scored negatively across the board between 26 and 65. Use of library computers for **social networking** attracts a negative score in all age-groups, but this rises steadily with age and reaches a fairly high negative score for over 75s.

Differences between the genders on these services are generally small, but it is noticeable that women rate the newspaper/magazine service much less important than do men, while women place a much higher rating on children's activities and children's lending. Women also give a much higher score to the possibility of meeting friends in the library, something men actually rate negatively.

People with disabilities give a low positive score for newspapers, but those without disabilities rate this service negatively. The computers are also more important to people with disabilities, as is the social aspect of the library. Disabled people give a modest positive score to IT training, in contrast to their non-disabled counterparts who assign a negative score. Services like audio books and large print are rated much more positively by people with disabilities.

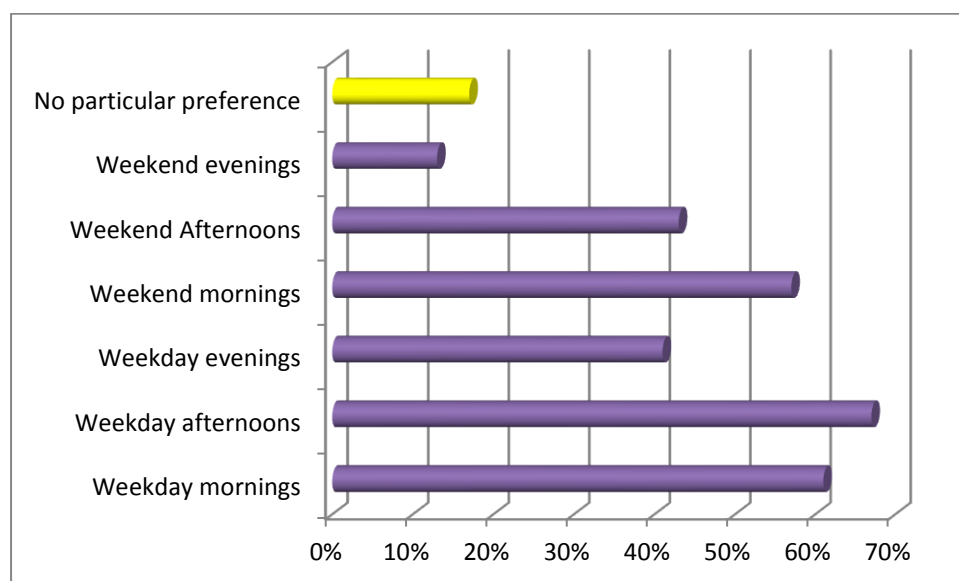
4.2 Service availability

This table shows respondents' preferences for library service availability:

Table 17: Service availability preferences

Timing	Proportion of respondents
Weekday mornings	61%
Weekday afternoons	67%
Weekday evenings	41%
Weekend mornings	57%
Weekend Afternoons	43%
Weekend evenings	13%
No particular preference	17%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	2,608

Chart 17: Service availability preferences



One in six respondents has no preference as to opening times, but for those who do have a view on this, weekday afternoons are the most popular time, favoured by two thirds of those taking part in the survey. Three in five favour weekday mornings, and two in five would like their library to be available on weekday evenings. The picture at the weekend is a little different; the numbers wanting weekend opening are a little lower generally, and the morning is more likely to be preferred than the afternoon. There is a limited appetite for evening opening at the weekend; just one in eight respondents ask for this. One in twelve respondents (8%) would like the library to be open at all these times.

There are again differences in view according to age. Younger adults are more likely to favour weekend opening, especially in the afternoon; they are also the most likely to look for opening on weekend evenings. On weekdays, those aged 26-45 vote primarily for weekday afternoons, but prefer weekend mornings and afternoons. Those aged over 65, however, are much more in favour of weekday opening, and interest falls away sharply at the weekend; weekday afternoons attract a slightly stronger appeal for those aged 65 - 75, but over 75s prefer the mornings. The implication is that the market for library users varies according to the time of day, and also the time of the week.

There are also differences by household composition. Those with no children at home prefer weekday daytimes, and so do those with under fives in the home, though the parents of under 5s also like weekend mornings. Those with school age children prefer weekday afternoons, and weekend mornings, but also like weekday evenings and weekend afternoons. No group is enthusiastic about weekend evening opening.

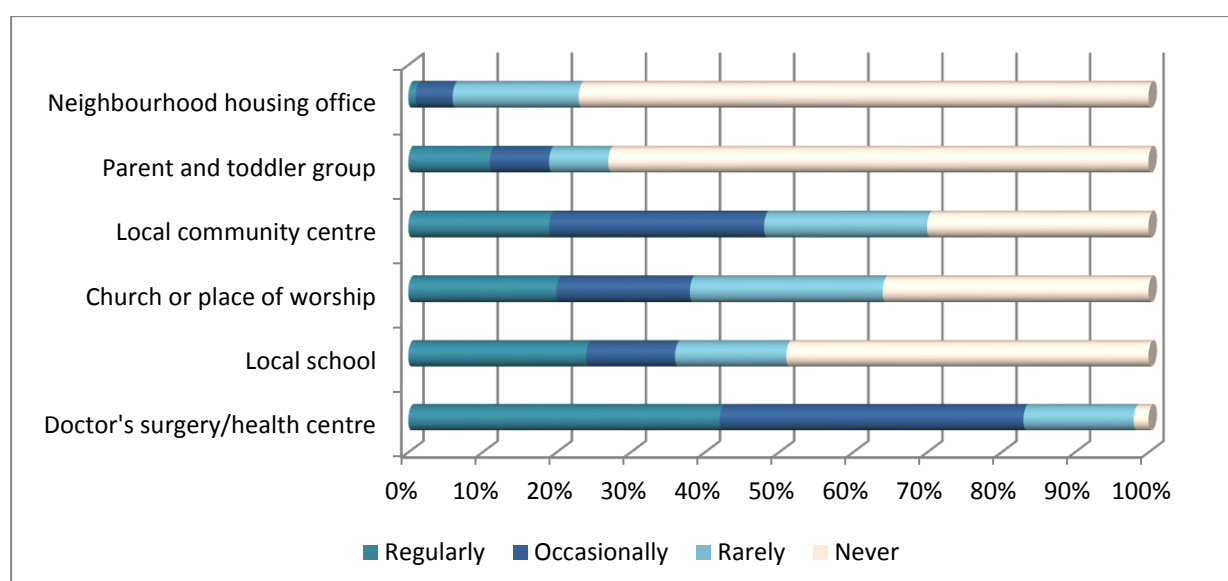
4.3 Co-location potential

The emerging model seeks to explore opportunities for possible co-location of library and other services, and respondents were asked how often they visit each of these other facilities that are generally provided on a locality basis.

Table 18: Use of localised services

Service	Proportion of respondents			
	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Doctor's surgery/health centre	42%	41%	15%	2%
Local school	24%	12%	15%	49%
Church or place of worship	20%	18%	26%	36%
Local community centre	19%	29%	22%	30%
Parent and toddler group	11%	8%	8%	73%
Neighbourhood housing office	1%	5%	17%	77%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>Ranges from 2,326 to 2,573</i>			

Chart 18: Use of localised services



Of these services, the one used most frequently by respondents to this survey is the doctor's surgery; two in five attend their doctor regularly, and a similar proportion go occasionally, whilst hardly anyone never visits the doctor. A quarter visit their local school regularly, but half never go there.

Although there are churchgoers in the response, over a third of people never attend church (or any other place of worship) and nearly two-thirds are at best rare attenders. The local community centre attracts more occasional visiting, but overall around half of all respondents

use it to some extent. Three quarters of people never contact their neighbourhood housing office, and a similar proportion never attend a parent and toddler group, though the latter does appeal to at least some extent to one in five respondents.

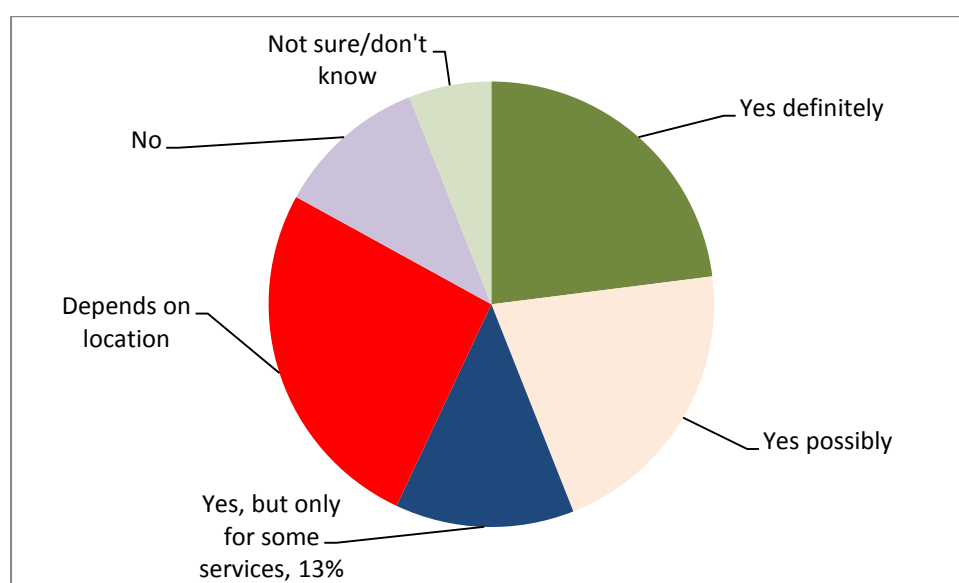
There are age-related variations here. Surgery attendance is high among younger respondents and among the recently retired, whilst churchgoing is relatively level across all age-groups over 25, achieving its highest level in those aged 66-75. Younger adults are most likely to contact the housing office, whilst under 18s and 35-45s are the groups most likely to use parent and toddler groups. Community centres are used by all age-groups but local schools are most likely to be visited by people with school age children. Women are more likely to visit parent and toddler groups and local schools, but otherwise gender differences are small.

Asked about the value of co-location, respondents answer thus:

Table 19: Co-Location

Is there value...	Proportion of respondents
Yes definitely	23%
Yes possibly	21%
Yes, but only for some services	13%
Depends on location	26%
No	11%
Not sure/don't know	6%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,608</i>

Chart 19: Co-Location



Just one in nine respondents say there is no value in co-location, whilst five out of seven are willing to go along with co-location to a certain extent at least. A quarter are quite positive and a quarter a little less so, while one in eight is willing to accept the idea depending on the services in question, and a quarter say it depends on the location chosen.

Older respondents are those who are keenest on co-location; almost a third of over 75s are definitely positive about this idea; in contrast, adults of working age are the least enthusiastic, though those who oppose the idea remain a small minority in all age-groups. Men are a little less enthusiastic than women, and those with older children are less keen than those with younger children.

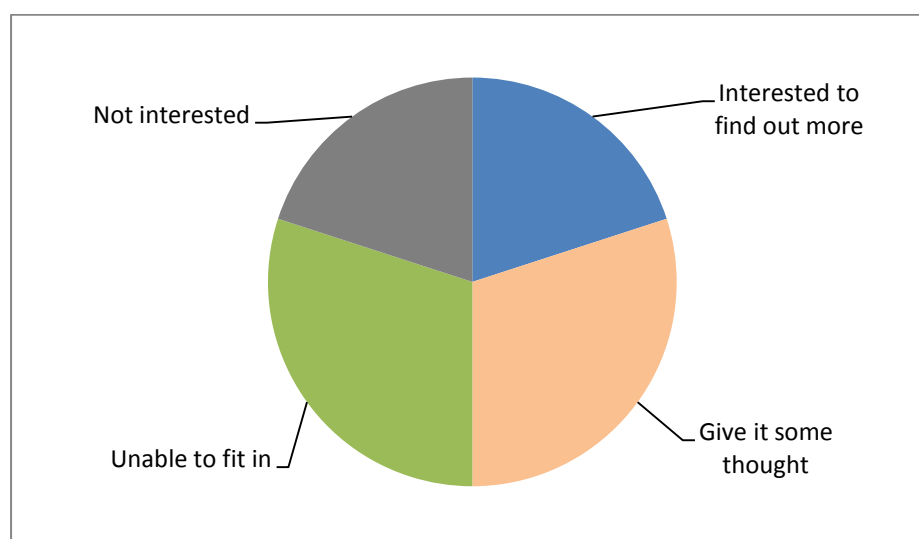
4.4 Volunteering

The emerging model calls for an increased involvement of volunteers, and respondents were asked about their predisposition to volunteer in support of this service. The results are shown here:

Table 20: Readiness to volunteer

Readiness	Proportion of respondents
Interested to find out more	20%
Give it some thought	30%
Unable to fit in	30%
Not interested	20%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>2,220</i>

Chart 20: Readiness to volunteer



Half of all respondents express a measure of interest in volunteering in support of the library service, and two-fifths of these are sufficiently interested to want to find out more. The other half of the respondent base are unable, or unwilling, to act in this way.

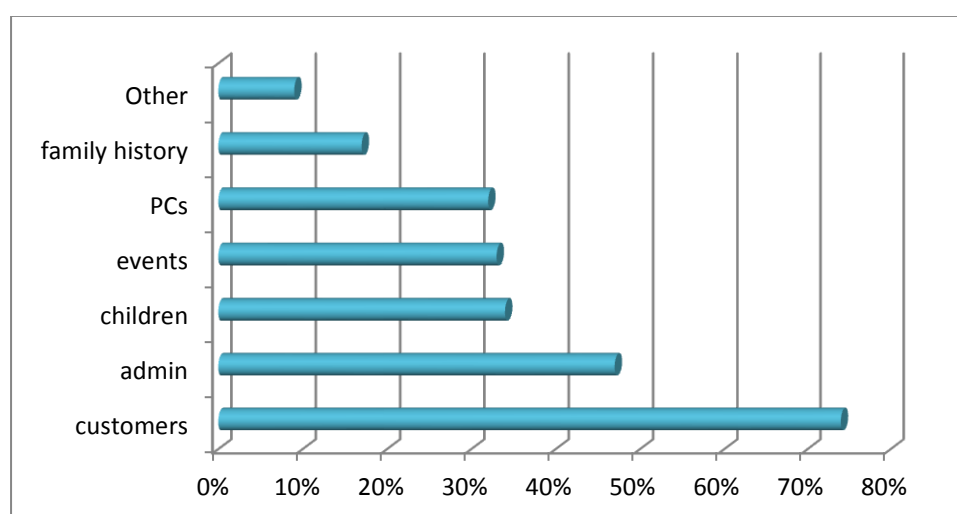
There is interest in volunteering in all age-groups, but enthusiasm is strongest among under 18s and those aged 66-75, with 56-65s more likely to be willing to think about it. Adults of working age are much more likely to be unable to fit this in alongside other commitments, and a third of over75s say they are not interested in helping in this way. Women seem a little more predisposed to volunteer than men, and those without children at home are more likely to respond positively to this suggestion.

Those who expressed a willingness to volunteer were asked to indicate what are they might be willing to help with, and answer in this way:

Table 20a: Area of volunteering

Area of volunteering	Proportion of those interested in, or thinking about, volunteering
Helping customers, issuing books	74%
Helping with administrative work	47%
Helping with children's activities	34%
Helping with events etc.	33%
Helping with computers	32%
Helping with family history	17%
Helping in other ways	9%
N (=100%)	1,213

Chart 20a: Area of volunteering



Many people expressed an interest in helping in more than one area of the service, so the figures exceed 100%. Three quarters of those willing to consider volunteering are interested in customer-facing work, helping customers, issuing books and the like, and half of all those expressing interest are willing to help with library admin. A third offer to help with children's activities, and a similar proportion say they might be able to help with special events and activities. One in six say they can help with family history.

Those offering to help in other ways offer a range of possibilities, including those listed in the question but also more specialist activity including literacy support, fundraising, teaching and music, but also more routine tasks such as re-shelving books, making tea and cleaning. There are also some willing to help with the home library and chatting with customers, and a number who offer their services in any area where they can help. Some, however, qualify their willingness to volunteer by linking it to the retention of their preferred library.

Alongside these are a small number who object to being asked to support a service in this way, without pay or other reward and at the expense of paid staff posts.

In the online survey, organisation representatives who took part in the survey were asked whether their organisation might be able to help with libraries. Thirteen organisations have responded to this, and seven say they are unable, or unwilling, to help. Of the remainder, three say they are supportive of libraries and imply a willingness to work with the service to find acceptable solutions, and three others already have a form of engagement with the service that they are keen to retain and develop. The remaining response is incapable of interpretation.

5 Comments and Observations

Three opportunities were provided in the questionnaire for people to respond, in a free-text format, to questions about the emerging model and the overall future of the library service. A substantial proportion of people took the opportunity to express their opinions on these matters, and raised a variety of observations - some brief, some lengthy and detailed - covering a fairly wide range of issues that are of importance to them. We have deconstructed these comments and identified a number of broad thematic areas to which they relate, and this chapter presents the resulting analysis.

In this analysis, each comment is broken down into its component parts; some comments make a single observation, and are counted once, while other more wide-ranging comments may appear multiple times in the analysis, although only once in respect of each theme they cover.

5.1 The Emerging Model

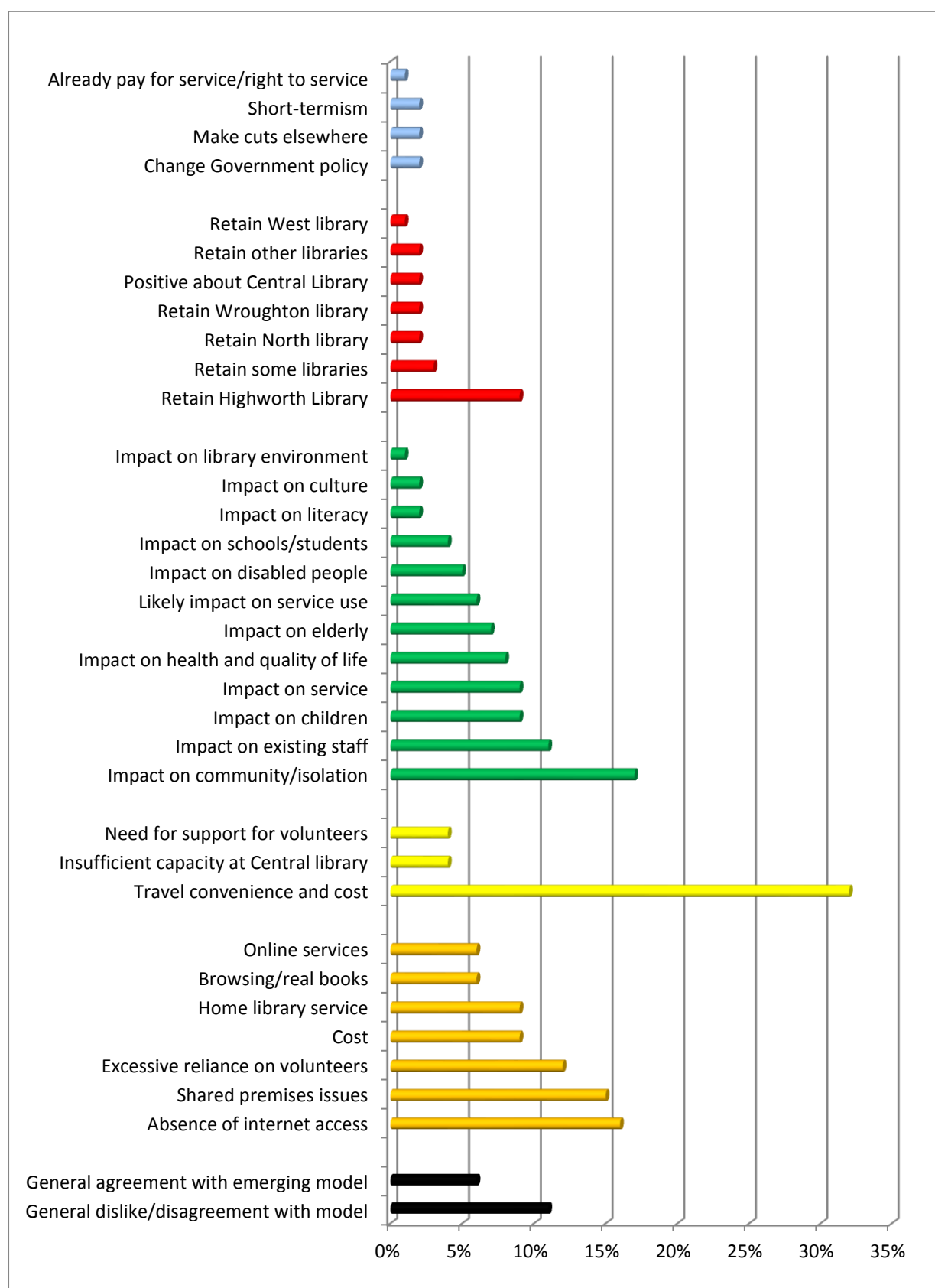
The first of these questions relates to the emerging model described in the questionnaire and accompanying material, which would be based on the provision of a core library service from the Central Library, enhanced by some targeted services focussed on areas and groups with the highest levels of need. Possible inclusions in this model are 24/7 online access to library services, home library services, targeted support to the most disadvantaged communities, and support for community responsibility for the maintenance of local services, perhaps in shared premises alongside other public services.

Respondents were asked to identify what they see as the advantages and disadvantages of this model, and the results are summarised in the table below. It should be noted that the only prompt given here was the detail of the emerging model; the numbers shown as commenting do not necessarily amount to a total who might agree with these comments.

Table 21: Advantages and disadvantages of emerging model (issues attracting 20 or more comments)

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
General perceptions		
General dislike/disagreement with model	167	11%
General agreement with emerging model	86	6%
Comments on aspects proposed in model		
Absence of internet access	250	16%
Shared premises issues	241	15%
Excessive reliance on volunteers	189	12%
Cost	142	9%
Home library service	137	9%
Browsing/real books	96	6%
Online services	91	6%
Comments on practicalities		
Travel convenience and cost	506	32%
Insufficient capacity at Central library	56	4%
Need for support for volunteers	55	4%
Impacts		
Impact on community/isolation	264	17%
Impact on existing staff	175	11%
Impact on children	148	9%
Impact on service	136	9%
Impact on health and quality of life	130	8%
Impact on elderly	117	7%
Likely impact on service use	99	6%
Impact on disabled people	71	5%
Impact on schools/students	65	4%
Impact on literacy	38	2%
Impact on culture	35	2%
Impact on library environment	22	1%
Cases for libraries		
Retain Highworth Library	134	9%
Retain some libraries	44	3%
Retain North library	37	2%
Retain Wroughton library	29	2%
Positive about Central Library	30	2%
Retain other libraries	25	2%
Retain West library	22	1%
Policy		
Change Government policy	29	2%
Make cuts elsewhere	28	2%
Short-termism	25	2%
Already pay for service/right to service	20	1%
N (=100%)		1562

Chart 21: Advantages and disadvantages of emerging model



Several people chose to express a **general opinion** of the emerging model, either favourably or otherwise, which they may or may not have gone on to elaborate upon or explain. There is a certain amount of support for the model, with 6% of all those making a comment expressing general support for the idea; but twice as many, around one in nine of all those offering a comment, express dissatisfaction or disagreement with the proposal, some doing so with evident strong feeling.

Several aspects of the model are commented on in depth. The most common of these is the understanding that the service will become much more dependent on **personal internet access**, a perception that around one in six commenters express a view on. A very high proportion of these draw attention to the fact that a significant proportion of the population do not have, and in many cases cannot afford, private internet access, and will thus be excluded from the model as they interpret it. There is a widespread perception that this will especially disadvantage elderly people, who are widely thought to be unable or unwilling to engage as fully with the internet as the model will require, and several people point out that the service provided by the library in this respect is invaluable to this group of people precisely because it is free of charge, and comes with staff support when this is needed.

The idea of **sharing premises** attracts a mixed bag of responses. For many commenters, this is a sensible way of reducing the costs of local provision, and there is an extent to which people are willing to concede space if this is the way of retaining a more local service. Others note the possibility of cross-fertilisation between services if they are under one roof, with the customers of one service having the potential to also become customers of other co-located services, and also welcome the convenience that this one-stop shop approach might introduce. However, for others there are disadvantages in sharing premises, including the loss of space but also questions of inappropriate combinations of services that might threaten safety, confidentiality or personal comfort for library users.

The model is understood as placing significant **reliance on volunteers**, and many people commenting - around one in eight of those responding - say they believe the expectations of volunteers in the model are unrealistic. They argue that volunteers are not easy to find, especially with changes in the retirement age, and that the experience of other volunteer-dependent services such as charity shops is not encouraging; they also contend that volunteers can be unreliable, prone to unplanned or lengthy absence, and cannot deliver the quality of service that they expect in the library, for instance in relation to customer safety and security.

Cost is raised by one in nine respondents. In most cases it is cited as an advantage generated by the model - usually the only identified advantage against a longer list of disadvantages. However, the financial benefit to the authority of the proposal is nevertheless clearly seen, although not always believed in its entirety, as some respondents foresee unrecognised costs in delivering the model.

One area where clarity is missing, however, is the **home library service**. Several respondents cite this as a lifeline service, either for themselves or for those who benefit from

the service, but there is a certain amount of confusion as to whether this service is provided at the moment or not. The idea is viewed positively, and it is thought large numbers of people would benefit from such a service especially with an ageing population, but this is also an area where doubts about cost emerge, especially around sustainability in the face of rising need.

A number of people emphasise the value they place on being able to browse, or to hold, **'real' books** - by which they mean non-electronic editions. For these people, browsing is preferable to electronic catalogue selection because it allows them to make a more informed choice - perhaps based on sampling the contents, or reading the blurb - whilst a real book is a traditional joy that is not matched by the e-reader experience. The point is made especially in relation to illustrated books generally, and children's books specifically, which do not always transfer satisfactorily to e-readers, and this is deployed as an argument against the e- service perceived at the core of the model.

On the other hand, a large number of people do welcome the idea of the **e-service**, and the possibility of completing library transactions online at their own convenience and using electronic resources. They like the idea of having the books they order delivered to a convenient local collection point, and not being tied to the limited opening times of physical libraries. There is nevertheless a recognition that this will not suit many library users without internet access, and there are also concerns over the quality of the service, ease of use, and compatibility with e-reading devices.

Several commenters raise issues that are essentially to do with practicalities of the emerging model. By far the most prominent of these - and the single issue most often raised by respondents to the engagement survey - is the issue of **access to the Central Library**, if this is to become the only staffed resource available for the service. One in three commenters raises this as a concern, interpreting the model as obliging them to use the Central Library as the only place where they, or their accompanied children, will be able to access the books in the way they wish to, or continue their use of the service. The problems associated with this include the time needed to travel in and out of Swindon, the costs associated with travel to and from the library on public transport, the costs and expected difficulties in parking (not least for disabled people), and having to carry heavy books in addition to shopping. In addition, several people mention that although they can catch a bus into Swindon, this service stops well short of the Central Library, leaving what they feel is an excessive walk between the bus stops and their destination. For many people, the corollary of these transport and access issues is that they feel they are unlikely to make use of the Central Library.

The related question of **capacity at the Central Library** also emerges under this heading. One in 25 people suggests that the Central library is already quite busy at certain times, and that it will not be able to absorb the additional traffic generated by the model, as there are not enough seats, not enough computers, and not enough space to accommodate the demand that will result.

One in 25 people also raise concerns over **support for volunteers**. These are not in essence negative about the voluntary approach indicated in the model, but rather the practical issues of adequate training, supervision and management of a voluntary labour force that they feel need to be recognised in costing the model.

Several respondents identify (almost always negative) impacts they expect to result from the approach being suggested by the Council. The most prominent among these, raised by one in six commenters, is the fear that the closure of local libraries will, in some way, **damage the local community**. Many feel that the local library serves as a meeting place as well as a public service, and that its role in building community cohesion should not be overlooked. Some make a point of giving their own experience in this respect, identifying that they will lose contact and become isolated if the library closes, although most argue from a more general position that the library is part of what defines a community, and that closure will irreparably damage this.

The staff are one dimension of this, and it is clear that many library users value the staff, not only for their friendliness and warmth but also for their help and professionalism. One in nine commenters is concerned about the impact of the proposals on staff numbers, some because they fear for the staff concerned and their jobs, others because they place high value on the availability of professional and trained staff who can help customers with queries.

A substantial number of commenters fear an **adverse impact on children** - often their own children, but also their grandchildren, or children more generally. They refer to their own experience as children, or as parents, of using the library to create a love of books and reading among their offspring, or they note how popular the libraries they use are with families supporting their children in reading. The impact on 'future generations' is frequently mentioned and the need for a physical library to protect children from this impact is strongly stated. Closely related to this is a perceived **impact on students**, including children who do their homework in the library (especially those with no computer at home) but also older students using the library for reference or as a quiet study space. The suggestion that there will be an **impact on literacy** is also child-focussed in the main, but links to a more general concern over **cultural life** in Swindon where the libraries, some think, have an important contribution to make.

One in twelve respondents suggests the emerging model will have consequences in terms of **impact on health and quality of life**. The main factor in this is the problems the model creates for older people who will find they can no longer access their local library, and who will not be able to travel to the Central Library nor to use the 24/7 online service. Several respondents think that older users risk isolation as a result, with one of their main weekly activities removed, and that this in turn will have damaging effects on health (no longer walking to the library), mental health (isolation, loss of personal interaction) and more general quality of life issues.

Alongside children, though, many people fear the new model will have negative impacts on **elderly people** in Swindon, mainly because they will be denied access to the service through its relative remoteness, their lack of internet access, and their inability to access the

Central Library. Many of those commenting here include **people with disabilities** among their perceived impacts as well, for similar reasons.

More generally, there are fears that service quality will suffer under the emerging model; that the service will simply not be able to achieve its **current level of quality**. This is attributed primarily to the loss of physical presence and the replacement of professional staff with less well-informed volunteers, but there are also concerns over reduced opening hours, more limited stock, and the pressure on space created by sharing premises, together with large print and other special items squeezing out the general stock. There are also concerns at the loss of convenient access to services such as copying and scanning. The concern over the **library environment** embraces issues related primarily to noise levels, especially with increased demand at Central Library.

For these reasons, one in sixteen people indicate that they will **no longer use the service** if these changes are implemented.

Several people respond to the emerging model's advantages and disadvantages in terms of the **impact on their own local library**, or the one they most often use. Feelings in this respect run especially high in **Highworth**, where there is evident anger and frustration at the possibility of closure; one in eleven of those commenting in any way is protesting the impact on Highworth library. They argue that Highworth Library is well-used, has an important role in its community, hosts a number of community-related activities which could be put at risk, is too isolated from central Swindon to make the Central Library a viable alternative, benefits from a low rent arrangement with the local Co-operative, and serves a separate community that is sufficiently large to merit its own library. They also point out the benefit to other smaller communities which relate to Highworth and use its facilities.

Some respondents urge consideration of a **compromise** whereby smaller libraries are closed, but a small number of larger or remoter libraries (usually including Highworth, North and West Swindon) are retained, alongside the Central facility.

Other libraries also attract their advocates. Prominent among these is **Wroughton**, where the numbers making representations on its behalf are substantial relative to the volume of users; **North and West Swindon** also have protagonists who argue that their location, take-up facilities, and proximity to transport and local services make good arguments for retention. The numbers arguing cases for retention of other libraries are relatively small, but include devotees of Liden, Old Town and Even Swindon. There are also a number of people who take the opportunity to praise provision at the **Central Library**, and to make positive comments about the facility.

There are small numbers of respondents who take the opportunity of this question to criticise Government policy, which they see as responsible for this situation, and to urge the Council to fight the Government on this, or to make cuts elsewhere, especially in reducing the amounts spent on what they see as 'vanity projects'. Some feel the emerging model is a short-term approach that will not prove sustainable in the longer term, while others believe their Council Tax already pays for the service, and that they have a right to it accordingly.

Observations made by smaller numbers of people, that do not appear in the table, include the view that it will be good for communities to take responsibility for their own libraries, but also the view that the service is being badly led and managed, and that there will be an impact on civic pride in Swindon if the proposals go through. Some think the engagement process is flawed and that the decision has already been made., but others think that any model that keeps the service going is better than nothing, while there are some who see advantage in widening access through the 24/7 approach and through the added convenience of shared premises.

In summary, although there are some who see the emerging model in a positive light, or at least prepared to accept it as way forward in difficult circumstances, these are far outnumbered by those who reject it, and who have no difficulty in marshalling a range of arguments in support of this position.

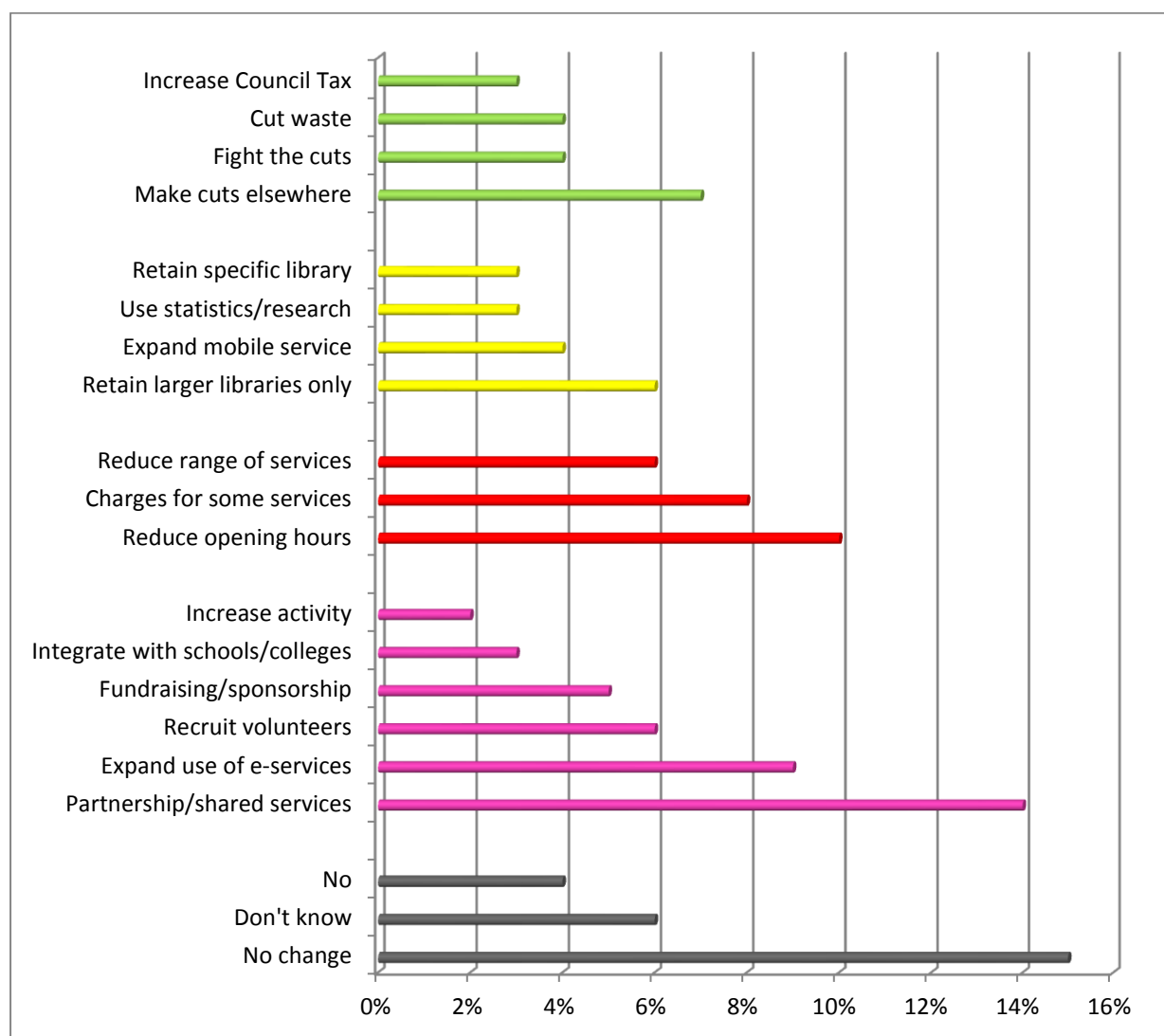
5.2 Other approaches worth considering

A second free text question asked respondents if there were other approaches that the Council should consider, bearing in mind the financial pressures it is experiencing at present. This table summarises the response to this question:

Table 22: Other ways of delivering the service the Council should consider (issues attracting 20 or more comments)

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
No change/no contribution to make		
No change	173	15%
Don't know	71	6%
No	50	4%
New ways of working		
Partnership/shared services	161	14%
Expand use of e-services	108	9%
Recruit volunteers	71	6%
Fundraising/sponsorship	62	5%
Integrate with schools/colleges	36	3%
Increase activity	22	2%
Operational changes		
Reduce opening hours	111	10%
Charges for some services	89	8%
Reduce range of services	64	6%
Provision changes		
Retain larger libraries only	66	6%
Expand mobile service	42	4%
Use statistics/research	40	3%
Retain specific library	34	3%
Policy changes		
Make cuts elsewhere	79	7%
Fight the cuts	49	4%
Cut waste	49	4%
Increase Council Tax	32	3%
<i>N (=100%)</i>		<i>1,153</i>

Chart 22: Other ways of delivering the service the Council should consider



Although the question sought opinions on alternative approaches to the emerging model, that recognise the situation the Council faces, most people struggled to come up with additional ideas; one in sixteen of those responding say they don't know, while a further 4% say there are **no other ways** of delivering the service. The largest proportion, though, 15% of all respondents to this question, say that the existing model should not change; the way the service is provided now is thus their alternative to the emerging model.

There are nevertheless some who can identify **new ways of working** that will support provision of the service within financial constraints. The most prominent among these are the people who see the benefit of **shared service provision**, usually through co-location of the library with other services, primarily (though not always) other public services. Mostly, this is about sharing a common address but with services separated within the premises, but

there are some who see possibilities in widening the range of services available through the library, and up-skilling the staff to provide these.

People also see potential in expanding the **use of e-services**, and the increased deployment of a **volunteer labour force**, both of which (like co-location) are aspects of the emerging model that seem to attract a measure of support, even if the model as a whole is not endorsed fully. There are also suggestions that the service should increase its level of activity, by which people mean a larger number of events and special activities that might attract new customers, and for which a charge could be levied. New ideas mentioned in this context also include **fundraising and sponsorship**, and the possibility of integration with the libraries in **local schools and colleges**.

One in ten respondents would prefer the service to look at **reducing opening hours** rather than outright closure, and one in twelve people suggest **making charges** for some services, especially the use of PCs; many of these indicate that they would themselves be willing to pay for book loans, or for membership by subscription, to help support the service. Others suggest a **more focussed service** is the way forward, though there is limited consensus on which services should be dropped; everyone wants book lending to continue, but some would drop DVD/CD rentals, PC usage, or other library services as a way of saving money.

The alternative option most frequently put forward is the compromise whereby some libraries are saved from closure, **reducing but not eliminating** altogether the out-of-centre properties so as to ease travel and co-location alike. An expansion of the **mobile service** is called for, mainly as a mitigator for the impact of the closures on the less mobile library users, while opportunity is again taken to make the case for **retention** of specific libraries, especially Highworth. A small number of people urge the Council to carry out more **thorough research** into levels and patterns of use of libraries before making cuts.

Substantial numbers of people do not believe the Council should accept the situation it faces; they say that the **Government should be challenged** on the austerity agenda, or that if cuts must be made that these are **prioritised elsewhere**. This includes, if necessary, in care and education budgets, although senior management and Councillor expenses are more popular options for trimming. There is also frustration that the Council spends money on what are seen as **frivolous projects** instead of prioritising frontline services like libraries, and in some quarters a willingness to **pay increased tax** to secure the service's future.

Other observations that failed to achieve the support needed to appear in the table include a wish to see management changes in relation to the service, staff reductions, and the possibility that the Central library should close, so as to allow retention of other libraries. There are also some who want to prohibit some activities, such as the use of library PCs for social media activity, or who believe that cuts in services such as cleaning, window cleaning, or heating would make a contribution to the savings needed.

In summary, there is very little new here; many people have simply nothing to add, or wish only to reiterate the points already made in the previous question. There is a level of support for co-location, albeit grudging at times; presumably possibilities like opening hours have

already been rejected as not offering the level of savings needed, and the ideas that emerge here most strongly are those already put forward by the service in its emerging model.

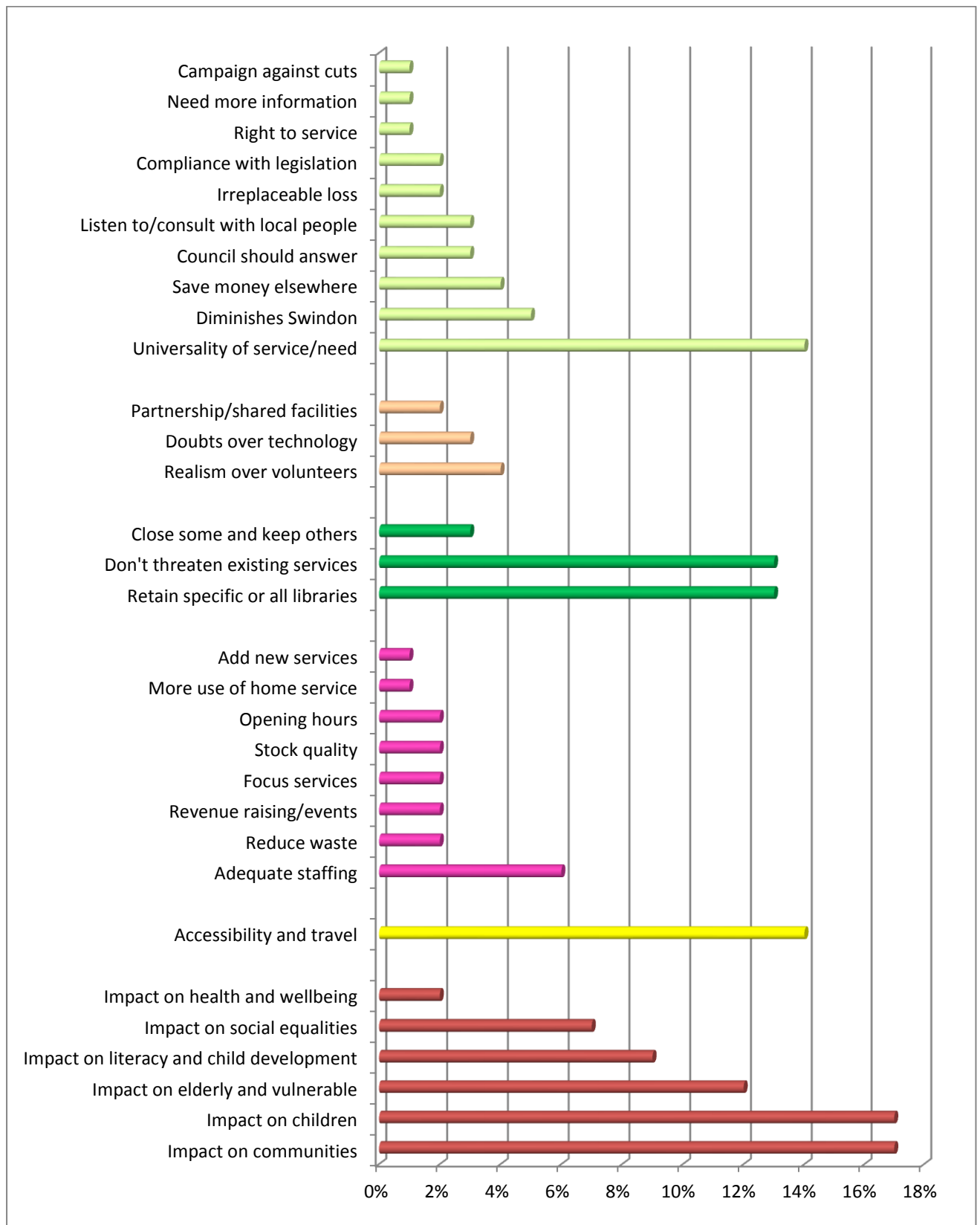
5.3 Key considerations

A third open ended question sought people's views on the key considerations the Council should bear in mind in pondering changes to the library service. The answers are summarised here:

Table 23: Key considerations (issues attracting 20 or more comments)

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
Impacts on groups of users		
Impact on communities	284	17%
Impact on children	280	17%
Impact on elderly and vulnerable	193	12%
Impact on literacy and child development	154	9%
Impact on social equalities	109	7%
Impact on health and wellbeing	31	2%
Practical issues		
Accessibility and travel	232	14%
Operational issues		
Adequate staffing	94	6%
Reduce waste	40	2%
Revenue raising/events	33	2%
Focus services	30	2%
Stock quality	28	2%
Opening hours	26	2%
More use of home service	23	1%
Add new services	21	1%
Retention of service		
Retain specific or all libraries	210	13%
Don't threaten existing services	207	13%
Close some and keep others	52	3%
Emerging Model issues		
Realism over volunteers	69	4%
Doubts over technology	54	3%
Partnership/shared facilities	39	2%
Policy and reputational issues		
Universality of service/need	230	14%
Diminishes Swindon	88	5%
Save money elsewhere	62	4%
Council should answer	48	3%
Listen to/consult with local people	46	3%
Irreplaceable loss	36	2%
Compliance with legislation	28	2%
Right to service	24	1%
Need more information	23	1%
Campaign against cuts	21	1%
<i>N (=100%)</i>		1,626

Chart 23: Key considerations



For all the size of this table, reflecting again the range of comments offered in response to this question, there is relatively little here that has not already been considered in relation to the earlier questions. The Council is thus urged to give due consideration of the needs of specific socio-demographic groups, especially children and the elderly, with the ramifications of damage to health, well-being, and literacy restated alongside. It is also encouraged to drop, or to significantly amend its plans, retaining at least some, if not all, of the existing libraries, while the doubts over technology and technological exclusion, volunteers, and the possibilities of shared facilities, are rehearsed here.

There is also a relatively long list of operational suggestions, most of which have already appeared in answer to the first two questions. There is a newly expressed view, though, that the Council should maintain the quality of the **book stock** as a key consideration, with smallish groups of people making other revenue-saving or revenue-raising suggestions.

Access reappears as a major consideration the Council should take into account. One in seven of those giving any response to this question raise issues of accessibility, especially but by no means uniquely in relation to access from Highworth.

Some new themes arise under the broad heading of policy and reputational issues. A major one, expressed by one in seven people, is that the library service is one of very few public services from which **everyone can benefit**, regardless of age, or other personal characteristic, and deserves to be treated accordingly as an important service that potentially impacts across the demographic board. There is also a view that the emerging model in particular, and closure of libraries more generally, **diminish Swindon** culturally and also in the eyes of those outside the town, damaging its reputation or even giving it a negative reputation viewed from outside.

There is a strand of thought that believes that the **Council should be answering** these questions, rather than the public, as they are privy to the information that is needed to make a proper assessment. In contrast, there are others who urge the Council to pay more attention to what **local people are saying** about the proposals, and others who do not believe they have had **sufficient information** about the proposals to give an informed view (several of these complained they had not seen the FAQ leaflet). The over-riding need for the Council to **comply with legislation** is mentioned by some, who either expressly or by implication suggest that the emerging model is non-compliant, whilst others draw attention to the fact that, once the service is gone, it is **unlikely ever to return**.

Other observations made by smaller numbers of people urge the Council to use cost-effectiveness measures to evaluate its approach, or to consider raising money through taxes, charges or subscriptions. There are also concerns that the model adopted by the Council must be sustainable into the foreseeable future, implying that the model currently being offered is not.

6 Additional material

In addition to the survey response, this report also includes an analysis of comments and observations made on post-it notes at a series of engagement events organised by the Project Team, and also some correspondence received from individuals and organisations linked to the issues raised in the engagement process. These are now considered in turn.

6.1 Engagement event material

A series of engagement events took place, essentially during the same period as the survey itself, in which libraries were a discussion topic. In this report, only the library feedback is reported, although other topics were also raised by participants. It should be noted, however, that it is likely that some who attended will also have contributed through the survey. It is also the case that a very large proportion - around 80-85% - of the comments analysed here originate in Highworth alone.

The events posed three questions on libraries to those attending, namely:

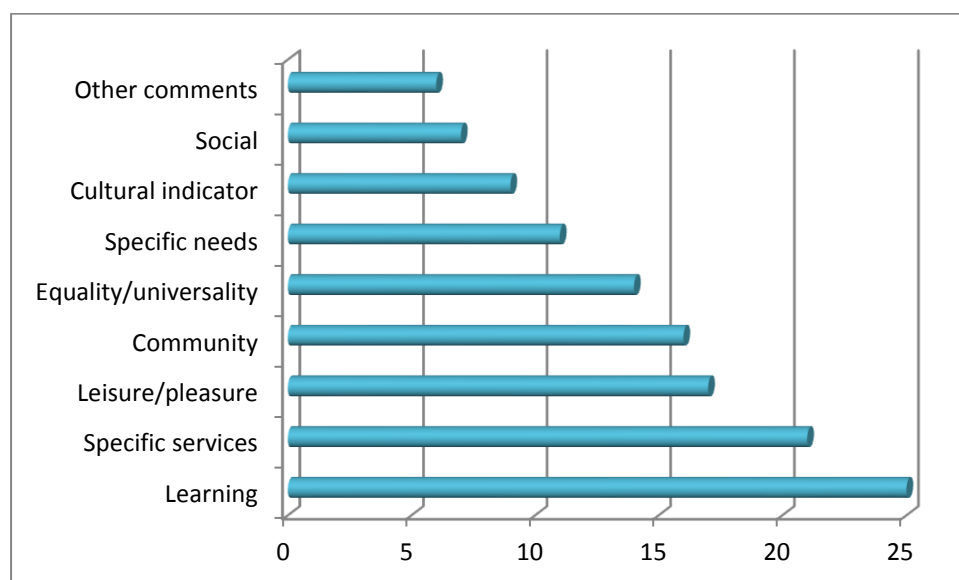
- Why are libraries important?
- Who are libraries important for?
- What should libraries be like in the future?

The response to the first question is summarised here:

Table 24: Why are libraries important?

Area of comment	No. of comments
Learning	25
Specific services	21
Leisure/pleasure	17
Community	16
Equality/universality	14
Specific needs	11
Cultural indicator	9
Social	7
Other comments	6
<i>N</i>	67

Chart 24: Why are libraries important?



A variety of reasons is given, but the most commonly expressed opinion is that libraries contribute to **learning**. This is often focussed specifically on child development, and the promotion of literacy, but some comments also note the importance of adult and lifelong learning. Libraries are also important because of **specific services** they provide - most frequently lending of books, but also the availability of computers for those who have no provision at home, the access to information, and other services as well. Libraries are associated, for several people, with **pleasure and leisure**, and the importance of reading in people's leisure activity is noted.

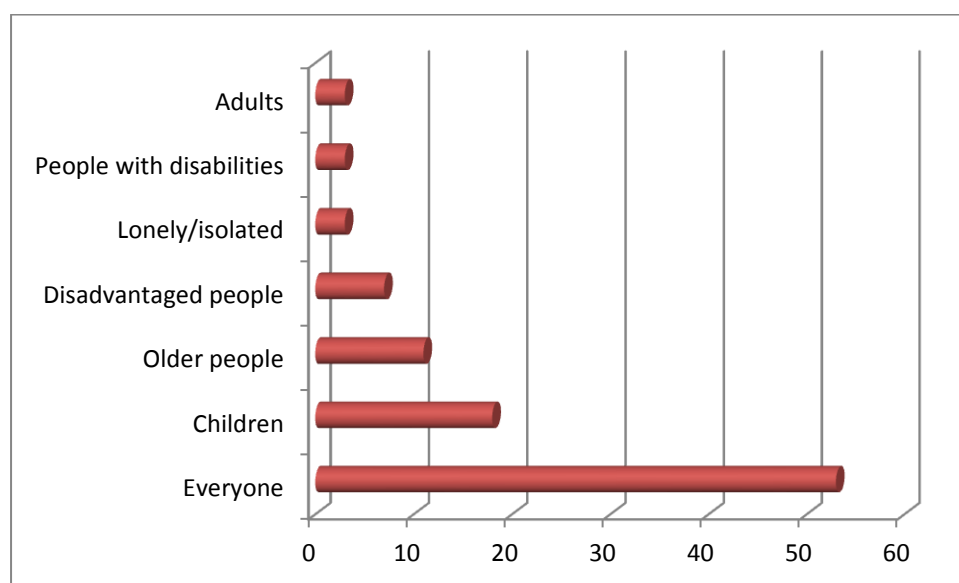
The importance of the library as a **community focus**, or as a marker of a community, is mentioned several times, and so too is the idea that the library is **free to be used** by anyone who chooses, regardless of status or means. Nevertheless, the library is also important for **specific groups of people**, with children the ones most often mentioned, but also the elderly and those with special needs. Several people suggest that the presence of a library is a **cultural indicator**, contributing to the overall local quality of life, to self-improvement and to personal and communal growth, whilst others value the **social** dimension of the library.

Other comments include the quiet space the library provides, the physical appeal of handling books, and the value of a library in making a place attractive to locals and newcomers.

Table 25: Who are libraries important for?

Area of comment	No. of comments
Everyone	53
Children	18
Older people	11
Disadvantaged people	7
Lonely/isolated	3
People with disabilities	3
Adults	3
Students	2
<i>N</i>	66

Chart 25: Who are libraries important for?

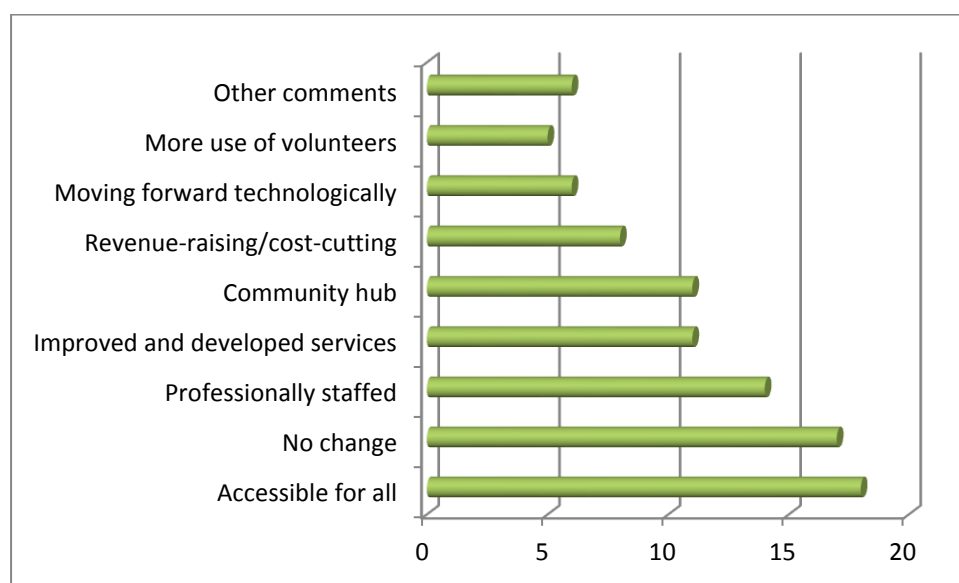


There is a consensus here that libraries are a universal service, available to and potentially benefiting everyone in the locality. Among specific people groups, children are the most often mentioned, but libraries are also seen as especially important for older people and for those whose circumstances limit the availability of books, IT equipment or information at home. They are also seen as valuable for people who are lonely or isolated, as a place to access and meet others.

Table 26: What should libraries be like in the future?

Area of comment	No. of comments
Accessible for all	18
No change	17
Professionally staffed	14
Improved and developed services	11
Community hub	11
Revenue-raising/cost-cutting	8
Moving forward technologically	6
More use of volunteers	5
Other comments	6
<i>N</i>	65

Chart 26: What should libraries be like in the future?



There are two principal responses to this question: the idea that libraries should continue to be accessible to everyone who wants to use them, and the preservation of the status quo, especially as regards Highworth library, whose users dominate this response. There are also calls for libraries to be professionally staffed, although some would welcome a wider deployment of volunteers in support of paid staff, and for them to be considered and supported as a community hub. Some people have suggestions about the development of services, both in terms of maintaining and expanding existing services and also developing new activities, and keeping pace with technological change. Some suggest revenue-raising or cost-cutting measures, which includes the idea of a community trust to take over library management.

6.2 Correspondence received

In addition to the survey responses, the Council has received a number of letters and emails - 25 in total - addressing the issues raised in the engagement process. These include contact from individuals with concerns about the proposals, and from groups that represent specific interests affected by the future of the service, either directly or indirectly. This correspondence has all been read in detail by the responsible officers, but is summarised here in the interests of presenting a comprehensive picture of response to the emerging model.

Correspondence from groups and representatives

Four pieces of correspondence have been received from representative bodies (in one case a local Councillor). All are detailed and cover a wide ground; all are also opposed to the proposals implicit in the emerging model, and urge reconsideration.

The **Save Swindon's Libraries Campaign** have submitted detailed correspondence in which they argue against the emerging model on several grounds, contending that the library strategy should not be based on this approach. Their views are informed by visits to, and knowledge of, libraries across the Borough, which have (amongst other things) indicated that libraries often have catchment areas that are wider than the obvious.

The group argues that the proposed budget for the service articulated by the authority will be insufficient to provide a service that complies with the legal duty enshrined in the relevant legislation, and call instead for a professional and accessible, Borough-wide service. They recognise the pressures created by austerity policies and are concerned at the possible privatisation of services. But they insist that a single model for consultation is insufficient and assert a need for fully costed options to be put before the public. They also urge the Council to look at how other authorities, including Devon, York and Suffolk, are confronting the same issue, and to seek constructive partnership with neighbour authorities.

On volunteering, they cite the example of Walcot library, and highlight its diminishing levels of usage over recent years, backing this up with evidence from Wales and Scotland (both referenced) indicating that lower investment in libraries and increased reliance on volunteers will impact adversely on levels of public usage.

The group also adduces OECD evidence concerning the importance of reading for pleasure in child development, and in later economic potential. It notes the popularity of reading groups that support isolated and lonely people to meet socially as well as to read, as well as children's groups, and believes these will not be supportable through the Central Library, due to its relative distance from the customer. Bus services into town are not necessarily helpful, due to the distance involved in travelling beyond the bus terminus, especially if carrying heavy books, and the affordability issue especially for the young user.

The group recognises the potential in e-services to enhance customer choice, but points out that internet access is far from universal and that alternatives to e-service are still needed, including the need for help in using mandatory e-forms to claim benefits and other Government services. Carers may also suffer because their limited time windows may not permit access to the Central Library. The group foresees adverse impacts on homework, and on the vulnerable; it also suggests that some may be made more vulnerable by the loss of an accessible library service, not least in the arena of mental health where depression and isolation may be compounded.

Save Swindon's Libraries places great importance on professional library staff, because of their knowledge and skills, their accountability as employees, and their governance. They point out that the Government has given an undertaking not to run libraries on a voluntary basis, and that this has been endorsed locally, at least in respect of Highworth.

The group are not convinced that all options have yet been fully explored and ask questions about revenue raising possibilities such as sharing of space and catering services. They also want opening times to be discussed with users, so they can be optimised, and they want an adequately funded library service that provides physical access for people local to where they live.

Correspondence from the **Friends of Covingham Library** references earlier contact from this group which has apparently not been acknowledged and which is now re-sent. The group note that Covingham Library's catchment area includes other districts of Swindon as well as two outlying communities, and also draw attention to the consultation undertaken in 2014 which covered similar ground to the present survey. The group wishes to contribute its thoughts to inform a draft Library Strategy, with its starting point being that no library should close, nor should any opening hours be reduced. Neighbourhood libraries are an asset, not a burden, to the Borough.

As to Covingham Library specifically, the group draws attention to its level of use, its cost-effectiveness, its range of well-supported activities and its valuable links with the community, not least through the Friends Group itself. The group is willing to see volunteer deployment as a means of retaining libraries, but in support of rather than in place of paid staff; there may also be scope for volunteer-led additional activities using library space. Access to the Central Library will be difficult as there is no nearby parking, and public transport terminates at some distance from the facility; access will deteriorate further as development around the town hall area progresses. Covingham Library is co-located in the local church centre, and operates a self-issuing system which the group would like to see extended to embrace other Council services. They would also like to see stronger relationships, perhaps sponsorship, with local business such as the new supermarket, both for Covingham and Liden.

The **Swindon Heritage** Team direct their focus towards the local studies collection at the Central Library, fearing that it may be at risk through this review; they are not writing about the wider issue of library services. They strengthen their argument by reference to the town's heritage as a source of civic pride, and as an attractor to new investment and residents.

The group draw attention to the expert knowledge of staff who act as custodians of the collection, which they fear may be lost in the re-shaping of library services, having already been eroded in the past. They believe this is inconsistent with Swindon's other heritage and cultural plans, notably the Museum and Art gallery project, which has yet to gain full popular support; they suggest that failure to properly manage the Local Studies collection into the future will undermine the credibility of the Museum bid, and will diminish a heritage sector that is of growing importance to the local economy, with several major heritage bodies located in the vicinity.

Correspondence from individuals

Twelve letters from individuals all raise concerns specifically about the retention of Highworth library, and the damage and loss to the community that would arise from its closure. They raise several observations, including the benefit the library provides to groups of people within the local community, including its children, families, older people and disadvantaged residents, as well as the impact on surrounding communities for which Highworth acts as a hub. The correspondents include two who have donated materials to the library in the past.

The arguments against closure of Highworth include its importance to the community as a local service that contributes to the strength of the local High Street, its social importance as a place where people can gather freely, and its high level of usage by local people, indicating its value to the local populace. The cost-effectiveness of the library, which occupies low-rent property provided by a local trader, is a further argument against closure, and so too is its quality and service, which several correspondents do not feel could be matched by a volunteer workforce. One correspondent argues strongly, and in some detail, that Highworth library should be retained if the authority is to meet its legal obligations to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service.

There is also correspondence urging the retention of Wroughton library, on the grounds of the remoteness of the Central Library, and the levels of use Wroughton attracts, including its impact on local children and families. Covingham library's retention is also urged, with reference to its importance to a local family.

Other correspondence is less specific about keeping individual libraries open, but rehearses arguments against closures. Correspondents urge the authority to rethink the approach, avoid short-termism, and to look at the approaches being adopted - apparently with a measure of success - in other authorities facing budget pressures. Library users reference the benefits they and their family have enjoyed from using Swindon's services, and want these to continue for present and future generations, and for the advantage of those who cannot afford alternatives. A local GP urges a reconsideration of the approach, fearing that it will cause further disadvantage to those who already struggle to improve their lot in life.