

## Libraries Transformation Consultation Report

### Introduction

1. Southampton City Council recognises the importance of libraries as a community resource, and also the need to transform the Library Service in a way that will meet the changing needs of the residents of Southampton. Life is very different now, compared to when the current library infrastructure was developed in the city. For example, many people are choosing to access the service in ways which are more convenient to them, such as online services.
2. Therefore, the Libraries Transformation Project was set up, with the aim of developing and delivering a comprehensive and efficient service, which is modern, creative, innovative, inclusive and affordable. The project identified a number of options, based on evidence gathered through a needs assessment, as outlined in the November 2014 Cabinet report. Discussion also took place with key stakeholders and national bodies.
3. Prior to making any decision regarding the options for the future transformation of the service, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders was essential. The next step was to take the proposals to public consultation, and Southampton City Council's Cabinet published their draft proposals for consultation on 18 November 2014. These covered both proposed changes to the service and the Future Focus of the service itself, and was used as the basis for extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders. The consultation was led by the council's Research and Consultation team working closely with the Libraries Transformation team, the Legal team and Library Service managers.
4. This report outlines the principles, process and outcome of the public consultation on the proposed changes to the Southampton Libraries Service. It both supplements and contextualises the more detailed information about the consultation which is contained in the full Opinion Research Consultation Report (henceforth ORS report) which is a document in the member's room. The consultation was led by the council's Research and Consultation team working closely with the Libraries Transformation team, the Legal team and Library Service managers.

### Consultation principles

5. The council takes its duty to consult with residents and stakeholders on changes to services very seriously. The council's consultation principles are to ensure all consultation is:
  - **Inclusive**, so that everyone in the city has the opportunity to express their views.
  - **Informative**, so that people have adequate information about the proposals, what different options mean, and a balanced and fair explanation of the potential impact, particularly the equality and safety impact.
  - **Understandable**, by ensuring that the language used to communicate is simple and clear and that efforts are made to reach all stakeholders, for example people who are non-English speakers or disabled people.
  - **Appropriate**, by targeting people who are more likely to be affected and using a more tailored approach to get their feedback, complemented by a general approach to all residents, staff, businesses and partners.
  - **Meaningful**, by ensuring decision makers have the full consultation feedback information so that they can make informed decisions.
  - **Reported**, by letting consultees know what was done with their feedback.

6. The city of Southampton also has a compact (or agreement) with the voluntary sector in which there is a commitment to undertake public consultations for a minimum of 12 weeks. This ensures that there is enough time for individuals and voluntary organisations to hear about, consider and respond to consultations. It is also in line with national government guidance, which suggests 12 weeks as a minimum period for consultations.
7. Finally, the council ensures that consultations are conducted in a timely fashion. This ensures that there is time for proposals to be influenced by the outcome of the consultation, and time for decision makers to see the full results and understand the views of consultees before taking any final decisions.

### **Approach**

8. Prior to the proposals for libraries being developed, significant data analysis was undertaken by the Research and Consultation team in the form of a needs assessment. This was detailed in the November 2014 Cabinet report on Libraries Transformation. The needs assessment used existing data to show a range of options with different savings and impact, and from this one preferred option was chosen by the Cabinet to go forward to consultation.
9. The public consultation was designed to elicit the views of the public on:
  - the Future Focus for the Library Service and its priorities contained within
  - the decision to continue to provide a Library Service from six city council managed libraries plus the online virtual library and the School's Library Service
  - the proposal to offer library buildings to community groups to develop independent community libraries prior to the consideration of disposing of the properties
  - the council ceasing to lease the properties in which Thornhill and Millbrook Libraries are located
  - bringing the temporary provision in Weston to an end and to seek to create the opportunity for the community to develop an independent library provision within a new unit being provided in the area
  - the removal of the Mobile Library Service
  - any alternatives or expressions of interest offered up by consultees
10. Consultation commenced on 28 November 2014 and ran for just over 14 weeks. This exceeded the commitment to consult for 12 weeks to allow for the fact that Christmas fell during the consultation period. The consultation period was intended to ensure that as many people as possible had an opportunity to hear about and comment on the proposals.

### **Appointment of contractor**

11. A decision was taken to appoint an external contractor to undertake this consultation. This was in recognition of the fact that any proposed changes to Library Services create significant public interest and that consultations in Southampton usually have good levels of engagement. Therefore, it was anticipated that this consultation could well receive in excess of 5,000 responses, with many written (email and letter) responses which would need to be read, categorised and analysed. It was also recognised that the small in-house Research and Consultation team did not have the capacity to deliver this work.
12. The other main benefit of using a third party for the management, analysis and reporting of consultation responses is they are impartial and completely independent from Southampton City Council.

13. As part of the procurement process, a specification was drawn up by the Research and Consultation team, working closely with the Libraries Transformation team. The scoring criteria within the specification allocated 60% of points for quality, broken down equally into: understanding the brief, being able to deliver, and experience of similar projects. The remaining 40% was allocated according to the cost of the proposal. Once agreed, it was advertised through the UK SBS Market Research Purchasing Framework. This is a national government framework that enables a group of (80) research providers who have met all the technical and organisational requirements for working with government bodies to compete for projects under an agreed set of rules.
14. There was an opportunity for all the providers within Lot 2 'Quantitative and Qualitative' specialism (53 providers) to express an interest in seeing the full project research specification. In total, five providers expressed an interest and, of these five, three submitted a tender for the project.
15. The tenders were carefully evaluated using scoring criteria laid out in the research specification. The council appointed the highest scoring tender, Opinion Research Services (ORS). Once the appointment was made, a project inception meeting was held which began the process of jointly developing the consultation materials.

### **Consultation methodology**

16. Deciding on the best process for gathering feedback from stakeholders when conducting a consultation requires an understanding of the audience and the users of the service. It is also important to have more than one way for residents to feedback on the consultation, to enable engagement with the widest range of the population.
17. As noted above, the libraries consultation sought feedback on:
- views on the decision to continue to provide a Library Service from six city council managed libraries plus the online virtual library and the school's Library Service
  - views on the proposal to offer library buildings to community groups to develop independent community libraries prior to the consideration of disposing of the properties
  - views on the city council ceasing to lease the properties in which Thornhill and Millbrook Libraries are located
  - views on bringing the temporary provision in Weston to an end and to seek to create the opportunity for the community to develop an independent library provision within a new unit being provided in the area
  - views on the removal of the mobile Library Service
  - views on any alternatives or expressions of interest offered up by consultees
18. Questions were also asked about the respondents' use of libraries, their views on community groups running libraries and the demographic details of respondents. This was to aid analysis of views.
19. Both paper and online questionnaires were used as the main feedback mechanisms. The rationale for this was that these enabled more detailed information to be included for this complex consultation. There were a range of areas to ask questions about and a need to outline the details of the proposals. The best way to bring this all together was in a structured questionnaire that contained background information for the relevant questions. This helped to ensure that respondents were aware of the background information and proposals they were responding about.

20. To make the consultation as accessible as possible the questionnaire was made available online and in a printed form. The online questionnaire was screen reader compatible to aid accessibility.
21. In addition to the main questionnaire a general response email and postal address was also advertised. This was to allow for respondents who for whatever reason, would not wish to use the questionnaire.
22. Children and young people were identified as another key group of library users that could benefit from a targeted survey. Therefore two more age specific surveys were developed with some local head teachers to make them as accessible as possible.

### **Promotion and communication of consultation**

23. Throughout the consultation, every effort was made to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the proposed changes and had an opportunity to have their say.
24. Particular effort was made to communicate the proposals in a clear and easy to understand way. This was achieved by using an easy read presentation document to outline the background to the project, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document and by dividing the questionnaire into themed sections. All of these documents were available on a dedicated webpage.
25. The consultation was promoted in the following ways:
  - Posters about the consultation were on display at all of the libraries throughout the consultation, alongside consultation information, printed copies of the questionnaires and a drop box for completed copies of the questionnaire.
  - Over 40 e-alerts were sent to over 60,000 subscribers to the council's email marketing service. These featured hyperlinks to further information about the consultation including the consultation timescales, the libraries presentation, FAQs and the questionnaire itself.
  - Information and support was provided to the regional media to help them cover the consultation. This resulted in coverage including a feature on the Julian Clegg Breakfast show (BBC Radio Solent's flagship show), BBC Sunday Politics Show, Meridian News, Daily Echo website and in the Daily Echo newspaper.
  - A web link to the libraries consultation was included on the council website homepage for the duration of the consultation, and the libraries and museums section was also displayed more prominently on the home page so it was visible without scrolling down when viewed on a desktop.
  - News stories about the start and end of the consultation (with hyperlinks to the presentation, FAQs and questionnaire) were published in the "Top news" section of the council website, with a news story available to read in the news section throughout the consultation.
  - Emails were sent to all of the organisations that use libraries on a regular basis.
  - Emails were sent to all organisations that form part of the Anti-Poverty Network.
  - Emails were sent to all individuals that use libraries on a regular basis and had provided the council with an email address for service updates.
  - The council's Facebook and Twitter accounts were used to signpost people to the consultation information and questionnaire, and paid Facebook posts were used to encourage participation by certain age groups.
  - Screensavers about the consultation were on display on the people's network (public access) computers in all of the libraries.

- The Head of Service and Libraries Transformation Project Manager developed, promoted and implemented a drop-in programme of two two-hour visits to each library during the consultation period. They promoted the consultation during these visits and responded to any questions from the users of those libraries.
- Two additional versions of the libraries questionnaire that were specifically designed for children and young people (with the input of local head teachers) were promoted via social media, e-alerts to subscribers and head teachers, and by schools. The Libraries Transformation Project Manager emailed head teachers directly three times to encourage participation and it was also mentioned at the Primary and Secondary Schools conference. Paper copies of the children's and young people's questionnaire were also available in all libraries.

### **Consultation respondents**

26. In total, 7,706 people responded to the libraries consultation (there were also over 1,500 signatories to petitions), meaning it was one of the largest consultations Southampton City Council has conducted in recent years. Responses were received in the form of 1,104 paper questionnaires, 5,337 online questionnaires, 778 children's questionnaires, 198 young people's questionnaires and 289 written submissions. All questionnaire responses that had at least one question completed were included in the analysis, therefore the demographic information outlined in this section does not totally reflect the respondents. It was important to include all responses even if only a single question was answered as this was still a way of feeding back on the proposals. However, it does mean that the demographic information outlined in this section does not cover all respondents, as some did not complete this section.
27. In total:
- 81.8% of the libraries consultation respondents were regular library users (defined as having made six or more visits in the last six months)
  - 9% were active users (defined as having used at least one library in the last 12 months)
  - 7.2% had not used any Southampton library in the last year.
28. This section shows the demographic makeup of respondents to the main questionnaires (the age analysis includes the children's and young people's survey data) used to gather feedback as a part of the consultation, enabling us to see which groups were over or under represented. As consultations should be open for anyone to answer, they will not necessarily be representative of the whole population. It is however important that a wide range of people have been engaged with and have had the opportunity to give their views on the proposals. Written submissions are not included in this section as they did not include details on the demographics of their author.
29. Figure 1 shows the age breakdown of consultation respondents plotted against the age breakdown of registered library users and the population of Southampton as a whole. This shows good representation across age brackets, with 16-24 year olds being the least represented and the 55-74 age group over the most represented. This is in line with normal expectations of consultation responses as the over 45-74 age group tend to participate in greater numbers. As an example, in Southampton City Council's budget consultation for 2014/15, 48% of respondents were between 50-69 years old and 7% for were between the ages of 17 and 29.

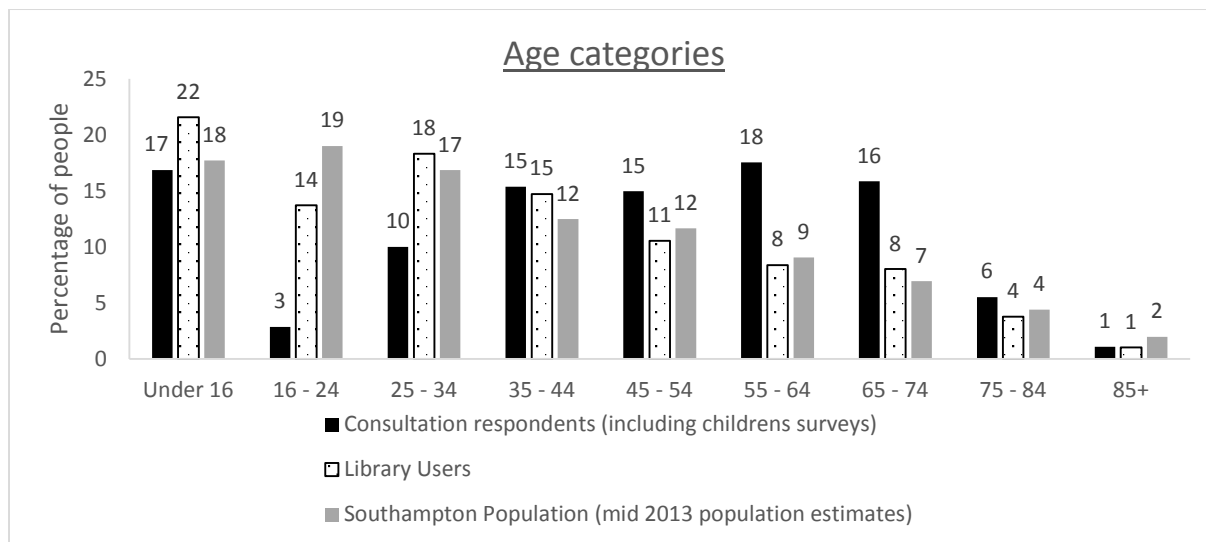


Figure 1

30. The gender breakdown of consultation respondents was 37% male and 63% female. Registered Southampton library user figures show there are more women (57%) but the Southampton population as a whole is more even (49% women).

31. Out of the 6,441 total main questionnaire responses, 5,061 (79%) were on behalf of individuals and 40 (0.6%) were on behalf of organisations. 1,340 respondents didn't answer the question to identify who they represented.

32. Figure 2 shows consultation responses against the city ethnicity and the latest ethnicity information held on library users. This shows that each ethnic group was represented in the results.

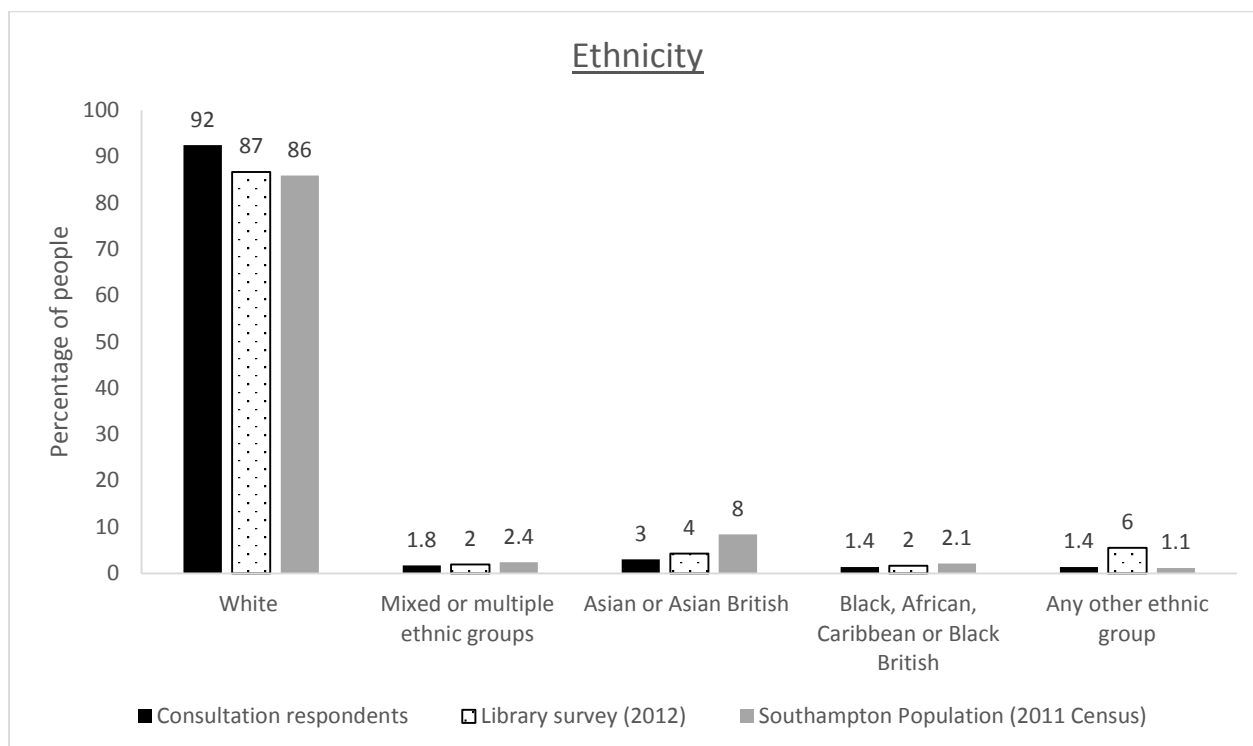


Figure 2

33. Figure 3 shows the response breakdown by ward. Bassett and Bitterne Park had a high response rate, and contain Burgess Rd and Cobbett Rd libraries respectively. Redbridge ward has the lowest level of response despite containing Millbrook library. Bitterne and

Woolston wards also have comparatively low levels of response despite containing Thornhill and Weston libraries.

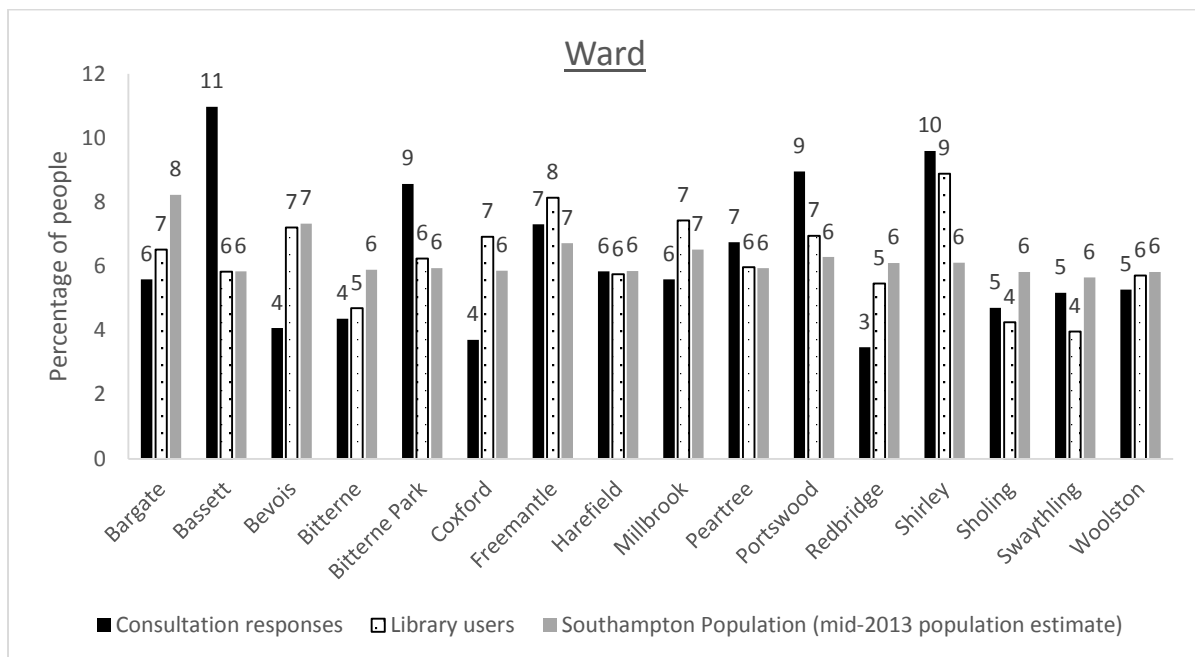


Figure 3

34. The full demographic details of the respondents to the consultation are included in section 2 of the ORS report.

35. There has been analysis of consultation respondents by level of deprivation using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010. The IMD shows a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score for each small area in England. This is used to create a score for each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) which is a geographic area, these are then ranked nationally from least to most deprived. While this measure is from 2010 and is due to be updated later on this year, it is the most up to date version available. As shown in figure 4, there is good overall representation from each group with higher levels of response from least deprived areas.

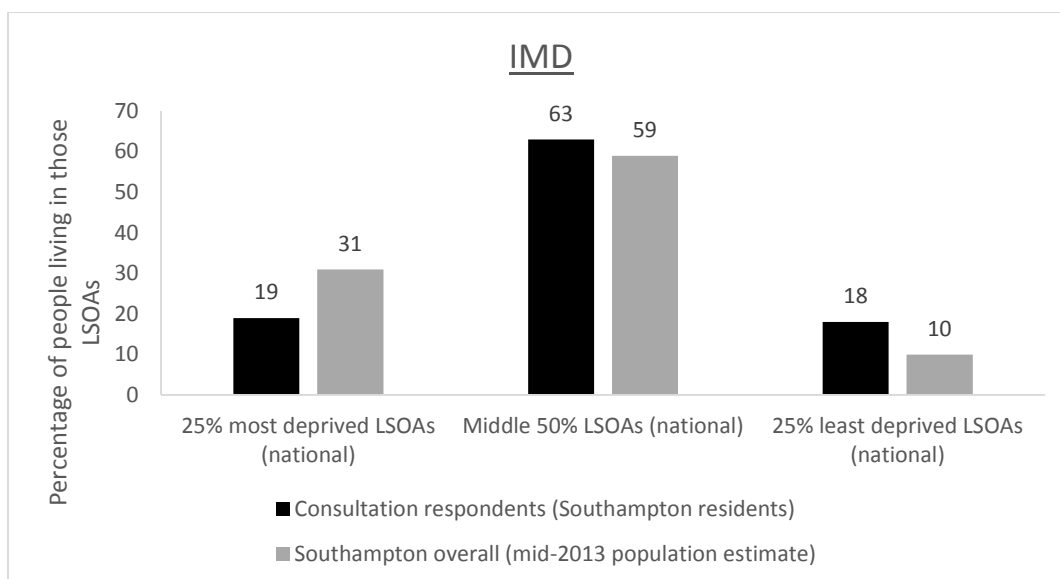


Figure 4

36. Figure 5 shows the breakdown of the consultation respondents by whether or not they consider themselves to have a disability, and shows that there is an under representation of disabled people compared against the results of the last library user survey. However, 9% of all respondents consider themselves to have a disability, which is in line with the level of disability for the city of Southampton at 8.5% (2011 census).

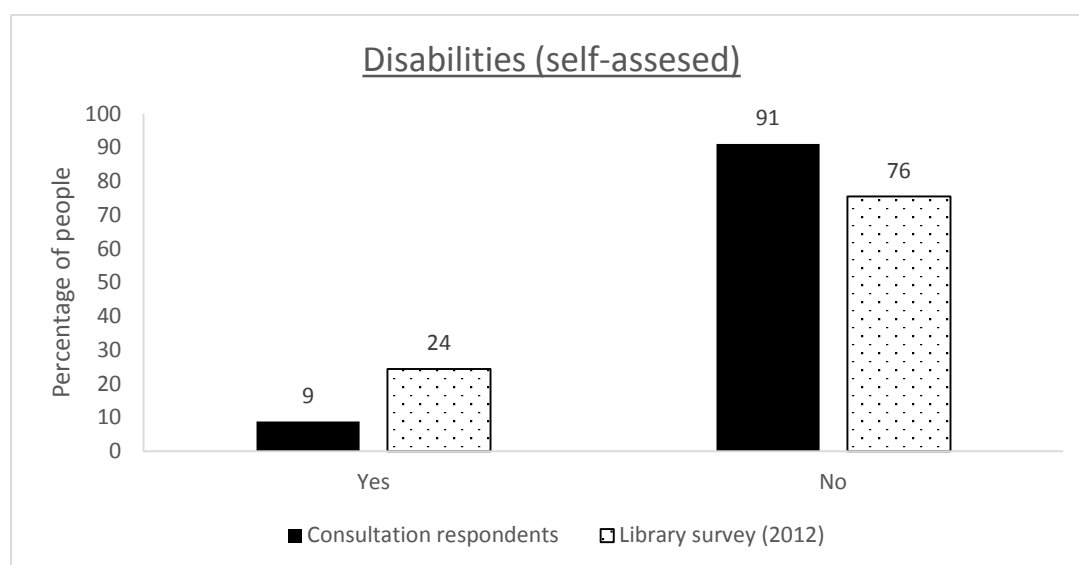


Figure 5

### Consultation results

37. The full results are outlined in the detailed consultation report from ORS, which covers all questions and responses and gives a full picture of the consultation. This section outlines the key results and highlights any further analysis that has been conducted to help understand the results. The ORS report covers all questions and responses with initial analysis and gives a full picture of the consultation. This report both summarises the key points, asks questions of pertinent findings and seeks to clarify and contextualise the results.

38. Respondents were asked for their views on the Future Focus for the Library Service. Five areas of focus were developed and, for each of these, consultees could state whether they agreed or disagreed. Below the focus areas are listed in order of agreement:

- Developing a lifelong love of reading especially in children (97% agreed)
- Helping to meet the information needs of the city (83% agreed)
- Getting the city confidently online (62% agreed)
- Delivering services in partnership (60% agreed)
- Further development of the 24/7 virtual library (51% agreed)

39. Full details of the views on the Future Focus can be seen in figure 15 of the ORS report. Further analysis was conducted to establish whether there were any significant differences between different groups of respondents.

40. There was only one priority area which had any difference when analysed by sub group. Developing the 24/7 virtual library had quite different levels agreement by the type of library user. Agreement levels are shown below with the total number of responses for each category in brackets:

- Regular users (have made six or more visits in the last six month) - 47.7% (5267)
- Active users (have made at least one visit in the last 12 months) - 67.8% (617)



- Non users -79.4% (471)

41. The high level of agreement from non-users underlines the potential demand for an expanded online library service. There is a clear pattern showing that those people who most regularly use the existing Library Service place less importance on the development of the online service.

42. In total, 57% of respondents agreed that Southampton’s Library Service needs to change to meet future needs. Figure 6 shows the agreement level, according to the library most used by the respondent. It is worth noting that users of the mobile library had the lowest agreement and those who used a library outside the city have the highest.

43. It is also worth highlighting that respondents to the young people’s survey had a lower level of agreement, with only 23% of them agreeing that the Library Service needs to change.

Which library have you visited most in the last year and to what extent do you agree or disagree that Southampton's library services need to change to meet future needs?

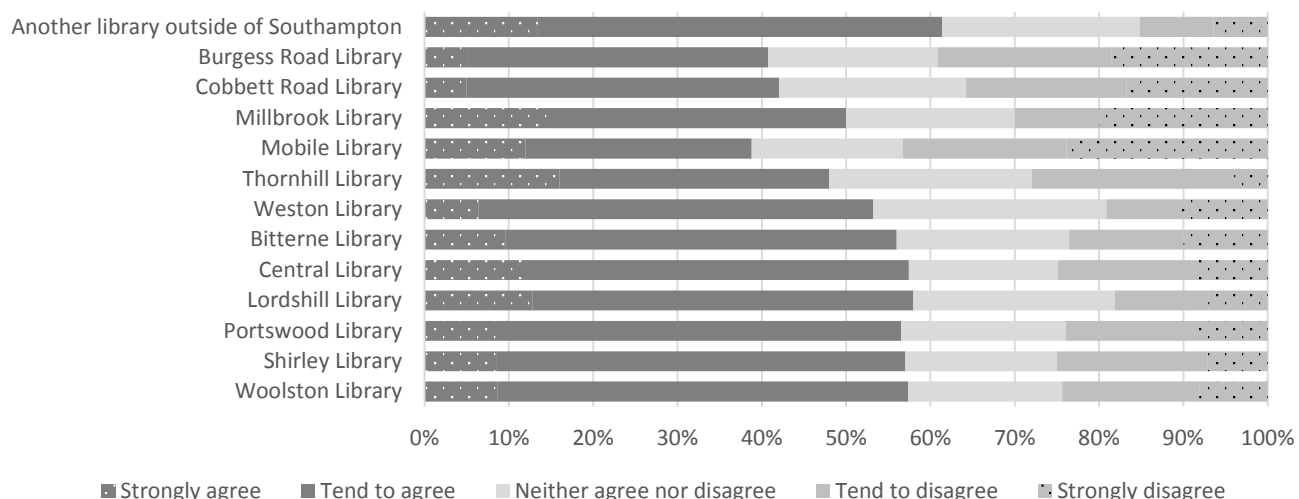


Figure 6

44. Overall 40% of respondents agreed that the council should seek to make savings from the library, with 42% disagreeing. Figure 7 shows this by most used library, with Cobbett and Burgess Road libraries having the lowest level of agreement and Lordshill having the highest.

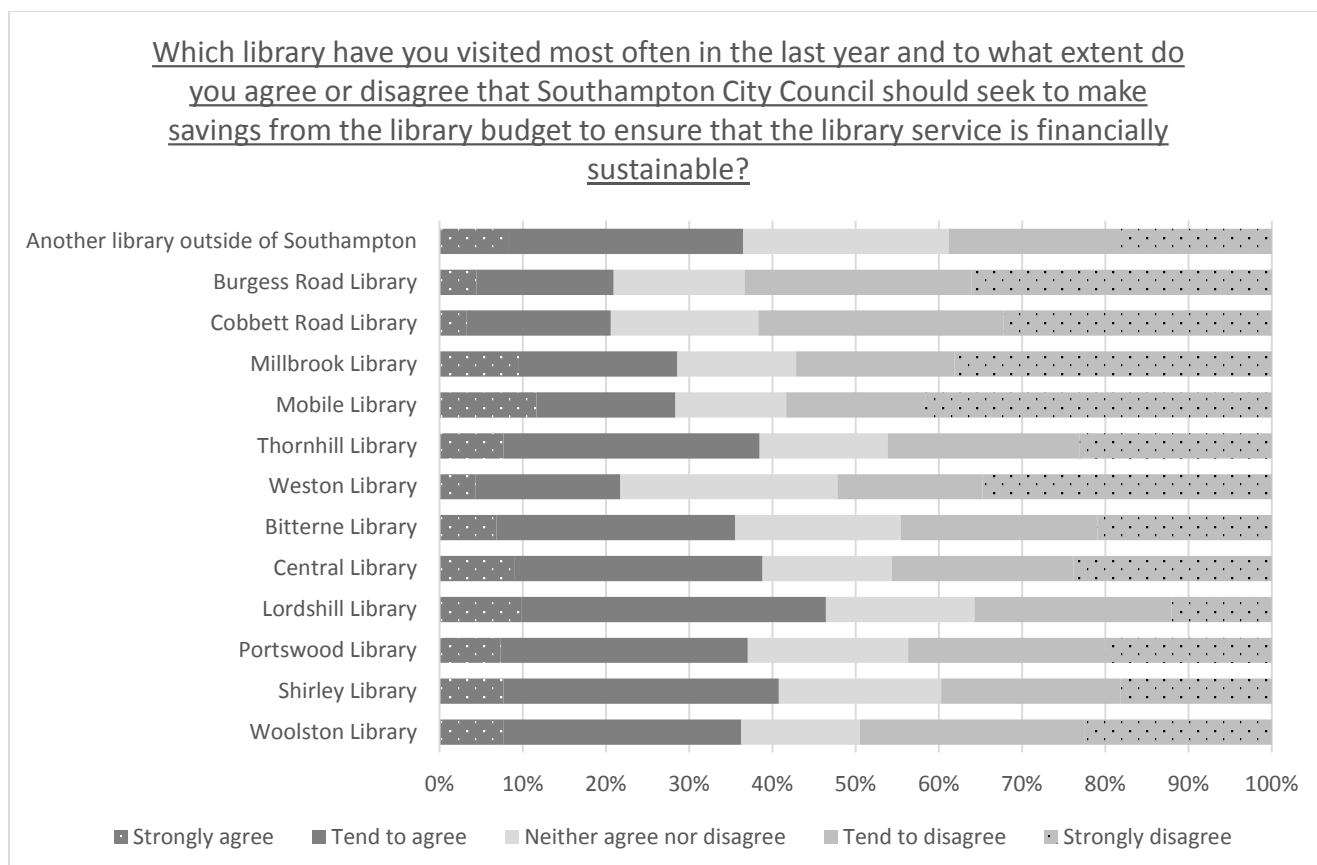


Figure 7

45. Consultation respondents were also asked to rate the perceived importance of each of the four priority rating criteria: usage, need, proximity and value for money. This was assessed on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no agreement and 10 being high agreement. These were ranked in the following order:

- Need – 59% respondents scored this over 9
- Proximity – 44% respondents scored this over 9
- Usage – 34% respondents scored this over 9
- Value for money -27% respondents scored this over 9

46. This ranking of the needs assessment criteria is broadly in line with the methodology used. 'Need' was double weighted over 'usage' and 'value for money' to create the needs assessment score. Respondents ranked 'value for money' as the lowest with 44% giving it a score between 0 and 6, this formed the smallest part as 'value for money' was an element of the performance score which was one sixth of the total needs assessment score. More detail on the methodology can be found in Appendix 2a of the Cabinet papers November 2014.

47. Figure 8 shows the level of agreement with the council's preferred option by the library visited most in the last year. Overall, 53% agreed with the council's preferred option. However, as might be expected, there is a marked difference between respondents who use a library where the proposal is to cease providing a service (17%) and respondents in areas where Library Services will remain (57%). Amongst those respondents who do not use a Southampton library, 51% agreed with the council's preferred option.

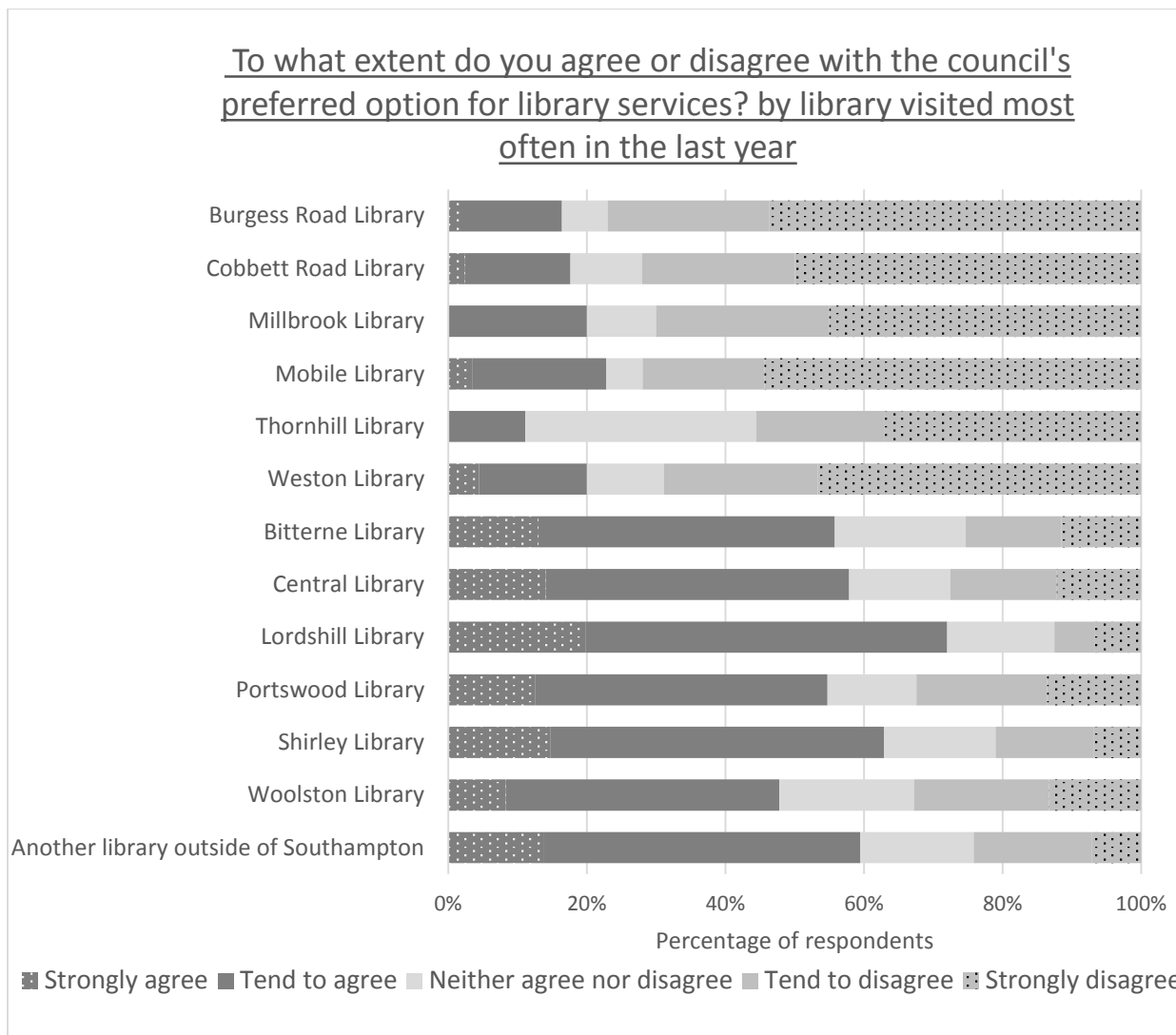


Figure 8

48. Figure 9 shows the agreement with the council's preferred option by the library user status. This shows that the more individuals use the library service the more likely they are to disagree with the preferred option.

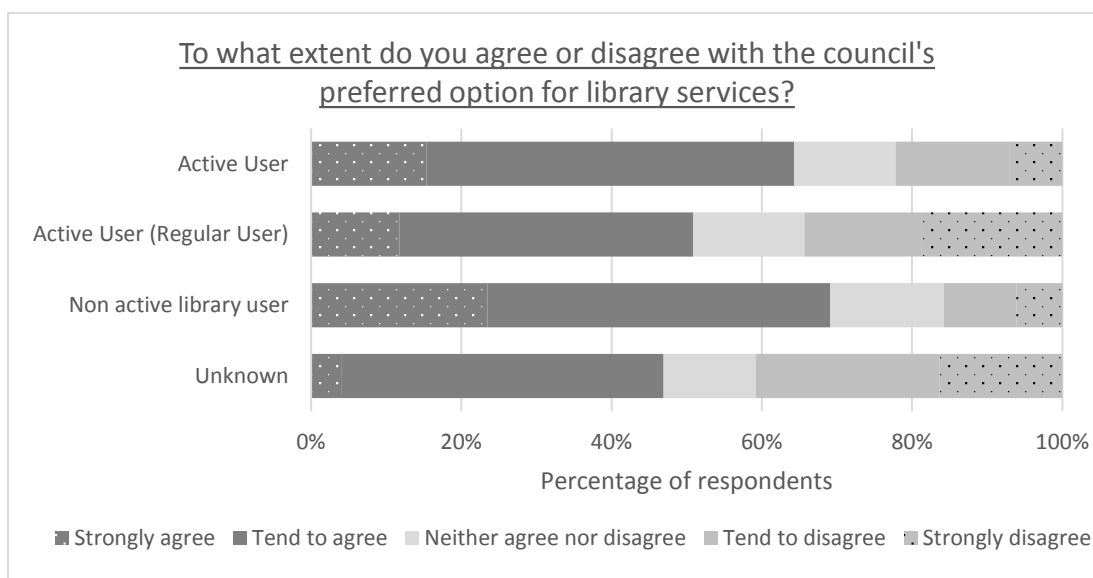


Figure 9

49. There were a wide range of comments relating to the council's preferred option. In total 1,655 individuals responded to this question and made a total of 3,200 distinct comments. The breakdown of comments below is based on individual codes for grouped analysis and more details on the coding methodology see the ORS report. A summary of the most common comments is below, including analysis showing where certain groups were particularly prevalent:
- 300 comments expressed general opposition to library closures of any sort. Respondents who used libraries at least once a month made 77% of these comments. 54% of these comments are from people working either part or full time.
  - 202 comments related to the impact of the proposed option on children and young people. 58.4% of these respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54. 46% of the comments were made by individuals with dependent children under the age of 18.
  - 185 comments related to the impact of the proposals on the most socially deprived areas of the city. 64% of these comments were made by women and 59% were between the ages of 35-64.
  - 174 comments related to not being able to access libraries as easily. 18% of these people normally travelled to the library by car and 40% on foot.
  - 165 comments showed opposition to the closure of the mobile library. 44% of these respondents were 55 or over and for 18% the mobile library was their most used library.
50. The level of agreement with the council's preferred option from the young people's survey was lower than in the main questionnaire with 28% combined agreement and 59% combined disagreement.
51. The main questionnaire also sought feedback on the potential for community groups to be involved in delivering Library Services in the future. Figure 10 shows the level of agreement with the council providing opportunities for community led initiatives. Overall, 70% of all respondents agreed with this; when analysed by library, there is stronger agreement from those respondents who use libraries with no proposed changes (aside from Thornhill).

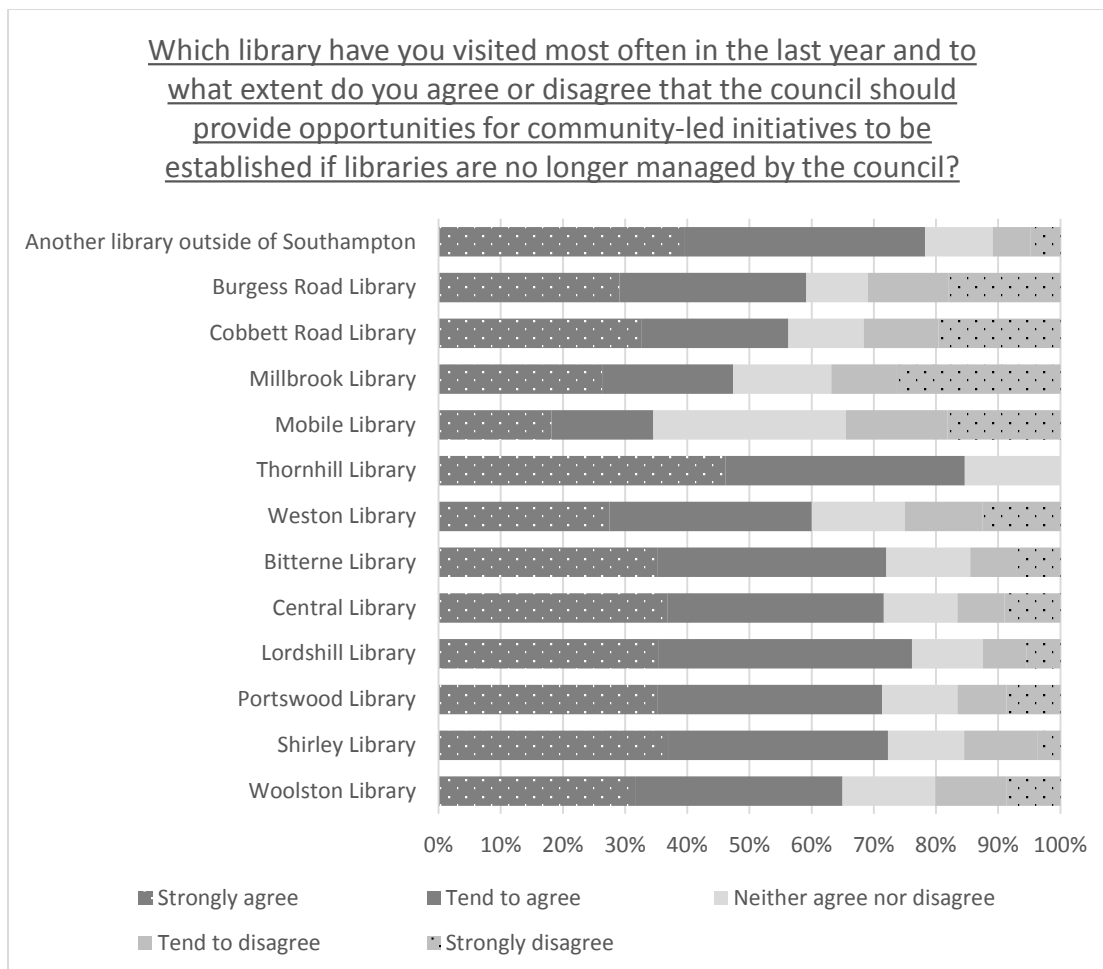


Figure 10

**Impact assessed through the consultation**

52. The penultimate section of the main survey focuses on understanding the impact of the proposed changes to Library Services. These questions give respondents an opportunity to self-assess the impact on them as individuals, and are an important consideration as a part of the consultation process.

53. Overall 18% (989 individuals) identified themselves as having a great personal impact if the proposed changes were implemented (shown in figure 11). A further 26% (1,312 individuals) felt there would be some personal impact. Figure 34 in the ORS report shows a breakdown of the total results.

Map showing location of respondents who feel the proposals would impact them a great deal

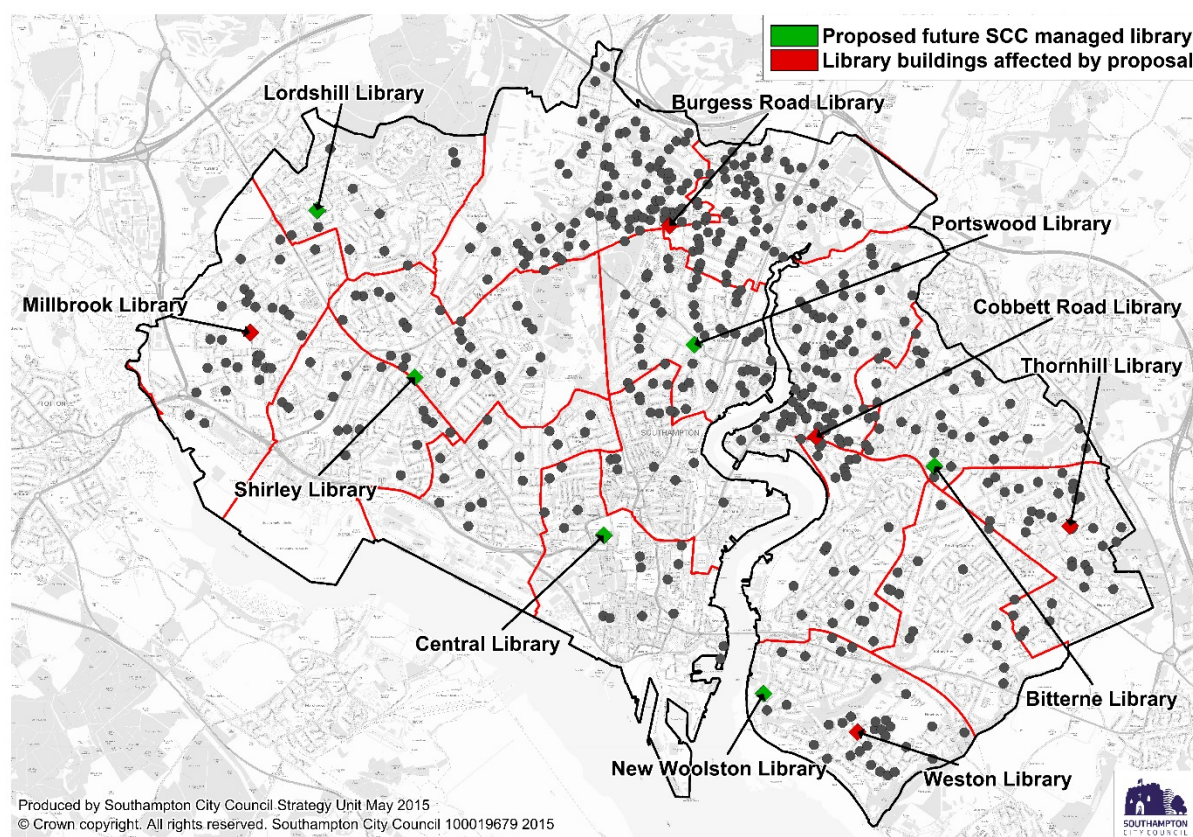


Figure 11

54. There were also a range of questions about how the impact of the proposed changes could be mitigated. These questions covered a range of areas including transport and other services. One area related to the potential for users being able to access another library using either their own, or public, transport. It is worth noting that Thornhill (73%) and the Mobile library (69%) had the highest level of users saying the proposals would have a personal impact on them, and that they would not be able to reach another library using their own transport. The Mobile library also had the highest level of users stating that they could not access another library using public transport (60%).
55. A second potential mitigation related to potential use of the online library. When looking at potential online library access for those who said they would be greatly impacted by the proposals, 54% of users over the age of 75 felt they could not use this service. When analysed by library, 70% of impacted mobile library and 60% of impacted Millbrook library users felt they could not access the online library as an alternative.
56. Another potential mitigation was use of the virtual library (e-books etc.). When looking at this, of those impacted by proposals 60% of users over the age of 75 felt they could not use this service. When analysed by most used library, 70% of impacted mobile and 73% of impacted Millbrook library users felt they could not access the online library as an alternative.
57. Of the users over the age of 75 who said they would have a great personal impact, 44% could access Library Services by using the housebound service. 48% of impacted users of the Mobile library would also be able to access the housebound service. Conversely 62% of Millbrook library users saying they would have a personal impact said that they would not be able to use the housebound service.



58. The book collection service is a further potential mitigation. When looking at this, of those who feel impacted by proposals, 42% of users over the age of 75 felt they could use this service as an alternative. When analysed by library, 48% of impacted mobile and 50% of impacted Millbrook library users felt they could not access collections from other sites as an alternative.
59. Overall, 57% of impacted mobile and 44% of Millbrook library users felt they would have to stop using libraries. These were the two highest proportions for all of the libraries, and compare to Central library where there was a lower impact of 13%.
60. 898 individuals felt they would be impacted a great deal by the proposals, of which 52% most regularly use a library unaffected by the proposal.
61. Figure 12 shows where respondents who have identified themselves as having to stop using libraries live. There are clusters around those libraries where the council is proposing to cease providing a service, but also a significant number of people who are located close to libraries with no proposed change. There are a total of 40 respondents who reside outside the city boundaries and some are not be shown on this map. It is important to note that while this visual presentation is helpful in understanding the geography of responses, the breakdown analysis is conducted based on the library people say they use the most rather than proximity. So if a respondent lives next to Central library but uses Burgess Road library most, they will be classified as a Burgess Road library user, as it is their choice which library they use. Therefore, some respondents who live close to a library with no proposed change, but regularly use a different library, may still be affected by the proposals.

Map showing location of respondents who say they would have to stop using libraries if the proposal is implemented

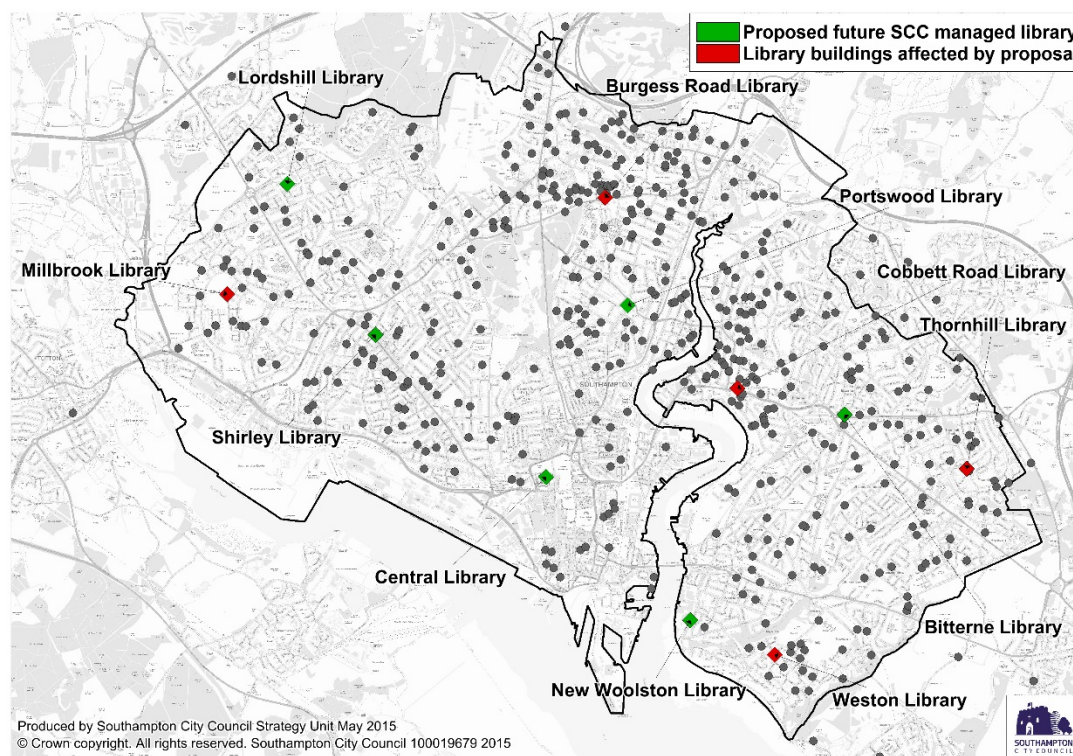


Figure 12

62. 783 respondents said they would have to stop using libraries. This represents 10% of the main questionnaire respondents. Further analysis of this figure shows that, of the 783, many have indicated elsewhere in the questionnaire that they either already use, or are able to use, alternative provision:

- 251 stated that they most often used a library unaffected by the proposals, a further 21 did not use any library in the last 12 months and 238 did not supply information on their library use. It is unclear why these respondents feel they would have to stop using libraries, although we cannot assume that this would not be the case.
  - The remaining 273 people say they would have to stop using libraries, and currently use an affected library the most.
  - Of those 273 people, 181 have also said that they cannot reach another library using their own transport.
  - Of that 181, 123 have stated that they could not reach an alternative library using public transport.
- However, it should be noted that these respondents may choose not to do so, and may therefore still be affected.

63. The 123 individuals who appear unable to access a physical library under the proposals represent 16% of respondents who have indicated they would have to stop using libraries, or 1.9% of the main questionnaire respondents.

64. Further analysis of these individual's responses indicates:

- 97 state that they would not be able to use the online library either.
- Of those 97, 92 state that they would also not be able to use the virtual library to access online content.
- Of those 92, who say they would have to stop using libraries, use an affected library the most, could not reach an alternative library with their own or public transport, access the online library or use the virtual library, 57 state that they would not be able to use the housebound service.
- Of those 57, 55 would not be able to collect books from community venues.

65. Therefore, it would appear that there are 55 respondents who have indicated that they will not be able to access a physical library or any of the other library services that are on offer under the proposals. This equates to less than 1% of questionnaire respondents for the whole consultation. However, as noted above, there may be other respondents who have stated that they could, physically or otherwise, access library services under the proposals, who would choose not to, and would therefore still be affected.

66. Questions were also asked in the children's and young people's surveys to establish any impacts on them of changes to the Library Services. Rather than focusing on the specifics of a proposal, the questions were far broader than for the main questionnaire. Children and young people were asked 'If we closed the library that you use, what would you do instead?'. Overall, 38% (374) of respondents said that would have to stop using libraries. Of these, 34% (126) of the 374 only used a library affected by the proposal. Furthermore, out of these 126 respondents, 22 suggested they could use alternative libraries. Overall, this equates to 11% of the total responses to the children and young people's survey, of this group 91% (95) use the library to borrow books. It is also worth noting that of this group 56% use Burgess Rd library which is a result of the larger response rate for this library.



## Petitions

67. In addition to the consultation process, a number of written petitions were also received. As the combined total of all the petitions reached over 1,500 signatories, a debate was held at Full Council on 18 March 2015.

68. The following motion was agreed at the Full Council meeting:

*“Council welcomes the petitions regarding the future transformation of the Library Service and thanks all those who have signed them for doing so. Council recognises that this is an issue of concern to many.*

*Council acknowledges that the consultation period ended on the 6<sup>th</sup> March and as such the results of the consultation exercise need to be collated and reviewed. Consequently, these petitions will feed into the consultation process and which will inform the ultimate decision.*

*Council calls upon the Executive to ensure that all submitted suggestions and options regarding the now finished Library Consultation are investigated with consideration given to the general positive physical and mental health improvements that a vibrant library provides”.*

## Feedback on the consultation process

69. The council is committed to make the whole consultation process as transparent as possible. As a part of this any feedback on the consultation process itself received during the course of the consultation is gathered together here.

70. Overall, out of the 7,706 people who took part in the consultation, 146 commented on the consultation process itself, representing less than 2% of consultation responses. These included comments on the whole process, the needs assessment, views on the final decision, the questionnaire and the supporting information supporting the consultation.

71. Some of the key areas where feedback was received on the consultation process itself are as follows:

- *Failure to comply with council’s consultation guidelines*
- *No opportunity to provide feedback on the consultation itself*
- *Engagement activities only taking place in normal working hours*
- *More time being allowed to respond to the consultation*
- *No alternative ways to the questionnaire of feeding back on the consultation*
- *Issues with the questionnaire itself:*
  - o *Too long*
  - o *Too complicated*
  - o *That it pushed people to respond in a certain manner*
  - o *Not enough open ended questions*
  - o *Focusses on library users*
- *That the response will only represent the views of a few*
- *The exclusion of the views of certain groups because the feedback process is complicated.*

72. The following paragraphs respond in turn to each of the main areas of feedback on the consultation process.

73. As earlier sections of this report have shown, the council has conducted the Library Service consultation in line with the principles and the legal requirements of public consultation.
74. The inclusion of open ended questions and the option to respond in writing or email allowed respondents to give their views on the process itself, demonstrated by the fact 146 people gave feedback on the consultation process.
75. The libraries information drop-ins were conducted during evenings and weekends as well as in normal working hours.
76. Government best practice dictates *'consultation should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible'* (HM Government, Code of Practice on Consultation). This consultation lasted for just over 14 weeks.
77. In addition to the main questionnaire (paper and online), consultees were also given the option to respond in a free form way to a consultation email or postal address.
78. The questionnaire was reasonably long and contained background information, in order to ensure that consultees had the information available to make informed responses. This was a consultation that contained many elements and required respondents to understand the context, meaning the questionnaire had to be of a certain length so that adequate feedback could be sought. As a result of the length of the final questionnaire, the email and freepost address for general response were promoted throughout the consultation to ensure that any individual who felt unable to use the questionnaire had alternative means to respond. The questionnaire was developed with careful guidance from consultants who are experts in public consultations.
79. The questionnaire was developed to ensure all views could be captured on a range of areas relating to the transformation of libraries in Southampton. All questions that sought to ascertain the level of agreement with a proposal or approach contained a balanced scale. Figure 13 shows an example of this type of question, there are two degrees of agreement, two degrees of disagreement and a neutral centre point. The respondent can also either leave the question blank or select the 'don't know' option. Therefore questions cannot be seen to force consultees in any direction.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the council's preferred option for library services?

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Figure 13

80. The questionnaire included three open ended questions, one gave respondents the opportunity to explain why they disagreed with the Future Focus for the libraries service or to give other ideas and suggestions. The second allowed for people to explain if they disagreed with the council's proposed option and provide alternatives. The final open ended question allowed respondents to share any impacts the proposals would have which they felt the council had overlooked. These three open ended question gave a range of opportunities to respond in a free form way to the consultation. These open ended questions did not have a limit on length of response. In total 2,904 of respondents answered an open ended question.

81. A range of questions were asked about the respondents use of libraries in order to put their views in the context of their use of the service. The questionnaire was available to all and nearly 500 non-users responded.

82. Section 7 of this report outlines the demographic details of the consultation respondents, and shows a wide range of individuals who engaged in the process.

### **Conclusion**

83. Over 7,700 stakeholders have engaged with the consultation process and given their views on the proposals. This represents 43% of the Southampton's regular library users, and 18% of active library users.

84. The consultation has engaged with a wide range of individuals through a variety of methods to allow residents in Southampton to give their views on the Library Service.

85. As section 7 of this report has outlined, by looking at various demographic breakdowns of the respondents, while certain groups were less represented than others there was still engagement across the board.

86. This consultation has sought to explore the views of the whole community on a wide range of issues, to elicit a full discussion on the future of Southampton's libraries. It has sought the views of residents on the Future Focus for libraries, the future of the Southampton Library Service and the impact of proposed changes.

87. Overall there was a significant level of engagement with the consultation as a whole. In total 7,706 responses, including 3,193 open response comments, have been shared and analysed as a part of the process.

88. This consultation has ensured compliance with local and government standards. This report, the Cabinet and other appendices outline the full picture of the consultation results and will be used to inform decision makers.

89. In conclusion, this consultation allows Southampton City Council's Cabinet to understand the views of residents on the Library Service and the proposed way forward. Therefore it provides a sound base on which to make decisions.