

The future of Swindon's Libraries

Report on consultation, autumn 2016

A report by Phil Back Associates Ltd

for Swindon Borough Council

October 2016

Executive summary

1. This report summarises the results of a consultation on the future of Swindon's libraries, run in August and September 2016, to which a total of 1,632 valid responses were received. It also includes a summary of a number of separate written submissions received through the consultation concerning the proposal being put forward by the Borough Council.
2. Respondents to the consultation are almost all library users, and most are local residents, but there are also a number of responses from groups and organisations with an interest in the subject. The respondents are more likely to be older people, and women are more likely to have responded than men; a third of respondents have some sort of disability, most frequently related to mobility or long-term health. Two in five respondents is working, and a slightly higher proportion are retired. A quarter of respondents have children at home.
3. There is a particular concentration of response from the Wroughton area and from the south of the urban area, as well as from Highworth; response is more patchy from areas such as Penhill, Pinehurst and Gorse Hill. Response from eastern Swindon is also high. There is a significant interest in the survey from users of Wroughton, Park and Covingham libraries in particular.
4. Three quarters of respondents have access to a car, and two thirds have a bus stop within easy walking distance. One in three has a concessionary bus pass. Around 5% of respondents has none of these.
5. Those who use the non-core libraries tend to visit more frequently than those who regularly use one of the proposed core libraries. Three quarters of those using a non-core library visit at least monthly, but only half of those who use the North or West libraries do so. Highworth has a large group of regular users, who tend to be concentrated at the older end of the age-range. A third of those who use non-core libraries regularly are also monthly visitors to the Central library, and small proportions of those who use the non-core libraries also patronise the North or West libraries, but very few use Highworth, which thus caters primarily for a localised catchment.
6. Four out of five respondents choose a library close to home as their first choice; one in eight choose one close to a workplace. But two in five say there are other reasons for choosing their preferred library, and their responses suggest that these include issues relating to opening hours, stock, staff, and convenience in relation to other activities. Over half of all library visits are made on foot, with a third made by car.
7. A quarter of people say the proposed changes will make no difference to their use of the library service. One in seven says they will change libraries, with Central the most likely choice. One in five intends to stop using the service if the changes go ahead. A third of all respondents don't know what course of action they will take.

8. Saturday morning is the most popular time for those who intend to use a core library if the proposal is implemented; weekday afternoons and weekday mornings are also popular choices, with little difference in result according to the weekday. Weekday evenings are less popular, and Sundays even less so; Sunday evenings would attract very few visitors. Respondents with children especially favour Saturday mornings, and also like weekday afternoons; weekend evenings are not popular with this group. Over 65s prefer mornings over afternoons, but are reluctant to entertain evenings or Sundays. Respondents with disabilities are equally keen on weekday mornings and afternoons, and Saturday mornings; they are much less enthusiastic about weekday or weekend evenings.
9. One in seven respondents say they are likely to use the proposed online reservation service, and a third are willing to consider occasional use; two in five library users say they will not use this service.
10. There is limited interest in becoming part of a group to establish community-based library services; a quarter of respondents express a degree of interest. There is a similar level of interest in volunteering to help in a library.
11. Many respondents explicitly say they see no advantages in this proposal. Where advantages are identified, respondents see primarily the cost savings to the Council, along with the possible advantage of a more focussed service. A number of respondents acknowledge that this proposal is an improvement on its predecessor, primarily because it allows additional libraries to remain open.
12. There is widespread disappointment at the loss of local services and the anticipation of reduced accessibility to the service that remains. There are concerns about the distance and travel implications of the reduced number of library outlets. This is thought likely to reduce take-up of the service.
13. The proposal is widely thought to be likely to be detrimental to children and families, and to the elderly. There are particular concerns about the less mobile, and the isolation that may result from the library being too far away from them to allow easy access, compounded for some by limited familiarity with new technology. Respondents identify a need for access to the service without reliance on technology (for those without IT at home) and also for the IT services provided within the library.
14. There are also significant concerns that the proposal will impact negatively on people who are less well off, both by making it more difficult for them to access services they need and by withdrawing services from areas of greatest socio-economic need. Many point out that a significantly disadvantaged area in East Swindon will be left unserved.
15. There are also significant concerns that the proposal will impact on community life, affecting both informal contact for people (especially older people) and reducing opportunities for groups and activities that utilise library premises.
16. There is a strong concern over the loss of skilled staff, both for their knowledge and expertise but also because of their friendliness and for the support they provide. A

large number of respondents believe the proposal places excessive reliance on volunteers, who may be difficult to find and whose reliability is in doubt.

17. Significant levels of doubt arise over the capacity of volunteers to handle the management, financial and legal obligations and responsibilities associated with running a library. There is also strong scepticism over reliance on technology, and frequent reference to the regular failure of existing technology. Many respondents express concern over safety and security in unstaffed libraries, or libraries staffed by volunteers. A number of people point out that voluntary effort is more likely to be forthcoming in areas of relative affluence, and that this will compound the withdrawal of services in areas such as East Swindon where recruitment of volunteers is likely to be more difficult.
18. For many respondents, there are concerns over the funding of community-based libraries. Some see the transitional funding as inadequate, others as unlikely to be replaced once it runs out, or dependent on the ability and willingness of parishes to make up the cost of keeping libraries operating. There is a prominent view that the Council should seek an alternative solution through raising Council Tax to cover the shortfall.
19. Several respondents reject the proposition on the basis that they already pay for this service through their Council Tax, and resent the idea that they should have to accept voluntary provision, or (if parishes set a precept to fund community-based libraries) pay additional taxation to provide what they view as a core public service.
20. A significant number of people urge the Council to consider, or to adopt, the staff-led proposal for a trust model. There is a level of suspicion that the Council is not being open or transparent about this proposition.
21. Some respondents ask the Council to look at delivery models being deployed elsewhere, where austerity has had a less draconian impact on the library service. A service merger with Wiltshire, or a stock-sharing arrangement with another service, are suggested as possible solutions.
22. Several respondents make specific requests for their local library to be retained. The libraries at Park and Wroughton are those most frequently identified but are by no means the only ones. A significant number of people raise concerns over the future of the mobile and deposit collections services. Concern over reduced hours leads many to suggest that the limited hours available be redistributed to enable the non-central libraries to open for longer.
23. There is a measure of scepticism about the consultation and the willingness of the Council to listen to the response it produces. A number of people are concerned that the opinions expressed in the last exercise have not been taken notice of, whilst others are clearly becoming fatigued at answering what they see as the same questions about a proposition they reject.

1 Introduction and methodology

Swindon Borough Council currently runs 15 libraries and a mobile service. However, financial pressures on the Council mean that significant savings must be made in the cost of the library service over the next few years, and the Council has therefore developed proposals for a redesigned service that it believes will achieve the savings required whilst continuing to meet the need for the service. At the same time, changes in the ways people access books, information and other media give the Council the opportunity to explore the possibilities offered by new technology to deliver aspects of the service.

An engagement process took place in spring 2016 to explore public reaction to an emerging model of library service provision, based around a focus on Council service from the Central Library and the possibility of community-run libraries to replace other library services across the Borough. The results of this engagement process were explored in detail in our earlier report in May 2016.

This further consultation explores public reaction to an alternative option for service delivery based around the retention of Council-run services at Central library, and also (with limited hours) at Highworth, North Swindon (Orbital) and West Swindon libraries. Council services would be withdrawn from other libraries, but support would be provided to enable local communities to take over local libraries and run them as community-led outlets, should they wish to do so. The consultation reported here ran from 1st August to 30th September 2016.

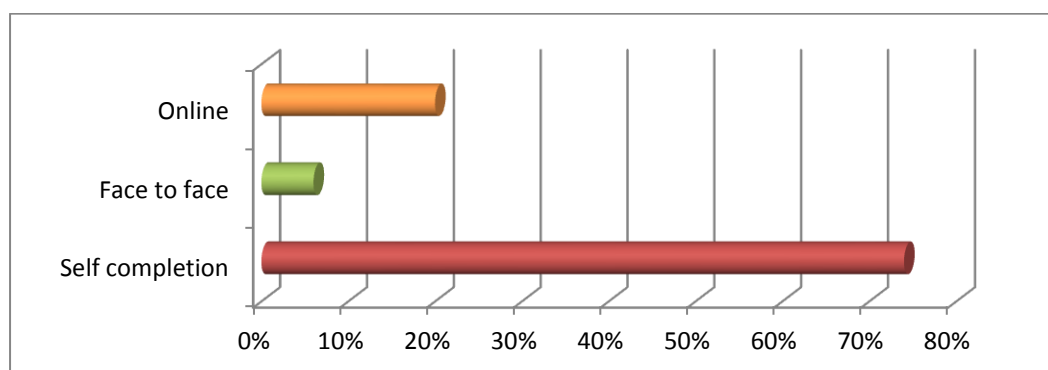
The consultation was widely advertised, through libraries themselves but also through information provided to each household in the Borough, inviting people to respond either through an online survey or through a paper version, made available at libraries or from the authority directly on request. Council officers held a series of drop-in sessions in all libraries to promote the consultation and to give local people an opportunity to ask questions about the proposals. In addition, Council officers undertook a programme of face to face interviews with local people using the same questionnaire as in the survey.

This table shows the response secured from each of the different approaches used.

Table 1: Origin of response

	Number of responses	Proportion of respondents
Self-completion	1,207	74%
Face to face	98	6%
Online	327	20%
N (=100%)	1,632	

Chart 1: Origin of response



The total response of 1,632 valid responses is significantly less than the 2,688 responses to the engagement on the emerging model. The study reaches no conclusions about this difference, although there are some indications as to why response might be lower. The two studies are only capable of limited comparison, because the proposal, the information presented, and in many cases the questions themselves are different.

In addition to the response received through the questionnaire, the Council received a number of written responses from individuals and representative groups, both by letter and e-mail. This report includes a section which attempts to summarise these responses, which are reproduced in full as an appendix.

Responses to the questionnaire are considered as of equal weight, and each is counted only once regardless of the numbers of respondents it may claim to represent. However, the response of groups is also explored separately within the analysis.

The questionnaire used in this consultation was developed in discussion between Council officers and ourselves. The data analysis and the report have been undertaken from a completely independent perspective. As with any 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.

Not everyone answered every question. Sometimes this was because their previous answers took them down one of two routes through the questionnaire, but in other cases this was because they chose not to respond to particular questions. Each table in the study therefore shows not only the breakdown of response, but also the numbers of people responding.

Similarly, some people gave more than one answer to a question. Where the question allowed this, these answers are recorded and this can mean that a table's total response exceeds 100%. Where the question explicitly requested only one answer, multiple answers have been disregarded. All data have been rounded to the nearest whole number; where the number of responses exceeds zero, but is less than half of 1%, an asterisk (*) is used to indicate the presence of data.

2 Respondent Profile

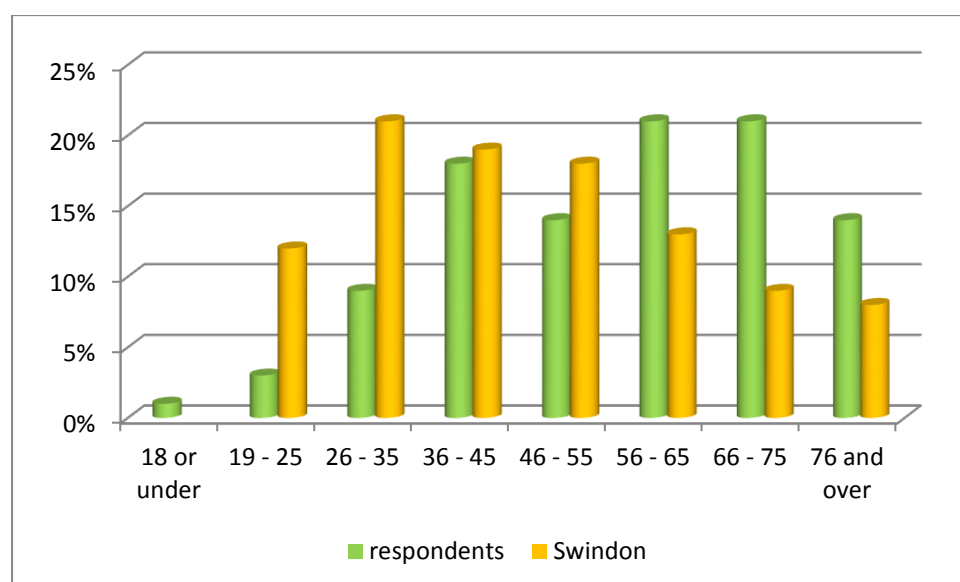
2.1 Age

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

Table 2: Respondent age

Age-group	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adults in Swindon ¹
18 or under	1%	
19 - 25	3%	12%
26 - 35	9%	21%
36 - 45	18%	19%
46 - 55	14%	18%
56 - 65	21%	13%
66 - 75	21%	9%
76 and over	14%	8%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,438</i>	<i>162,633</i>

Chart 2: Respondent age



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

Although there are respondents from all age-groups, there are more older residents in the response than would be predicted from their presence in the local population. A third of respondents are aged over 65, and well over two thirds are over 45 years of age. A quarter of respondents are aged between 26 and 45, but only 4% are under the age of 25. This figure includes a small number of responses made by, or on behalf of, children.

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 and this is especially true among younger retired people, who are more than twice as 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

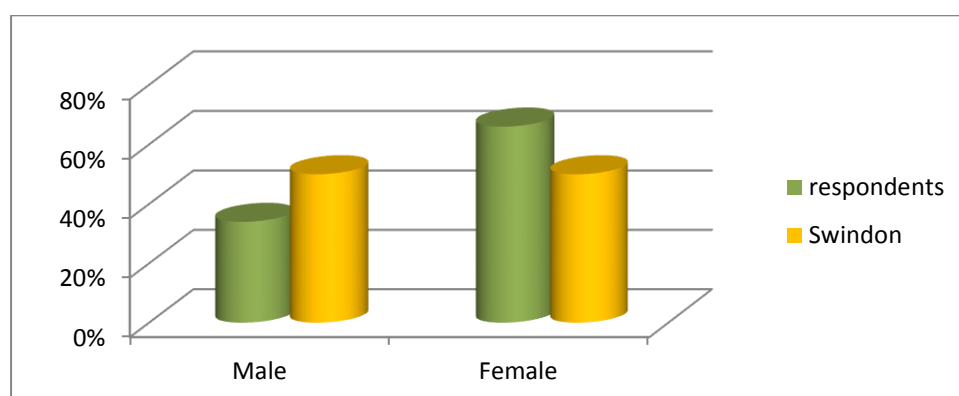
2.2 Gender

This table shows the split of response by gender:

Table 3: Respondent gender

Gender	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population
Male	34%	50%
Female	66%	50%
Transgender	*	
N (=100%)	1,457	162,633

Chart 3: Respondent gender



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.

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 higher proportion of females than might be inferred from population data. A small 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.

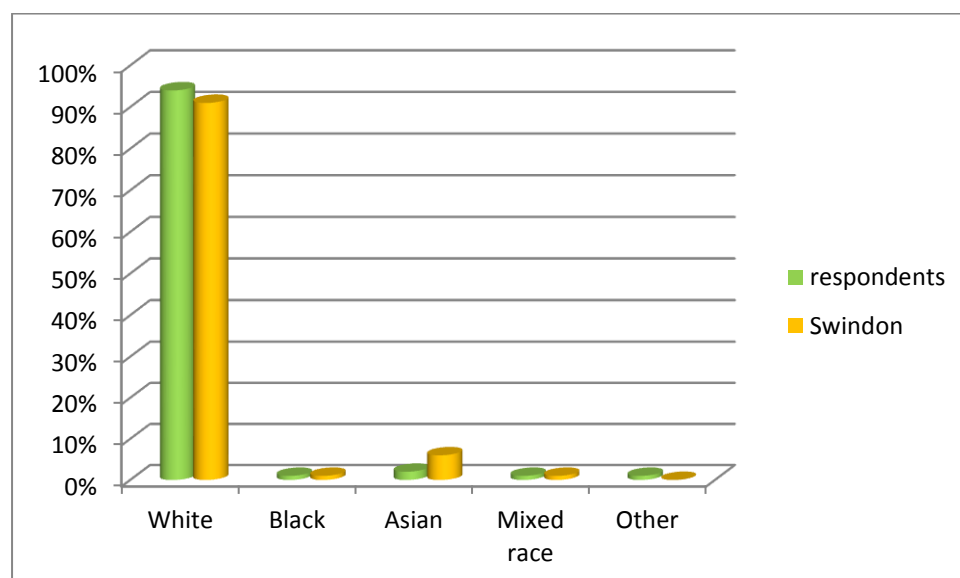
2.3 Ethnicity

The ethnic origin of respondents is shown here:

Table 4: Respondent ethnicity

Ethnicity	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population
White	94%	91%
Black	1%	1%
Asian	2%	6%
Mixed race	1%	1%
Other	1%	*
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,370</i>	<i>162,633</i>

Chart 4: 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 small numbers of people from a wide range of different backgrounds, cultures and languages, including people from Arab, Chinese and Latin American backgrounds.

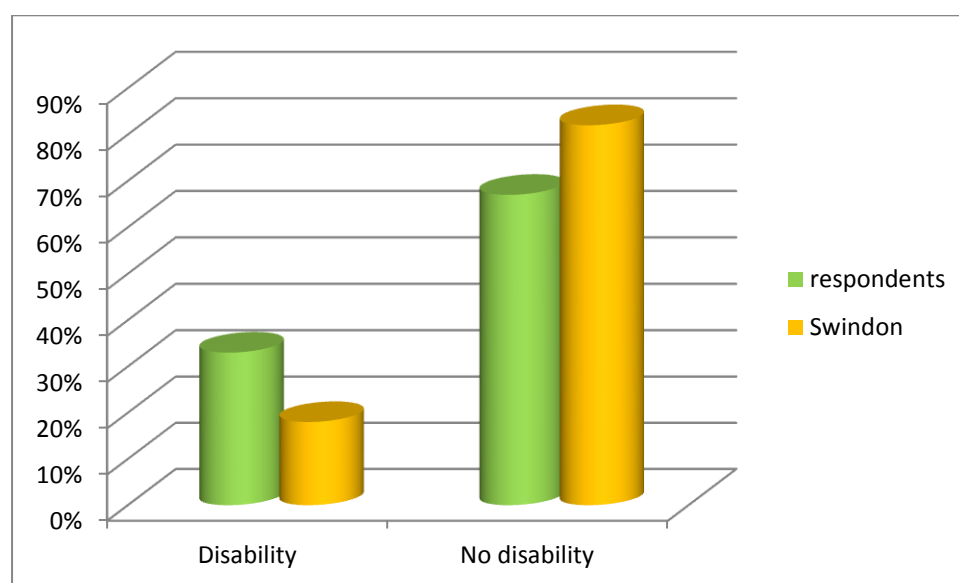
2.4 Disability

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

Table 5: Respondent disability

	Proportion of respondents	Proportion of adult population ³
Disability	33%	18%
No disability	67%	82%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,294</i>	<i>167,774</i>

Chart 5: 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.

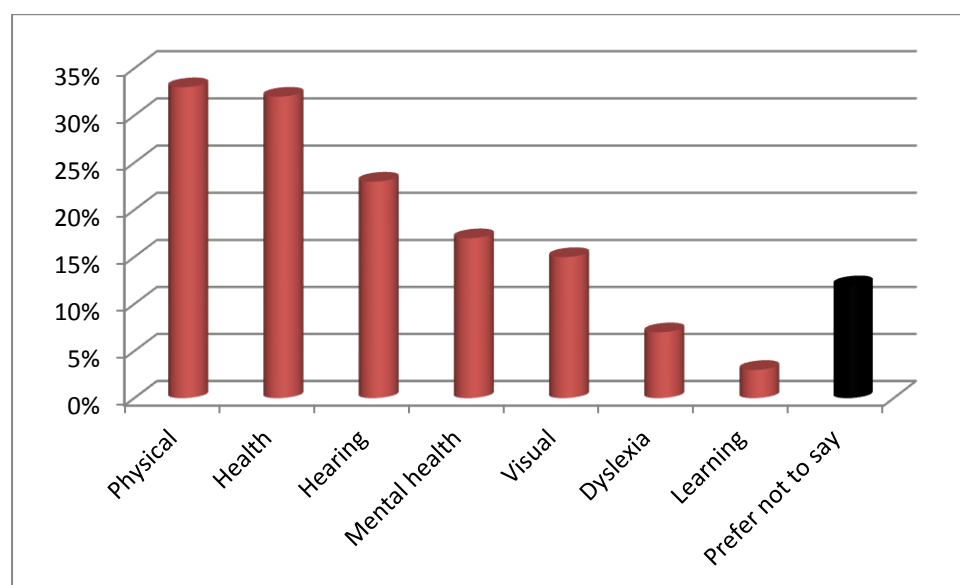
One in three respondents identifies themselves as having some form of disability. The proportion of people with disabilities is significantly higher than would be expected from the general population data, but this is certainly influenced to some extent by the age profile of respondents, as older people are more likely to be experiencing disability. Nevertheless, the proportion of people with disabilities in this study exceeds by some distance the 25% who participated in the engagement exercise.

This table explores the different dimensions of disability among respondents:

Table 5a: Respondent disability by type of disability

Disability	Proportion of respondents who have a disability	Proportion of all respondents
Physical disability	33%	11%
Long-term health problem	32%	11%
Hearing impairment	23%	7%
Depression or mental health	17%	6%
Visual impairment	15%	5%
Dyslexia or reading disorder	7%	2%
Learning difficulties	3%	1%
Prefer not to say	12%	4%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>427</i>	<i>1,294</i>

Chart 5a: Respondent disability by type of disability



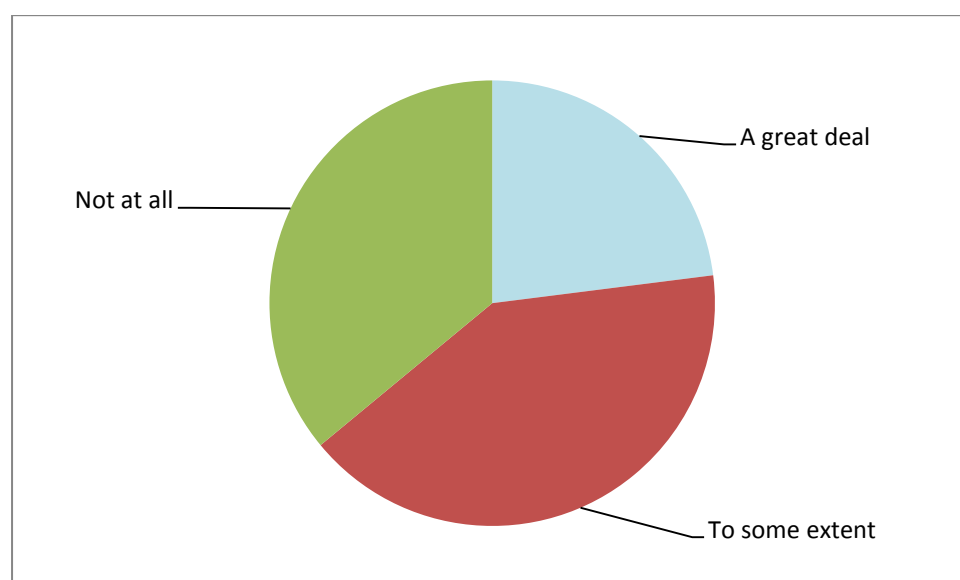
Several respondents have more than one area of disability or impairment, so the proportions add up to more than 100%. The most common aspect of disability among respondents is a physical disability, which affects around a third of those who declare themselves as disabled. Just under a third report long-term health problems (which include diabetes), while a quarter have hearing issues and one in six experience mental health challenges. One in seven are visually limited, and respondents also include smaller numbers of people with dyslexia, or with learning difficulties.

Respondents were also asked to indicate how their disability affects their use of the library, and their answers are reported here:

Table 5b: Impact of disability on use of library

	Proportion of respondents with disabilities
A great deal	23%
To some extent	41%
Not at all	36%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	353

Chart 5b: Impact of disability on use of library



A quarter of those who report a disability say that it has a substantial impact on their use of the library, and a further two in five find their use of the library limited to some extent by the nature of their disability. Over a third of people with disabilities, however, say that their disability has no impact at all on their use of the library service.

Responses later in the survey indicate that several people have mobility limitations that may affect their capacity to walk even moderate distances, or to access public transport; others require parking spaces that are nearby to their destination, or level access. Disability may also limit people's capacity to carry items, to stand, or to find items without assistance. In some cases, these people are confined largely to their own homes and are dependent on services that come to them.

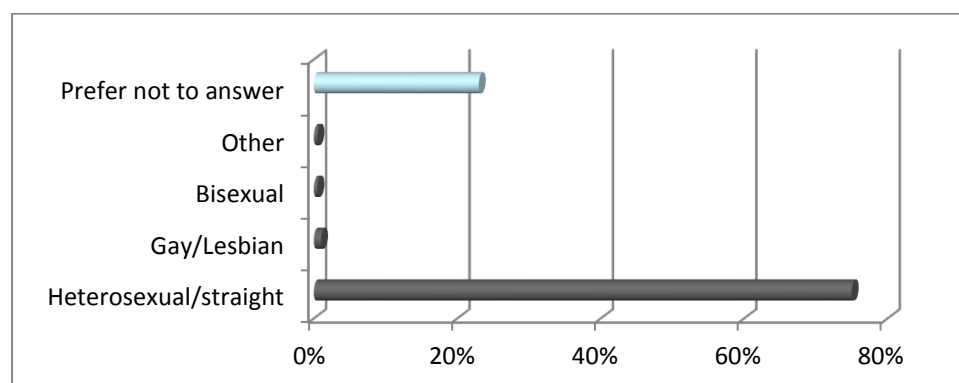
2.5 Sexual identity

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

Table 6: Sexual identity

Sexual identity	Proportion of respondents
Heterosexual/straight	75%
Gay/Lesbian	1%
Bisexual	*
Other	*
Prefer not to answer	23%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,361</i>

Chart 6: 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. The proportion of people unwilling to answer this question has increased substantially from the previous study (when it was 16%).

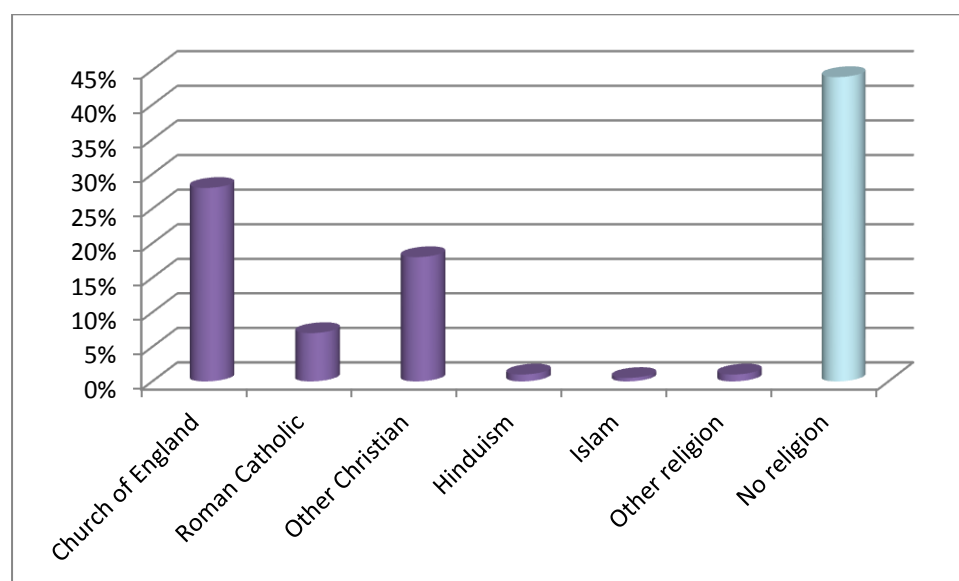
2.6 Religion

Asked to indicate their religion, respondents answer as follows:

Table 7: Religion

Religion	Proportion of respondents
Church of England	28%
Roman Catholic	7%
Other Christian	18%
Hinduism	1%
Islam	*
Other religion	1%
No religion	44%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,272</i>

Chart 7: 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 53% 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. Over two-fifths of people claim no religious affiliation at all.

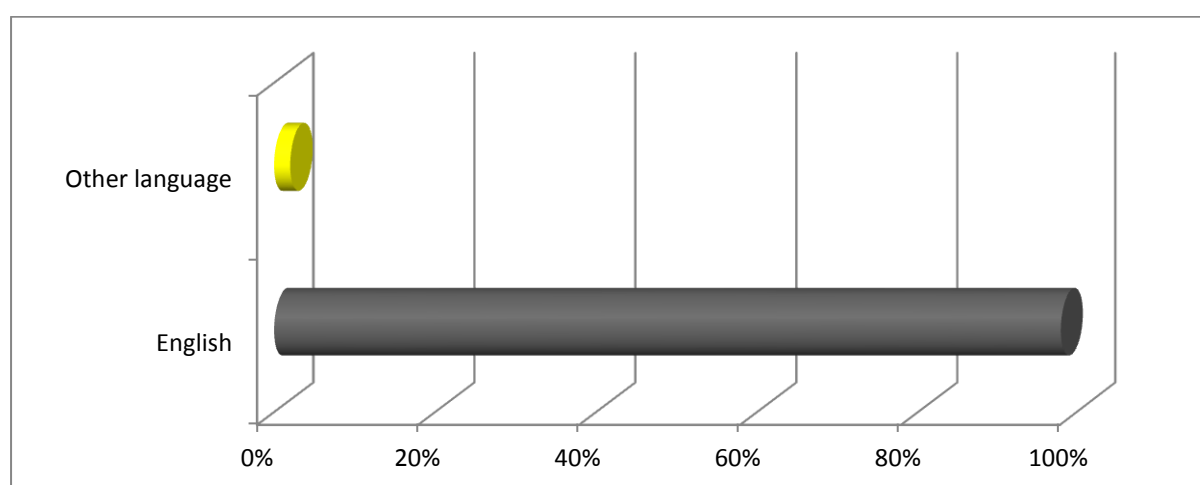
2.7 Language

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

Table 8: Language

Language	Proportion of respondents
English	98%
Other language	2%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,441</i>

Chart 8: 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) mentioned. There are also speakers of Asian languages including Nepali, Telugu and Thai as well as Mandarin Chinese, Arabic and Japanese.

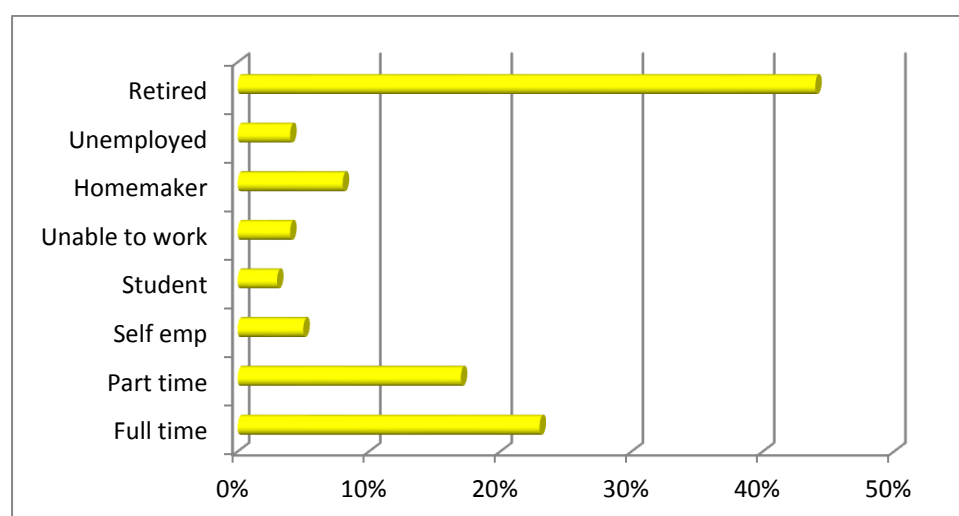
2.8 Working status

The working status of respondents is shown in this table:

Table 9: Working status

Employment status	Proportion of respondents
Working full time	23%
Working part-time	17%
Self employed	5%
Student in full-time education	3%
Permanently sick or unable to work	4%
Looking after the home	8%
Unemployed/looking for work	4%
Retired	44%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,465</i>

Chart 9: Working status



Less than half the respondents to the survey are working in some form; the proportions who work full-time exceed those who work part-time, 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. Whilst there are differences between this table and its counterpart in the earlier study, the overall picture is not dissimilar.

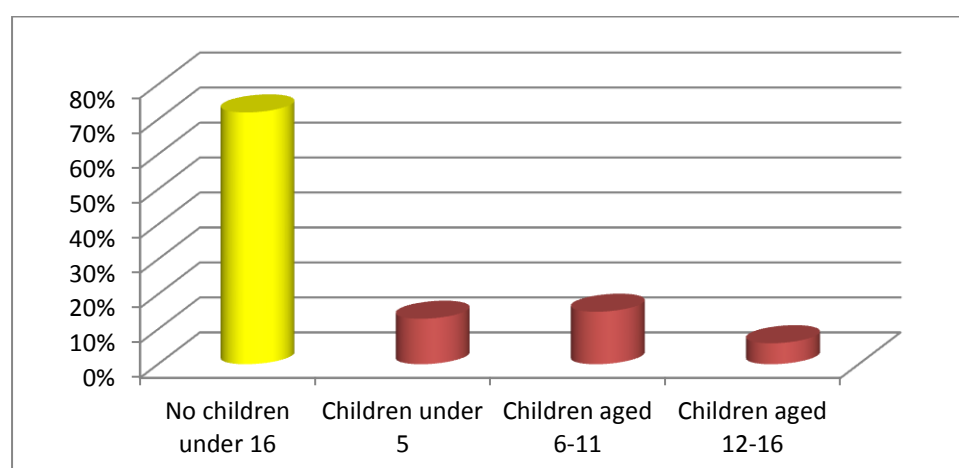
2.9 Household composition

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

Table 10: Household composition

Household with...	Proportion of respondents
No children under 16	72%
Children under 5	13%
Children aged 6-11	15%
Children aged 12-16	6%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,407</i>

Chart 10: Household composition



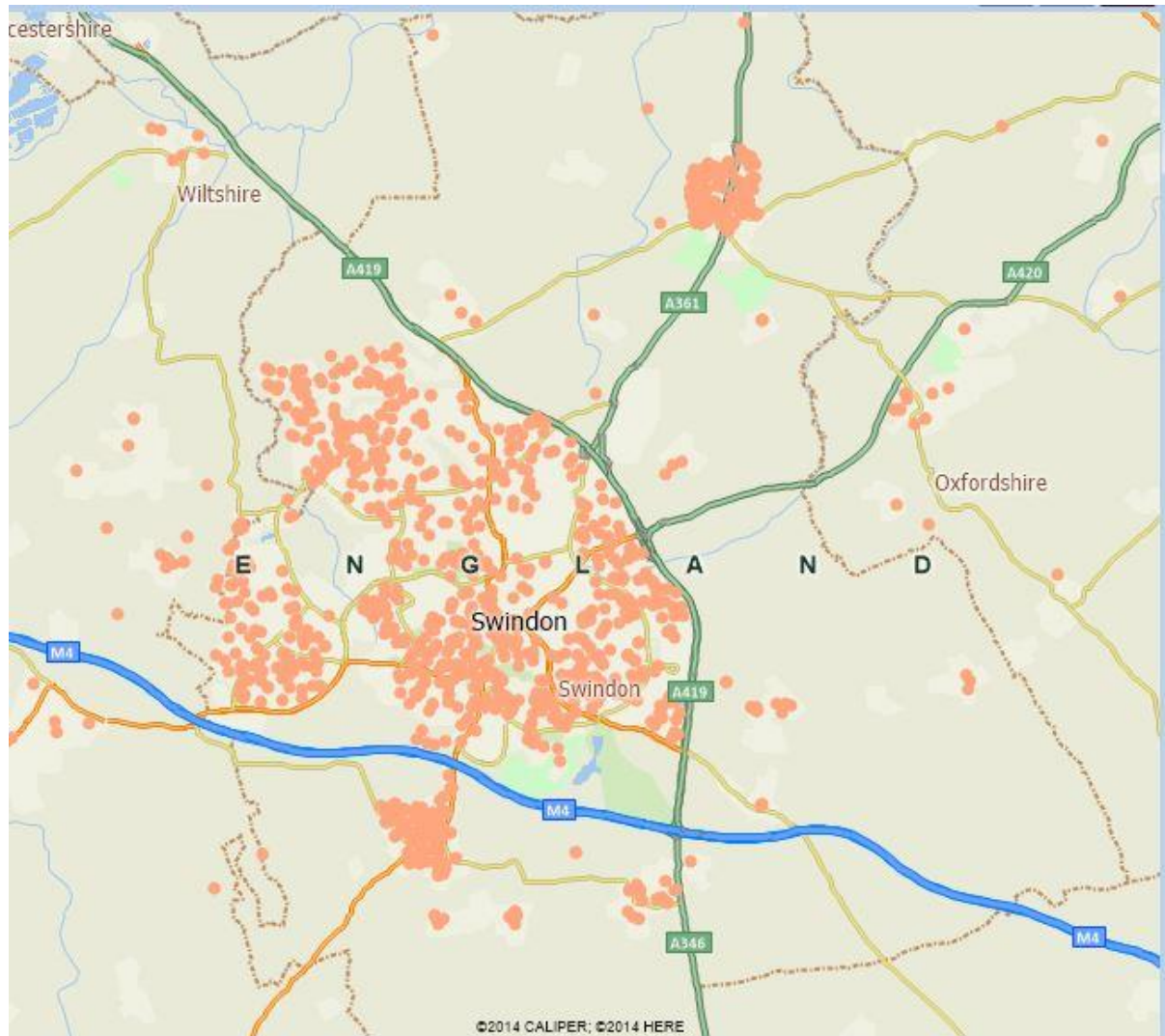
Some households have children in more than one category, so the totals exceed 100%. Just under three-quarters of the households represented in the survey are 'empty nests' with no children living at home, leaving just over a quarter where children are present. This reflects the age profile of the response,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

Households with teenagers are a little less frequent in this study than in the previous engagement, but the dominance of childless households is unchanged. There is a slightly higher representation of households with younger children, but the difference is small.

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. There are concentrations of response in the south of the Borough, in Highworth and in Wroughton. The pattern of response from eastern Swindon is less concentrated, but is nevertheless substantial. Response is comparatively less strong from north Swindon, and even more so from west Swindon. Areas such as Penhill, Gorse Hill and Pinehurst contribute to the survey on a much more limited basis.

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. Cirencester is well represented; a smaller-scale map would also reveal a small number of individual contributions from Bath, Cheltenham and Worcester, and individuals contributing from Liverpool and Sheffield.

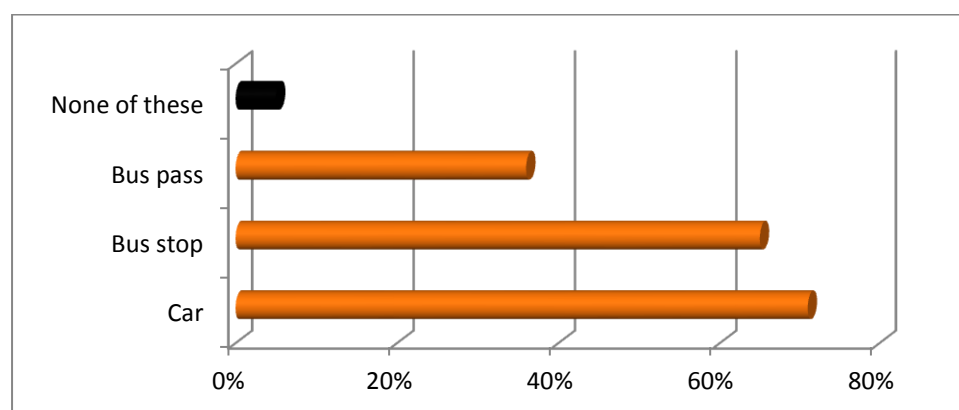
2.11 Access to transport

The table below shows the proportions of respondents who have access to different types of transport.

Table 11: Access to transport

	Proportion of respondents
A car either as a driver or passenger	71%
A bus stop within easy walking distance of home	65%
A concessionary bus pass	36%
None of these	5%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,455</i>

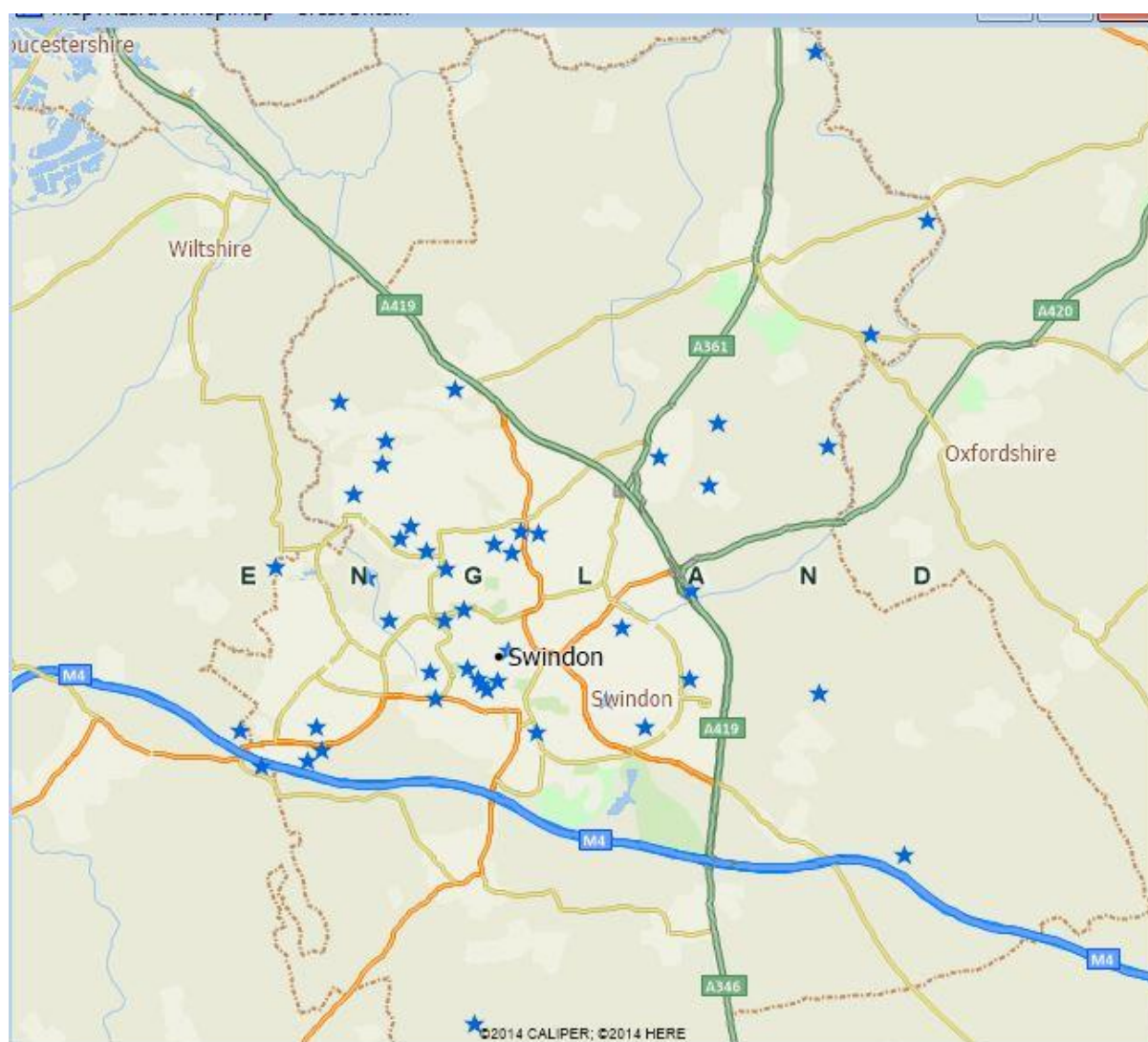
Chart 11: Access to transport



Close to three-quarters of respondents have access to a private car, either as a driver or passenger, while two thirds have a bus stop within convenient walking distance (as defined by the person completing the questionnaire). Over a third possess a concessionary bus pass, either as a disabled person or as an older person. Just one in twenty respondents has none of these, but two-fifths of this group say their disability has a significant impact on their use of the library. The question does not, of course, rule out the possibility of other means of accessing services, such as by bicycle, mobility scooter, or through the agency of another person.

A closer look at those with no access to any of these means of transport indicates that they are more likely to be aged in their thirties and forties; in contrast, relatively few people aged 66-75 have none of these means of transport available to them. They are also more likely to be male. Nearly half (46%) of those with no access to transport are people with disabilities, in contrast to just a third of the total response to the survey. These respondents' geographical locations (of those who provided postcodes) are shown in this map:

Map 2: Location of those with no access to transport



Several of these respondents live in outlying areas of the Borough, but many are resident within areas that are served by public transport. To the extent that there is any concentration at all in this data, it is in the northwest of the Borough around the Rodbourne Cheney area.

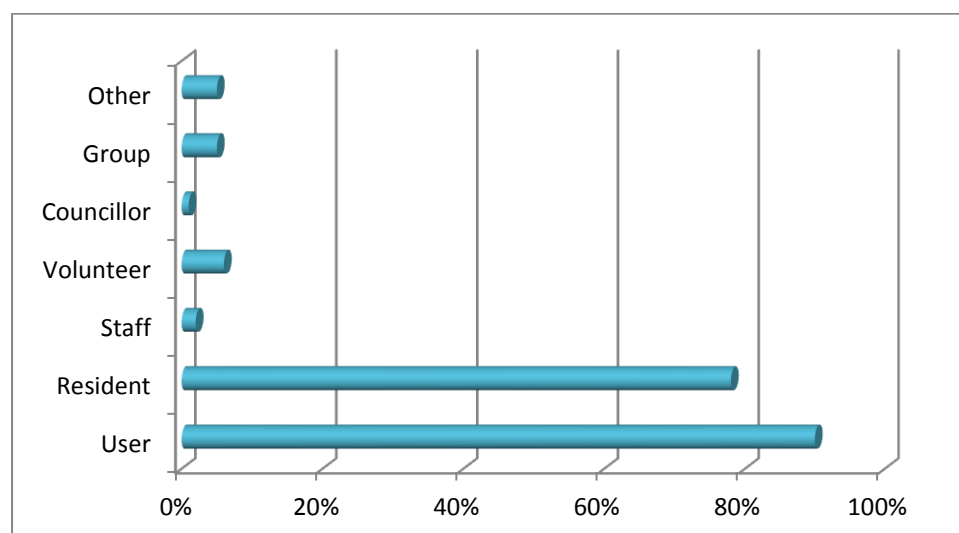
2.12 Nature of interest in the survey

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

Table 12: Nature of interest in library survey

Interest	Proportion of respondents
User of Swindon's libraries	90%
Local resident	78%
Library staff	2%
Library volunteer	6%
Local Councillor	1%
Representative of a group/organisation	5%
Interested in some other way	5%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,613</i>

Chart 12: Nature of interest in library survey



The response is dominated by library users; only a small number of people who do not use libraries have taken part in the survey. This is at least partly due to the distribution method chosen, with most forms acquired through 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 out of five 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 explicitly identify as local residents are, in fact, resident within the Borough.

Other groups are present in smaller numbers in the survey. Staff, volunteers and local Councillors (Council and Parish) are all present. 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.

There are only minor differences between this breakdown of interest and that from the previous study. The proportion of users and local residents are both a little lower, whilst there is a higher volunteer presence in the current survey, but the differences are not significant.

Those who declare other interests include members of Friends Groups, and also members or leaders of groups who use library premises for their meetings. They also include parents, grandparents and carers (professional and voluntary) who take children to the library. A small proportion are people with more general concerns about library services in general, and there are also retired librarians and teachers, and members of other residents' or interest groups. Other interests include being a local MP, a political party, and people who use the library services to support their professional, student or amateur research interests.

3 Using the library service

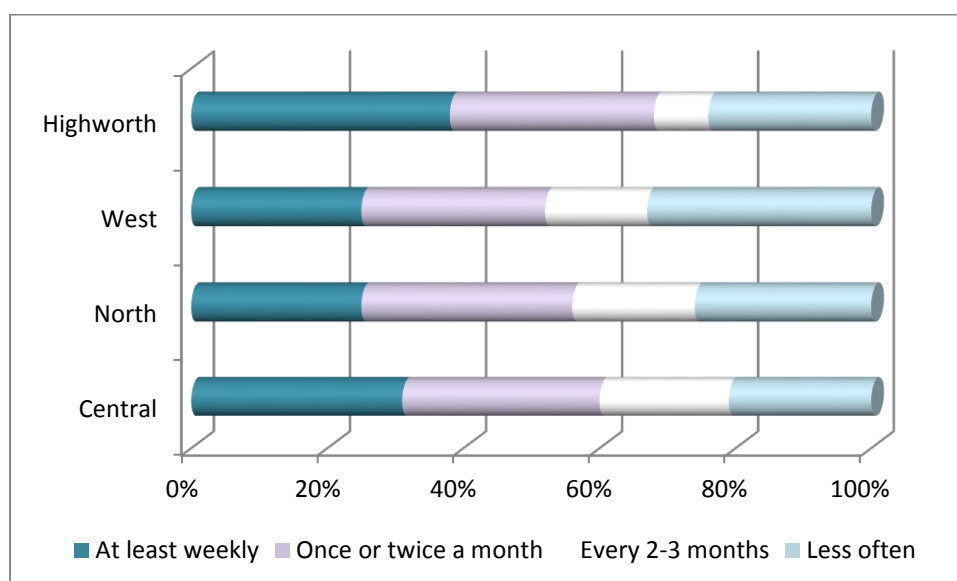
This table analyses data on the frequency of visiting different libraries in the Borough, including the Central library, the three other libraries proposed for retention, and the other libraries where the Council proposes to withdraw its management. The data thus represents respondents' own perspective on their frequency of visiting, and will not necessarily be consistent with data collected by the service itself, since this covers all users rather than just those answering this question. The question was not uniformly answered, however, with some respondents ticking the box to indicate they 'never visit' a particular library, whilst others left it blank. 'Never' responses thus distort the comparison between libraries, and the table that follows removes them to allow that comparison between usage frequencies to be more meaningfully made.

Table 13: Frequency of visiting individual libraries (excluding 'never' responses) by library visited

	Proportion of all respondents for each library				
	At least weekly	Once or twice a month	Every 2-3 months	Less often	N (=100%)
Central	31%	29%	19%	21%	983
North	25%	31%	18%	26%	508
West	25%	27%	15%	33%	422
Highworth	38%	30%	8%	24%	346
Any other library	40%	34%	9%	18%	821

This table summarises the response to the question for each of the identified libraries, with the percentages adding up to 100% along the rows.

Chart 13: Frequency of visiting individual libraries (excluding 'never' responses) by library visited



Of those who use the Central library, the largest proportion are those who visit weekly, who account for a third of visitors; a similar proportion visit Central at least monthly, so three in five (60%) of Central library users are regular visitors (i.e. at least once a month). North library has a slightly lower proportion of weekly visitors, as does the West library, but even so more than half (56% and 52% respectively) of the users of these two facilities are regulars. However, the library with the highest proportion of regular visitors is Highworth; two in five Highworth users attend weekly, and a further 30% at least once a month, giving Highworth a total of two thirds (68%) of its users who can be defined as regulars.

Across the other non-core libraries, weekly visiting is even more the pattern. Two in five of those who use non-core libraries do so weekly, and a further third go at least once a month, meaning that 75% of those who use non-core libraries do so regularly.

Looking at the age distribution of library users, the most frequent visitors to the Central library are those aged 19-25 and those aged 46-55, while 26-45 year olds are much less frequent users of this facility. In contrast, 26-45s visiting the North library do so more frequently, and 19-25 much less often. The West library's most frequent visitors are over 65s, with 26-45s visiting less frequently. Highworth too attracts more frequent visits from its older clientele, and 19-55s tend to visit less regularly. The remaining libraries, taken together as a group, have a particular appeal to 26-45s and to over 75s, but also show a more even pattern of visiting according to age.

Men who use Central library do so more frequently than women, but women are the more frequent visitors to North, West and Highworth libraries. Women are much more frequent users of the non-core libraries than their male counterparts.

Although this summarises the ways individual libraries are used, it is also helpful to look at users as a single group and analyse how they are distributed across the range of libraries

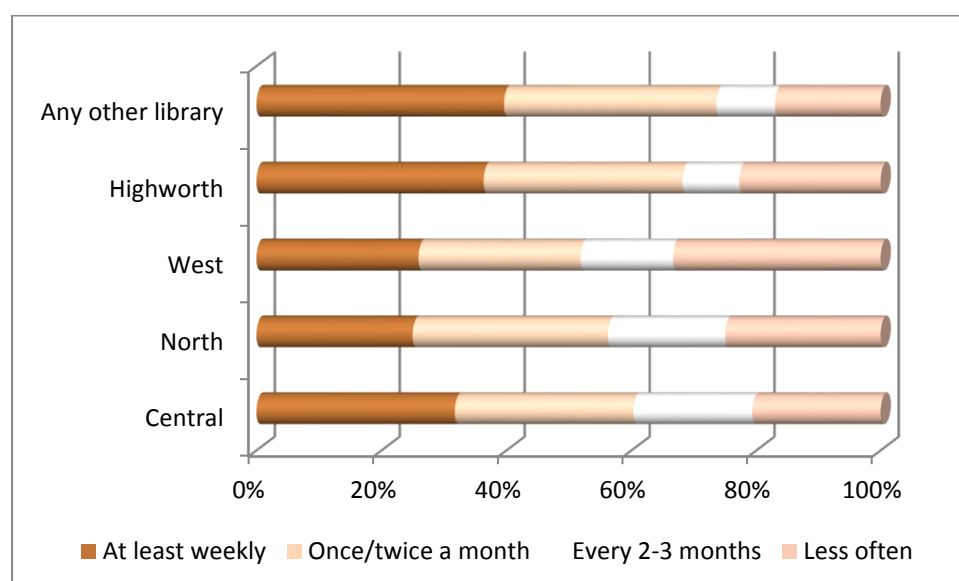
available. This table looks at all respondents who use libraries at all, and examines what proportion of that whole respondent group visits each library and at what frequency.

Table 14: Frequency of visiting libraries (100% = all library users regardless of library visited)

	Proportion of all respondents who visit libraries				
	Central	North	West	Highworth	Any other library
At least weekly	20%	8%	7%	8%	21%
Once/twice a month	18%	10%	7%	7%	18%
Every 2-3 months	12%	6%	4%	2%	5%
Less often	13%	8%	9%	5%	9%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	1,568				

In this table, the percentages add up to a single total representing the entire response from library users.

Chart 14: Frequency of visiting libraries (all respondents taken together)



One in five of all library-using respondents say they use the Central library at least weekly, and a slightly smaller proportion say they visit at least monthly, so that the Central library serves nearly two in five of all library users on a regular basis. A further quarter of respondents say they use the Central library, but on a less frequent basis, so that in all two-thirds of those responding to the survey have some contact with the Central library.

One in twelve respondents visit the North library weekly, and a further one in ten visit at least monthly, so that this library serves one in five participants in this survey on a regular basis.

A further one in seven respondents are occasional users at the North library, meaning that a third of respondents have some sort of contact with this library.

The West library is not as well-attended, but one in fourteen respondents visit weekly and a similar proportion visit once or twice a month, making a total of one in seven respondents (14%) who visit regularly. A similar proportion visit less often, making a total of a quarter (27%) who have contact with this library.

Visiting patterns at Highworth are similar, in that one in twelve respondents visits weekly and a similar proportion visit once or twice a month, so that in all 15% of respondents to the survey visit Highworth at least monthly. A further 7% say they visit Highworth less often, making a total of 22%, just under a quarter of all participants, who have some contact with Highworth library.

The non-core libraries are grouped in this question and analysis of individual locations is not possible. One in five respondents say they visit a non-core library on a weekly basis, and a further 8% visit once or twice a month, so that two in five respondents use a non-core library on a regular basis. The non-core libraries have lower levels of occasional visitors but in total one in fourteen respondents say they visit one or more non-core libraries from time to time.

In total, a quarter of current library users (25%) in the survey use a non-core library either exclusively or more frequently than they visit any other library. These include older people, particularly over 75s; they also include more women, and people with children at home. One in five respondents (20%) say they only use one of the non-core libraries, implying that four out of five respondents are able to access one of the libraries retained in the proposed model, though not necessarily on a frequent or regular basis.

Library users with children are a little more likely to visit the Central library than their counterparts, and are also more frequent visitors to the North and West libraries, though many of their visits to these libraries are occasional rather than regular. They do make use of Highworth, but not to the same extent as those with no children. The major difference is in the use of non-core libraries; a third of people with children (33%) visit a non-core library at least once a week, and three in five (61%) visit at least once a month. People with children are also much more likely to spread their visits across more than one location.

The visiting pattern of people with disabilities shows only small differences from the pattern of usage in general. People with disabilities are more likely to be regulars at Highworth, or at one of the non-core libraries, and are generally less likely to make occasional visits to any library.

The results also indicate that a large proportion of respondents use more than one library; in fact, some respondents use several libraries, usually with one taking precedence but not precluding occasional visits to others. Almost one in five (18%) respondents say they use at least two libraries (sometimes more) at least monthly, and a similar proportion (22%) use at least one library regularly and a second (or more) from time to time.

Given the proposal to withdraw Council funding from non-core libraries, there is clearly interest in knowing what proportion of those who use these libraries also go to one of the

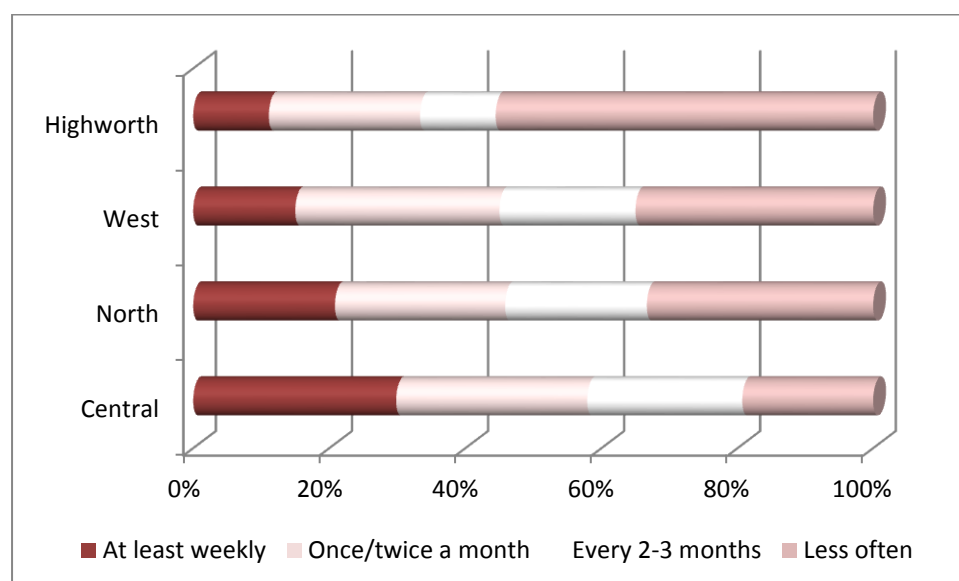
core libraries. The table below analyses the visiting patterns of those who use non-core libraries at least once a month.

Table 15: Proportions of non-core library users who also visit core libraries

	Proportion of all respondents who visit non-core libraries at least once a month			
	Central	North	West	Highworth
At least weekly	17%	5%	3%	1%
Once/twice a month	16%	6%	6%	2%
Every 2-3 months	13%	5%	4%	1%
Less often	11%	8%	7%	5%
<i>N</i> (=100%)	602			

In this table, the base number is those who visit a library at least once a month.

Chart 15: Proportions of non-core library users who also visit core libraries



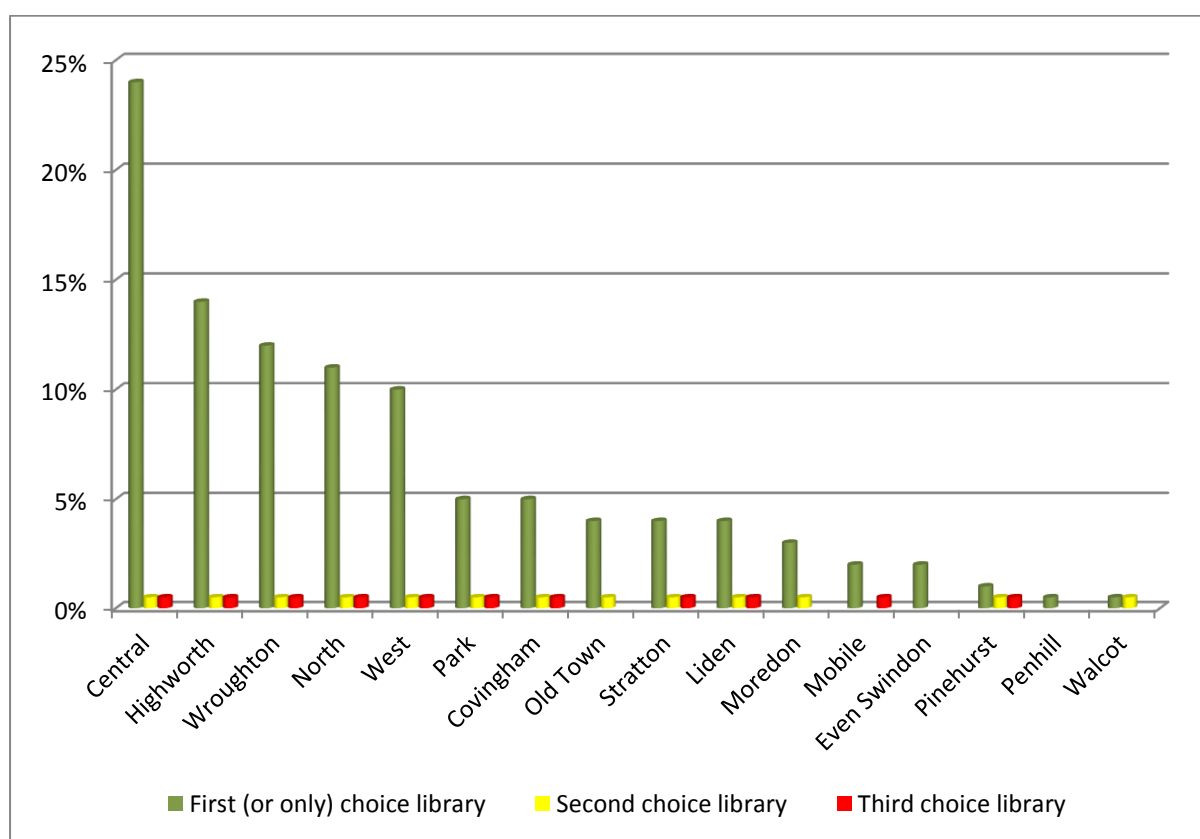
One in six regular users of a non-core library is a weekly visitor to the Central library, and a third of regulars at non-core libraries visit the Central facility at least once a month, with a further quarter of non-core library users visiting less often, making a total of nearly three in five (57%) of regulars at non-core libraries who also use the Central facility, albeit only occasionally in some cases. One in nine small library users is a regular at the North library, and one in eleven regularly visits the West library. Very few users of other libraries also make use of Highworth, however.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the library or libraries they use most often, and the results are set out here, including not only the main library used but also any alternative libraries mentioned.

Table 16: Library visited most often

	Proportion of all respondents		
	First (or only) choice library	Second choice library	Third choice library
Central	24%	3%	*
Highworth	14%	*	*
Wroughton	12%	*	*
North	11%	2%	*
West	10%	1%	*
Park	5%	2%	*
Covingham	5%	1%	*
Old Town	4%	1%	
Stratton	4%	*	*
Liden	4%	1%	*
Moredon	3%	*	
Mobile	2%		*
Even Swindon	2%		
Pinehurst	1%	*	*
Penhill	*		
Walcot	*	*	
<i>N (=100%)</i>	1,324		

Chart 16: Library visited most often



Most people identify a single library in response to this question, but almost one in five (18%) added a second or even a third library that they use regularly, a result which corresponds to the data presented in the previous question about regular use. A quarter of respondents overall (27%) say they use the Central library most often, and no other library approaches this in popularity among this group of respondents; Highworth, mentioned by one in seven respondents, is next, and Wroughton is mentioned by one in eight. As might be expected with more outlying libraries, only a very few respondents use Highworth or Wroughton as second or third libraries, though there are individuals who do so.

This table is not of course necessarily representative of library use as a whole. The previous study had a much stronger response from Highworth than is evident on this occasion, and the same is true of both North and West Swindon. All have been reprieved, to some extent at least, with their incorporation into the new model, and this may have reduced the desire to contribute further from these quarters. There is a correspondingly increased proportion of responses from Wroughton, and to a lesser extent from Covingham and Park libraries in particular.

These are followed by the North and West libraries with around one in eight and one in nine respondents respectively. Most of the non-core libraries have elicited some response, with the largest groups being those using Park and Covingham. In contrast, though, there is very

limited participation in the survey from Penhill or Walcot, neither of which has a response that even reaches double figures in terms of numbers of respondents.

As has already been noted, Central library is more popular with 19-25s and 46-55s, while Highworth has a particular appeal to over 55s and especially to over 65s. The North library is more popular with the 36-45 age-group, while the West attracts both younger and older people. These results are consistent with the previous question in this study, as is the gender split.

Among the non-core libraries with enough respondents to allow analysis, Wroughton has a generally even appeal across all age-groups. There are indications that Old Town is popular with younger adults, and Stratton and Covingham with over 75s, though these are far from the only users at these locations. Similarly, Park appeals most strongly to 36-55 year olds, but not exclusively so.

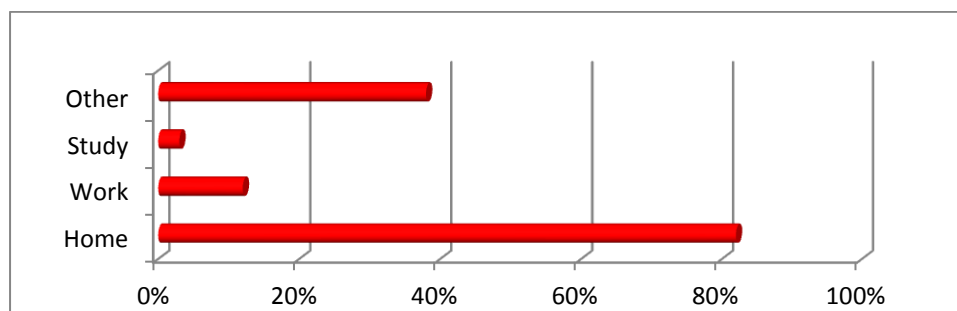
Wroughton also has a particular appeal to respondents with children at home, as does Old Town to a lesser extent; Stratton, Covingham and Park all have children in their customer base, but children are less prominent at these locations. People with disabilities are a little less likely to attend Wroughton, but are prominent at Park and Covingham (this corresponds to the age breakdown in large part). Wroughton, Stratton and Covingham all have an appeal to female library users, a tendency less pronounced at Park or Old Town.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether their first-choice library was close to any other feature of their life, and respond as follows:

Table 17: Location of first choice library

	Proportion of respondents
Closest to home	82%
Closest to workplace	12%
Closest to place of study	3%
Convenient for other reasons	38%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,555</i>

Chart 17: Location of first choice library



Four out of five respondents choose the library nearest to their home, an overwhelming proportion that associates this activity closely with the place of residence. One in eight users visits the library closest to their workplace, and a small proportion visit the library closest to their place of study.

High proportions in all age-groups use the library closest to home, but this is especially true of those users aged 26-45 and, to a lesser extent, those aged over 55. The library closest to home is also more favoured by people with children than by those without, and is more popular with women.

The library closest to work is favoured strongly by those aged 19-25, and by 46-55 year olds; it is naturally much less chosen by those who are beyond normal working age. Similarly, a library close to a place of study is more likely to be chosen by a younger library user, under the age of 25, though this group is still twice as likely to choose the library closest to home.

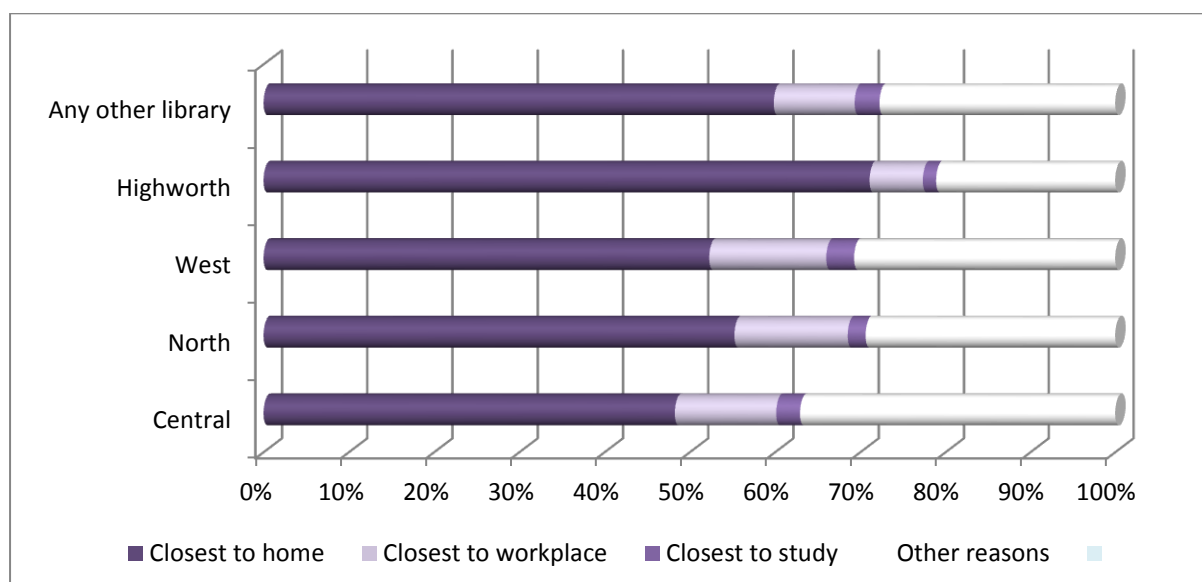
Two in five people say they choose a library that is convenient for other reasons, and this is often an additional reason for choosing the library they use most. Other reasons come into play for all age-groups, but are especially prominent for 19-25s, 46-65s and people with disabilities. The question did not ask what the other factors might be, but responses to other questions suggest accessibility, opening times, staff friendliness, sociability, comprehensiveness of stock, availability of computers, and convenience in relation to other regular activities such as shopping or health appointments are all likely to play a part here.

This table breaks down the reasons why regulars at each library choose the one they do.

Table 18: Location of first choice library for each core library

	Proportion of respondents using each library at least once a month				
	Central	North	West	Highworth	Any other library
Closest to home	69%	79%	80%	91%	82%
Closest to workplace	17%	19%	21%	8%	13%
Closest to study	4%	3%	5%	2%	4%
Other reasons	53%	42%	47%	27%	38%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	69%	79%	80%	91%	82%

Chart 18: Location of first choice library for each core library



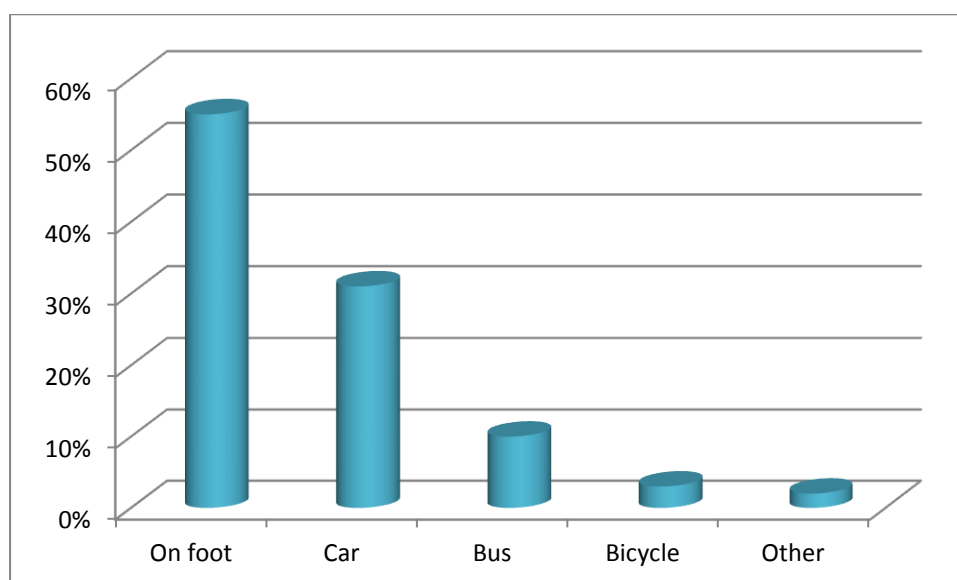
The library closest to home is the strongest factor for all four core libraries, but less so for central than for the other three larger libraries; proximity to home is extremely influential in relation to Highworth, and also for the non-core libraries. Workplace proximity is a factor for a third of regular users at Central, North and West but is less important for non-core libraries and much less so for Highworth. Study proximity is small for all libraries. Other convenience factors play an important role at Central, North and West, but are less influential at non-core libraries and are comparatively unimportant at Highworth.

This table shows how people normally travel to the library they use most often:

Table 19: Travel to library

	Proportion of respondents
On foot	55%
Car	31%
Bus	10%
Bicycle	3%
Other	2%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,438</i>

Chart 19: Travel to library



Over half of the library users in this survey walk to their chosen library. Around a third travel by car, and one in ten use public transport. Small proportions use bicycles or other means of transport (usually motorcycles, and perhaps trains for those who commute into Swindon).

Walking to the library is most likely among those aged 19-45, where over three in five (62%) use this travel mode; it is correspondingly less likely for over 55s, although a little over half of over 55s (52%) walk. The car is most likely to be used by those aged 46-65, a third of whom travel this way (33%), but is much less a feature of access for those aged 19-25, where just 18% use a car to visit the library. Bus travel is more common among over 60s, where one in seven uses the bus (14%), but bus use is much less likely for 36-45s (just 4% use it). Bicycle access is largely, though not completely, limited to under 25s.

Users with children show a greater predisposition towards walking, but those with disabilities are more likely to use other forms of transport, with the bus service much more important to

them. Women are also more likely to walk, while men are more likely users of bus and bicycle.

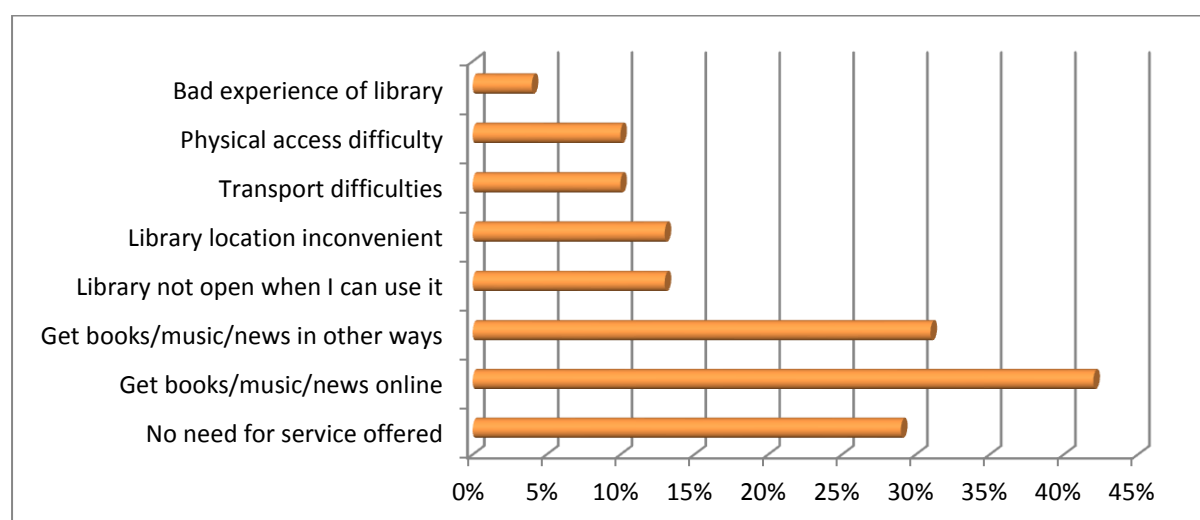
Walking to the library is particularly a feature of Highworth and Wroughton, where around two thirds of visits are on foot. It is also a feature of the non-core libraries, with between two thirds and four fifths of visits on foot. The car is more prominent at North and West libraries, and to a lesser extent at Highworth; at Central, less than a quarter of visits are by car. The bus is very important for Central, and a quarter of visits to this facility involve use of public transport.

The questionnaire also explored the reasons why people do not make use of the library service. The response here is limited, because relatively few non-users participated in the survey, but is summarised in this table:

Table 20: Reasons for not using the library

	Proportion of respondents answering question
No need for service offered	29%
Get books/music/news online	42%
Get books/music/news in other ways	31%
Library not open when I can use it	13%
Library location inconvenient	13%
Transport difficulties	10%
Physical access difficulty	10%
Bad experience of library	4%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>48</i>

Chart 20: Reasons for not using the library



The main reason given for not using the library is that the respondent has no need for the service; over a quarter of the limited number of non-users gave this reason. Two in five non-users get their books, music or news online, and a third use other sources for this material.

There are nevertheless a few non-users who might use the library under different circumstances. They include small numbers for whom the library is not open when needed, or for whom the library is in the wrong place, and a handful who have problems accessing the premises. Bad experiences with the library appear relatively rare, however.

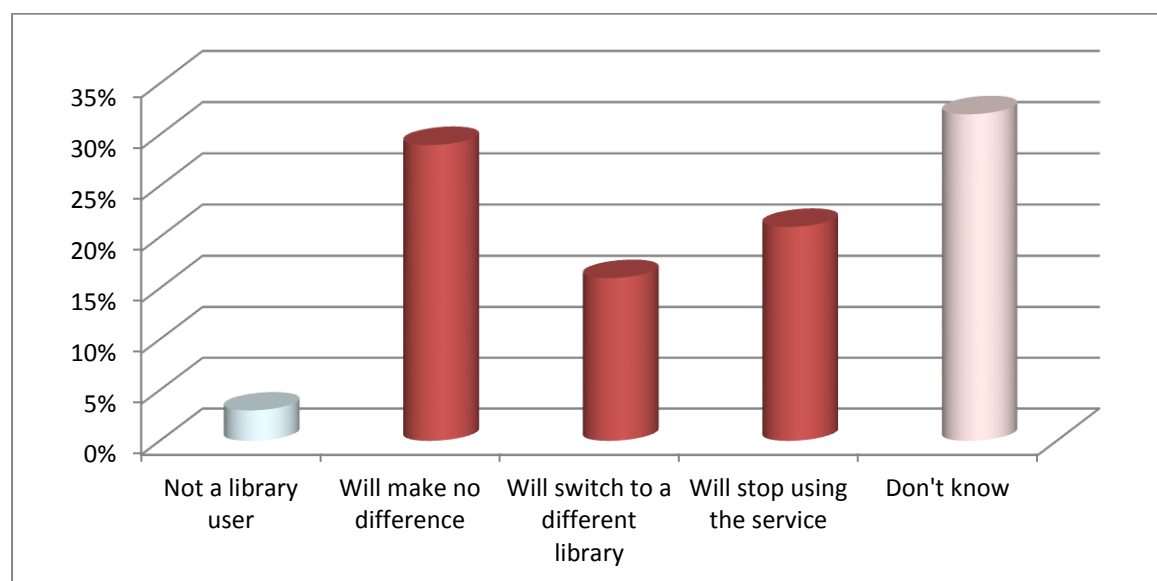
4 Using the library service in future

Respondents were asked to indicate their future intentions in relation to use of the library service, should the proposal go ahead, and respond thus:

Table 21: Future use of the library service

	Proportion of respondents
Not a library user	3%
Will make no difference	29%
Will switch to a different library	16%
Will stop using the service	21%
Don't know	32%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,378</i>

Chart 21: Future use of the library service



A small number of respondents are not library users, so the proposal will have no impact on them. Over a quarter of participants in the survey say that the proposal will make no difference to their future use of the library, and a further one in six say they intend to change the library they use if the proposal moves forward. One in five, however, say they will stop using the library after implementation. A large minority, around a third, are undecided as to what they might do if the proposal goes ahead.

Respondents for whom the proposal will make no difference are more likely to be over 55; over a third of over 55s (34%) say nothing will change for them. Over 65s are marginally more likely than their younger counterparts to switch library, but a third of over 55s (31%) say they don't know yet how they will react to the proposal. There are also older people who

say they will stop using the library, including one in five over 75s, but the main impact in this respect is on people aged 19-45, where a quarter (26%) say they will stop using the library.

Women seem more likely to be affected by the proposal than men; a third of men (33%) say it will make no difference to them, but this falls to just a quarter of women (26%), and although one in eight (13%) men plan to switch library, this is true of nearly one in five women (19%). Similarly, 17% of men say they will stop using the library, but this rises to nearly a quarter of female users (22%).

A third of childless respondents (33%) say the proposal will make no difference, but this falls to just one in six (17%) of those with children at home. One in five respondents with children (19%) will switch libraries, but over a quarter (26%) say they will stop using the service. The proportion of don't knows is comparatively high at 36%.

People with disabilities are less likely to say the proposal makes no difference to them, and are correspondingly more likely to switch to a different library; one in five respondents with a disability (21%) say they will stop using the service. Those who have no access to transport (no car, no bus stop, no bus pass) are less likely to switch library, and more likely to stop using the service.

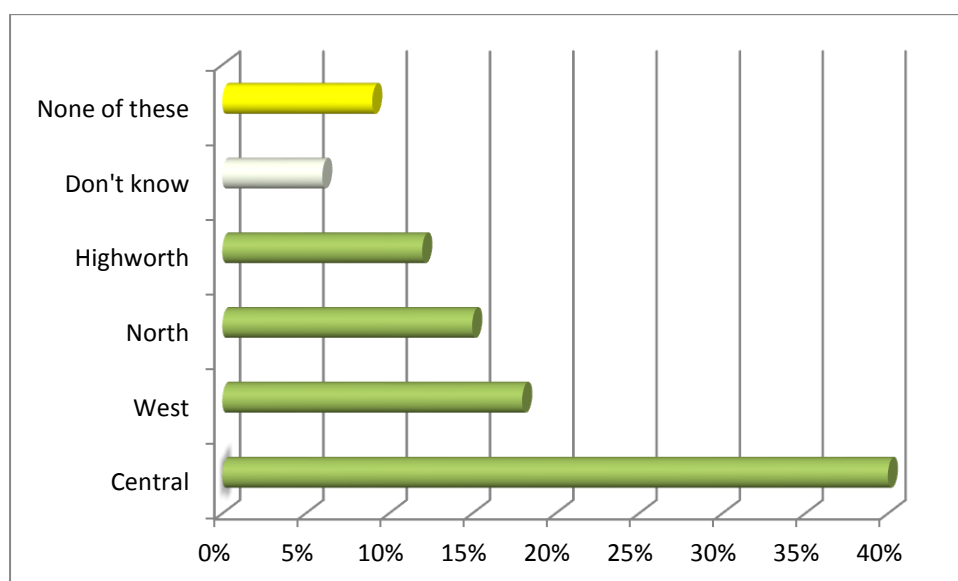
Looking geographically at those who expect to stop using the library, these include nearly half (46%) of those who currently use Wroughton library; Liden users also seem more likely to give up the library, and each of the non-core libraries has a significant proportion of people who say they will stop using. However, there are also people who use the core libraries who say they will stop doing so, with 15% of North library, 10% of West and 10% of Highworth users saying they will no longer use the service, and 5% of those who use Central also pulling out.

This table shows which of the four core libraries is the most likely to be used if the proposal goes forward:

Table 22: Likely library to be chosen for the future

	Proportion of respondents
Central	40%
West	18%
North	15%
Highworth	12%
Don't know	6%
None of these	9%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,264</i>

Chart 22: Likely library to be chosen for the future



There is a discrepancy here with the previous question, where over half the respondents said they would stop using the service or were undecided as to what they would do. In this question, only 9% say they will use none of the libraries on offer, and just 6% are undecided. The level of response on this second question is markedly lower, but even if all of those not answering can be allocated to 'Don't know' or 'none of these' this still does not make up the apparent difference.

Two in five (39%) of those who said they would stop using the service in answer to the previous question, now say they will use one of the core libraries. Half of these say they will go to Central, with small proportions going to each of the other three core libraries. As for the don't knows in the previous question, most identify a core library they might use; just one in six of the previous question's don't knows fail to nominate a core library. Again, Central is the main beneficiary of this but Highworth is also attractive.

Looking at the responses of those who do nominate a preferred library, around half (47%) choose the Central. One in five (21%) choose the west, a similar proportion (18%) would go to the North, and one in seven (14%) choose Highworth. These proportions include both existing users of these libraries and those choosing to switch libraries. Library switchers opt decisively for Central (59%); one in eight switchers would go to the North, and 15% would choose the west. Few switchers – just 3% overall – would choose Highworth.

The analysis also indicates that those displaced from Wroughton, Old Town, Liden, Pinehurst, Covingham and Park will be most likely to migrate to Central, whilst Stratton and Moredon users will mainly go to North. Mobile library users are also most likely to switch to the Central. The users with greatest uncertainty are those in Even Swindon, where half say they don't know what they will do; this also applies to two in five of library users at Stratton and a similar proportion of mobile users.

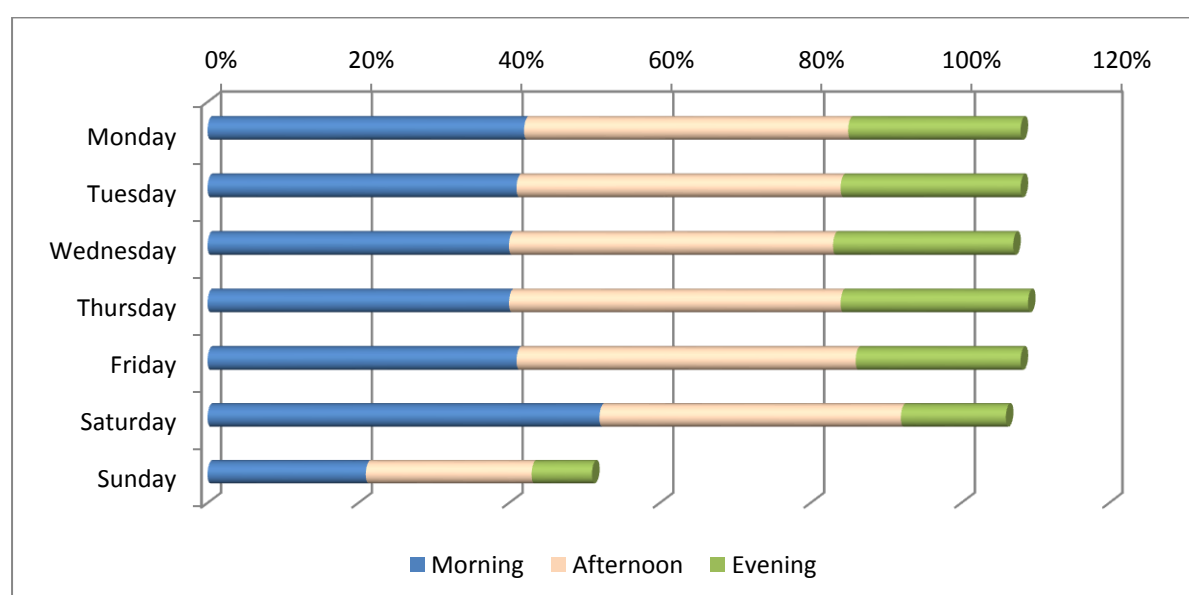
Respondents with cars are less likely to use Central library, but those with nearby bus stops or bus passes are more likely to choose this library. Car users are less likely to go to this library and tend towards the North or Highworth libraries. Those respondents with no access to transport identify the Central library almost exclusively for their future custom.

Those who indicate an intention to use a core library were asked which time and day of the week would be the time most likely to be chosen for their access to the library, and the answers are shown here:

Table 23: Preferred day and time of day

	Proportion of all respondents intending to use a library in future		
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	42%	43%	23%
Tuesday	41%	43%	24%
Wednesday	40%	43%	24%
Thursday	40%	44%	25%
Friday	41%	45%	22%
Saturday	52%	40%	14%
Sunday	21%	22%	8%
Don't know	11%		
N (=100%)	1,225		

Chart 23: Preferred day and time of day



One in nine respondents were unable to suggest a time or day they would prefer, but among those who do express a preference there is a wide distribution across the options offered. During the week, a consistent pattern emerges, with two in five saying they prefer a weekday morning, a marginally higher proportion expressing a preference for the afternoon, and around a quarter interested in the evening service. The most popular time, though, is a Saturday morning, which is selected by over half of respondents. Two in five like Saturday afternoon, but just one in seven suggest Saturday evening. Sunday is a much less popular choice; those selecting Sunday morning or afternoon amount to just half of those interested in the comparable weekday time, and only a small minority of people favour Sunday evening. Over half of all respondents (57%) indicate no interest in any evening session at all.

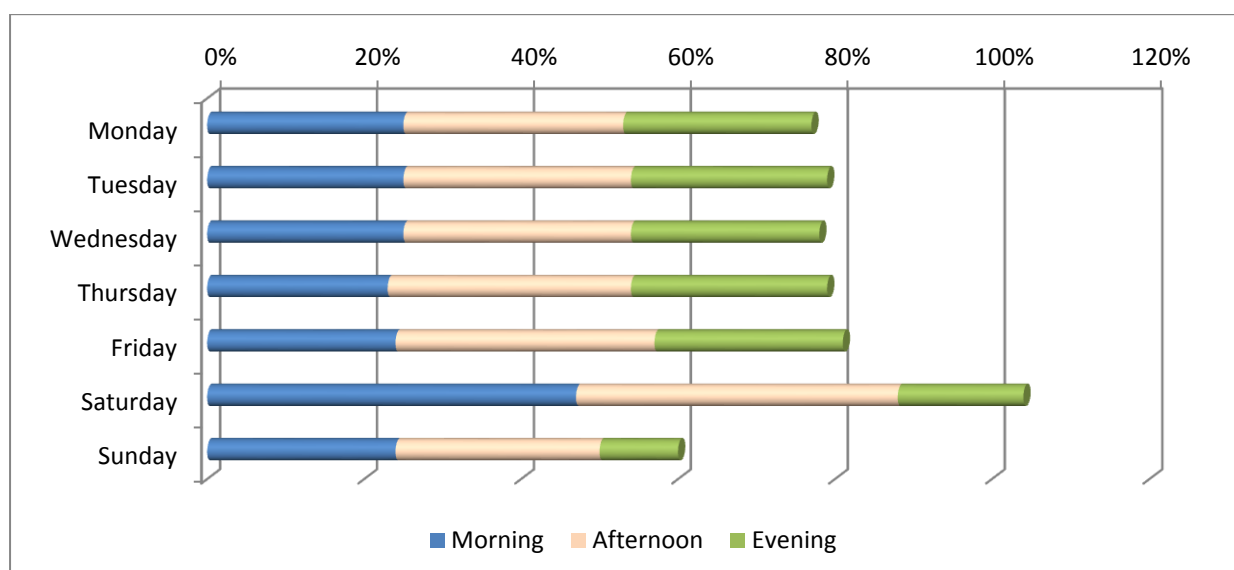
Evidently, many people express a degree of flexibility in their selection. One in forty respondents (2.5%) suggest that any of these times is suitable for them, and one in twenty (5%) are prepared to consider any time of the week excluding Sundays, while a similar proportion say that they can only manage weekends, in whole or in part; in contrast, one in five respondents (22%) say they can only manage weekdays, and select no suitable weekend time. Few people have such straightforward lives, however, and a large number of responses indicate complex permutations where different times of the week are included or excluded according to other commitments and availabilities. Thus, there are individuals who can only access the library on Monday evenings, or on Monday or Tuesday afternoons, for example, whilst others have more flexibility in their week but still need to block out selected times.

This table shows the pattern of response for those who have children living at home:

Table 24: Preferred day and time of day (respondents with children)

	Proportion of all respondents with children		
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	25%	28%	24%
Tuesday	25%	29%	25%
Wednesday	25%	29%	24%
Thursday	23%	31%	25%
Friday	24%	33%	24%
Saturday	47%	41%	16%
Sunday	24%	26%	10%
Don't know	7%		
N (=100%)	389		

Chart 24: Preferred day and time of day (respondents with children)



There are some interesting differences from the overall picture, with enthusiasm for weekday opening a little higher in the afternoon than in the morning, but generally lower than support for weekday daytime opening in general. Respondents with children are just as keen as their counterparts on weekday evenings, however, and there is little variation according to the weekday except that interest rises a little on Thursday and Friday afternoons. Interest at the weekend is similar to the overall picture, with a little less support for Saturdays but a compensating small increase in interest on Sundays.

This table shows the pattern of response for respondents with disabilities:

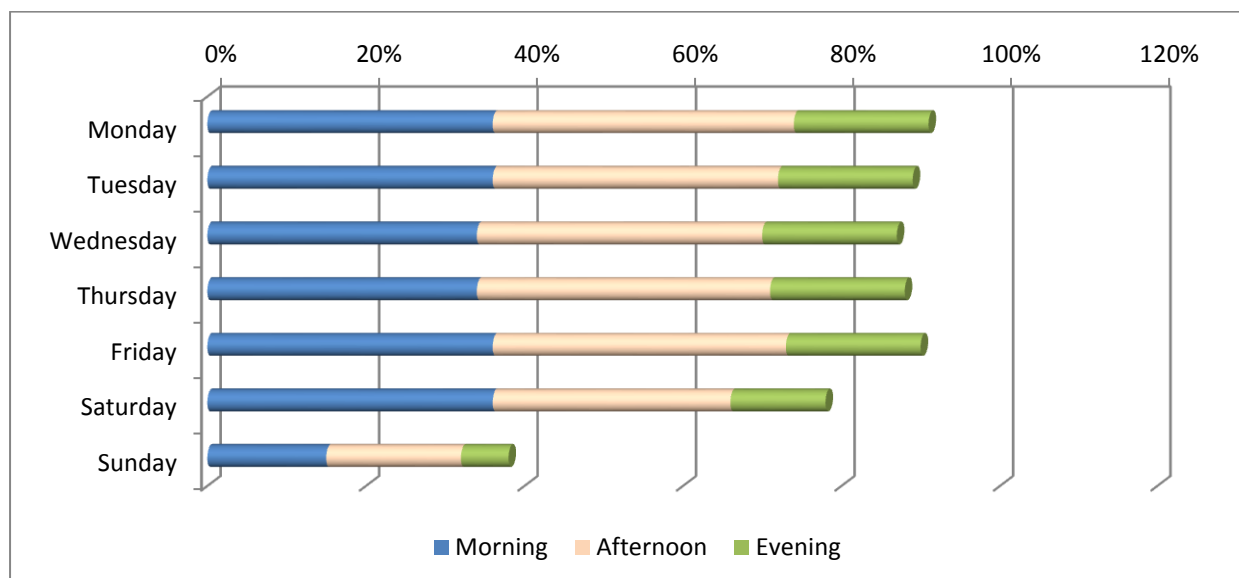
Table 25: Preferred day and time of day (respondents with disabilities)

	Proportion of all respondents with a disability		
	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	36%	38%	17%
Tuesday	36%	36%	17%
Wednesday	34%	36%	17%
Thursday	34%	37%	17%
Friday	36%	37%	17%
Saturday	36%	30%	12%
Sunday	15%	17%	6%
Don't know	8%		

N (=100%)

427

Chart 25: Preferred day and time of day (respondents with disabilities)



All the results are lower than in the overall result, suggesting that respondents with disabilities have less flexibility in their schedules, but otherwise the consistent pattern across each weekday remains, with little difference between any Monday to Friday session. Saturday mornings attract the same interest as weekday mornings, but Saturday afternoons and evenings are less popular, and Sundays are much less attractive.

People over the age of 65 show a preference for weekday mornings; between three quarters and four fifths would choose one or more weekday mornings, and this falls to around two thirds of over 65s who choose a weekday afternoon. Weekday evenings are much less popular and only around one in seven (14%) would choose this time; among over 75s, this proportion falls even further. At the weekend, Saturday morning is popular with two thirds of over 65s, but Saturday afternoon interest is only half this level. Saturday evenings and Sunday are not at all popular choices.

There are also variations in the results on this question according to the core library respondents propose to utilise after implementation. At Central library, the weekday pattern is consistent, with around two in five users choosing a weekday morning, and a slightly higher proportion choosing a weekday afternoon; around a quarter choose a weekday evening. Saturdays are more popular, attracting nearly half of all users in the morning (46%) and nearly as many in the afternoon, but weekend evenings are much less popular than this.

The same consistency is evident at North library, with around a third of users interested in weekday mornings, slightly more in weekday afternoons, and around a fifth indicating weekday evenings. Saturday mornings appeal to half of all potential North users (47%) and this level of interest is also sustained into Saturday afternoons; interest in Sunday daytimes

is lower, but is nevertheless the highest of all four core libraries, especially on Sunday afternoons.

In the West, just over a third are interested in weekday mornings, but this rises on Monday and Friday mornings to over two in five potential users. Interest in afternoon visiting is substantially higher than in mornings at this library, with levels of interest approaching half of all potential users. Saturday morning would be a popular time here, but interest reduces on Saturday afternoon and is much lower on Sundays.

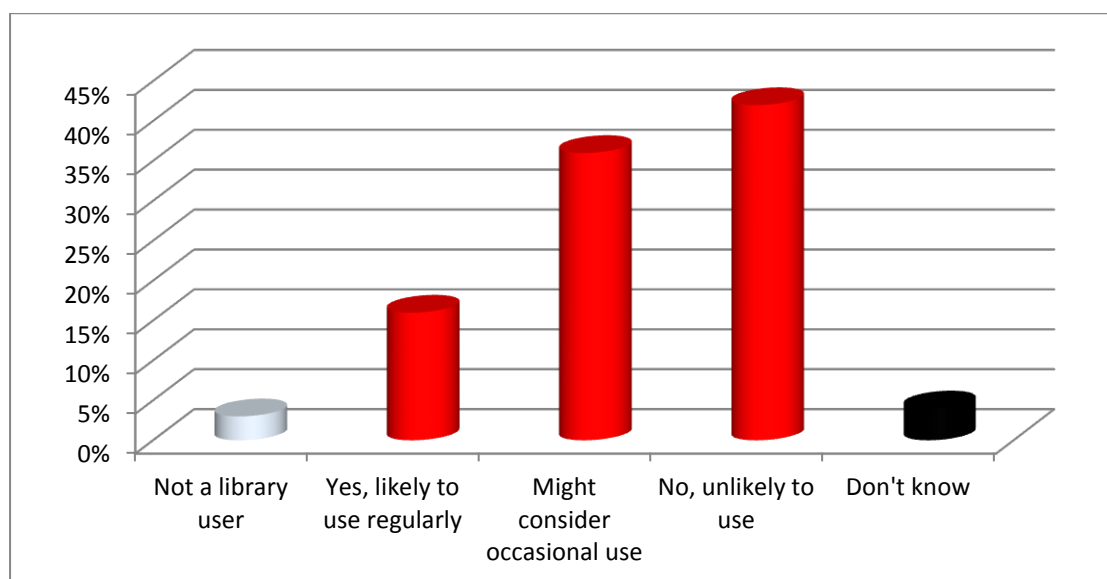
At Highworth, there is significantly higher support for weekday mornings, which appeal to over half of all potential users (other than on Thursdays, when interest falls to 47%). Weekday afternoon interest is lower, but still at a level similar to the overall result; one in five respondents who would use Highworth would be possible evening visitors during the week. Saturday morning would be exceptionally popular at Highworth, with two thirds of users saying this time would suit them (65%) but this figure falls away dramatically on Saturday afternoons, and there is very little interest in any other weekend opening time.

Likely take-up of a paid-for online reservation service is shown in this table:

Table 26: Likely take up of online reservation service

	Proportion of respondents
Not a library user	3%
Yes, likely to use regularly	16%
Might consider occasional use	36%
No, unlikely to use	42%
Don't know	4%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,446</i>

Chart 26: Likely take up of online reservation service



One in six respondents say they are likely to use this service, and a further third of respondents might consider it, totalling around half of all respondents who might make some use of the service. On the other hand, over two in five respondents say they are unlikely to use this service, and there are very few don't knows on this issue.

Those who say they are likely to use the service tend to be younger people; interest in this service falls away significantly after the age of 45 and reduces to just 10% of over 75s. Those who might consider occasional use extend further up the age-range and into the late 60s, but this possibility is still fairly remote for over 75s. Likely non-users include not only over 75s but also under 18s. Women are a little more enthusiastic about this service than men.

Respondents with children show a greater likelihood of using the service than those without; one in five (19%) say they will use the service regularly, and a further 38% are possible occasional users. People with disabilities, however, are less likely to use this service, with just 15% saying they will do so, and 45% rejecting it altogether.

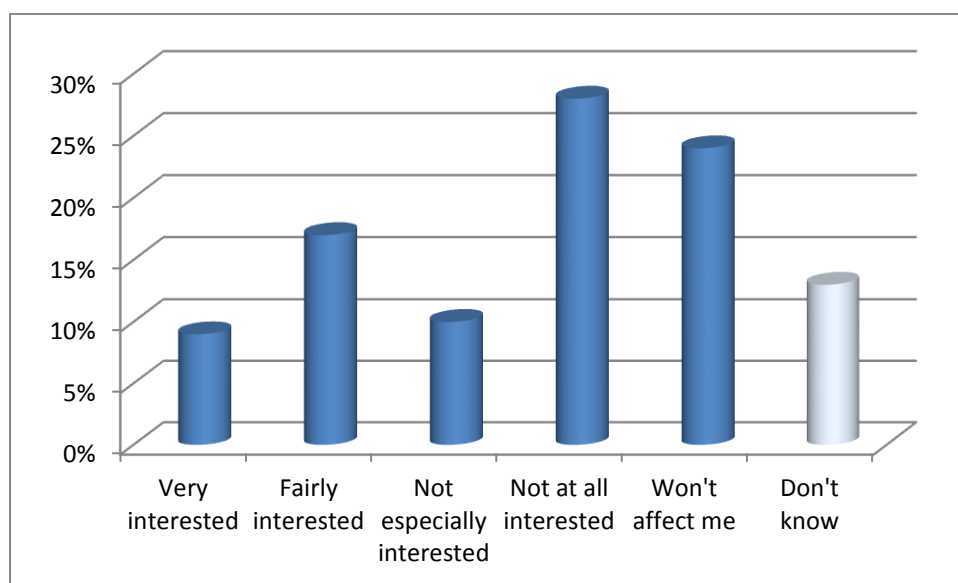
Interest in this service is fairly strong at Central and North, where one in five users say they expect to make use of it regularly. As far as non-core libraries are concerned, interest in this service is greatest at Wroughton and Moredon, where one in five library users say they expect to use it regularly.

The survey also sought to establish respondents' interest in becoming part of a group working to keep or develop community-based library services to replace those from which Council funding is being withdrawn, and also to explore interest in volunteering to help in community-based libraries. This table shows the readiness of people to become involved in establishing a community-based library:

Table 27: Interest in becoming part of a group

	Proportion of respondents
Very interested	9%
Fairly interested	17%
Not especially interested	10%
Not at all interested	28%
Won't affect me	24%
Don't know	13%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,446</i>

Chart 27: Interest in becoming part of a group



Overall, a quarter of respondents express some interest in the possibility of involvement in a group establishing a community-based library; about a third of these are very interested in the possibility. On the other hand, nearly two in five respondents say they are not interested. A quarter of people say the proposal doesn't affect them, and one in eight is currently undecided.

Interest in involvement in this way is highest among those aged 26-45, and to a lesser extent among younger retired people; women are a little more enthusiastic about this than men.

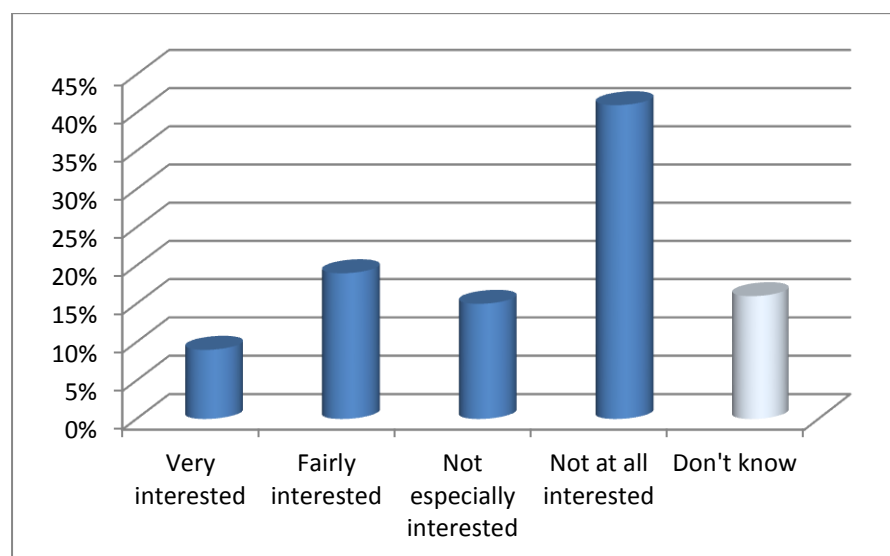
Interest is considerably higher among those with children at home than among their counterparts, and some people with disabilities also express interest.

Interest in becoming part of a group is strongest at Wroughton, where one in six users (16%) express strong interest and a further third (32%) some interest. There is also significant interest at Moredon, Liden and Park (though the numbers involved are much smaller).

Table 28: Interest in becoming a volunteer

	Proportion of respondents
Very interested	9%
Fairly interested	19%
Not especially interested	15%
Not at all interested	41%
Don't know	16%
<i>N (=100%)</i>	<i>1,439</i>

Chart 28: Interest in becoming a volunteer



All in all, around a quarter of respondents are interested in volunteering, again with a third of these expressing strong interest. On the other hand, well over half of respondents say they are not interest, and most of these are quite certain about this position. One in six respondents is unsure at this stage.

Interest in volunteering is highest among those aged 19-35, and among 56-75 year olds, and is considerably higher among women than among men. There is little variation in interest according to whether a person has children or not, but interest in volunteering is lower among respondents with disabilities.

Interest in volunteering is present at all libraries, but is greatest at Wroughton where a third of users express a measure of interest, and at Liden, Covingham and Moredon where a small number of very keen respondents are supported by a number of users who are fairly interested

The survey document also invited people to provide their details on a separate sign-up sheet, or via e-mail, but this data is not available for analysis on the grounds of confidentiality.

5 Comments and Observations

Three opportunities were provided in the questionnaire for people to respond, in a free-text format, to questions about the proposal 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 Advantages and disadvantages of the proposal

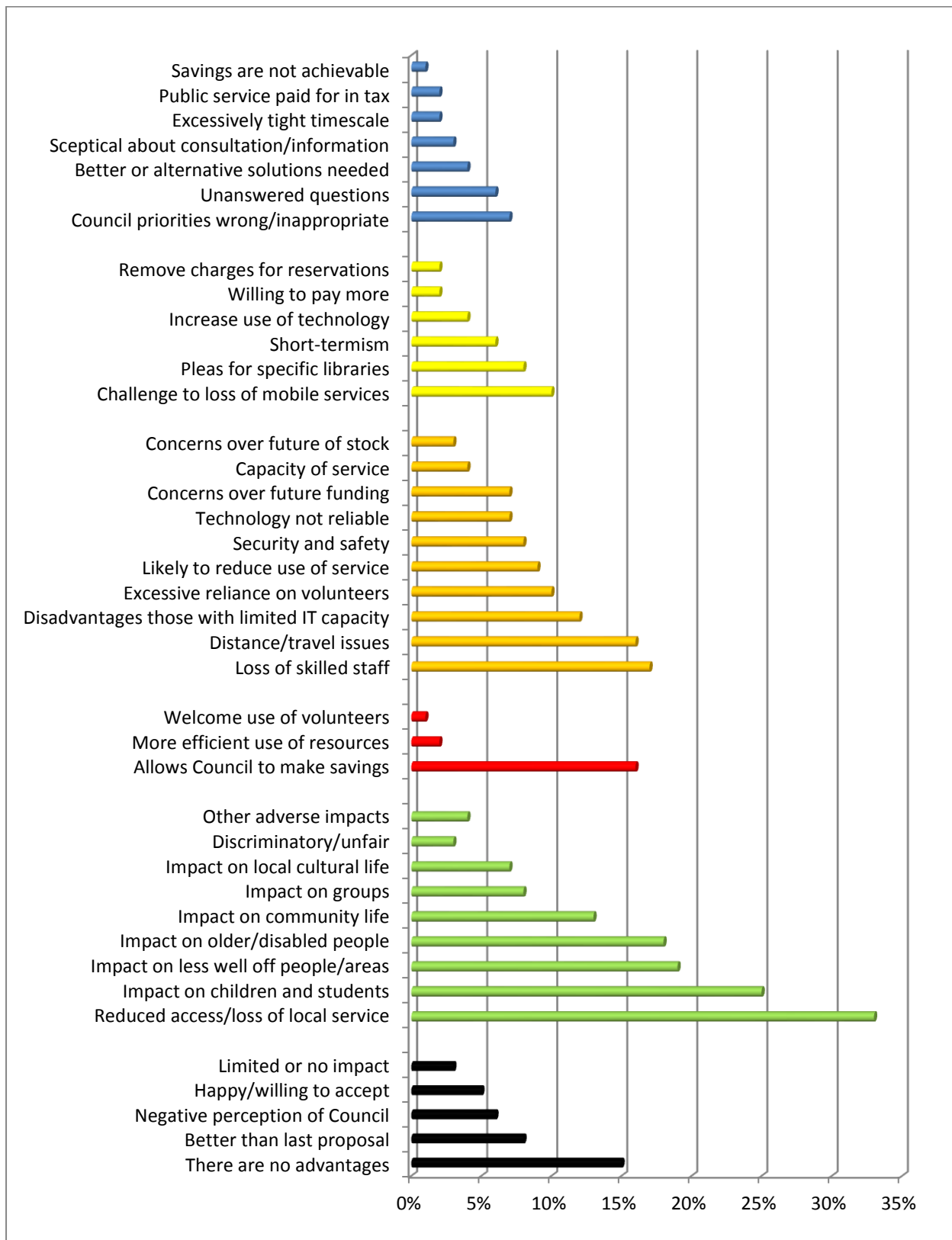
The first of these questions invited respondents to comment on the new proposal, which was described in detail in the questionnaire. Its key elements would be a core network of four libraries, with limited opening times but supported by self-service technology, and possibly augmented by the involvement of volunteers to extend opening hours. In addition, the Council proposes to support local groups and communities to develop community-led solutions for those libraries that would lose Council funding under this arrangement; the Council also proposes to withdraw the mobile library and deposit collections to residential homes. The plan is to implement this between April and July 2017.

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 proposal; the numbers shown as commenting do not necessarily amount to a total who might agree with these comments.

Table 29: Perceived advantages and disadvantages of proposal

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
General comments		
There are no advantages	195	15%
Better than last proposal	100	8%
Negative perception of Council	75	6%
Happy/willing to accept	59	5%
Limited or no impact	35	3%
Adverse impacts		
Reduced access/loss of local service	425	33%
Impact on children and students	319	25%
Impact on less well-off people/areas	239	19%
Impact on older/disabled people	229	18%
Impact on community life	162	13%
Impact on groups	98	8%
Impact on local cultural life	90	7%
Discriminatory/unfair	44	3%
Other adverse impacts	56	4%
Identified advantages		
Allows Council to make savings	205	16%
More efficient use of resources	21	2%
Welcome use of volunteers	16	1%
Concerns over proposal		
Loss of skilled staff	217	17%
Distance/travel issues	200	16%
Disadvantages those with limited IT capacity	148	12%
Excessive reliance on volunteers	131	10%
Likely to reduce use of service	111	9%
Security and safety	96	8%
Technology not reliable	89	7%
Concerns over future funding	88	7%
Capacity of service	51	4%
Concerns over future of stock	39	3%
Specific requests for modification		
Challenge to loss of mobile services	128	10%
Pleas for specific libraries	101	8%
Short-termism	75	6%
Increase use of technology	50	4%
Willing to pay more	30	2%
Remove charges for reservations	24	2%
Issues with proposition		
Council priorities wrong/inappropriate	91	7%
Unanswered questions	75	6%
Better or alternative solutions needed	57	4%
Sceptical about consultation/information	42	3%
Excessively tight timescale	28	2%
Public service paid for in tax	26	2%
Savings are not achievable	16	1%
Other comments		
	6	
<i>N (=100%)</i>		1,269

Chart 29: Perceived advantages and disadvantages of proposal



A substantial number of respondents explicitly state that they can see **no advantages** to the proposal; many more imply this by not identifying any advantage in their response. About half as many, however, concede that this proposal is **an improvement** on the emerging model previously considered, largely because it allows additional libraries to remain open albeit on a limited basis. A smaller number express a more positive view, stating that they are **happy with the new proposal** or at least willing to accept it as the best alternative available to the authority, given its current constraints, and there are also people for whom the proposal will have **little or no impact**, primarily because their use of their preferred library will be unchanged.

Alongside these, though, there is a small but significant proportion of observations that convey a **negative opinion of the Council** generated in part by this proposal. Some of these comments employ strong language and suggest betrayal of staff and library users, and there is criticism of the Council's apparent passivity in relation to austerity and its willingness to sacrifice the town's reputation and standing.

A large proportion of respondents comment on the adverse impacts they think will result from the proposal. The largest group regret the **loss of local services** and the reduced access to and availability of the service that will result from this, but there also large numbers who reflect on the impact on specific groups of people. **Children and students** are a prominent group here, and no less than a quarter of those commenting make a comment about the negative impact on children, including the possible impact on literacy and achievement at a later educational stage, and the loss of a beneficial reading habit.

Alongside this is a concern that the proposal impacts adversely on **those who are less well off**, in that it reduces the access of people who cannot afford IT access at home and thus penalises people needing to use IT to apply for benefits, or to carry out job searches; several people point out that Government forms increasingly require applicants to complete them online, and compliance will now cost the less well-off more money in bus fares, as well as providing fewer computers overall which they can use. Respondents also note that the geography of the new service will reduce access for areas of the Borough that are less advantaged, particularly the eastern side of the Borough and specifically the Parks estate. They question the withdrawal of services that are intended to increase the life chances of disadvantaged people and communities.

A significant proportion of respondents draw attention to the adverse impact on **older people**, and on people with disabilities (both are often mentioned in the same comment). These concerns centre on the dependency of older people on locally-provided services, and the difficulties in accessing services that are further away and require public transport and/or a longer walk than is comfortable. There is also a perceived **impact on community life**, in that the libraries threatened with closure under the proposal are seen as playing a greater role in their communities than simply the loan of books; they offer a social environment for otherwise isolated people, and a chance for informal contact with staff and with neighbours. A further related impact is on the **community groups** that rely on library premises for their

activities and meetings, and which again provide a service that is valued within the local community.

These adverse impacts are viewed as unfair by some respondents, in disadvantaging some groups in comparison to others; there are respondents who go further than this and accuse the authority of being **discriminatory**.

There is also a group of people who see the proposal as having a wider impact on the **cultural life of Swindon** generally, sending a message about the reduced importance of the benefits of a library service which some see as incongruent with the Borough's history as a pioneer of library services. Other adverse impacts identified include an impact on mental health because of increased isolation, an impact on rural communities from withdrawal of services, an impact on users of other statutory services which rely on libraries to disseminate information on their behalf, and an environmental impact as a result of an increased need to travel.

There is nevertheless a large minority of people who can see **advantages in the proposal**. Chief among these is an acceptance that the Council will be able to **make the savings** it needs to achieve through this approach; a small number of people welcome what they see as a more **efficient use of limited resources** as a result of the proposal, and the benefits to the community of greater community and voluntary involvement.

Concerns about the proposal focus particularly on the **impact on the workforce**. Several people regret that people they value greatly will lose their jobs, while others suggest that the service will be diminished by the loss of the expert knowledge and guidance these staff bring, and which adds value to the service generally. There are also significant concerns over the **distance, and travel difficulties**, implicit in accessing the core libraries; this is especially a concern of people living in more outlying communities such as Wroughton.

The proposal's increased reliance on new technology is seen as a disadvantage for those people who do not have **personal access to this technology** at home, or who are unable or unwilling to learn the skills needed to use technology independently. Many say that the library is their service provider in this respect, and that they cannot therefore be expected to access library services in this way without having a convenient library and staff available to help. People are not confident in the ability of volunteers to replace this knowledge, and this **lack of confidence in volunteers** extends to their reliability over the medium to longer term, and in their general availability at a time when volunteers' effort is so widely sought to offset other service reductions.

Concerns over **security and safety** are associated with the expected use of new technology to allow out of hours access, and also on the use of untrained volunteers to control behaviour in the library. Staff are trained to deal with disruptive or anti-social elements in the library, and to monitor and enforce rules on computer usage, but access to an unstaffed library implies for several people an increased risk that they will be put in a situation that threatens safety, or that valuable stock and equipment will be vulnerable to pilferage and

theft. Several people point out that the libraries' **track record in deploying new technology** has not been especially successful, and for several this reinforces the need for staff trained to resolve problems with the technology when these arise. There is a view that the **take-up of the library service** will be affected by this proposal, in that people who find access more challenging or time-consuming will find it difficult to visit as often, or perhaps at all.

Other concerns focus on the **future availability of funding**, particularly after the transitional period ends; some are uncertain that parishes will feel able to make up the shortfall or increase their precepts to meet this extra funding requirement. Others suggest that the reduced service envisaged in the proposal will **struggle to meet the demand** that will be placed on it, not least in the provision of computers for those needing to make use of them, and there are also concerns about **what may happen to the book stock**, and whether funds for a regular refresh will be available. A fragmented service may also find exchanges of stock with other libraries more difficult to co-ordinate.

Several respondents take the opportunity to request modifications to the proposal. The most frequent is for the **mobile service** to the housebound (or to isolated communities) to be replaced, or even extended, to offset the loss of a locally accessible service; others are concerned at the withdrawal of **deposit collections** to residential homes, where residents are by definition very limited in their capacity to access alternatives. There are also several pleas for individual **libraries' futures to be reconsidered**, with Wroughton and Park the most frequently mentioned but by no means the only ones identified as worth sparing.

The proposal is criticised for its **short-term view** of the future, making savings in current budgets but seen as likely to cause increased demand for other services such as health and personal support, and damaging literacy and achievement levels for the future. However, there are others who welcome the **increased use of new technology** as an innovative and entirely appropriate approach for a service whose delivery context has been transformed by e-readers and on-demand services; many want to see this aspect extended to provide a wider range of services in these delivery channels.

Small numbers of people express a **willingness to pay** for the service, either through charge or donation, as a means of reducing the financial pressure and save parts of the service; but others are unwilling to pay for a **reservations service** and call for the charges here to be removed.

There are also a number of wider issues with the proposition as a whole. Several respondents suggest that the Council's priorities are misplaced; these include some who think the Council's focus should be more specifically directed towards addressing disadvantage, and others who think the Council's spending priorities are wrong. There is specific criticism of some well-publicised Council projects including northern area wi-fi and roundabout beautification, which people see as much lower priorities, and significant concern at the Council's willingness to increase members' allowances at a time of austerity

and service reductions. Some feel the Council should be more pro-actively lobbying national government for policy change.

Unanswered questions are especially focussed on the future opening hours of the core libraries; without this detail, some people feel unable to comment, as they cannot assess the effect this will have on them. There are a number of people who feel that a **better solution than this one** is achievable, or at least worth considering, and several of these draw attention to the staff proposal for a trust model. These naturally include library staff themselves, but also those who have read about this possibility in the local newspaper. Others see solutions in a more entrepreneurial approach, such as the provision of coffee shops or other retail or premises-based income streams.

There are **concerns about the consultation** in some quarters. Some respondents are concerned to have been consulted again on proposals that they see in a very similar light to the emerging model, and to which they wish to address the same concerns they raised on the previous consultation; this leads on to accusations that the Council is failing to listen, that the consultation is token, and that the decision has already been made. there is also concern that the Council is not being transparent about the staff proposal, and that people should have had the opportunity to comment on this as a viable alternative that is, for some reason, being suppressed (as they see it). There are also **concerns about the timescale**, and some respondents question why the proposal is being pushed through so quickly - too quickly, some think, for communities to organise an effective response - when the timetable for savings is a longer one.

The view remains that libraries are a public service that is **paid for through Council Tax** and therefore an entitlement that ought to be sustained; this is often linked to resentment at the possibility of being charged twice for the service, through the imposition of a parish precept to support a community-led library. A small number of people **doubt that the savings claimed for the proposal are achievable**, and that the service will be severely damaged without achieving the aim the Council seeks.

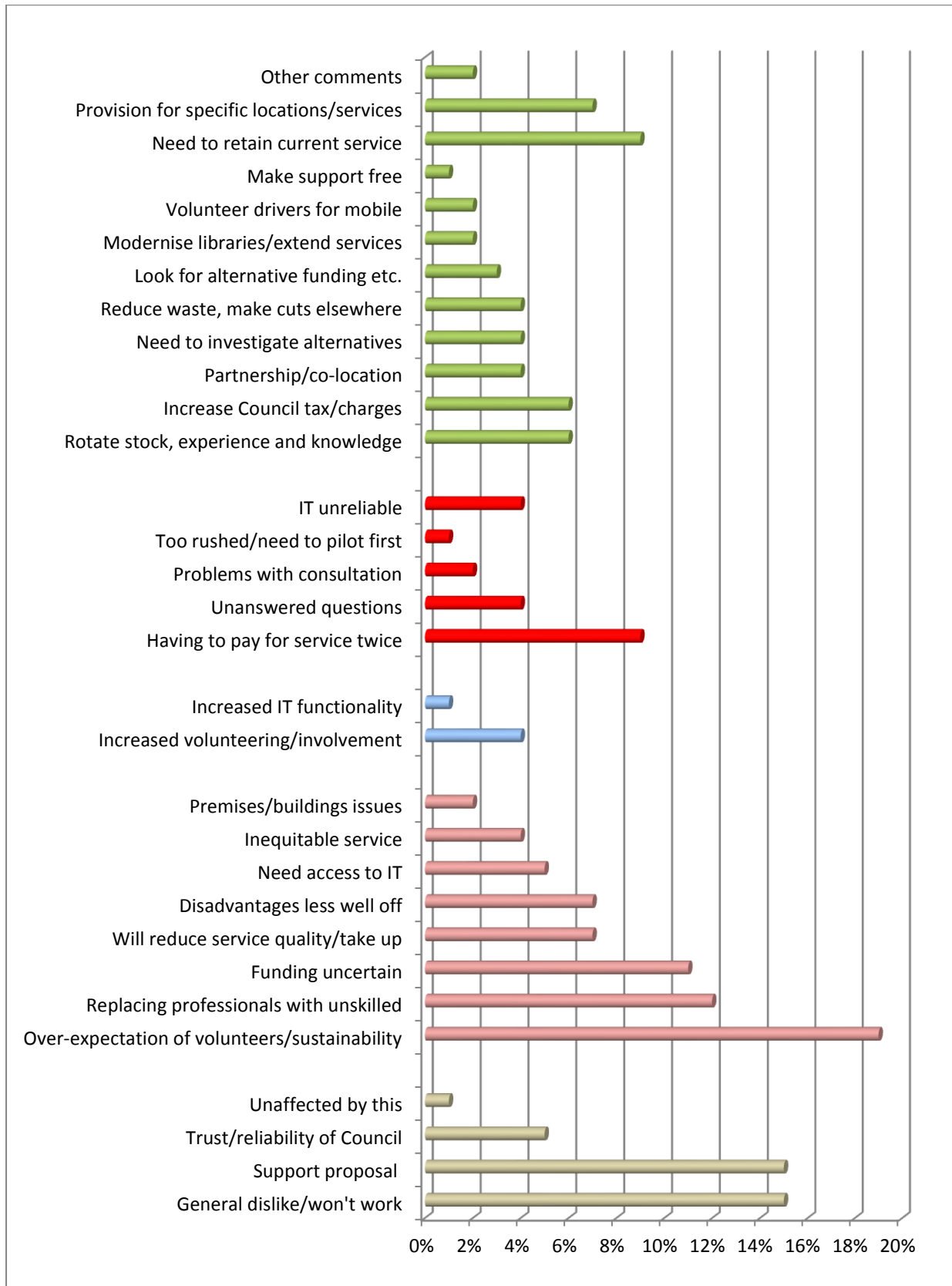
5.2 Community-led approaches and support

The second open-ended free response question invited respondents to comment on the proposal to create and support community-led libraries in those areas where the library may otherwise close. the question also asked what additional help might be needed to help communities develop solutions for local library service needs. The results are summarised in this table:

Table 30: Opinions on proposals for community-led libraries

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
General observations		
General dislike/won't work	150	15%
Support proposal	149	15%
Trust/reliability of Council	51	5%
Unaffected by this	10	1%
Identified problems with proposal		
Over-expectation of volunteers/sustainability	192	19%
Replacing professionals with unskilled	122	12%
Funding uncertain	114	11%
Will reduce service quality/take up	73	7%
Disadvantages less well-off	69	7%
Need access to IT	48	5%
Inequitable service	45	4%
Premises/buildings issues	22	2%
Identified positives		
Increased volunteering/involvement	45	4%
Increased IT functionality	8	1%
Objections to principle		
Having to pay for service twice	87	9%
Unanswered questions	38	4%
Problems with consultation	19	2%
Too rushed/need to pilot first	15	1%
IT unreliable	14	4%
Alternative approaches		
Rotate stock, experience and knowledge	59	6%
Increase Council tax/charges	56	6%
Partnership/co-location	43	4%
Need to investigate alternatives	37	4%
Reduce waste, make cuts elsewhere	36	4%
Look for alternative funding etc.	29	3%
Modernise libraries/extend services	24	2%
Volunteer drivers for mobile	20	2%
Make support free	10	1%
Need to retain current service	88	9%
Provision for specific locations/services	74	7%
Other comments		
N (=100%)	18	2%
		1,005

Chart 30: Opinions on proposals for community-led libraries



Some of the comments here reiterate points already made in the preceding analysis, but there are several new issues raised in relation to the community-led library element of the proposal. In terms of general observations, 15% of respondents express a general dislike of the idea, or suggest that it will not work, while a similar proportion express support for the idea, though it has to be said that many do so grudgingly or reluctantly. This apparent parity of views should not be allowed to conceal the fact that the general tenor of comments in this question is critical and negative, however. Issues of **trust and reliability** re-emerge here, along with a challenge to the legal responsibilities of the Council.

Many comments identify potential problems with the proposal. The most frequently raised is the viability of a proposal that **depends on volunteers**, who may prove difficult to find in sufficient numbers, may be unable to commit to a level needed to maintain the service, and who are likely to give up their role once the initial enthusiasm wanes; this in turn raises questions of the sustainability of this model. There are also doubts about **substituting skilled and knowledgeable professional staff** with untrained volunteers, both in respect of the library knowledge and their training in handling customers more generally. There is a view that **service quality will suffer**, and take up will reduce in response.

Questions are raised about the **ongoing funding** of these libraries. Some suggest that parishes should be invited to commit to funding packages to keep their libraries open, but others point out that such a commitment is open-ended in the absence of detailed costings or details of what would be transferred, including the **future of the existing buildings** and responsibility for their ongoing care and maintenance. Others suggest parishes may find it difficult to raise their precepts to meet these costs, especially in less well-off areas where affordability is an issue. This links to the idea that **disadvantaged communities will suffer more**, because volunteering is a stronger characteristic of more affluent areas; these may succeed in finding volunteers, but areas with a lower tradition of volunteering (and arguably a lower capacity to volunteer) may struggle. In turn, this raises the likelihood of a service that is **inequitable** between different parts of the Borough, something the Council should not tolerate. The **need for IT access** is also most keenly felt in areas which rely on IT provision to make claims and access statutory services.

There are nevertheless some who see positives in this approach, most commonly in raising the profile and **significance of volunteering** and providing more local opportunities for volunteers, and in expanding the **IT functionality** of the service, for example in expanding the e-book stock.

Objections in principle include the problem of **paying twice** for what is seen as a service paid for in Council Tax; there are also again **unanswered questions**, usually related to the detail of what assets and responsibilities will be devolved to communities. Problems are again raised over the consultation, and the absence of information needed to give an informed response, and the **speed of implementation** is again raised, with the suggestion that this solution should first be piloted before being launched across the Borough, so that lessons can be learned to smooth over wider implementation. The **reliability of the IT** on which the community-led services may depend is again raised.

Several respondents identify what they see as alternative approaches, in whole or in part, which they would wish to see investigated. In particular, there is a desire to ensure that stock does not become stale, and one way of reducing the problem here would be to set up a mechanism to rotate stock from non-core libraries across the new community-led libraries; similarly, there is no advantage in each library pursuing and resolving its own challenges when they can learn from one another and benefit from shared professional knowledge.

There is also a significant number of respondents who suggest that **co-location and partnership** could help to reduce overheads and generate revenue streams for libraries; school liaison is especially encouraged, and the possibility of integration with the school library service is offered as a suggestion. In addition, **external funders and sponsors** could be sought to support retention of the service, and imply that the Council has had recourse too quickly to the option of cuts without investigating other possibilities first. Some call for the libraries to modernise, to embrace the technology of change, and to review the services they provide for a 21st century marketplace. They also encourage the Council to consider **what other authorities are doing**, and challenge Swindon's approach in comparison with the less severe cuts they see in other authorities - some going so far as to suggest shared services with neighbouring authorities to reduce overheads.

Several people urge the Council to **raise Council Tax** to a level that will allow retention of the current service, in whole or in part. There are again suggestions that the Council could make savings elsewhere in place of the library cuts, and a call to make the support on offer to community libraries free. The loss of the mobile service is lamented and several people suggest the **recruitment of volunteer drivers** to deliver an informal mobile service.

Several respondents simply urge **retention of the existing service**, rather than proceed with this plan, and others repeat specific pleas for retention of individual libraries, again most frequently Wroughton, Park and the mobile, but also several of the others.

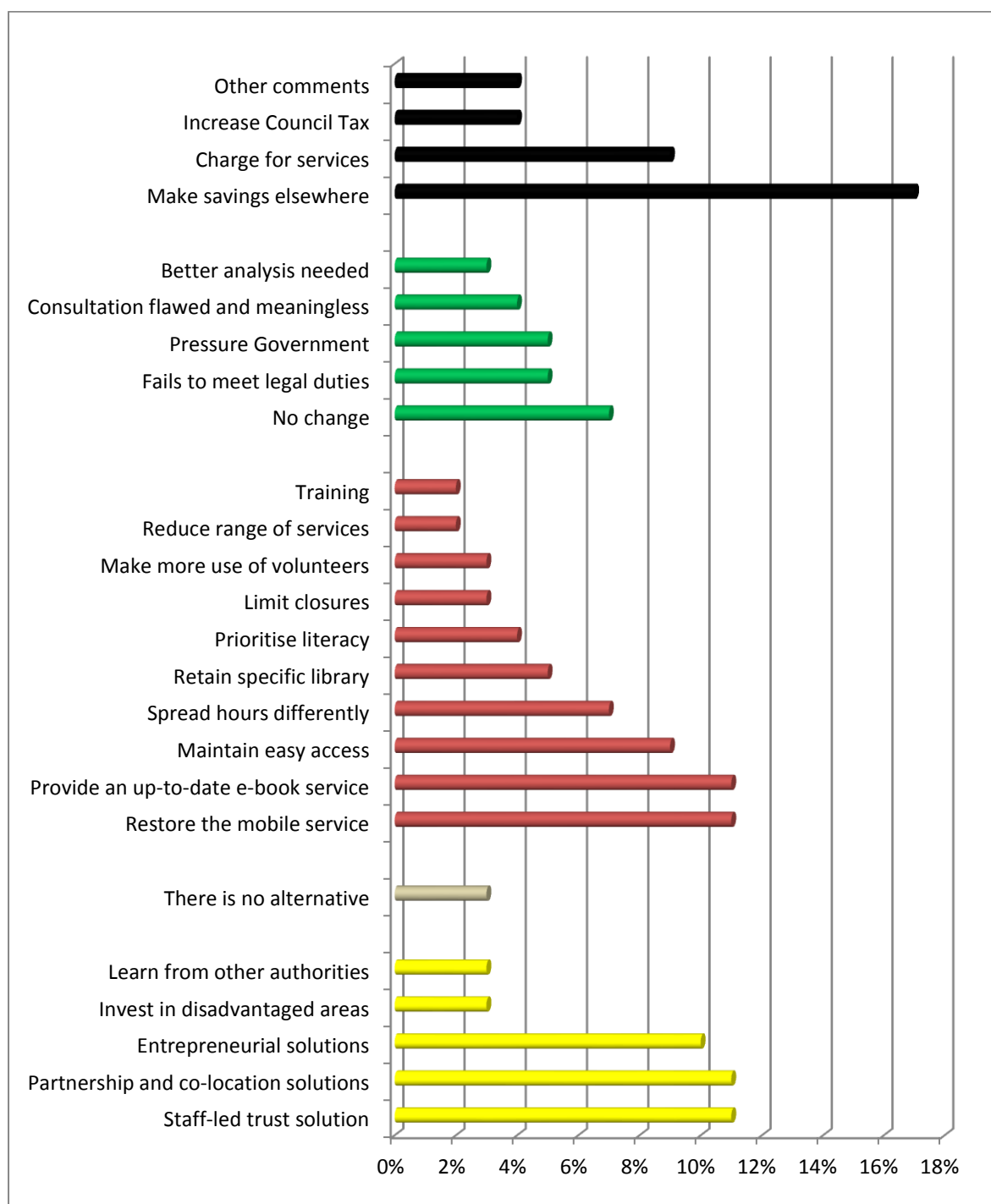
5.3 Alternative approaches

The third open-ended question asked about alternative approaches, and unsurprisingly respondents again take the chance to reiterate several points already made in the other two opportunities, whilst also raising some further new thoughts. The results are summarised here:

Table 31: Alternative approaches

Area of comment	No. of comments	Proportion of respondents making comments
Alternative approaches		
Staff-led trust solution	87	11%
Partnership and co-location solutions	84	11%
Entrepreneurial solutions	77	10%
Invest in disadvantaged areas	25	3%
Learn from other authorities	20	3%
No alternative		
There is no alternative	21	3%
Adjustments to proposal		
Restore the mobile service	89	11%
Provide an up-to-date e-book service	83	11%
Maintain easy access	68	9%
Spread hours differently	53	7%
Retain specific library	36	5%
Prioritise literacy	31	4%
Limit closures	26	3%
Make more use of volunteers	22	3%
Reduce range of services	17	2%
Training	13	2%
Problems with approach		
No change	57	7%
Fails to meet legal duties	40	5%
Pressure Government	37	5%
Consultation flawed and meaningless	32	4%
Better analysis needed	24	3%
Alternative fundamentals		
Make savings elsewhere	133	17%
Charge for services	70	9%
Increase Council Tax	31	4%
Other comments	32	4%
<i>N (=100%)</i>		<i>787</i>

Chart 31: Alternative approaches



The response to this question is less voluminous than to the other two open-enders, and is again repetitive in nature, with several themes expressed already recurring here, along with some new material. These include some alternative approaches the Council is encouraged to consider, with the list headed by the **staff proposal for a trust model**, which several people feel should be examined and consulted on as a genuine alternative approach that would, among other things, save Park library from closure. There is also interest in

partnership and co-location options, including fairly familiar ideas of raising revenue through letting space in libraries to groups, or even commercially, moving libraries into co-location with supermarkets, pubs or other commercial outlets, and taking a generally more **entrepreneurial approach** that looks at new ways of attracting a market for libraries. This includes better **promotion and marketing** of the services currently or potentially available through libraries.

There is a school of thought that wants to see the council take a more pro-active approach to its **disadvantaged areas**, echoing earlier concerns that the proposal as it stands adds to disadvantage for those who live in these localities, and the authority is again urged to look at the **solutions adopted elsewhere** in the hope that good practice elsewhere can inspire an as yet unknown alternative approach.

A small number of people accept that the authority has done all it can, and cannot think of **any viable alternative**. However, several people want to adjust the proposal - not changing it fundamentally, but making minor adjustments that will address some of their main concerns about it. The main one is the desire to restore a **service to the housebound** and to those living in residential homes, but there are also calls for **expansion of the e-book service**. The maintenance of **easy access** is called for, with reference both to remote access and to local service provision, and several people want to see the **available hours spread differently**, generally increasing the staffed hours at the three outlying core libraries at the expense of the Central library.

Smaller numbers of people call for **retention of specific libraries** currently scheduled for closure or transfer, or for an amended proposal that allows more libraries to remain open. Some people point out that **population growth** is projected for the areas where services are being withdrawn. There is a call for a **prioritisation of literacy** to support the local economy and skills marketplace, and a suggestion that the proposal could usefully include an increased level of **volunteering**. Library service cuts are seen as part of the solution by some, **reducing the availability of more marginal activities** such as DVD rental, and there is also a suggestion for **increased training**, both for older or remotely located people in the use of IT to access the library, the use of e-readers, and the possibility of apprenticeships for young people in the community-led libraries.

A number of people simply want to **retain what they currently have**, and are not therefore willing to suggest alternative approaches; there is also a significant level of attention to the **Council's legal obligations**, which people feel are not being honoured by what is currently on offer. Some people urge the authority to **pressure Government** to change an unpopular policy, and see an opportunity for this is the post-referendum scenario of a new administration no longer bound to austerity.

The **consultation is again criticised**, mainly for not putting forward the staff trust alternative (we understand this was not made available to the council before the consultation began) but also for tokenism, and the service's **needs analysis is challenged** with doubts expressed that the nature of use of libraries, and the extent of cuts proposed, are properly founded on accurate statistical analysis.

As before, others' alternative approaches include **raising revenue in other ways** (through charges, or through Council Tax) and **making savings** in areas of Council spend seen as less important.

Looking at the **views of library staff** on these questions, they focus attention on the disadvantages they see in the proposal, and especially on the loss of a local service, the impact on areas and people seen as already disadvantaged, and (unsurprisingly) the likely impact on skilled and experienced staff. On community libraries, there are concerns over the replacement of professional staff with volunteers, and a sense that the Council has excessive expectations as regards volunteers running and day to day delivery of the service. On alternative models of delivering the service, the most prominent response from staff is in favour of the staff's own model for delivery through a trust.

Responses from representative groups largely reflect those of the service users generally. They focus on negative impacts on specific groups of people, especially children and young people, older people, those with disabilities and those who are less well off. They point out that services would be withdrawn from (or made more difficult or costly to access from) less well-off areas of the Borough, where the capacity to adopt new ways of accessing the service is limited by time and expense. Linked to this are concerns that the proposals will have adverse impact on community life, and on the community groups that make use of library facilities. Several groups draw attention to the reliance of the proposals on new technology, to which many people in Swindon (and especially in disadvantaged areas) have no access or no understanding. A number of the groups see no advantages in the proposals, but some acknowledge that the Council will make savings from this approach.

Groups share the widespread concern that the community libraries proposal relies too heavily on a volunteer workforce that may be difficult to recruit, unreliable in practice, inexperienced in managing public access premises, and hard to retain. They draw attention to the need for volunteers to be properly trained and supported, not only in day to day operations but also in the management and financial dimensions of running this service. They also suspect that the future funding of these community-led libraries may not materialise, and that parishes may be reluctant to impose further financial pressures on their residents, especially in the less well-off areas which will also be the most difficult recruiting ground for volunteers.

Representative groups also share residents' views that the Council should look to make savings elsewhere, and share their concerns about current spending priorities. Some add their support to the staff trust model, and others encourage the Council to seek solutions through partnership approaches such as co-location with other services, with the private sector, or sharing services with schools or neighbour authorities.

6 Additional material

Alongside the responses received through the survey, a number of additional responses were sent directly to the Council either as e-mails or letters. The Council has asked us to summarise this feedback as part of this report, and a precis of each is noted in this section; the full text of the more detailed responses has also been made available in the form of an appendix to this report.

6.1 Responses from Parish Councils

Wroughton Parish Council has written to express its serious concern at the proposals, and especially the withdrawal of services from the southern side of the Borough with the closure of Park and Wroughton libraries, which they believe will have an adverse impact on these communities generally and on vulnerable people especially. They strongly urge the Council to consider the staff trust proposal, and express strong interest in working with the future trust to retain a library within Wroughton, an approach they see as significantly preferable to the community-led model set out in the proposal.

Haydon Wick Parish Council say that Swindon Borough Council is the best placed body to provide a comprehensive library service. They think that the proposal relies too much on volunteers, and suggest seeking funding from the private sector to help with this challenge. They are concerned about the health and safety implications of unstaffed premises. They also indicate that parish council funding can only be spent in the parish where it is raised, and that they are unwilling to offer financial assistance to library provision in the Borough as they believe this is the responsibility of SBC.

Highworth Town Council point out that they have already responded to the earlier consultation. They express significant concern at the limited hours proposed for Highworth library. They ask the Council to reconsider its proposal and to consider the Trust proposal put forward by library staff.

Chiseldon Parish Council express their serious concern at the proposed library service cuts. They point out the high proportion of older parish residents with no independent transport, and the difficulty of accessing the alternatives provided by the proposal; they believe this will risk increased social isolation of elderly residents. They also point out that young people in the community are similarly disadvantaged by the absence of independent transport, and the level of use (not least by families with younger children) of the mobile library that calls at Chiseldon. Access to a library will cost significantly more for residents in Chiseldon if the proposal goes forward, a situation that is compounded by the absence of any direct bus route to one of the four core libraries, and by threatened reductions to local bus services.

The Parish Council therefore expresses its particular concern at the proposed closure of Wroughton library, and the loss of the mobile service. It asks to be kept informed as an

interested party in any proposals to save Wroughton library, or to establish an alternative service in Wroughton, which it might wish to assist.

A parish councillor has also written in to raise doubts about the consultation; they suggest that the Council has already made its decision and has failed to listen to the response given to the earlier consultation; they would like to see the results of this earlier consultation. They regret the proposal, which they believe is based on an arbitrary decision to reduce the service budget by over 60%.

6.2 Response from eleven Swindon library staff

A written response has been received from eleven members of library service staff. This sets out what they describe as a fully-costed viable alternative to the Council's proposal, and claims to have the support of a majority of service staff. It retains Park library and allows for an increase in opening hours compared to the Council's proposal; staff want to see this model given due consideration as part of the consultation process.

The staff believe the Council's proposals risk legal challenge under libraries legislation, and suggest there are two serious erroneous premises in the Council's own proposals. One of these is the rapid implementation of the proposals, which allow little time for any viable community initiative to be established; the other is the Council's conviction that a Trust model cannot deliver the required savings. They also question the capacity of the service to raise the revenue assumed in the proposal.

They point out that the engagement on the emerging model earlier this year drew attention, among other things, to the value and importance placed by library users on the friendly and professional staff and the help they can provide, something they feel is not adequately recognised in the Council's proposals. They propose the retention of Park library, alongside significantly more staffed hours at North, West, and Highworth libraries, and the development of a strategy to serve the town's growth areas effectively.

The staff model also provides advice and support, as well as transitional funding, to any group seeking to set up a community-led library, but accepts the removal of the mobile service. It claims that to align closely with the most recent ministerial guidance on library provision. It expects its model to achieve a lower level of savings (it presents a cost of £1.4 million, in comparison to the £1.1 million the Council seeks to achieve), but argues that this is affordable under a Trust model since the Council would no longer need to charge non-domestic rates to the service budget.

In summary, the staff response calls for an extension of timescales to allow a more robust implementation of change in the service; a change in the Council's affordability limit; the establishment of a staff trust to manage the future core service; to maintain premises funding for the non-core libraries until 2020 whilst working with communities and groups to develop community hubs which include library services; to withdraw other funding from non-core libraries in April 2018; and to close the mobile service in April 2017.

6.3 Response from Save Swindon's Libraries

A comprehensive and detailed response has been submitted by Save Swindon's Libraries (SSL). The full response is provided in the Appendix but some of its key points are rehearsed here.

SSL believes that the future budget for the service determined by the Council is inadequate to meet the statutory obligation, and has been driven by financial constraints rather than local need for the service. They suggest that this makes the Council liable to intervention from DCMS, as has happened elsewhere, and provide evidence to support their contention that a community library staffed by volunteers is not adequate to address statutory requirements; they also argue that the proposal fails to meet Government aspirations for standards of library provision. The possibility of Judicial Review is also raised.

SSL thinks the budget is excessively low for a population of this size, and points out that a large part of the budget is reserved for payment of National Non-Domestic Rates, and has already been allocated to other Council spending. At the same time, the budget does not provide for ongoing premises costs at the core libraries.

SSL draws attention to the lack of provision for the south and east of the Borough, and regards the two-mile catchment in the proposal as flawed in that it does not recognise ability to travel or to walk the four-mile round trip; the proposal also fails to cohere with recently-proposed changes to bus services in Swindon and its outlying areas.

The group believes the proposal contravenes equalities legislation, and that this is evidenced by the Council's own Diversity Impact Assessment, for which no mitigation has been proposed. SSL also believes the impact of the reduction in service will tend to increase levels of vulnerability in the Borough, and will disproportionately affect disadvantaged areas of Swindon. SSL quotes other sources in identifying typical costs that may result. They call for a longer-term view that sees services like these as preventative of increased vulnerability, and cost to the public purse, at a later time. They accuse the authority of failing to consider impacts on worklessness and economic growth, in contravention of the Council's own Child Poverty Needs Assessment. SSL point out the inconsistency of the proposal with DWP requirements for Universal Credit claimants and job seekers. They do not believe the proposal caters adequately for groups such as those with Special Educational Needs, or the blind and partially-sighted.

SSL deplores the reduction in staffed hours for core libraries, and suggests that experience elsewhere indicates a likely reduction in take up of the service. They also echo wider public concerns over safety and security in unstaffed libraries accessed through self-service technology. They point out that schools without libraries, which currently rely on the local library service, will be adversely affected and that no provision has been made for this in

education budgets, with consequential detriment to child literacy and learning; they also say that schools have not been consulted about this.

The group also point out the importance of the local library's social and community role, especially in the lives of people who live alone or who have mobility limitations. This has been raised separately with the relevant Scrutiny Committee but no answer has yet been received. They state that alternatives to the Council's proposal exist but have not received due consideration; one alternative they believe to be viable, and describe, could retain at least ten of the Borough's libraries.

On the proposal itself, SSL believes the reliance on parish council funding is optimistic and unsustainable, and that most of the unfunded libraries will end up closing. The reliance on volunteers will at best result in a reduced quality of service. In the meantime, a fragmented service will be wasteful and inefficient. The group identifies areas of wastage within the service that could be addressed, and commends co-location with other services to generate revenue, whilst a Friends Group could also access (and organise) funding opportunities that might make a significant contribution to revenue. They strongly criticise a timescale that will inhibit successful transition to a community-led model even in the most advanced parishes, and believe this makes a mockery of the consultation. Meanwhile, the public meetings have emphasised the importance of several local libraries as a home for groups and activities.

The group insists that Park library justifies retention due to the level of usage it attracts and its location in an area of lower literacy and higher deprivation; its closure would impact adversely on adjacent local businesses.

SSL also note that even relatively affluent areas may hesitate before committing to the precept increases required to sustain their local library; in disadvantaged or low-band housing areas, this is even less likely, as is the probability of recruiting enough volunteers when voluntary organisations are already having difficulty recruiting. It agrees that volunteers can supplement the service, but not with the replacement of skilled staff by volunteers.

SSL is very exercised about the inclusion, in the present consultation, of just a single option for the future, despite its awareness of other options, and the representations made to the authority in this respect, which it believes have been ignored. An FOI request has been submitted on this issue, and SBC is also urged to consult other authorities and their response to similar pressures.

SSL does not believe that the present consultation is properly sampled and contends that it is not sufficiently representative; it draws attention to a failure to consult head teachers, or to inform ward councillors. The unrepresentative nature of the approach, which is likely to result in a disproportionate response from older women, was raised at the previous engagement but has not been adjusted or rectified. They allege that a discussion on a community trust in Wroughton has already taken place and signals that this consultation is tokenistic; the decision has already been taken.

In conclusion, the group recommends: a review of the budget to allow for a less damaging reduction in budget; the full investigation of all alternatives; the consideration of a trust model for management of the service, and an associated Friends Group with revenue raising responsibilities.

6.4 Response from 25 local Head Teachers

A group of 25 local Head Teachers has collaborated on a response to the proposal. They raise serious concerns about the detrimental impact they think the proposal will have on local children, and especially those who are disadvantaged, and the loss of staff knowledge and guidance which promotes the love of reading to children. While recognising the financial pressures the Council faces (and which they share), they urge that savings be sought in other areas of spending, and that this proposition be reconsidered.

6.5 Response from Swindon UNISON

UNISON in Swindon is opposed to any cuts in the library service. Whilst it recognises the pressures faced by the Council, it believes there are alternatives both to the proposal put forward and to the timetable for implementation, and calls for alternatives to be set out with costings, and a timetable which only implements cuts after exhausting other options, and after full consultation. The union believes that the proposal does not meet the requirements placed on the authority by statute.

The union wants to see a comprehensive and transparent review that assesses the profile and needs of local communities (now and projected), reviews approaches adopted elsewhere, and compares the impacts of alternative methods of delivering the service; it raises several questions around the needs of local people, the availability of resources, and the adequacy of consultation. It also seeks to explore the potential for partnership-based solutions, and requests evidence that the proposal will in fact provide an adequate service to meet local need.

The union raises further questions about service efficiency and the ways in which the arguments for and against professional staff presence and the use of modern technology have been assessed. They also ask about the extent to which the authority has appraised the possible shared use of its library premises, and of collaboration with neighbouring authorities (for instance, on the provision of a mobile service).

UNISON asks whether the staff proposal has been considered, and why it has not been presented as an option. They call for a proposal from UNISON members to receive proper consideration, and state their intention to fight to defend services and to protect their members' jobs, to ensure the Council meets its legal obligations, and to ensure the Council explores all other alternatives fully and transparently before implementing any service reductions.

UNISON has also made a second submission, having received no acknowledgment of its first response outlined above. This adds to their initial response by referring to the Diversity Impact Assessment and the Needs Assessment, which although placed in the public domain have not been shared with UNISON. UNISON has now consulted further and wishes to raise additional questions. These are: whether the proposed Trust model has been considered and why it has not been put forward as an option; how the savings target was arrived at and what methodology was used; why a four-year plan to reduce costs is being implemented largely in 2017; and clarification of the proposal to raise revenue through use of space at the core libraries and the implications of failure to meet the target set.

UNISON also formally requests the authority to discuss the staff proposal with UNISON members and staff who have suggested an alternative.

6.6 Response from Swindon Liberal Democrats

The party stresses the importance of addressing issues raised in the Council's Diversity Impact assessment.

The local Liberal Democrat party's response notes that the Council's proposal is among the most draconian proposed in England. The party believes that the future of the service should be led by popular need rather than by financial constraint, and notes concerns raised by the Council's own Diversity Impact Assessment in relation to older and less IT-capable service users. It also notes that libraries remain a popular service with lower-income groups, and that Government guidance encourages local authorities to maintain this as part of their legal obligation.

The party draws attention to levels of deprivation in Swindon, and suggests that the reduced service planned in the proposal would impact adversely on access to education, skills and services for jobseekers. It regards this as unfair. It also points out that disadvantaged areas typically find it more difficult to generate volunteers, so that the proposal could result in fewer resources being available in the areas of greatest need. There is little material available to help community-led libraries learn from their counterparts elsewhere and it is easy to foresee significant management and financial difficulties that might threaten the levels of savings sought.

The Liberal Democrats regard the closure of Wroughton library as unacceptable, noting the lack of future provision in the south of the Borough, and the distance to any alternative either in Swindon or Wiltshire. They also oppose the closure of Park library, because of the level of current usage. The group also point out that the proposal fails to consider plans for future development in the south of the Borough, which will require library service provision.

6.7 Responses from individual members of the public

A member of the public expresses concern at the proposed closure of Old Town library and the impact this will have on her grandchildren specifically and on older people, especially those who do not have IT access or skills, and who are unable to get to the Central library as an alternative. Another contributor expresses strong opposition to library closures and urges the Council to pressure Government to provide the resources needed to keep libraries open; they believe the proposal is morally wrong and that replacing trained staff with volunteers is unfair on both.

A member of the public asks that no decision be taken until the staff's trust model has been given full consideration. They believe the present proposal relies excessively on volunteers and that the reduction in hours will lead to a reduced usage of an important service, threatening literacy levels and increasing access costs for disadvantaged people, whose children have already lost their Children's Centres and now stand to lose free services provided by local libraries. They also regret the loss of skilled staff and do not believe volunteers can provide a service of the same quality.

A local resident asks how the Council will communicate effectively with local people once it has removed one of the most important sources of information, especially for those who have no computer access at home. They believe that Government policy is contradictory, in urging a better educated workforce while cutting the resources that can support this. They urge retention of Park library which serves a poorer area of the Borough. They also ask what the Council is doing to put pressure on Government to invest more in education for the benefit of an underachieving local population.

One resident accepts the need for financial savings, including reluctant acceptance of the closure of the non-core libraries, but asks that hours at the remaining four should not be reduced. They point out the need for increased capacity at these libraries, to meet demand transferring from the non-core libraries. Another raises the same point, asking for staffed hours at the core libraries to be maintained and similarly raising the issue of increased demand for the service.

A local resident expresses reservations about the increased reliance on technology. They have recently experienced anti-social behaviour at one of the core libraries, which was reported to and addressed by a member of staff. They are concerned that unstaffed premises and those using them legitimately may be vulnerable to this kind of behaviour, and point out that bank ATMs suffer from anti-social activity outside banking hours. They want to see longer staffed hours at the core libraries.

A regular user of the service deplores the proposal and wants to see all libraries retained and professionally staffed; they say that staff have a level of knowledge and training that cannot be expected of volunteers, and that the libraries have an important role as community hubs and as supporters of community cohesion. Another user reports on their recent visit to Covi9ngham library and the number of children using the premises, and expresses concern that this service, clearly of value to local children, is being withdrawn.

One member of the public wishes to stress the importance of retaining Park library, not least because of its presence in a disadvantaged community and the lack of a nearby alternative.

They regret the likely impact on community groups that use the library, as well as noting the high level of computer usage at Park by a range of different people, including children and jobseekers who need to meet their obligation to search for 35 hours a week. They point out that Universal Credit will place obligations on all benefit recipients, with the only alternative a premium rate phone line. They ask the Council to reconsider the future of Park library.

A resident of a small rural community (outside the borough boundary) urges retention of the mobile service to such communities, due to their remoteness from physical libraries.

Another local resident raises a question about the future of a small satellite library run at low cost through Gorse Hill Baptist Church should the proposals go ahead, and suggests the Council promote the library service more effectively.

A member of the public expresses concern over the consultation, believing that the decision has already been made, and asking that residents be asked about the acceptability of an increase in taxation to allow residents to decide whether they wish to pay for their libraries. They also take the opportunity to reject perishing in their locality.

Two members of the public have emailed in to say how much they value library services.

The Leader of the Council has received 49 identical letters from individual residents protesting the proposal to withdraw support from the Park library. The letters draw attention to Cllr Renard's personal knowledge of the locality and its severe levels of disadvantage, which make book purchases or home access to IT much less likely, and the need for IT support for children to do homework and for job seekers. They also note the important role of the library as a community hub which has a positive impact on social isolation and learning. They also anticipate difficulty in recruiting volunteers with the skills and capacity to take on this service. They urge the Council to reconsider its proposals in relation to Park library.

6.8 Responses from Councillors

Three Borough Councillors have submitted responses in writing to the officers managing the consultation. All three are opposed to the proposal, and two specifically endorse the response from 'Save Swindon's Libraries'.

Appendix: Detailed written submissions made separately from the consultation

A1 Responses from Parish Councils

Highworth Parish Council

Highworth Town Councillors instructed me at our last Full Town Council meeting to write to you in response to the Public Consultation on the Future of Swindon Library Service. This follows a letter sent to you on the 20th January of this year.

Councillors are very concerned and disappointed that only 15 'staffed hours' are proposed for Highworth. They request that the Borough re-visit this as a solution and to look at the alternative solutions being put forward, including the proposal put forward by the Library Staff.

Haydon Wick Parish Council

Following a discussion at the Full Council meeting on Monday the Councillors have asked for the following comments to be considered:-

Swindon Borough Council are best placed to provide a comprehensive library service;

The proposed strategy contains an over reliance on volunteers;

Funding from commercial organisations should be sought;

Any unattended service provision would need to be fully assessed for health & safety risks;

To advise of the requirement that any parish council funding to be spent only in the parish and cannot to be used to replace Borough funding for use elsewhere;

It is not intended at this moment to offer any financial assistance to the library provision in the Borough as this is the responsibility of the Borough Council.

Chiseldon Parish Council

After discussion at various Parish Council meetings, our council was very concerned at the proposed library service cuts to come into force in June 2017.

We outline below our concerns over the closure of many of the areas libraries, leaving a core service of 4 libraries.

- Our Parish has a high population of elderly residents who do not have access to their own transport. Losing access to their nearest library would mean a longer and often

unpractical journey into Swindon to one of the 4 proposed remaining libraries. The end result of this would mean the elderly losing a means of engaging with the community at large and therefore increasing social isolation.

- Our young residents who do not have their own transport would face the same transport issues as the elderly stated above. It is vitally important that the young be able to access readily available information from a library and an inconvenient public transport journey may put some off from using their library service.
- Families with young children can currently easily visit the mobile library that stops in the village, therefore encouraging the young to enjoy books and reading. Families will find this increasingly difficult if they have to travel to one of the central libraries. Our elderly and mobile restricted residents are increasingly reliant on the mobile library, withdrawal of this service will further disadvantage an already vulnerable group in the community.
- Travel costs would automatically increase if users had to visit one of the 4 central library. Whether these be public transport costs, fuel costs, parking costs or taxi costs. Currently the cost is zero as we have a mobile library provision within the village.
- The current bus network in place to get to one of the 4 main libraries has no direct route. The route involves a change of bus and several instances of crossing busy main Swindon roads. This is not an ideal or feasible situation for the elderly, disabled, and those with young children.

We are also greatly concerned over the proposed closure of our two closest library services; Wroughton Library and the mobile library service.

The mobile library provides a provision for all those who would struggle to leave the village to access a library service. The elderly and disabled can access the provision and parents can easily take young children there. Due to the other service cuts that Swindon Borough Council are proposing in terms of the Bus consultation it seems short sighted to also remove the mobile library service and further isolate those in rural communities.

Likewise the Wroughton Library at least provides a service for those who can travel, without the extra time, inconvenience and expense a journey into central Swindon would incur.

Should there be a subsequent plan to try to save either Wroughton Library or the mobile library service visiting Chiseldon then the Parish Council would like to be kept informed so it can debate what level of assistance we can provide moving forward.

We would appreciate it if someone from your office would confirm receipt of this letter via an email to the Clerks office on the email address above.

When all the paperwork has been reviewed after the 30th September, would you please keep us updated on any proposed changes.

Wroughton Parish Council

Future of Swindon Library Services

Wroughton Parish Council are very concerned about the proposals to make significant cuts to Swindon's Library service and are particularly anxious that, if the closure of Parks and Wroughton Libraries go ahead, there would be no library provision to the South of the Borough. This would have huge implications for social inclusion and the wellbeing of vulnerable people within the communities affected by the proposals.

The Parish Council are however very encouraged by the Library Staff's alternative proposal for a Trust run Library service and believe that this offers an opportunity to retain a credible and sustainable Library service within Swindon and retain library provision within Parks.

Should Cabinet be minded to support this proposal, Wroughton Parish Council would be very interested to work with and help the Trust to retain a Library within Wroughton. This would be much preferable to any library provision in Wroughton being provided by a Community Trust.

Whilst Wroughton Parish Council are opposed to significant cuts in library provision across Swindon we would be grateful for any influence you can bring to encourage Cabinet Members to support the Staff proposal, this provides the best opportunity to maintain a sustainable library service within Wroughton.

A2 Response from 11 Library Staff

Please find attached a document outlining an alternative proposal for remodelling Swindon's library service.

This is a fully-costed viable alternative with the support of the majority of library staff.

Our alternative proposal retains Park Library and offers increased staffed opening hours.

Please feel very welcome to share this document as and where appropriate

Please consider this the official feedback from Swindon Libraries staff and ensure that it is submitted into the consultation process accordingly.

A. Introduction

Swindon Libraries have a long and proud history of supporting the residents of Swindon and improving life chances and opportunities. They continue to play an essential role in the social, educational and cultural value of our communities: for families, children and young people; for students of all ages, job-seekers seeking employment, older people, and community groups.

This proposal acknowledges the Library Strategy presented to Council, July 2016. We also acknowledge the financial pressure facing the Council, the reduction in the central government grant, and the increasing demands for adult social care and children's services.

However, Swindon Libraries are well placed to reinforce the Council's vision and pledges including supporting education, generating economic growth, and enabling self-sufficient communities.

Therefore, this proposal presents a different funding and delivery model to those accepted by Cabinet. The alternative proposal aims to deliver substantial savings to the library budget by 2020 while building a sustainable future beyond that date. This plan also takes into account the expanding nature of Swindon as a member of the Fast Growth Cities group.

B. Current Council proposals

While acknowledging the financial pressures we consider the current proposals too limited in scope and failing to reflect the growing and dynamic nature of Swindon. As such the town deserves a library service commensurate with its ambition.

We believe that the current proposals might leave the Council open to a legal challenge under the Libraries and Museums Act, 1964, and the avoidable high costs this will entail. The current proposals also contain 2 erroneous premises:

1. The final savings target was to be delivered by the 2020 but in practice 80% is to be frontloaded in 2017 with the remaining 20% delivered over the following three years.

This allows little time to develop and deliver the most efficient model for the long-term future of Swindon Libraries.

The pressure to deliver savings within such a short timescale is not in the long-term interest of the library service.

2. That a Trust model is unable to deliver the savings needed to help the Council achieve its financial targets.

This would be correct if the savings mitigation related to NNDR only rather than as part of a wider restructuring of the service.

A further erroneous assumption is the service's ability to raise substantial funds through income generation. Added to the current income target, which form part of the Council's financial modelling, the additional £318,000 would make an unrealistic target of £457,000 per year.

This proposal challenges the above assumptions and suggests a different delivery model and timescale but one that still delivers substantial savings by 2020.

C. Alternative Proposals

We acknowledge the Libraries vision as outlined and its mission to 'build communities through literacy and learning'.

However, we believe this would be more comprehensively delivered through a core network of 5 libraries with longer staffed hours. This will provide wider coverage both geographically and demographically, and provide face-to-face staff support, which many library users value.

The recent engagement with Swindon residents and subsequent report highlighted that "many library users value the staff, not only for their friendliness and warmth but also for their help and professionalism" and that users "place high value on the availability of professional and trained staff who can help customers with queries."

This value on staff is not sufficiently recognised in the Council proposals with proposed staffed hours at odds with the findings of the report.

Therefore, we recommend:

Library	Staffed Hours
Central	47.5
North	31
West	31
Highworth	27
Park	27

In addition we agree that this can be complemented by:

- Investment in self-service and public access technology (outside of staffed hours)
- A professionally managed and delivered service by a team of qualified librarians and paid library staff including: service development, learning and outreach, local studies, information and digital literacy, stock management and volunteer co-ordination

Consideration will also be given on how best to develop services to the growth areas of the town such as the Eastern Development Area.

Libraries would also need the opportunity to generate greater income to further decrease the Council's financial input post 2020. However, this can only be achieved by maintaining sufficient space in the core libraries to allow the development of income generating strategies. In addition we propose that the building costs for the remaining libraries (below) are met until 2020, when a second review would take place in light of the Council's finances. Support, advice and transitional funding would be offered to develop community-led solutions, with support from partners, community groups and volunteers to maintain a library offer or develop a community hub.

- Moredon
- Upper Stratton
- Wroughton
- Even Swindon
- Covingham
- Liden
- Old Town
- Walcot
- Penhill
- Pinetrees

We propose that the mobile library should be decommissioned by March 2017.

D. Advantages of a trust model

There are significant advantages to establishing a libraries trust or similar for Swindon including relief on NNDR, which would substantially reduce the running costs of the core libraries.

This approach would also be in keeping with advice from the new Minister for libraries, Rob Wilson. Mr Wilson sent a letter, 25th July 2016, to local authorities outlining overlap between his Civil Society work and his library portfolio including the “exploitation of new governance models (like mutuals, trusts and co-operatives) and new funding opportunities (such as social impact bonds and crowd-funding).”

A staff led model would be best placed to take such work forward.

The cost of providing 5 core libraries plus the building costs for the remainder, and with the removal of NNDR charges, would be £1.4m. We therefore propose that the Council increases its affordability limit from the £1.1m in order to maintain a more robust library service.

As part of the changes a new staffing structure would need to be implemented.

E. Recommendations

1. To extend the timescales to allow a robust and realistic delivery strategy to be developed and implemented, while still retaining the 2020 target date
2. Increase the Council's affordability limit from £1.1m to £1.4m (to increase in line with inflationary factors) and remove NNDR charges.
3. To establish a staff led trust to take on the management and delivery of a core set of 5 Libraries by 1st April 2018
4. To maintain the current space within the five libraries and allow the Trust to establish income generating partnerships within the premises, reinvesting profits to maintain a comprehensive & efficient library service for the benefit of Swindon
5. To maintain funding for the building costs of the remaining libraries until March 2020 but to work with communities and other organisations to transition them into 'community hubs' offering a range of services and facilities, which could include a book collection and/or IT facilities
6. To withdraw all funding, other than building costs, from the remaining libraries to take effect 1st April 2018

7. To discontinue the mobile library service to take effect 1st April 2017

F. Conclusion

We believe that these alternative proposals offer a practical and realistic solution, delivering substantial savings, while maintaining a comprehensive and efficient service for the residents of Swindon, and reflecting its expanding and dynamic nature.

A3 Response from Save Swindon's Libraries

SAVE SWINDON'S LIBRARIES SUBMISSION TO FUTURE OF SWINDON'S LIBRARIES CONSULTATION – SEPTEMBER 2016

Summary of Key Points and Recommendations

- The budget of £1.1m is inadequate to provide a public library service in compliance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964;
- This proposal has been generated from a statement of fiscal limit, rather than an understanding of user need, and is therefore a flawed solution;
- The overall budget of £1.1m is not completely dedicated to the library service because £337,015 of that total is to service NNDR. This is a figure that could be reduced by 80% if a trust model was adopted, but that has already been committed to other areas of the Council budget- this is merely an internal market within the budget that reduces the real amount for libraries to £762,985. This figure is unrealistically low for a compliant Public Library Service for a town the size of Swindon;
- Community libraries that are not part of the council-funded 'core', where the risk and responsibility for the service is not held by the Borough Council as the Public Library Authority, are not included as part of the statutory provision;
- The metric of inclusion of living within 2 miles of a core library- as the crow flies- does not take into account ability to travel the more than 4-mile round trip on public transport or on foot;
- The lack of provision in the south and east of Swindon Borough excludes all those who cannot travel on a single bus, or easily on foot to a library;
- The current proposal contravenes equality legislation, as is recognised in the Council's own Diversity Impact Assessment, and no adequate mitigation has been evidenced;
- The dramatic reduction in staffed hours at the core libraries reduces their service to such an extent that usage will drop, as evidenced in Lewisham and other authorities with reduced hours;
- The installation of self-service technology is a safety risk for library users, and should only be used to increase opening hours, not to offset reductions in staffing;
- The Local Government Association identified libraries as one of the key indicators of the sustainability of local communities;
- The current proposal will reduce by 60% a universal public service that currently saves money on delivery for acute services for vulnerable adults and children, particularly the 'hidden vulnerable' who are making use of universal services but are not known to the Council. The long term cost to Swindon Borough Council of ceasing library funding will be to push more into the expensive 'vulnerable' category;
- The current proposal disproportionately impacts areas of deprivation and relative low

- income in Swindon. The impact on joblessness and future economic growth has not been considered in this proposal, even though the impacts are laid out in the Council's own Child Poverty Needs Assessment 2011;
- Local schools are dependent on branch libraries where they do not have school libraries. No alternative provision within the education budget has been made to mitigate this need. The direct impact will be a detrimental one on children's literacy and learning across Swindon. Schools have not yet been engaged in the consultation which is now drawing to a close;
- The local library is a point of social contact for many elderly or limited mobility residents. To force them into social exclusion, even if the Home Library Service is extended to them, is proven to increase their chances of mental ill health. A written question was submitted to the Streetsmart Scrutiny Committee to ask how much extra money has been put aside to meet the increased mental health problems that will arise as a result of forcing older people into social exclusion- no response has been forthcoming from SBC;
- This consultation has not included alternative options for the consideration of the residents. Important alternatives exist and must be given due consideration (with evidence available that this has taken place);
- The ability for parish councils and community groups to sustain a library service for residents is overly optimistic and will result in the closure of most of the unfunded libraries;
- Divesting responsibility for library provision to diverse groups will result in a piecemeal and inefficient service;
- Transfer of the library service to a Trust would increase public confidence in the service and could increase the chances of community buy-in to supplement core funding;
- Over-reliance on volunteers has been shown to 'run down' public services under the radar of public scrutiny;
- Co-location of matched services could bring fiscal benefits to both the libraries budget and the budget for adult social care and vulnerable children;
- There are many efficiency savings that can be made already in the library service where money is being wasted. The most glaring examples are telephone and utilities;
- A Borough-wide Friends Group could provide a significant fundraising opportunity. Grants are available for certain elements of a library service that could heavily subsidise revenue and capital costs of branch libraries. Additionally, an ongoing membership subscription to the Friends (not to the Library Service) could be introduced, alongside year-round largescale fundraising to benefit all remaining libraries in Swindon.

Budget

1. It is well understood that Swindon Borough Council faces budgetary pressures. The choice to cut the libraries budget by 60% was a political one, and the Council could have chosen to make a smaller cut.

2. The cost of statutory services for vulnerable adults and children will rise significantly by 2020. Simply cutting budgets (including for statutory services) to pour money into services to the vulnerable is to misunderstand the need and lacks coherence. **Universal services prevent people slipping into vulnerability and save money in the long term.**
3. Reliance on parish councils to raise adequate revenue to run the majority of libraries will benefit areas where residents can afford to pay more. In the more deprived areas of Swindon, there are already incidences of default on payment of Council Tax- to ask residents to pay even more is not a workable solution.
4. Frontloading savings into 2017 is unnecessary since the agreed budget saving of £1.5m is by 2020, and this is what the public were consulted on. A move to frontload all this into 2017 is not what was agreed by Cabinet in December 2015. This also disregards a need for a 'soft landing' for local communities who may be exploring how they can support their local library. The timeframe is too compressed to be realistic, even for established groups. For example, Wroughton Parish Council is the group most likely to make a successful transition to managing their own library, but to do this by June 2017 requires budget decisions to be made by the Parish before the final decision has been taken by the Borough Cabinet. **This is not democratic and makes a mockery of the consultation process.**
5. The Department for Work and Pensions has a legal responsibility to ensure all its forms are available to those who need to use them. By December 2016, Universal Credit will roll out online in Swindon, meaning that the DWP must make sure all claimants can make online applications. Libraries allow 2 free hours of network access, and then charge £3/hour. If only available in core libraries, there will not be enough computers for all claimants, and jobseekers may lose their allowance. DWP should be paying for the provision of IT/ networks. This is also true where jobseekers must prove jobseeking time up to 35 hours per week; the majority of which will now be online.
6. Libraries will also print forms (at a cost) that Job Centres cannot do as they lose their own resources. **This proposal has not been drafted in coherence with the DWP.**
7. **If an alternative governance model were to be established, it would still be possible to keep open at least ten of the Borough's libraries** by doing the following:
 - NNDR reduced to 20%;
 - Staffing across 6 of the ten libraries cut to 70% of current, and 4 down to 60%;
 - Better value for money found in utilities to see a cut to 90% of current in ten libraries;
 - Cleaning costs cut to 70%/60% of current;
 - Better value for money found on telephone charges and cut to 70%/60% of current: current variance between £0.51/ hour open and £74.60/hour open! Median is £10.24/ hour open;
 - Charge of £32,000 at West Swindon cut to £16,000;
 - Disproportionately large 'other' cost at Highworth cut by 50%;

- Income generation maintained at current levels for ten libraries and supplemented by trust and Friends fundraising;
- Reducing stock and core service costs to 60%.

To refuse to consider a governance model that reduces NNDR because they feed an internal market for the Council makes the real library budget £762,785 – this is not enough to run a public library service.

Statutory Requirement and the DCMS

8. The proposal quotes the Council's responsibilities under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Public Library Authority in question (Swindon Borough Council) cannot divest its responsibilities under this Act, although it can contract others to deliver the service. Divestment of responsibility for funding, management and sustainment of branch libraries does therefore not contribute to the Council's compliance with its duty under the Act.
9. In 2001, the DCMS published a standard definition of a library to mean a staffed service point in a dedicated building, room or vehicle. It does not cover book-borrowing facilities in other premises. The dramatic reduction in staff of this proposal reduces the service to rooms only and therefore fails to provide a library when unstaffed.
10. The Act requires a library service to be both efficient and comprehensive. A service that does not serve the majority of the Borough residents is not comprehensive. The metric to measure the comprehensive nature of this proposal is an arbitrary figure of a 2-mile radius as the crow flies from each core library. This measure includes 85% of residents. However, this metric does not measure the ability of residents to access the library service on public transport or on foot. Many library users are elderly, have small children or have limited mobility; **a more than 4-mile round trip on foot, with heavy library books, is not a reasonable expectation.** If the radius is reduced to 1-mile, thereby making the round trip 2 miles (which will still exclude elderly and disabled people on foot), the percentage of residents served by the library service reduces to below 50%.
11. The four core libraries were chosen as they were the four most visited. This has been acknowledged by Council officers throughout the consultation as a "crude" figure. It does not take into account the reasons why and the manners in which people visit libraries. Park Library is 5th most visited in the Borough, but ranks 4th for network hours used. No justification has been given for choosing one metric over another; the impact of choosing an arbitrary metric will have a profound social impact, and contributes to the factors that set this library proposal in contravention of equality legislation.
12. The proposal leaves the southern and eastern areas of Swindon Borough completely unserved by the council-funded service. Communities within these areas might make use of alternative provision in adjacent wards, where transport exists between them, but to expect everyone from Wanborough, Dorcan, Liden, Eldene, Chiseldon, Wroughton, Lawn, who might use the Park Library, to come all the way

in to Central, or up to one of the other core libraries, is disadvantageous to those communities.

13. The new proposed bus strategy has not been developed in conjunction with the library proposal and reduces the ability of residents to reach one of the core libraries in a single bus journey; taking 2 buses through a 'hub' will become the norm and will make it less viable for many residents.

This proposal is not comprehensive or efficient and may be subject to intervention from the Secretary of State for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, as has been the case in Berkshire and is likely in Lancashire.

14. The DCMS Libraries Deliver Document

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-inengland-2016-2021>) makes clear the benefits of libraries and what efforts public library authorities should be making to achieve higher, not lower, standards of provision. The proposal from Swindon Borough Council to cease funding to 11 of the 15 libraries in Swindon **fails to comply with this central government vision** in the following ways:

- Reduced access to reading and a decrease in digital literacy;
- Reduced access to free study space and homework clubs;
- Reduction in social spaces;
- Undermines health and well-being as access to health advice is reduced;
- Limits access to job clubs and employment resources;
- Limits access to computers and to the free wifi which will not be available in community libraries.

The DCMS document also highlights which targeted services libraries deliver for acute needs:

- **Health:** Books and information for long term health issues and meeting spaces for groups; disability support through access to equipment and facilities, accessible spaces and information; mental health issues through books on prescription and autism and dementia friendly libraries.
- **Services:** English language learning and citizenship test support; job clubs and CV support; access to IT for jobseeking; start-up business support; digital skills training and e-resources.
- **Urgent needs:** Access to legal services, information about foodbanks, other emergency information.

15. The real costs are indicated as follows (figures from Age UK and corroborated by Herefordshire Libraries: Impact of libraries on communities 2013) for elderly people who use libraries for social contact and intellectual stimulation;

a. Preventing cognitive decline saves £12,050 per person: a Mayo Clinic study found that reading books, playing word games and participating in computer activities led to a 30 to 50 % decrease in the risk of developing mild cognitive impairment (MCI). Bibliotherapy (reading therapy) can be used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and is used in therapy at residential homes, hospitals and hospices.

b. Preventing a diagnosis of depression saves £2085 per person;

- c. Savings of up to £90,000 per year can be made by reducing the need for contact with mental health services.
 - d. According to DCMS 'Libraries Deliver', libraries save the NHS £1.32 per person per year in reducing contact with primary care services. In Swindon (pop 217,160, ONS figure) this presents an annual saving of £286,651 that has not been considered for its impact on other budgets when libraries close.
 - e. Additionally, libraries provide access to health information, reading lowers stress levels, and reading fiction improves empathy and problem-solving skills.
16. In providing a library service, local authorities must, among other things have regard to encouraging both adults and children to make full use of the library service, and lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area. This proposal falls far short of this requirement, and actively undermines it by making the library service inaccessible to many residents.
17. There are approximately 100 families home-educating their children in Swindon. The local library forms a very important part of the education of home-educated children. The ability to access a local library on foot, or cheaply (single bus or free parking) is essential since most home educating families are on one-earner low to middle incomes by the nature of having to dedicate so much parental time to education rather than work.

Consultation Process

18. In spite of sustained pressure from campaigners and library users, Swindon Borough Council has only put one option before the residents for consultation. The evidence for, and detail of, alternative options was presented to SBC during the public engagement period. Detailed submissions have also been made verbally to Councillors and officers. **In all instances the prospect of any alternative has been ignored.**
19. A Freedom of Information request was submitted to SBC on 4 Aug requesting evidence that alternative strategies have at least been considered. There has been a statement of exemption under section 36 of the FOI Act but no statement from a qualified person, written at the time of the exemption being applied, has yet been seen.
20. A letter was sent to the Leader of the Council by the Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals stating the case to keep more than 4 libraries within the public sector. This letter was ignored by the Council.
21. **If Swindon Borough Council does not fully consider the alternatives put before it and has pre-determined the outcome of the public consultation, it will lay itself open to legal challenge under Judicial Review.**
22. Furthermore, the size and spread of the consultation sample has not been designed to ensure a fair representation of responses. Not only have headteachers not been approached by the Council (they were written to by the Save Swindon's Libraries campaign), there are many ward councillors who have not been consulted either (as

at 29 Sep with one day of consultation remaining). There has been no attempt to tailor consultation to any particular group of library users so, like the public engagement, there is likely to be an overwhelmingly skewed sample of women over 50. This is not representative of the Swindon population as a whole. These problems were recognised in the report on the public engagement earlier this year, but no arrangement has been made to rectify this problem.

Impact of non-provision in non-core libraries

23. Submissions have been made to Swindon Borough Council from interested groups and individuals across the library user-ship of the Borough. The need for ongoing branch library provision where local communities can access it has been seen throughout the consultation period as members of the Save Swindon's Libraries group have visited drop in events. The key points are summarised below. They are not exhaustive or exclusive:

a. **Upper Stratton:** This library serves some of the most deprived areas of Swindon

from the north of Penhill, Upper Stratton and Gorse Hill. The local school makes use of the library for class visits to access book stock, and when this is no longer available a trip into town or North Swindon with small children during the school day will be impossible. A direct impact of closure of this library will be on childrens' literacy in the Upper Stratton area. The Advice Point is located in the library and cannot afford to keep going if rates are to be paid. This longstanding source of advice to members of the community to help them to access government services, if no longer available, will contribute to the number of people falling into vulnerability in the Borough. The Advice Point is a key preventative service and must be maintained at an accessible place in the community.

b. **Penhill:** This library is co-located in a building with a local youth service. The small

number of IT terminals are used for government applications for housing and benefits, and will be even more necessary when Universal Credit is rolled out across Swindon at the end of 2016, and all applications will have to be made online. Penhill has a high proportion of residents living on low incomes, who are limited in their ability to volunteer locally, or to travel large distances to access a library service. Families with low incomes are not able to prioritise purchasing a large number of books to improve literacy and learning. There is a direct link between low literacy rates and joblessness (see SBC Child Poverty Needs Assessment and Libraries Needs Assessment) which will only be exacerbated when job searching online at the library becomes impossible as it closes.

c. **Pinehurst:** The library is the only permanent service in the Pinetrees Community

Centre. The Pinetrees Community Centre is the only community facility in the Pinehurst area and the library is key to keeping its function as a hub for residents ongoing. The demographic in the area is similar to Penhill and the loss of the library will make low literacy rates and joblessness in the area worse. The likelihood of a community solution with adequate funds is low in Pinehurst.

d. **Liden:** This is a library with a lot of potential for income generation. Some of the building has been leased to Swindon 105.5, thereby reducing library costs already. Similarly to Pinehurst, this library serves an area with no other community centre and, as such, fulfils that function locally. If all libraries are to have no further funding, residents of Liden will not have a nearby library to access (Covingham and Park would be the next most likely for Liden and Eldene residents to use, but are also likely to close).

e. **Park: This library must be included in the core staffed provision as it is the largest and best used library in South Swindon.** The area served by Park Library extends well beyond the Parks and it is fifth most visited in the Borough. It is fourth in ranking for network hours used which underlines its importance as an access point for IT for the local community. This library is a vital part of the education service for local children who attend weekly storytelling and borrow the books they cannot afford to buy. These young families do not all have the resources to journey to Central Library. The children and adults who browse regularly at Park Library are broadening their own horizons and are being inspired by what they find at the library. The encouragement by the library staff to read for pleasure makes a difference to those whose literacy skills are below average and who do not have the confidence to access literature alone. Jobseekers rely on the IT and staff support available at Park Library. Some claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance have to undertake up to 35 hours per week of job searches, predominantly online. 20% of the UK population do not have access to the Internet at home, and this is likely to be higher in an area of high deprivation such as the Parks. Jobseekers will lose their benefits and face destitution if they cannot look for work. This will increase joblessness, default on rent, evictions, homelessness, and ongoing poverty with its consequent effects on health and well-being. All of this brings many more people into vulnerability and costs the Council significantly in services and lost economic input from salaried residents. The library brings people to the other businesses on Cavendish Square. If the library closes, those businesses will suffer and an area that already seems dilapidated will become a ghost town with no economic output, and a space that will become a focus for crime and anti-social behaviour. **These businesses have a stake in Park Library, and must be included in this consultation.**

f. **Wroughton:** By discussing setting up a Trust for Wroughton Library in whatever guise, both Wroughton Parish Council and SBC are jumping the gun when SBC consultation has not yet concluded. This signals a pre-determined outcome.

g. **Old Town:** This small library serves a need for children and adults who find the journey up and down the hill to Central too difficult, or whose educational needs mean that a smaller, quieter environment is needed. **Regard must be given to people with Special Educational needs who cannot access large libraries.**

Equality and Diversity

24. **Blind and Partially-sighted people.** There are an estimated 5,300 people living with sight loss in Swindon. Of this total, 620 are living with severe sight loss (blindness)-source RNIB. By 2020 the number of people living with sight loss in Swindon is projected to have increased to 6,950; and the number of people with severe sight loss will have increased to 840. Public libraries have an obligation to provide services to blind and partially sighted people as members of the community. Management of libraries by community groups and volunteers could have an unfair impact on minority groups whose needs are not understood or addressed. Library closures have a disproportionate impact on blind and partially sighted people. **No alternative provision has been made for blind and partially sighted people.** This presents a breach of the Equality Act 2010 on grounds of disability as a protected characteristic.
25. The Council's own Diversity Impact Assessment recognises the impact of this proposal on other groups with protected characteristics: the very young, the very old and those with physical disabilities. The impacts of this discrimination are not only in breach of the law, but will have adverse social, health and well-being impacts on those groups. The evidence is as follows (taken from a study by Herefordshire Libraries: Impact of libraries on communities 2013):
- a. **The very young: Children:** Challenging the brain early in life is crucial to building up more "cognitive reserve" to counter brain-damaging disease. Reading-habits prior to age 18 are a key predictor of late cognitive function, so a lifetime of using libraries protects against neurological degradation. Fluent readers are more likely to:
- Be physically and mentally independent in older age;
 - Make informed choices about their finances, health care and housing;
 - Have contributed to the community through volunteering;
 - Be upwardly mobile through their working life;
 - Contribute more financially into the system than they take out of it.
- They are less likely to:
- Feel socially isolated;
 - Be dependent on the local authority for their long-term care;
 - Develop neurological degeneration and the onset of memory loss.
- According to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee report on library closures, although adult visits to libraries declined between 2005/06 and 2010/11 from 48.2% to 39.7% of the adult population, there has been no statistically significant decrease over the last few years, and children's visits remain at a very high level (75.6%). Lending of children's books has risen for seven years in a row.

Support for children, young people and families through library use:

Improved language skills for under-fives through shared reading, storytimes and rhyme time sessions;

Improved performance by early years and primary school pupils through access to free books and on-line educational resources; Support families through children's events and parenting collections;

Access to a much greater range of free books and other materials than any family could possibly afford to buy;

Building socialisation skills through access to a free neutral community space;

Combating social isolation, especially for single-parent families and newcomers to Swindon, including those requiring access to English language learning;

Trusted access to information;

Developing a reading habit at an early age ensures better health in later life: children who are read to every day at age three have a more developed vocabulary at age five. Studies have shown how reading for pleasure and engagement in reading impact upon later life success. Where households are not affluent enough to have books themselves, access to a choice of books, i.e., at the library, can have the same effect:

"These results show unequivocally that improvement in reading literacy performance relies not just on improving student cognitive skills but also on increasing their engagement in reading. Students who have better educated parents in better jobs, and who have books and other resources in their homes, have more chances of coming to school more engaged in reading, and of entering into a virtuous circle of increasing reading interest and improving reading performance. Yet not all of engaged readers come from privileged homes, and those from more modest backgrounds who read regularly and feel positive about it are better readers than people with home advantages but weaker reading engagement." Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

b. **Older people:** libraries help older people retain independence:

- Public libraries are the only place readers can have free access to books in Large Print;
- Libraries provide talking books for readers who can no longer use printed books;
- Libraries reduce social isolation by providing a safe neutral environment;
- The library service provides collections for residential homes and sheltered housing complexes.
- The service to deliver books to the residential homes in Swindon is set to stop. The residents are often very limited in terms of mobility and a large proportion does not have the money to pay for taxis to and from the library. The cessation of their service will impact negatively on their well being (see paragraph 15).

c. **Low income residents/ residents from more deprived areas.** "Proportionate use of libraries in the most deprived areas of England is strong, demonstrating the role these unique public services play in improving life chances through literacy, learning and access to knowledge for those communities with the most to gain," said Mark Taylor, spokesperson for the Chartered Institute of Library Professionals. Around 9 million people of working age in England have low basic skills. The proportion of 16

to 19 year-olds who have low literacy is the highest of the 23 countries in the OECD's 2012 survey. As a child they will not succeed at school; as a young adult they will be locked out of the job market; and on becoming a parent they will not be able to support their child's learning, leading to a cycle of deprivation over generations. 100% literacy for all adults would boost the UK economy by some £80 million a year. The latest pilots suggest that public services overall save £3 for every pound invested.

Likelihood of community solutions in non-core library areas

26. Of the proposed unfunded libraries, Wroughton has the highest likelihood of managing and maintaining a library. This is because it is a well-established council with a coherent community of parishioners who contribute to the precept. It also has an annual precept income of around £312,000. In the case of Wroughton agreeing to fund and maintain its own library, it will need to raise its precept (already at £114 for Band D properties) significantly. Wroughton is not a deprived area, and yet this is a significant responsibility for a Parish Council comprised of volunteers. There is no established governance in place or guarantee of ongoing funding beyond the precept. It is much less likely that more deprived areas, or much newer parishes with fewer high band properties, will be able to raise an adequate precept, or establish a business plan with adequate governance by the time funding ceases in June 2017.
27. In areas where a parish council solution is not at all realistic, the next group to consider to run a library service would be a local community or voluntary group. There is already an abundance of these across Swindon, and many are finding recruitment challenging. The amount of money required to run even the smallest and cheapest of the branch libraries is more than £13,000 per annum, and this would be a sum that groups would need to find year on year, in addition to a circa £3000 annual fee to renew stock. **Unless building costs can be met, or a 'soft landing' provided in the form of a delay before funding ends, small libraries will close.** Even if volunteers come forward in the first instance, the future of unfunded libraries will remain precarious henceforward since there will be no reliable funding, staffing or management system in place.
28. Professional library staff are not just custodians of stacks of books, they love knowledge and know how to encourage and guide people in accessing knowledge both from books and computers. The Council says they will "support" volunteers in running their libraries: for how long and in what manner? The library in Walcot has shown that volunteers cannot do it alone. Quite aside from finance, volunteers need to be (1) adequately educated to be more than shelf-stackers (2) adequately trained (3) adequately supported and respected. (4) there has to be a sufficient supply of the right kind of volunteers to keep an organisation running. **Volunteers are beneficial in supplementing paid staff under a well-drafted protocol, but cannot take their place completely.**

The 'Core' libraries

29. The four core libraries are not 'saved'. The budget for their ongoing building costs has not been established, and the huge drop in staffed hours will result in them being closed for much of the week, or with limited opening through swipe cards.
30. Highworth: Highworth library is upstairs within the Co-op building. It is accessed by stairs and can be reached by a single lift. In the event of a fire this lift cannot be used. If the library is to be unstaffed and accessible only by swipe card, there is a high risk of people becoming trapped in the lift and not being able to signal for assistance. Also, access for disabled people will be limited at best, unsafe at worst. The swipe card system in place in other areas of the country is only designed to increase the number of hours libraries can stay open, not to remove a need for staff. In South Gloucestershire, they have the right approach: "While the Open Plus approach is an exciting opportunity to extend basic library services far beyond their current offering in terms of opening hours, it would only be as an extra to the full-service provision that our library staff deliver."
31. **West, North and Central:** Swipe card systems already in place in UK libraries exclude children under 16 when the library is unstaffed. This will make it impossible to cater adequately during the course of one week for preschool users and school children coming in after school unless staffing is split for a few hours in the morning and some after school. This would use the full 15 hours and thus be disadvantageous to adult users who use the library at different times.

Alternative models

32. During the public engagement, Save Swindon's Libraries provided evidence to SBC on alternative solutions in place around the UK. None of these have been given due consideration. The evidence of the lack of consideration is the subject of an ongoing FOI request. Solutions that must be thoroughly researched are:
 - Sharing the delivery of the service with other council(s) – close examination ought to be undertaken of the steps being taken in Greater Manchester towards the creation of single service in place of those provided by the individual boroughs;
 - Appointing an outside entity (e.g. a social enterprise or mutual) to deliver the service. By way of example, the use of a mutual to manage Devon's libraries (without closures being required) warrants scrutiny and the carrying out of a market test via a tendering process (as Bromley and Bexley councils have recently done) to ascertain whether there might be interest in taking on the service as a whole (and obviously proper consideration must be given to expressions of interest received), which is surely preferable to the fragmentation inherent in such approaches as individual community interest companies;
 - Seeking out whether there is room for internal efficiency improvements, notably in the way staff are deployed and timetabled and potentially with a targeted and planned complementary usage of volunteers in non-core libraries: see the report prepared for Sutton Council which has enabled the

preservation (with the closure of only one small branch and a mobile) of the service, at a greatly reduced cost, and

- Seeking out whether there are underspends in other Council departments that might be usefully applied to the conservation of a viable statutory library network in the Town or to proper investigation of alternative models.

The Council is still required to fulfill its duty of Best Value as described by the DCLG in 2011: "The Duty of Best Value is important because it makes clear that councils should consider overall value – including social value – when considering service provision."

33. Examples from other local authorities:

Libraries West consortium: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/librarieswest>

Explore York: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/explore-york-libraries-and-archives>

Bexley and Bromley: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/bexley-and-bromley-workingtogether>

Northampton CIC: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/northamptonshire-library-andinformation-service-cic>

Devon Libraries – as of 1st April 2016, the county's library service has been provided by a staff and community owned social enterprise <https://librariesunlimited.org.uk/> [suggested contact: Ciara.eastell@devon.gov.uk]

Dudley has also decided to pursue the mutual approach – http://www.halesowennews.co.uk/news/13890156.Dudley_Council_set_to_create_a_mutual_to_run_libraries_and_associate_services/

York library services have been delivered by a mutual for two years, with the Cabinet Office

providing some funding <http://www.yorkmix.com/things-to-do/books/york-library-service-all-you-need-to-know-about-thechanges/> [contact: Fiona Williams]

Suffolk have formed an IPS <http://suffolklibraries.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Routes-to-membership-2013-11-05.pdf> [contact: Alison Wheeler]

Report | The future of Sutton's library service : Feb 2016
<https://moderngov.sutton.gov.uk/documents/s44294/The%20Future%20of%20Suttons%20Library%20Service.pdf>

Greater Manchester – the creation of a single service is work in progress but the stage has been reached of moving towards unified borrowing facilities (note involvement of Blackburn)

http://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/14262665.Bolton_library_card_holders_to_get_access_to_millions_more_books_stored_in_libraries_across_North_West/

Amazon lockers for income generation.

Bedford consulted on four different options to allow real choice for library users.

The experiences of other libraries transferred to the community at Blackheath and Sydenham suggest that the scramble for volunteers and resources to keep both the

building open and a reliable service running is both exhausting and never ending. Moreover, official Lewisham figures monitoring footfall show that after transfer, book lending rates and school visits plummet.

34. **Recommendation:**

Firstly to revisit the libraries budget to make a less damaging cut.

Secondly, fully investigate all alternatives.

Thirdly, to strongly consider a trust to manage up to 10 core libraries, with an associated Friends of Swindon's Libraries charity that could apply for grants and fundraise in excess of £100,000 annually for capital and revenue costs to support services for children, adults and specific library user groups in Swindon.

These grants are available from different organisations with specific requirements on how funds are spent, are not available to Councils and would provide a budget to support the elements of library provision that are most at risk under the Council's proposal: children's' literacy, social inclusion for elderly and vulnerable adults, and employment support for specific groups in the Borough. A large Friends could also undertake fundraising to raise money to meet staff or buildings costs to extend the provision of the Trust to smaller libraries across the Borough.

A4 Response from 25 Head Teachers

This is in response to your consultation on changes to the Library Service in Swindon.

The undersigned Headteachers believe that the move towards closure of most Branch Libraries and Mobile library provision will be very detrimental to Swindon Children.

It will also place disadvantaged children at a much greater risk of not having adequate literacy resources in the home and therefore lower attainment in their most crucial years.

Branch libraries are more than a book repository. They are a staffed resource. Which provides information, access to and lifelong enjoyment of books.

We appreciate the financial pressures on the local authority, but believe that other areas of expenditure should come under much closer scrutiny before Library closures.

We ask, on behalf of our children, that as part of the Consultation, Swindon Borough Council reconsider this drastic step and seek an alternative.

Some individual Headteacher observations:

- We are really disappointed with the thought of losing Upper Stratton library on Beechcroft Road. We regularly take the children there to borrow books, to see visiting authors and have story times. This is going to be a massive loss to all of our children*
- This is very important to me personally. As a FSM child myself, my mum took me regularly to the library for books of all kinds and we collected leaves and conkers along the way! We didn't have money then so this was crucial and instilled a love of books and learning. I fully support the libraries staying open. What annoys me most – is that we are taking provision and opportunity once again from the children who need it most.*
- My own family is from a social housing background, it was only through school and using my local library that I became aware of the possibilities for my own life and was the first member of my large family to go to university.*
- I am aware that you are trying to do the best you can with a reducing budget, I am in the same circumstance for my school. However, please ensure that the priority for maintaining services is focused upon the poorest areas of the town in order to reach those children and families who need them most.*
- Library facilities do not merely represent access to books for children, they represent high academic aspirations and raised levels of social understanding within their communities. The lack of a university for a town this size is already a limiting factor but the removal of the libraries will strike at the heart of social and academic aspiration for the people of the town.*

A5 Response from UNISON

Swindon UNISON Branch Statement on the Proposed Libraries Strategy of Swindon Borough Council

Swindon UNISON Branch is in principle opposed to any cuts in the Library Service within the Swindon Borough and particularly to the swinging cuts proposed by the Council to close 11 out of the 15 Libraries and the Mobile Library Service.

However, we understand the financial pressures being placed on SBC by Central Government and the proposed targets for 2020 but are also aware that some of the proposed cuts are a matter of choice and there are alternatives to their proposal and to the timescales for implementation.

We believe residents of Swindon, Wroughton, Highworth and the Villages deserve to be shown the alternatives, properly set out with the estimated costings and reasoning for their preferred option or choice of options?

The timescales for implementation of any cuts should be based on the premise that all other options have been exhausted and would only then be phased in accordingly following proper consultation.

Swindon Borough Council has a Legal Statutory Duty to provide a Comprehensive and Efficient Library Service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 Section 7 and under Section 11 a Supplemental provision as to transfers of officers, assets and liabilities. We believe that the current proposal does not meet this requirement.

Before proceeding we would ask for a substantial review providing a full and transparent understanding of:-

- How this meets the Council's agreed local priorities and given their financial constraints this must still comply with the above
- The current & projected profile and needs of the different local communities within the Borough of Swindon
- Alternative delivery models and best practice from other Local Authorities be fully considered
- The comparative impact of alternative approaches to delivering the service be set out full and simple terms for all to see

What resources are available and how does this match the needs?

- Have the needs and demands been properly considered and analysed? By looking at the specific needs of young people, adults and the elderly, of all ages? Are any of the communities willing or able to make a contribution and if so what?

- What are the needs of those living and working and studying in the area?
- How accessible will the proposed service be to all residents considering public transport and physical access?
- Have all the communities been properly consulted? How has this been done?
- Have the Libraries user's views been sought and do we also know the views of non-users?
- Has a proper Diversity Impact Assessment been carried out?
- What implications are there for any other strategies and is all the information available, including from other partners?
- Are there any other possible partnerships that could be looked into?
- Can it be evidenced that the proposed service will be adequate and how would you promote it to be better used?

How efficient is the current service?

- Has an audit of all the Library buildings been carried out to show if they are fit for purpose in terms of access, suitability, maintenance and conditions etc?
- Could the existing or other facilities be used more flexibly?
- What possible other delivery partnerships could be formed within Swindon and the surrounding area?
- Who else could service the needs of the communities with the proposed Library closures?
- If the current delivery mode is both meeting the demand and cost efficient why change it? Why not just seek alternative funding? If not why?
- Given modern technologies is a physical presence of a Library/Librarian always needed? Have all the arguments for & against this been properly considered?
- What is Swindon Borough Council doing to encourage the use of all the existing Libraries and to maximise any possible income?
- What scope is there for combining services, for example with Wiltshire's mobile Library Service and has this been explored?
- Has the alternative of a Libraries Trust been fully considered and if so, what was the reasoning for not presenting this option?
- Should any decision on the Library Service be deferred until after the Community Governance Review has been completed and the possibility of transferring some of

the Library Provision to Parish Councils could be considered instead of the mass closures that are currently proposed?

UNISON members have suggested an alternative proposal to the Councils Library Strategy which UNISON would ask for this to be considered notwithstanding the above and they have also called for a more measured approach to any cuts.

Swindon UNISON Branch will fight to protect the jobs of its members within the Library Service of Swindon Borough Council and seek to minimise the cuts to the Service by working with our members, Library users groups & organisations, the public, Council Officers and Councillors to ensure the residents of Swindon Borough have a Comprehensive and Efficient Library Service and that all options and alternatives have been fully explored and communicated before any cuts are implemented.

Swindon UNISON Branch Statement, Supplementary Questions on the Proposed Libraries Strategy of Swindon Borough Council

Further to our original statement previously submitted, UNISON has had no response or acknowledgement from Swindon Borough Council. We have gathered some information required which Swindon Borough Council had not shared with UNISON:-

- The Diversity Impact Assessment
- The Needs Assessment

These were put into the public domain and should have been shared directly with UNISON.

Following consultation with UNISON Library members, other local groups and the public who are all opposed to the proposed closures we would like to submit additional questions.

Therefore, UNISON now formally call upon Swindon Borough Council to clarify the following areas:

1. Has the alternative of a Libraries Trust been fully considered and if so, by whom, and what was the reasoning and evidence for not presenting this as an option?
2. Explain clearly how the saving target of £1.1m was arrived at and to clarify the methodology and process used for arriving at this figure?
3. Why, despite presenting this as a four year plan to 2020, the vast majority of the cuts (80%) are proposed for 2017 instead of being phased?
4. To clarify the proposed reduction in library space at the core libraries to meet the projected income target of £450,000. How much space will be lost and what will happen if this income target is not met?

We also formally request that the Council immediately engages with UNISON and Library members who have suggested an alternative proposal to the Council's Library Strategy, which we regard as a more measured approach to the cuts.

Swindon UNISON Branch will continue the fight to protect the jobs of its members within the Library Service. We will seek to minimise the cuts to the Service by working with our members, Library users, groups, and organisations, the public, Council Officers and Councillors to ensure the residents of Swindon Borough have a Comprehensive and Efficient Library Service and that all options and alternatives have been fully explored and communicated before any cuts are implemented.

A6: Response from Swindon Liberal Democrats

Please find attached the comments of the Swindon Liberal Democrats regarding the proposed changes to the Library Service. Please note our concern that issues identified in Equality Impact Assessments must be fully addressed in the final policy.

- 1) The overall proposal – to maintain only four of the current libraries (and at a reduced level) and to close any of the remaining eleven if they cannot secure voluntary staffing – is among the most draconian currently proposed in England.
- 2) Swindon Lib Dems believe that even in a time of pressure on public services, a library service should be driven by the needs of its populace rather than demand or budget led. The Council's own Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) raises concerns over an adverse impact on older users, who may find it difficult to travel further and who are less IT savvy. The same concerns apply to disabled citizens.
- 3) Swindon has the dubious distinction of having some of the most deprived small areas in the country (DIA). This deprivation shows itself most severely in education, skills and training – all areas where literacy and digital skills will become more important in the future.
- 4) Nationally, library use has declined among the financially secure. It has however been maintained among the less advantaged, demonstrating a need that libraries must meet if they are to fulfil the duties laid on them by legislation. (DCMS, "Taking Part", 2016)
- 5) In particular we consider that the potential loss of public network access hours in the proposed model runs totally counter to attempts to increase fairness and equip disadvantaged citizens for employment.
- 6) The model proposes a "community style" library system critically dependent on volunteers. Deprived areas find it more difficult to attract volunteers. The result therefore will be that in the areas with the greatest need, there will be fewer resources. We consider this aspect of the model is not fit for purpose.
- 7) Although there has been considerable discussion over the role of "community" – ie "volunteer" libraries, there is not much hard data on what works and what doesn't. (Chartered Institute of Library and information Professionals). Without a body of best practice, the Council may find themselves reinventing the wheel – or worse, the first into a minefield of financial and governance issues which require so much management time to sort out that the hoped-for savings do not materialise. Swindon Lib Dems support the contention of the Arts Council of England that low income communities require a more supported approach.
- 8) With regard to individual libraries, we regard the possible closure of Wroughton Library, which is 3 miles from the facilities of the Central Library as unacceptable. The three other continuing libraries offer provision to the North, West and East (Highworth). The South of Swindon would be left with minimal provision. Use of Wiltshire Council facilities would not be the answer as it is 6 miles to Wootton Bassett and further to Marlborough.
- 9) In the context of development in the southern part of the Borough, future residents of Coate and Wichelstowe will require library provision, and the retention of Park Library, which receives over 1000 visits per week and has high public network usage, is supported.

**A7:
Letter
from 49
members
of the
public**

14120

2. 11. 17

Dear Councillor Renard

It has been recently announced that Parks library will be closed unless some way of volunteer or other form of management can be found. Our cabinet councillors tell us that this is due to government restraints on their funding of council run services, more services being requested and the caps on raising more revenue from council tax.

You have visited this "deprived" area so you will hopefully have some understanding what this means for some of our residents. We do already have a few charity run shops requiring volunteers and but the skills required to do this are less than those needed to run and organise a library.

A lot of residents are benefit applicants or on low incomes so do not have the financial means which allows them to buy books to support their children's and their reading, find the money to fund the internet to their homes or buy the technology which enables access to that learning route. Many schools request homework which can only be done via those two routes thus depriving their children even further. The parents of these children can also be job seekers, which require internet access and the technology so to do which many have to do via the library at Cavendish Square.

Our library at Cavendish Square is also used by other residents from outside this area who come here to shop.

It is the hub of our community, a place to ease social isolation, the meeting place for groups as well as an information centre and place of learning. Taking all of those away by shutting the library would deprive this area of a very important hub and it's staff who are a much valued part of our community.

PLEASE RECONSIDER AND DO NOT CLOSE OUR LIBRARY.

Yours sincerely