South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Library savings proposals

Consultation feedback report

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Executive summary

With almost 4,000 consultation responses, this survey provides a clear picture of local people's feedback about how savings might be made within library services.

Whilst there is majority support for restructuring the service to reduce management costs and making savings from the Enquiry Service, more people expressed their opposition than supported the options to reduce the budget for books and replace staffed hours with Open Access.

Reducing the amount of money to be spent each year on books and other resources was unpopular across most demographic groups, but feedback on cutting staffed hours was more nuanced. Many retired people cited the flexibility in their lives to visit libraries at different times, which meant they were more comfortable with fewer staffed hours. However, people aged 25-44 felt they (and their children) would be most impacted by this change as it reduced the number of times when people aged under 16 (who can't register for Open Access) could visit a library. There was also concern from parents of younger children that reduced staffed hours could mean fewer activities like Rhymetime, Lego clubs etc. which were extremely popular with our survey sample.

Disabled people were also more likely to be opposed to replacing staffed hours with Open Access. Whilst there is only limited evidence provided by disabled respondents as to why this might be, it is reasonable to surmise that disabled people could have greater support needs from library staff than other users.

People who have already registered for Open Access felt more comfortable with these changes and their feedback on Open Access was typically very positive. There is potential to increase the proportion of people who are registered for Open Access; over a quarter of people who hadn't registered didn't know about the service and when presented with the scenario of fewer staffed hours, many respondents said they would sign up so they could continue to use library services when they wanted to. However, some groups remain sceptical about using Open Access, with safety concerns a strong deterrent for many.

Over one hundred council staff working in libraries completed the survey and they expressed almost unanimous opposition to the reduction in staffed hours. They were relatively less concerned about other cost saving proposals, with a very different perspective from other respondents on the option to reduce the annual book budget.

The survey attracted a far higher proportion of paper responses than the council receives for other consultations and there are some very significant differences in feedback between people who completed a paper survey versus people who provided feedback via the online survey. Analysis has been conducted comparing the demographics of people who completed the survey by each mechanism, which does not explain the differences in feedback.

Considering the potential impact of changes, 17.1% of respondents thought the changes would prevent them, or their children, from visiting a library. The groups who were most likely to face this worst-case scenario were more likely to fall into one or more of the following groups:

- People aged 25-54,

- Parents of young library users (babies, toddlers, children and young people)
- People in active employment,
- Women,
- Minority ethnic groups,
- Disabled people.

In terms of direct impacts, beyond reducing visits to libraries, respondents also worried that limiting opening hours might result in fewer activities for young people, children and parents with babies and toddlers. However, many respondents talked about the wider role libraries play and the loss to society which would come with further cuts to these valued community facilities.

People described libraries as community hubs, providing a safe, welcoming place for everyone in society to go to when they need to – for company, for warmth and for much else.

They are seen as critical for young people in providing access to books and fostering a lifelong love of reading and learning and many respondents worried about the potential impacts on children's development and literacy.

Many respondents appreciated the benefits that staffed libraries offer for parents of babies and toddlers and older people in providing social opportunities and with fewer such opportunities, people were concerned about isolation and mental health problems.

In summary, the cuts to book budgets and staffed hours were seen as 'chipping away' at important public services, which over the longer term would have significant broader negative societal impacts, acting against measures which help 'level up' society.

Respondents were proactive in suggesting ideas and options for cutting costs and generating income and the project team working on delivering these savings are grateful for the thought, effort and positivity which people have put in to these alternative suggestions. Options will be explored as part of the decision-making process.

Background

Facing significant financial pressures, the council must look at opportunities to reduce what it spends to minimise council tax increases. Included in the consultation conducted towards the end of 2022 focused on the council's budget and finances was a proposal to reduce the annual budget for our library service by £473,000.

Fast forward to the end of 2023 and this new consultation put forward proposals to help deliver those savings, asking local people what they thought about – and what might be the impacts – of the following options:

- 25% reduction in annual budget for books and other materials,
- Restructure to reduce management costs,
- Reduction in third party costs for the Enquiry Service,
- Reduce staffed hours. Library services would continue to be available via Open Access.

A robust engagement and consultation process was designed and delivered to identify the relative support (or opposition) to each of the proposals and to capture a better understanding of the potential impact of the cuts.

The largest saving was proposed to be delivered by reducing staffed hours, with an increase in Open Access hours the primary mitigation. The consultation also therefore sought to find out about usage of Open Access and uncover potential barriers to greater use.

The consultation

The consultation ran from 18 October 2023 until 10 January 2024.

An online Common Place site was created to provide information about the proposals so that people could provide informed feedback. Respondents could comment either via an online survey on this site or by completing a paper survey response.

To raise awareness and give interested parties plenty of opportunity to provide feedback, the consultation was widely promoted through various channels including:

- an email to stakeholders such as town and parish councils for onward cascade to residents,
- a press release promoting the consultation to local media outlets, which led to regular coverage in newspapers,
- regular promotion on social media, and
- featured in the council's resident and business newsletters.

During the consultation period, members of the project team attended a series of 'Community Conversation' in-person events in local venues in Thornbury, Bradley Stoke, Yate and Kingswood. The purpose of these events was primarily to allow people the opportunity to ask questions about the proposals and direct them to the consultation to formally share their views, but anecdotal feedback was also captured, which is summarised in the appendices to this report.

The consultation was also actively promoted by staff working in council libraries.

Survey respondents

3,903 people completed a survey to respond to the consultation. The large sample size gives strong weight to the survey's findings as expressed in this report. There were a larger than usual number of paper responses received, with these accounting for more than a quarter of all feedback.

Whilst the survey sample is large, it is not fully representative of the local population. There were fewer responses from people aged under 35 and women were much more likely to complete the survey than men. It would have been especially helpful to capture more first-hand accounts from young people – there were only four responses from people aged under 16 and much of the analysis about potential impacts for this group comes from their parents' or grandparents' perspective.

Feedback on the proposals

Comparing the relative support for the four proposals shows majority support for two potential approaches, but reasonably strong opposition to either reducing the annual book budget or reducing staffed hours in libraries.

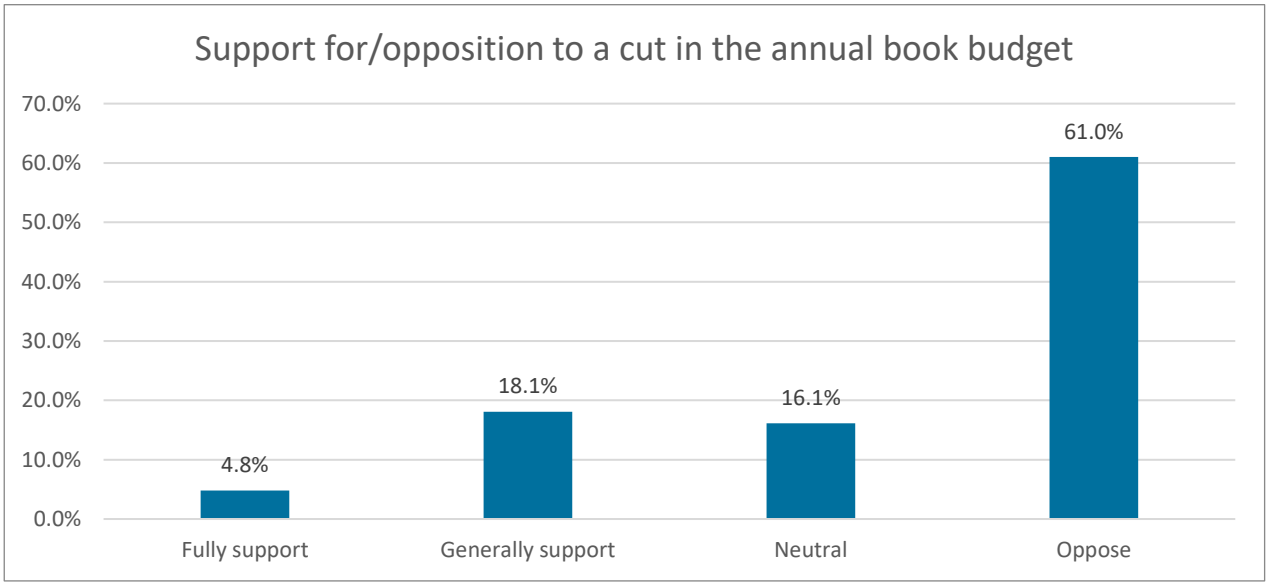
	Fully support	Generally support	Neutral	Oppose	Weighted support/ opposition
Annual budget for books and other materials reduced by 25%	4.8%	18.1%	16.1%	61.0%	**-0.33**
Restructure to reduce management costs	27.3%	39.6%	21.5%	11.6%	**0.83**
Reduction in Third Party Costs Enquiry Service	28.9%	32.2%	30.8%	8.1%	**0.82**
Reduce staffed hours	6.6%	19.7%	15.7%	57.9%	**-0.25**

Note: Weighted support has been calculated by giving double weight to 'fully support', combining this with the 'generally support' figure and taking away 'opposing' votes.

In the sections below, we consider feedback on each of these proposals in turn.

Cuts to the budget for books

The least popular of the four options was to reduce the annual budget which is used to buy books. 61% of respondents were opposed, whilst only 22.9% endorsed this as an approach to saving money from the library budget.



Cutting spending on books and other resources was especially unpopular with people aged under 45. Whilst across all age groups more people were opposed than supportive of this reduction, people aged 65 or over were significantly less concerned about it than other age groups.

	Under 25	25-44	45-64	65 or over
Support	16.7%	17.6%	23.5%	29.3%
Opposed	63.3%	67.9%	60.6%	52.7%
Net support (opposition)	(46.6%)	(50.3%)	(37.1%)	(23.4%)

There were no other significant differences in feedback for people in other different demographic segments (all showed similar levels of opposition), but other factors do influence opinion.

People whose local library is Hanham, Bradley Stoke or Yate were more likely to be opposed to cuts to book budgets than respondents from other libraries. Additionally, people who use their library as part of school visits are more opposed (interestingly, people who primarily visit to borrow books were no more opposed than other types of users.)

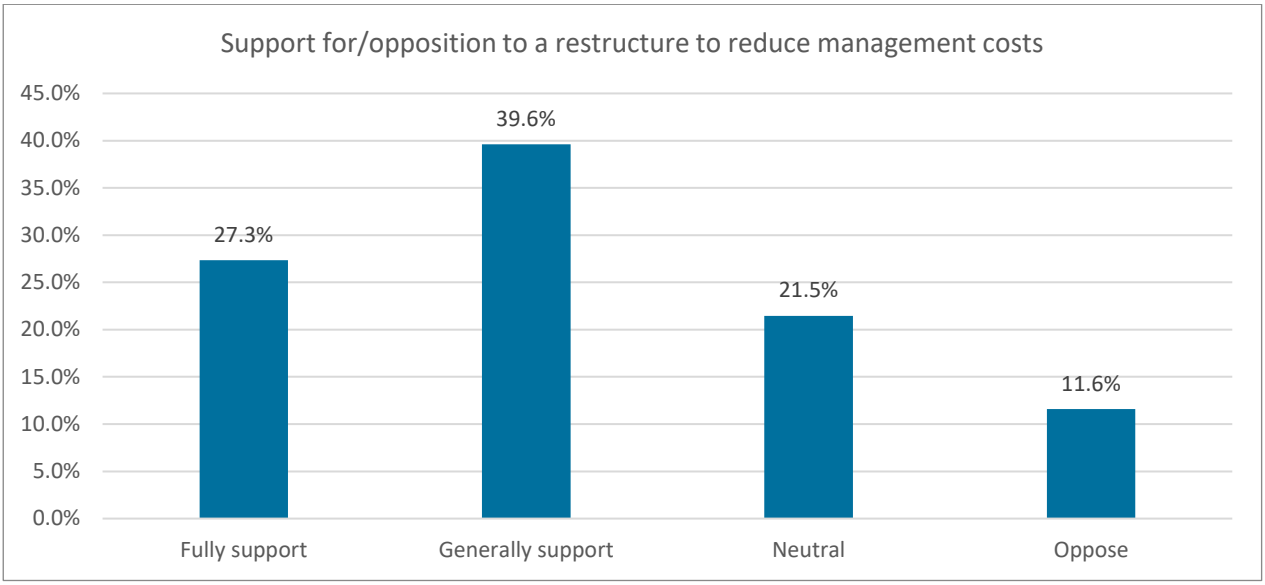
Finally, council staff who work in libraries are the least opposed of any group to reducing the budget for books (although more are opposed than supportive of the cut). Net opposition amongst this group was 15.3% whilst comparative net opposition figures were between 30% and 50% for all library user groups.

	Adult registered user	Child registered user	Parent/grandparent of child or young person who uses a library	Member of a community group who use a library	Member of council staff working in a library
Support	22.7%	17.5%	18.4%	26.5%	33.7%
Opposed	61.1%	65.1%	65.9%	61.1%	49.0%
Net support (opposition)	(38.4%)	(47.6%)	(47.5%)	(34.6%)	(15.3%)

Note: Table only shows the feedback for groups where more than 50 respondents completed the survey.

Restructure to reduce management costs

Two thirds (66.9%) of respondents were in favour of reducing the management costs of the library service by restructuring the function. By contrast, only 11.6% were opposed to this suggestion.



It would appear from the survey analysis that demographic factors are important in determining the level of support for reducing management costs.

- Men were significantly more likely than women to 'fully support' this approach.
- Support for restructuring the service increased steadily with age, with strongest support amongst people aged 45 and above.
- White British respondents were more likely to be in favour (and less likely to be opposed) than other ethnic groups (especially in relation to 'other white' ethnicities).

	Male	Female	Other*
Support	70.2%	64.5%	50.0%
Opposed	11.6%	13.2%	21.4%
Net support (opposition)	58.6%	51.3%	28.6%

* Net support for respondents with 'Other genders' was much lower, but the very low number of respondents in this group mean that the significance of this difference cannot be proven with any level of confidence.

	Under 25	25-44	45-64	65 or over
Support	54.1%	62.5%	72.6%	71.2%
Opposed	27.9%	13.6%	9.4%	8.3%
Net support (opposition)	26.2%	48.9%	63.2%	62.9%

	White British	White Other	Minority Ethnic Groups
Support	66.4%	62.3%	63.2%
Opposed	12.4%	17.6%	13.1%
Net support (opposition)	54.0%	44.7%	50.1%

It is difficult to surmise (and there are no clues within respondents' commentary) as to why different demographic groups might be more, or less, supportive of this proposal.

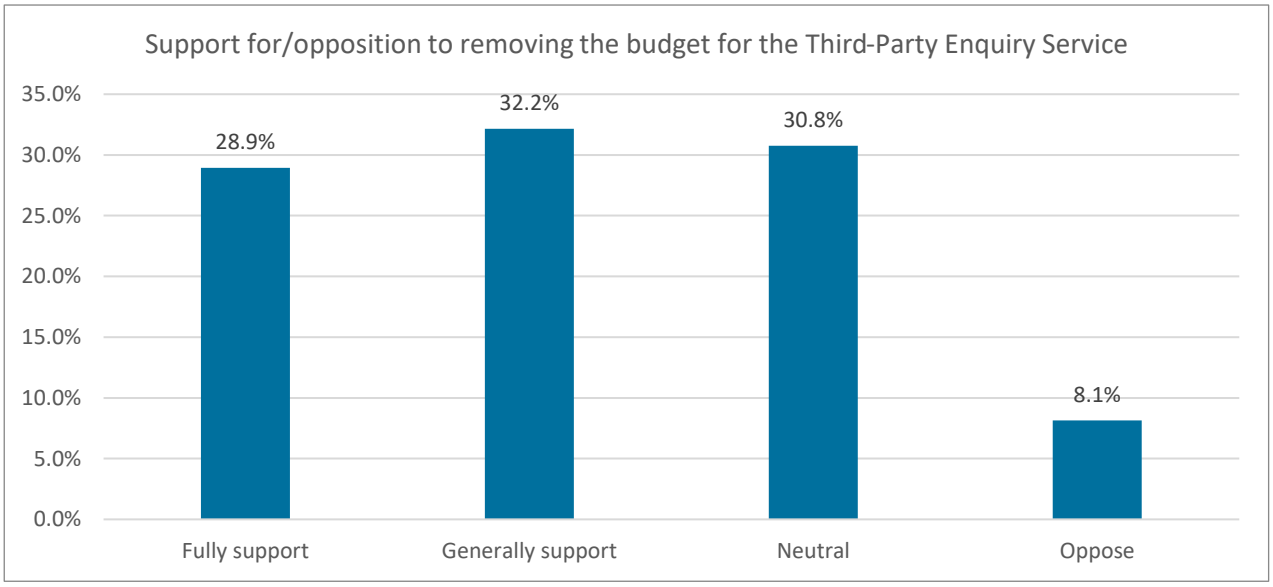
People whose local library is Hanham or Cadbury Heath were more likely to be opposed to the restructure than respondents from other libraries, whilst respondents who typically visit Yate library showed strong support for this proposal.

There are significant differences between the feedback provided by people submitting an online response as opposed to hard copy responses, with online responses much more supportive of this proposal than people who provided a paper response. There are several interesting patterns and differences in feedback seen between paper and online responses and this is explored in further detail later in the report.

	Online	Paper
Support	70.6%	55.9%
Opposed	9.2%	19.0%
Net support (opposition)	61.4%	36.9%

Removing the budget for the Third-Party Enquiry Service

Feedback for this proposal was less definitive than for others, with 30.8% of respondents providing neutral feedback. The third-party enquiry service is very infrequently used and whilst an explanation was provided on the consultation site, it may be that this change was less well understood than others. Overall, most respondents supported the change, with only 8.1% against.



The ubiquitous use of search engines and widespread access to the internet has reduced the number of people who might need this service, so it may be interesting to consider the feedback of groups who are more likely to be digitally excluded (research from Ofcom indicates that this includes people aged over 75, people who are not working, the most financially vulnerable, and people living with a condition that limits or impairs their use of communication services.)

Demographic analysis of responses does not provide evidence that digital exclusion is a factor.

- There is no statistically significant difference in the feedback provided by people who have a sensory impairment.
- Respondents aged 75 or over are less likely than younger age groups to be in favour of this change but are also less likely to be opposed.

It is not possible through this survey to analyse feedback based on financial vulnerability or unemployment.

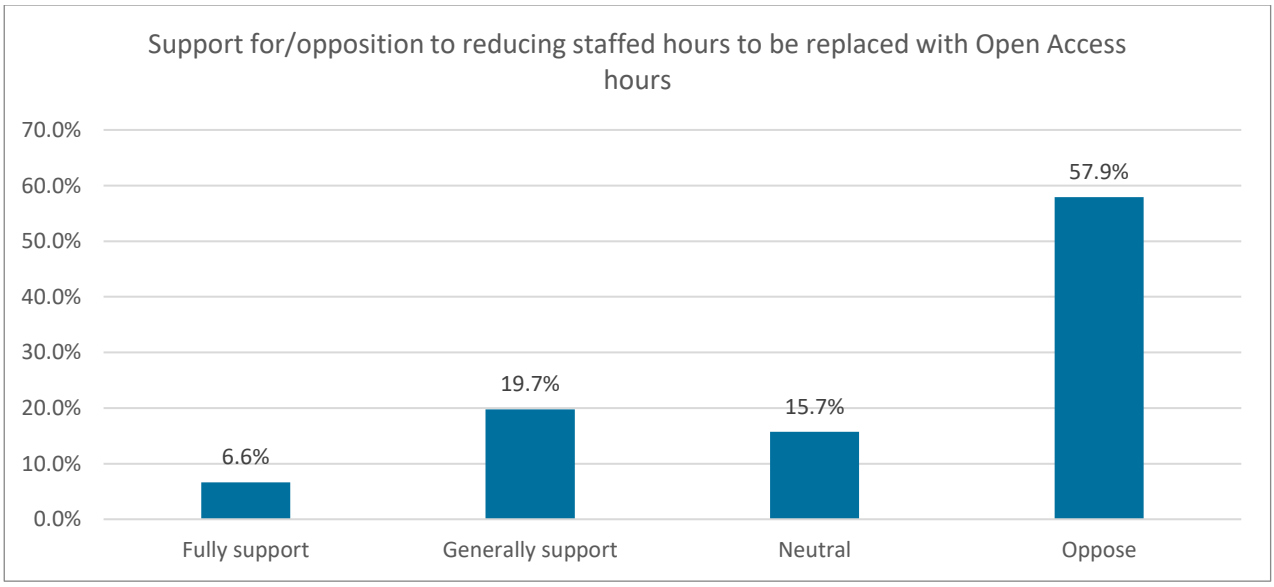
Another way of looking at this is to compare people who responded to the survey online with people who provided a paper copy (which may indicate they are more likely to be digitally excluded). This does produce a statistically significant result, with people who provided a paper response less likely to be in favour and more likely to be opposed to this measure (although both groups show strong majority support).

	Online	Paper
Support	65.0%	48.4%
Opposed	9.2%	14.4%
Net support (opposition)	54.8%	34.0%

Some differences were noted amongst responses from different demographic groups, with men more likely than women to be in favour of this cut and people of 'white British' ethnicity also showing greater support for the measure.

Reducing staffed hours in libraries

Opposition to moves to reduce staffed hours was strong, despite the potential mitigation provided by Open Access. 57.9% of respondents were opposed compared with 26.3% in favour, giving a net favourability score of -31.6%.



Open Access has been operating in libraries for several years and feedback collected from this survey (detailed in a later section of this report) suggests it works well for most current users.

Feedback on this proposal is much more positive amongst people who have already registered for the Open Access service, but this group still sees value in having staffed libraries, with more opposed than supportive of this cut. Net opposition amongst people who aren't currently registered is higher at 41.6%.

	Registered users	Non-users	Don't know
Support	31.0%	21.9%	32.0%
Opposed	52.8%	63.5%	51.5%
Net support (opposition)	(21.8%)	(41.6%)	(19.5%)

However, prior registration for Open Access is just one factor which influences opinion on this proposal, with noteworthy differences between groups.

Considering demography first and there are differences of opinion for people of different ages, sexes, ethnicities, and people also respond differently depending on whether they self-reported as having a disability or not.

- Men are significantly more likely than women to be in favour and significantly less likely to be opposed.
- The youngest respondents (people aged under 25) are significantly more likely to be in favour of the change.
- People aged 25-44 are significantly more likely than other age groups to be against. Conversely, people aged 65 or over are less likely to be opposed.
- Disabled people are significantly more likely to oppose a reduction in staffed hours in libraries.
- People from minority ethnic groups are significantly more likely to be in favour of this cut. This contrasts with the 69.4% of people who are grouped in the 'white other' category who are opposed to reduced staffed hours.

Sex

Men didn't want the budget for books and other resources to be cut but were significantly more supportive of the other cost-cutting measures. This may suggest that they were willing to sacrifice other aspects of the service to prioritise funding towards library materials.

	Female	Male	Other*
Support	23.8%	30.8%	28.5%
Opposed	61.7%	51.7%	57.1%
Net support (opposition)	(37.9%)	(20.9%)	(28.6%)

* Too few respondents to prove any difference with any confidence

Ethnicity

There are large differences in feedback from different ethnic groups. However, there is little evidence in the commentary to explain what might be behind these variations.

	White British	White other	Minority Ethnic Groups
Support	25.4%	18.8%	37.2%
Opposed	58.6%	69.4%	47.8%
Net support (opposition)	(33.2%)	(50.6%)	(10.6%)

Disability

Disabled people are significantly more likely to be opposed to reductions in staffed hours than non-disabled people. Whilst only a few disabled people pointed out specific challenges that they might face visiting a library during Open Access hours (a couple of quotes are provided in the impacts section below), it is likely that disabled people would have greater support needs from library staff than other users.

	Non-disabled	Self-reported disability
Support	26.6%	21.4%
Opposed	57.4%	66.1%
Net support (opposition)	(30.8%)	(44.7%)

Age

The commentary helps explain the differences in feedback from people of different ages.

Several people mentioned that because they were retired, reductions in staffed hours would not impact them because they could simply visit the library at a different time if they preferred to attend during staffed hours.

People aged 25-44 felt they (and their children) would be most impacted by this change as it reduced the number of times when people aged under 16 (who can't register for Open Access) could visit a library. There was also concern from parents of younger children that reduced staffed hours could mean fewer activities like Rhymetime, Lego clubs etc.

Under 25s were generally more relaxed about the change as they felt self-sufficient in using the full range of library services without needing to consult staff.

	Under 25	25-44	45-64	65 and over
Support	32.8%	22.1%	28.3%	32.2%
Opposed	55.7%	63.1%	55.6%	51.3%
Net support (opposition)	(22.9%)	(41.0%)	(27.3%)	(19.1%)

As we've seen in the feedback for other proposed cuts to library services, users at Hanham library were especially opposed to this change (73.9% opposed). There was also more negative feedback to this question from the libraries where the proposal would see

larger percentage reductions in staffed hours (Cadbury Heath - 76.9% opposed, Patchway – 66.7% opposed and Winterbourne – 66.0% opposed). Less significant cuts to staffed hours are proposed for libraries with more users (Bradley Stoke, Yate and Thornbury), which may explain why feedback on this measure was less negative from users of these libraries (46.2%, 50.1% and 51.0% respectively).

	Adult registered user	Child registered user	Parent/grandparent of child or young person who uses a library	Member of a community group who use a library	Member of council staff working in a library
Support	26.7%	19.5%	20.8%	17.9%	5.0%
Opposed	57.3%	69.0%	63.0%	68.8%	92.0%
Net support (opposition)	(30.6%)	(49.4%)	(42.1%)	(50.9%)	(87.0%)

Note: Table shows feedback from groups with more than 50 respondents

Again, there are very significant differences in the feedback of people completing the survey online versus people who handed in a paper copy, with 'hard copy respondents' again much more likely to be opposed to the change.

	Online	Paper
Support	30.5%	14.4%
Opposed	52.9%	73.6%
Net support (opposition)	(22.4%)	(59.2%)

Potential impact of changes

What would people do if staffed hours were cut?

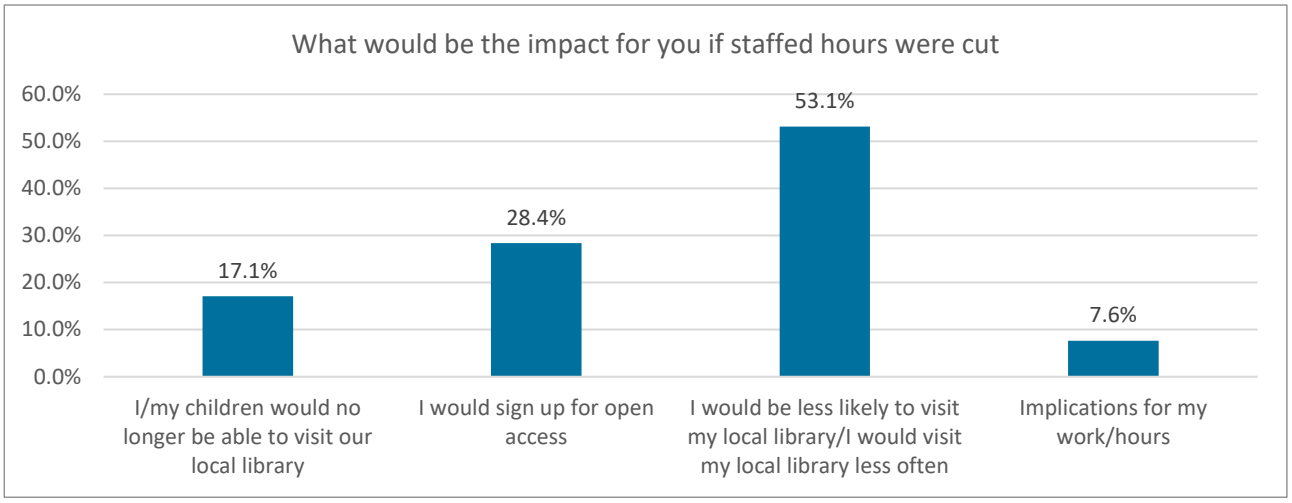
After capturing feedback on the four cost cutting proposals, survey respondents were then asked what the impact would be for them if staffed hours were reduced. Four options were provided, though many respondents added their own feedback, which are captured in a later section of this report.

Over half (53.1%) of people who responded to this question said they would be less likely to visit their local library or would visit less often.

"(I) will visit less. Libraries are constantly having their budgets cut, year on year. So, fewer people visit, so numbers drop, so cuts are made again. We should be investing more money (in libraries)."

17.1% of respondents said the change would have even greater impact and would mean that either they, or their children, would no longer be able to visit the library. A very high proportion of staff completed the survey and 207 respondents said they were concerned that a reduction in staffed hours would have implications for their work or hours.

28.4% of respondents said they would sign up for Open Access to allow them to continue to visit the library when it was most convenient to them.



Which groups would no longer be able to visit the library?

There are certain groups who are significantly more likely to believe that reducing staffed hours would prevent them, or their children, from accessing a library. Of the people who said they wouldn't be able to use their library:

- 76.3% are aged 25-54,
- 86.2% are actively working,
- 75.4% are women,
- 21.4% are from minority ethnic groups,
- 20.5% are disabled.

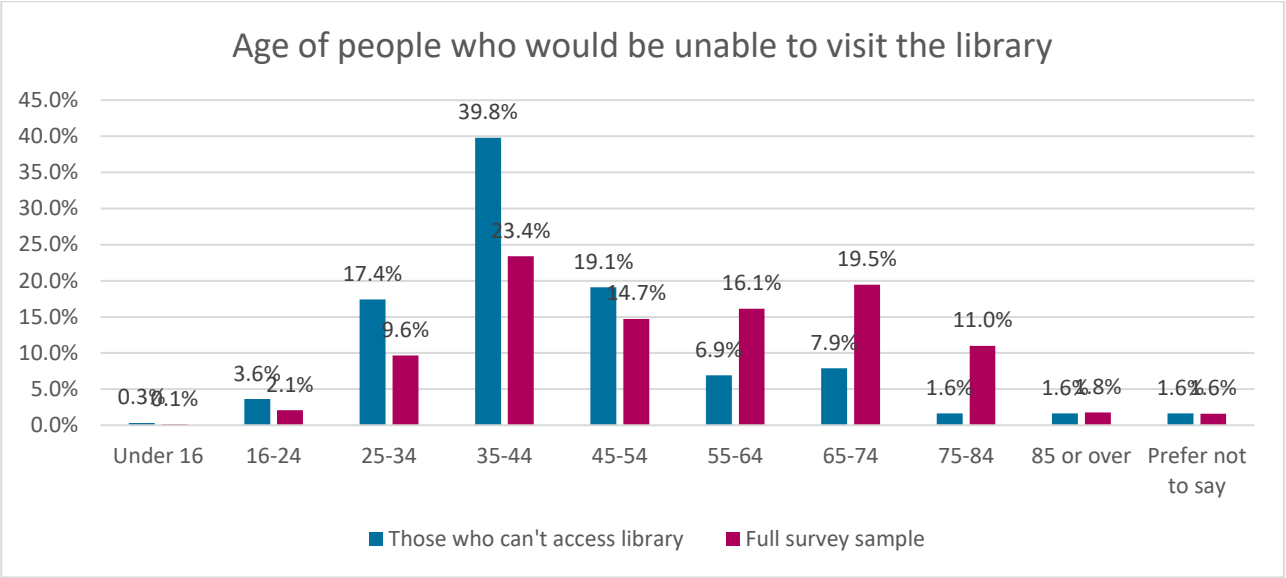
These percentages are all higher than both the survey sample breakdowns and the make-up of South Gloucestershire's population (in the case of the 25-54 age profile and working people, significantly higher).

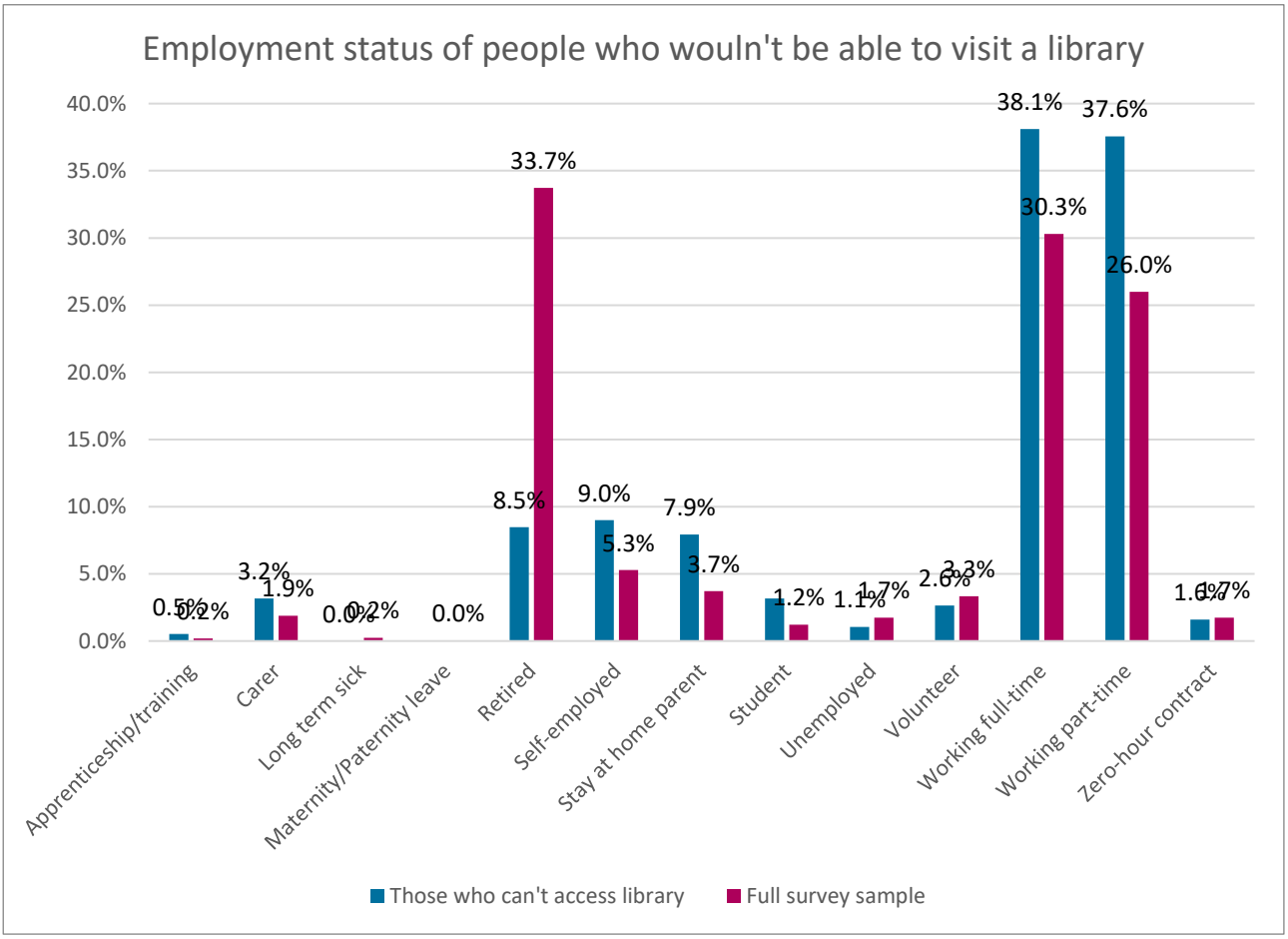
Parents (most likely responding on behalf of their children) are the group who are most likely to be excluded from libraries by these proposals. 76.3% of the people who said they (or their children) would not be able to access a library are aged between 25-54, yet only 47.8% of the overall survey sample were in this age group.

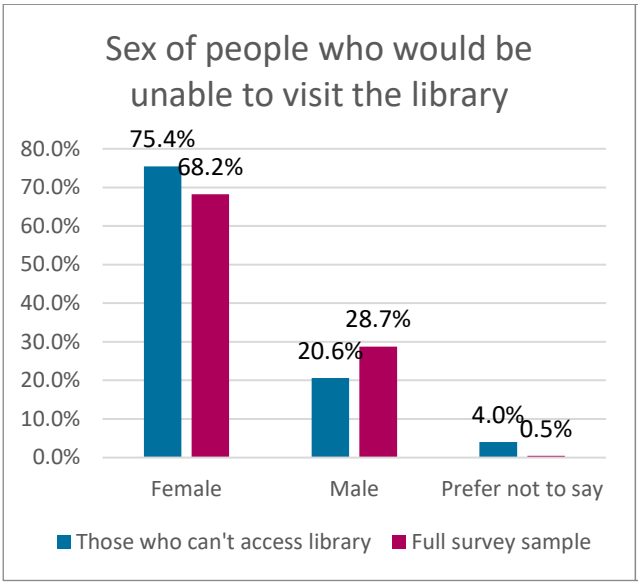
Stay at home parents would be impacted (7.9% of the excluded group), but working parents are even more likely to face this situation. 86.2% of the group who said they wouldn't be able to access a library work (63.3% of the full sample are in active work).

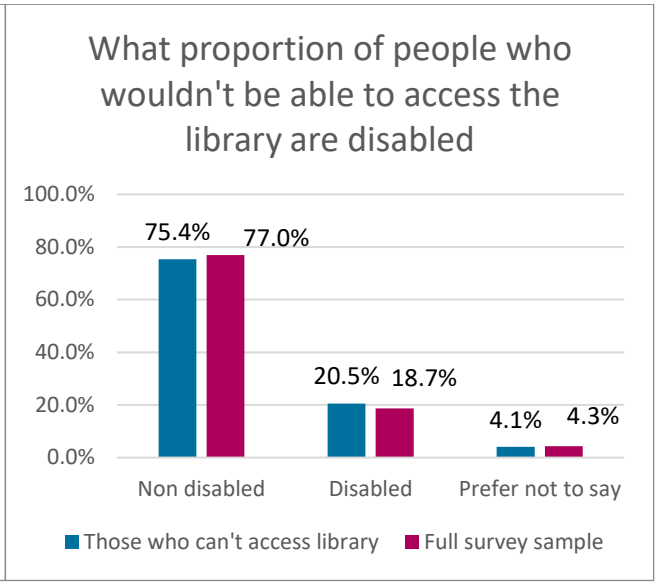
There was a far higher proportion of women than men who completed the consultation, but women are disproportionately more likely to say they wouldn't be able to visit a library because of the proposed changes. 20.5% of this most impacted group are disabled and 21.4% are from minority ethnic groups, again, slightly higher than the overall breakdown of survey respondents.

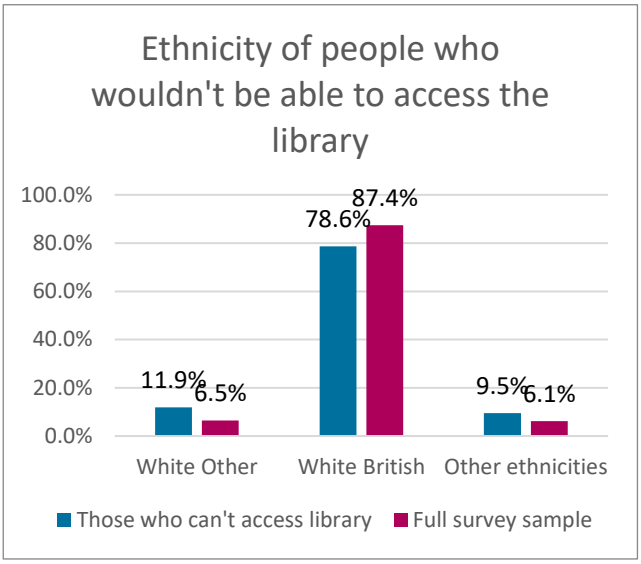
"Less hours at my library means less chance to visit. I already have few hours to visit due to my job and any reduction makes this worse."


Age of people who would be unable to visit the library
45.0%
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
0.3%
0.1%
3.6%
2.1%
17.4%
9.6%
39.8%
23.4%
19.1%
14.7%
6.9%
16.1%
7.9%
19.5%
1.6%
11.0%
1.6%
1.8%
1.6%
1.6%
Under 16
16-24
25-34
35-44
45-54
55-64
65-74
75-84
85 or over
Prefer not to say
Those who can't access library
Full survey sample


Employment status of people who wouln't be able to visit a library
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
0.5%
0.2%
3.2%
1.9%
0.0%
0.2%
0.0%
8.5%
33.7%
9.0%
5.3%
7.9%
3.7%
1.2%
1.1%
1.7%
2.6%
3.3%
38.1%
30.3%
37.6%
26.0%
1.6%
1.7%
Apprenticeship/training
Carer
Long term sick
Maternity/Paternity leave
Retired
Self-employed
Stay at home parent
Student
Unemployed
Volunteer
Working full-time
Working part-time
Zero-hour contract
Those who can't access library
Full survey sample







What might be the impacts of the proposals taken as a whole

The most mentioned potential impact of the cuts was from people concerned about fewer activities for young people, children and parents with babies and toddlers; Rhymetime and Lego clubs were especially popular.

"We love our local library, and my children love going to rhyme time, or to pick books out for the week. It feels like a backwards step to reduce opening times etc when it's vital for education and a lifeline for some in the community."

"My son who is autistic devours books and loves speaking to the fabulous staff about which new author he may enjoy next."

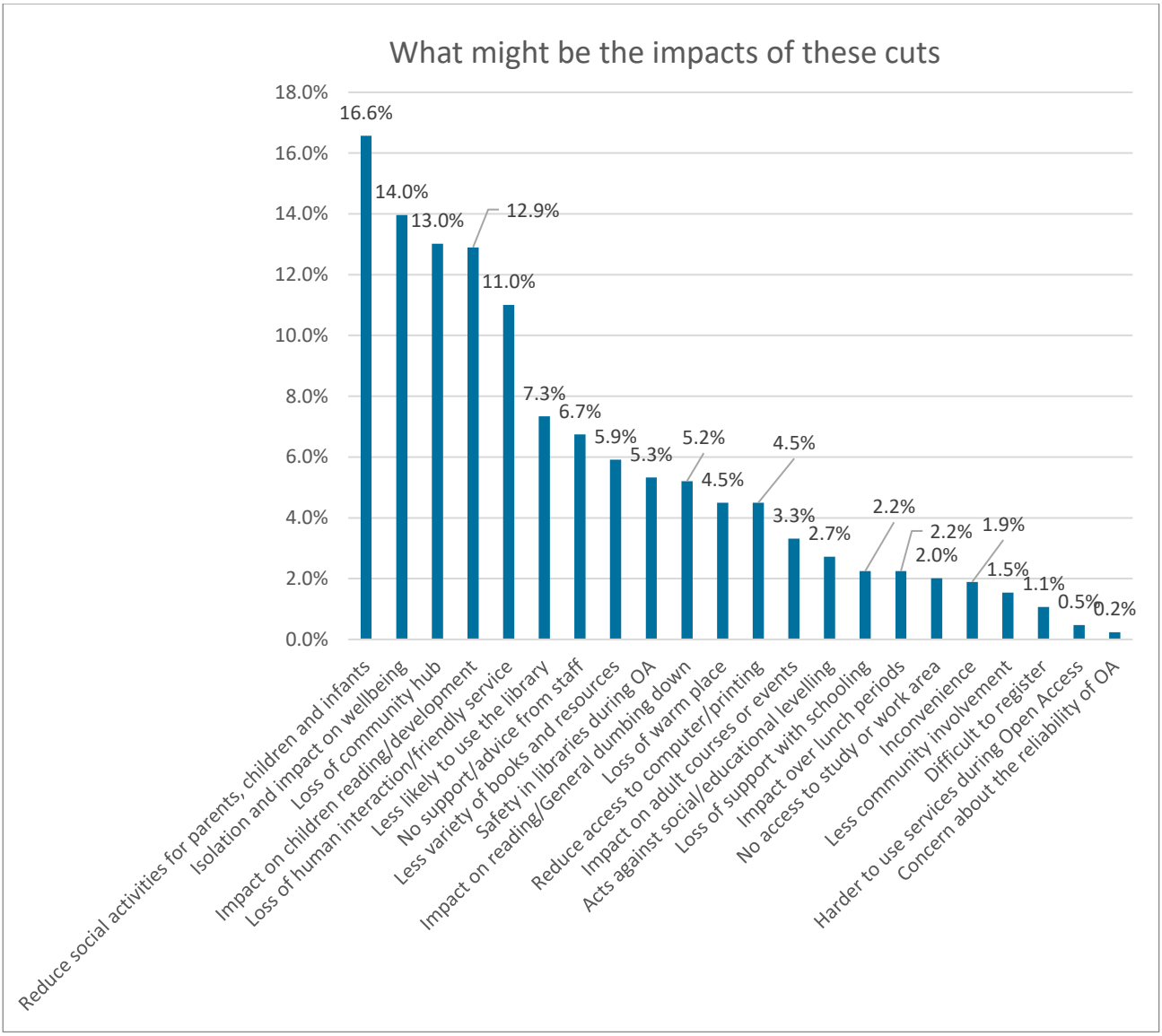
Libraries also play an important role in bringing communities together. 13% of respondents felt removing staff from libraries meant they could no longer perform the function of a

community hub and 14% believed this focus on Open Access would result in people becoming more isolated, with knock-on impacts on mental health.

Several respondents took the opportunity to talk about their positive experiences of using libraries and the helpfulness of librarians - 11% mentioned that an unstaffed library did not provide the same welcoming experience.

"These changes will potentially impact on vulnerable groups (such as long-term unemployed or those with mental health issues). Libraries provide an opportunity for human connections and interactions when they are staffed."

"Being a new parent can be very isolating. Some days they (librarians) were the only adults I spoke to."



Many people felt that whilst these cuts had been positioned through the consultation and surrounding messaging as quite small, the constant 'chipping away' at public services like libraries was having much broader negative societal impacts.

"Libraries are a vital safe, warm space for many of the most vulnerable in our society. From children for whom the library is an escape from a difficult home life and a safe place to study to the elderly and unemployed who have already been badly affected by the cost-of-living crisis and who may be unable to heat their homes. Reducing staffed hours will make libraries less safe and increase the risk of social issues."

12.9% of comments referred to the potential negative impact the changes could have on children's development and literacy. 2.2% mentioned that reduced staffed hours would make it harder to maintain links with schools and a further 2% focused on the potential loss of study space for young people after school. Over the longer term, people were worried that there would be a wider impact for education and reading levels (5.2%) and act against measures which help 'level up' society (2.7%).

"Reading is a fundamental life skill which enhances job prospects, wellbeing and mental health. Reducing this service could negatively impact children, particularly those under privileged and unable to afford to purchase the vast wealth of books available at the library."

4.5% welcomed the role libraries play in providing a warm place – especially important for the most vulnerable in society. Indeed, a homeless person completed the survey and mentioned the value libraries provide him not just as a place to warm up, but also for company, to charge his phone and to access books and computers.

Whilst most of the comments related to the replacement of staffed hours with Open Access, others mentioned the impacts of reducing the annual book budget. 5.9% of people felt the impact of this would be less variety of books and other resources in libraries.

"Reducing the amount spent on children's books and free activity sessions would mean children missing out on everything reading can offer. Having free access to a wide selection of free books can broaden the imagination and make children curious about so many things."

Others mentioned limitations of Open Access. Safety concerns deter some people from visiting a library when it is unstaffed and 5.3% of respondent highlighted this issue. 4.5% of the comments related to it being harder to access computers, printers and photocopiers during Open Access and 1.1% mentioned difficulties (especially for working people) to register for Open Access and believed that reduced staffed hours would make this process even less convenient.

6.7% of comments related to the support which librarians provide – either fixing issues with technology, helping people access services (especially disabled people who may find using libraries more challenging) or simply providing recommendations for books – support which is not available during Open Access hours.

"Staff are what makes the library a safe community space. Cut the staff and you take away the heart of the library; you take away the safety for women, girls and children."

Supportive commentary

To this point, the commentary and quotes presented in this section have been focused on people who have identified negative impacts of the potential changes. There were significant numbers of respondents who supported the proposals, but unfortunately there is very little within the commentary to explain the rationale for actively supporting cuts. The exception to this being a handful of people who said they preferred visiting the library during Open Access hours (including one young person who has autism and found staffed hours less appealing to being able to attend the library when it is quieter with fewer people).

There were also a very large number of people who either didn't provide feedback about the impact of changes or highlighted that a greater focus on Open Access would have no impact for them because they could simply visit at a different time. Whilst there are few comments which prove this, the priority for these people may have been to bank savings from the library service to either minimise reductions elsewhere or to help limit increases in council tax.

"I would be more likely to visit the library as I prefer going during open access due to being autistic."

"Shut the library and reduce council tax bills."

Which groups are *most likely* to be impacted

Reading respondents' commentary around potential impacts of the cuts, it was noteworthy how many people felt the direct implications for themselves would be limited but identified potentially much more significant affects for other groups.

The table below quantifies the number of comments from respondents highlighting potential impacts for certain groups in society.

Group highlighted	Number of comments
The poorest/most vulnerable/disadvantaged	76
Young people	74
The elderly	55

Parents/grandparents with young children	44
Working people	23
People with disabilities	19
People who struggle with technology	19
Rural communities	16
Job seekers	4

The group most people were concerned about were the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society. The following quote from a consultation respondent summarises the concerns of many.

"These proposed changes would have the greatest impact on the most vulnerable who often don't have internet or computer access and may need support using these facilities.

"They are the least likely to have a support network that enables them to access facilities offered at the library, elsewhere, say from friends or family. They are often struggling with mental health problems and need the friendliness and support of staff.

"They are least likely to be able to pay for books or access to services elsewhere.

"They are probably the least likely to be able to access this consultation and have their say and will be the most negatively impacted if these proposals go ahead."

Whilst the consultation was only completed by a handful of people aged under 16, this group were the next most mentioned as likely to be negatively impacted. Under 16s cannot register for Open Access and can't attend during Open Access times without an accompanying adult, which limits opportunities to study in the library – especially when the proposals would see staffed hours in the period after school cut. Some respondents suggested that this age restriction could be lowered to address this issue.

"I am a volunteer mentor with teenagers who are struggling with their mental health. (For many,) their home environments are not conducive to studying. They find researching and working in the library calming and a real aid to concentration.

"I'm particularly concerned about the impact on children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds for whom the library is the only place that they will encounter books. They cannot browse out of hours."

The potential impact of the cuts for children and young people is further emphasised by a paper produced by staff of the library service, which appears in the appendices to this report.

There was significant crossover in people's comments about 'older people' and 'people who may not be so familiar with technology', with assumptions that digital exclusion would prevent individuals accessing libraries during Open Access times. Linked to this were people who live in rural communities where bus services have been cut, which makes visiting a library that much harder.

However, as has been highlighted in the previous section of this report, it is unlikely that the most significant impact would be felt by older people. There were many more comments from retired people who said the proposals would not impact them as they have flexibility with their time and would simply visit a library at a different time.

The impact for people with disabilities mostly came in the form of second-hand feedback from other library users concerned about 'people who are more vulnerable than me'. A couple of respondents with disabilities (or family members with disabilities) mentioned how their personal circumstances meant they needed the support of staff to allow them to take full advantage of all that is on offer in a library.

"This will limit my disabled child going to the library and picking her own books due to the toilet facilities only being available during open hours. This will cause her to lose some independence which she needs as she's getting older. Teenagers don't want their mum to choose their books."

"As an elderly disabled widow with partial vision, using the library audio books is a lifeline and I simply cannot use the service without staff assistance. My grandson filled out this form for me."

Feedback from library staff

Library staff provide important feedback, being closest to the service and having a good understanding of the potential impacts of changes. Through the consultation, some staff provided detailed and specific feedback about challenges to implementing proposals and commentary about different ways of working. Whilst not published in full in this report, this feedback has been summarised in the 'Other ways to save money' section of this report and has been shared with the project team for consideration of their practicality.

The following tables show the difference in feedback on the main proposals between library staff members and other respondents.

Reducing annual budget for books and other materials by 25%

	Staff	Non-staff
Support	33.7%	22.7%
Opposed	49.0%	61.1%
Net support (opposition)	(15.3%)	(38.4%)

Restructure to reduce management costs

	Staff	Non-staff
Support	56.3%	66.9%
Opposed	18.8%	11.6%
Net support (opposition)	37.5%	55.3%

Reduction in Third Party costs associated with the Enquiry Service

	Staff	Non-staff
Support	73.8%	61.0%
Opposed	4.0%	8.1%
Net support (opposition)	69.8%	52.9%

Reduced staffed hours in libraries

	Staff	Non-staff
Support	5.0%	26.4%
Opposed	92.0%	58.0%
Net support (opposition)	(87.0%)	(31.6%)

Whilst staff express the same views as wider respondents about which of the proposals are supported and which ones are opposed, the strength of that support/opposition to the individual proposals is very different.

The most significant difference relates to the proposal to reduce staffed hours in libraries, where there is net opposition of 31.6% amongst library users, but the comparative figure for staff is opposition of 87%. The next biggest gap relates to the proposal to reduce the book budget. Whilst more staff are opposed than supportive of this change, this is to a much lesser degree; the net opposition to this measure for staff is 15.3%, whilst for library users, there is 38.4% net opposition.

Library staff are less supportive than other respondents of a restructure to reduce management costs but are more supportive of the proposal to reduce costs associated with the Enquiry Service.

Responses from people identifying themselves as staff working in libraries represented 2.6% of all responses, so this discrepancy will have had limited impact in skewing overall feedback (though it should be noted that in the question which asked about impacts of the changes, over 200 people told us that there would be an impact on their work or hours, which may indicate that more staff completed the survey than the number who identified as being library staff.)

A written response was received from Unison, presenting issues raised by staff. This response is provided in full in the appendices.

Online versus hard copy feedback

Paper copies accounted for a much higher percentage (26.5%) of overall responses to this consultation than the council usually receives for consultations. And as we have seen, there are significant differences in feedback between the responses of people who completed the survey online and people who handed in a paper copy.

As the tables below show, people who provided their feedback via a paper response were significantly more negative about each of the four proposals than people who responded online, with the largest differences relating to reducing staffed hours in libraries (net opposition was 36.8% higher for people completing a paper response) and for restructuring the service to reduce management costs (net support 24.5% lower for people completing a paper response).

The feedback was much more aligned (gap of 5.3%) when people were asked for their views about reductions to the annual budget for books.

Cuts to the budget for books

	Online	Paper
Support	23.6%	20.2%
Opposed	60.8%	62.7%
Net support (opposition)	(37.2%)	(42.5%)

Restructure to reduce management costs

	Online	Paper
Support	70.6%	55.9%
Opposed	9.2%	19.0%
Net support (opposition)	61.4%	36.9%

Removing the budget for the Third-Party Enquiry Service

	Online	Paper
Support	65.0%	48.4%
Opposed	9.2%	14.4%
Net support (opposition)	54.8%	34.0%

Reducing staffed hours in libraries

	Online	Paper
Support	30.5%	14.4%
Opposed	52.9%	73.6%
Net support (opposition)	(22.4%)	(59.2%)

Which groups were more likely to complete paper responses

In trying to explore reasons for these differences, analysis has been completed comparing the demographic data of people who completed the survey online versus people who provided feedback on a paper copy.

This is not especially helpful in explaining why there might be such significant differences in feedback. As the table below shows, people who completed paper copies were significantly:

- ***More*** likely to be aged 65 or over,
- ***Less*** likely to be aged 25-44 or 45-64,
- ***More*** likely to be women,
- ***More*** likely to be disabled,
- ***Less*** likely to be library users,
- ***Less*** likely to be parents or grandparents of children or young people who use a library,
- ***More*** likely to be part of a community group who use a library,
- ***More*** likely to not be registered for Open Access (also more likely to be registered - online respondents were less likely to answer this question).

	Paper	Online
Aged 25-44	28.8%	36.8%
Aged 45-64	24.9%	32.5%
Aged 65 or over	45.2%	28.7%
Men	26.7%	29.7%
Women	71.6%	66.6%
Disabled	20.2%	17.9%
Non-disabled	76.0%	77.5%
Parent/grandparent of a child or young library user	25.1%	31.3%
Registered library user (aged 16 or over)	90.0%	95.0%
A member of a community group who use a library	12.3%	5.8%
Registered for Open Access	43.6%	41.4%
Not registered for Open Access	56.3%	51.1%

If the patterns in support/opposition by demographic trends we have seen in the overall data were overlaid onto the paper responses, you might expect the results to be pushed in the *opposite* direction to that which we have seen.

For example, considering the age of respondents, older people (who account for a much higher proportion of paper responses) were the age group who were least concerned about each of the four proposals and people aged 25-44 (who account for a relatively low proportion of paper responses) were the most opposed – particularly to the proposal to cut staffed hours in libraries. Similarly, parents and grandparents of young library users (under-represented in paper responses) were one of the groups who were most opposed

to the cuts. Also, people who completed paper copies were less likely than people who submitted feedback online to be active library users, a somewhat unusual result.

There are some factors which do support the findings, for example the higher proportion of women and disabled people who completed paper copies, but these are much smaller in scale. These patterns make the results of the paper copies very difficult to explain.

Perhaps the most likely explanation is that most people completing a paper copy will have received the survey having visited a library, so it may be that these are also the people who get most value from attending a library in person and are therefore most opposed to the measures. Key to this, however, is how proactively staff in different libraries have promoted completion of paper copies of the consultation as shown by the differing proportion of paper copies completed by attendees of different libraries.

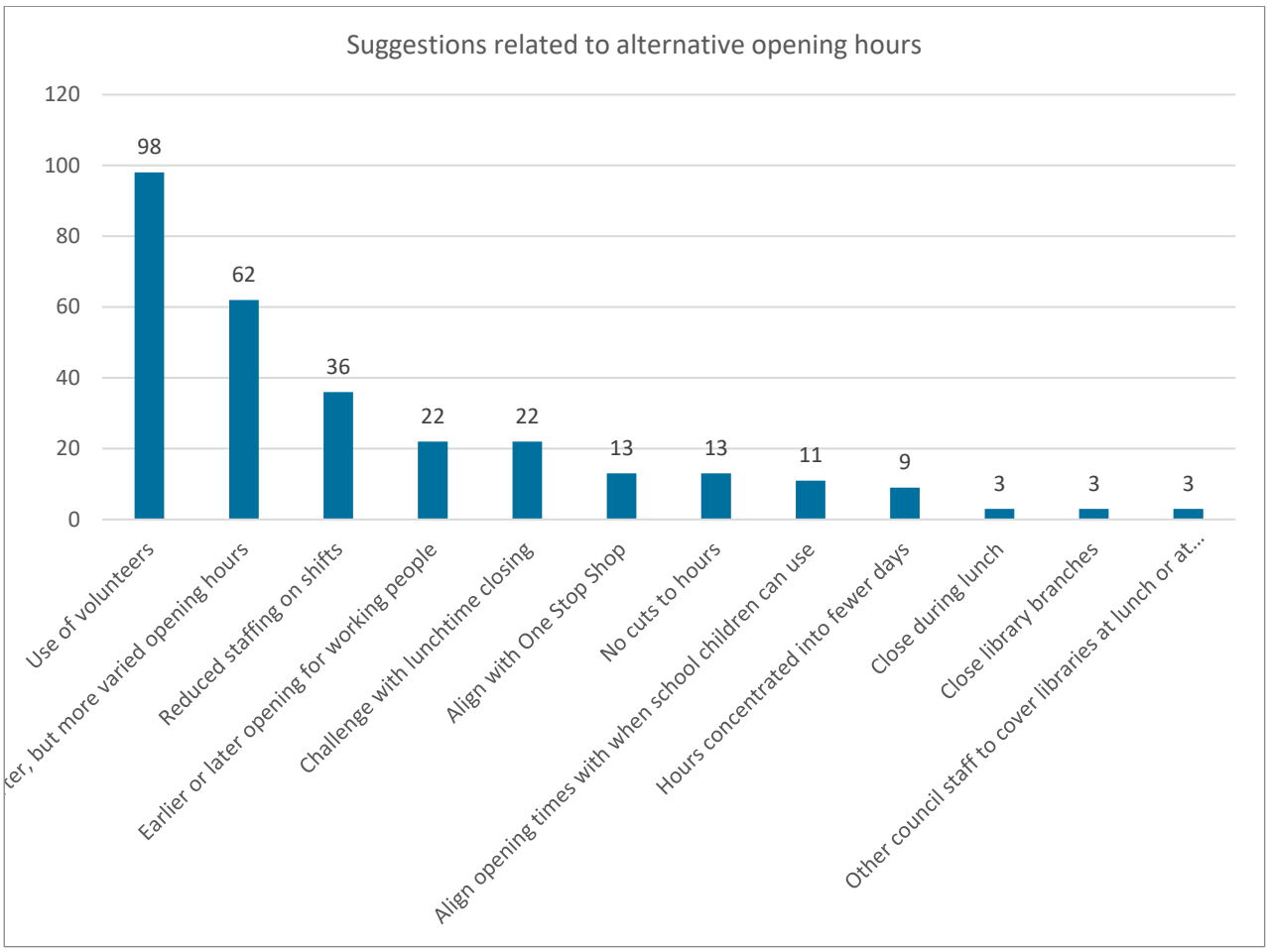
Main library	Percentage paper responses
Hanham	50.30%
Kingswood	41.40%
Winterbourne	38.40%
Cadbury Heath	38.00%
Thornbury	36.40%
Downend	34.10%
Bradley Stoke	30.20%
Yate	20.40%
Patchway	17.30%
Filton	17.00%
Staple Hill	16.90%
Emersons Green	14.90%

Respondents whose local library was Hanham were the most opposed to the measures and this is also the library which had the highest proportion of paper responses (50.3% of all responses from Hanham library users were paper copies). Contrast this with Emersons Green, where paper copies accounted for only 14.9% of all responses.

Alternative proposals/Other ways to save money

Opening hours

Included within the proposals for reduced staffed hours were recommendations for which hours at which libraries might be switched to Open Access time. The following graph shows feedback related to these suggestions.



The most common suggestion (98 responses) was that the library service take on more volunteers to cover the cuts to staffed hours. Other suggestions to prevent the need for reducing opening hours included:

- Reducing the number of staff in libraries at any one time and thus allowing the same number of 'man hours' to be spread over extended opening times (36 responses).
- Merging libraries with One Stop Shops/other council buildings to allow cover from other teams (13 responses).
- Asking staff in other council teams to cover additional library hours (3 responses).
- Closing less-used libraries to concentrate hours in other libraries (3 responses).

In the impacts section of this report, we have highlighted that school children and working people are the groups which are most likely to lose out with the reduced staffed hours. Many of the comments about the proposed opening hours were related to making it easier for these groups to access libraries. Suggestions included:

- Reducing overall hours, but varying opening times on different days (62 responses).
- Earlier or later opening times to accommodate working people (22 responses).
- Aligning opening times with when school children can use (11 responses).
- Hours concentrated into fewer, longer days (9 responses).

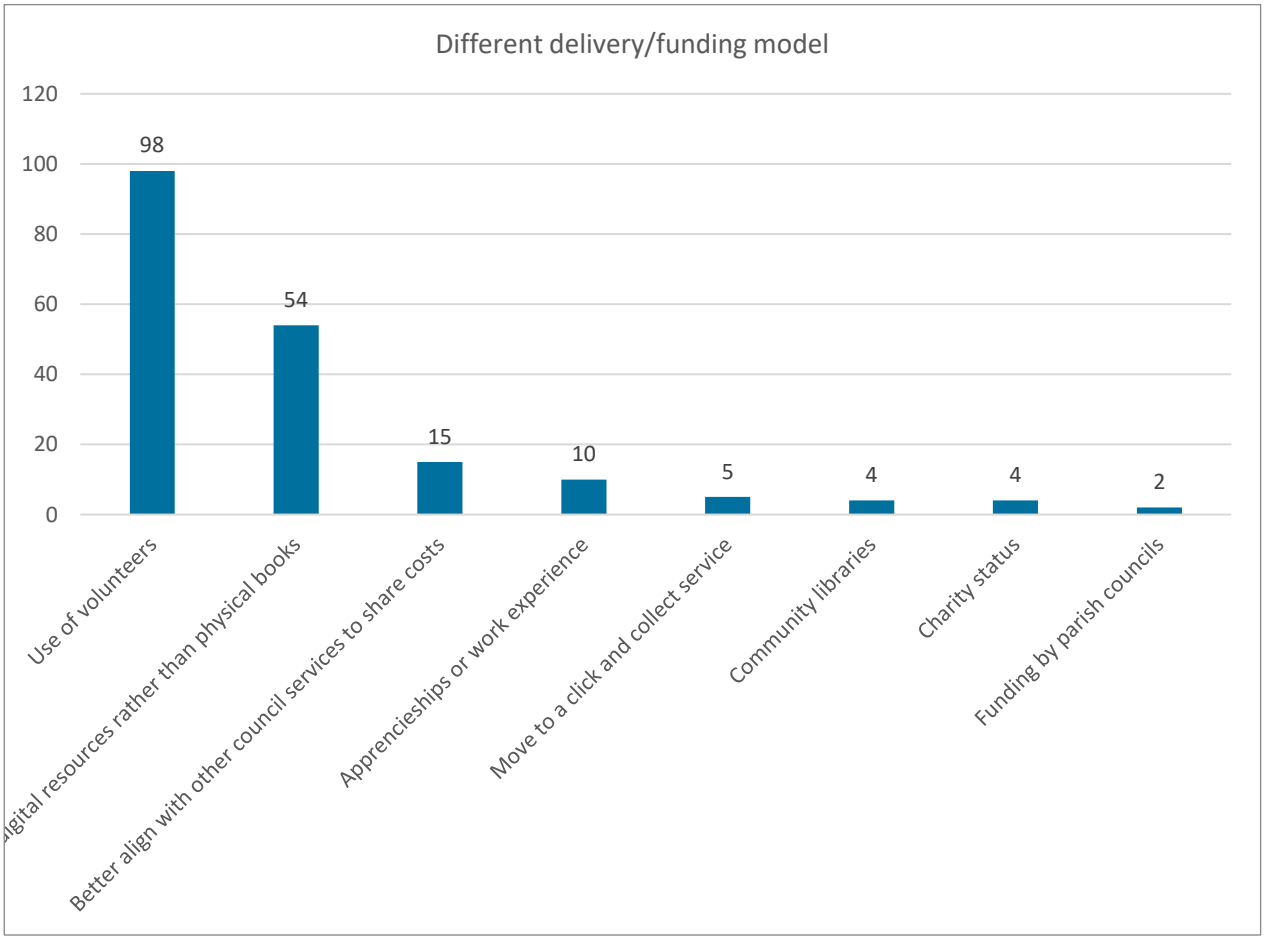
22 people highlighted potential practical challenges with closing libraries at lunchtime, with concerns about disrupting users for short periods and potential conflict.

Alternative delivery/funding models

As highlighted in the previous section, 98 people felt the answer to the library funding conundrum lay in using more volunteers to provide library services. 54 people thought part of the solution could be further reducing the book budget by switching from physical items to digital resources. 15 people wondered if there was scope to better align library services with wider council services to share costs (an extension of the suggestion above for merging with One Stop Shop buildings/staff). As well as volunteers, 10 people felt libraries could be staffed by apprentices or work experience staff to save costs.

"Merge libraries with other local service provisions. Can the provision of local services be provided at libraries or can the libraries be staffed by people who provide local services at those hubs. This would reduce staffing costs and possibly allow libraries to be open for longer periods of time."

More radical suggestions included moving to a click and collect only service for borrowing items (5 respondents), handing libraries over to local communities to run (4 respondents) or securing funding from parish councils to maintain existing opening hours (2 respondents). 4 people asked if it was possible for libraries to apply for charity status.



Reducing costs of library services

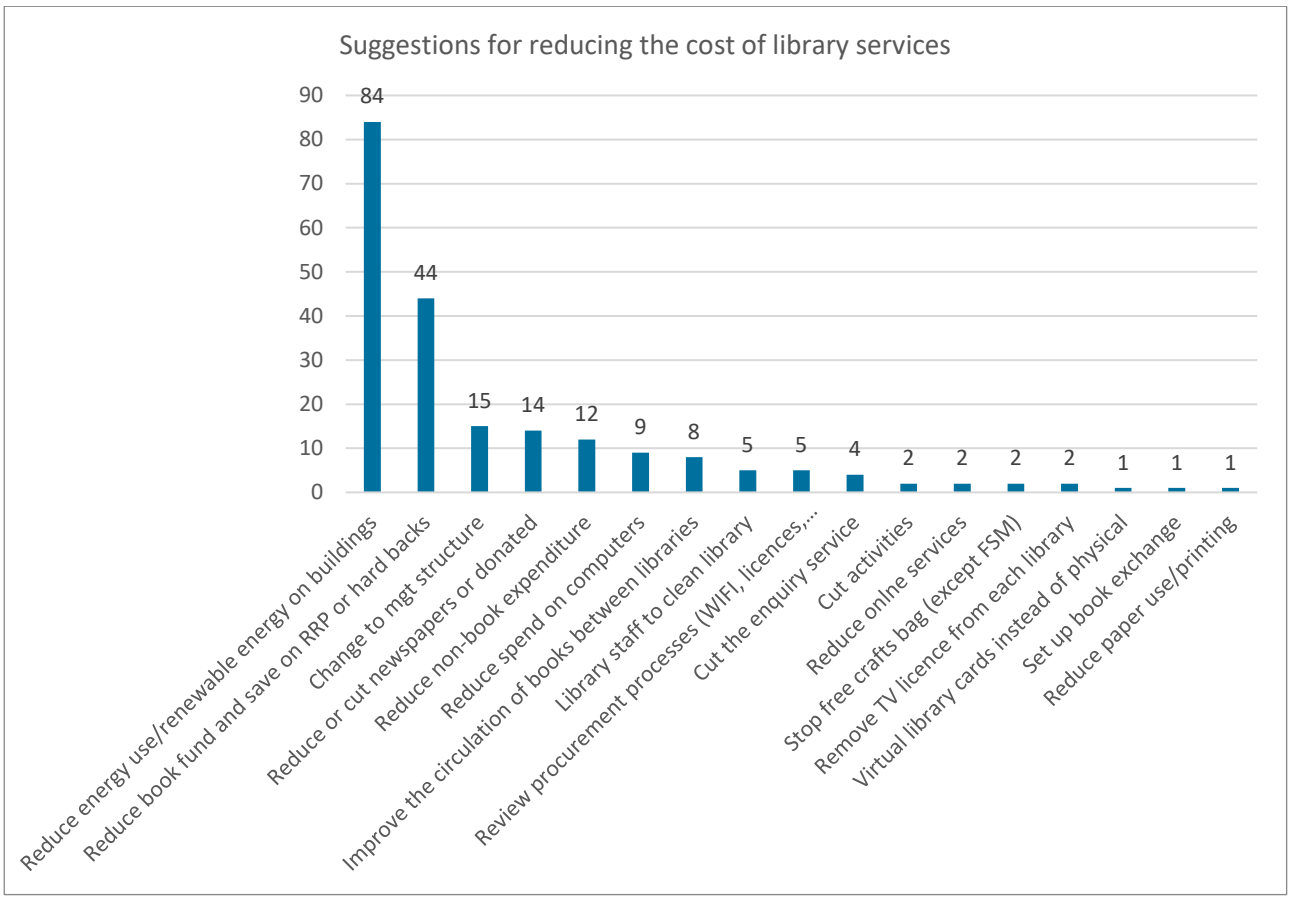
Respondents were invited through the consultation to identify potential opportunities to reduce costs. Several suggestions were made, although clearly some of these would deliver somewhat limited savings.

Most ideas related to reducing what is spent on library resources – readers of this report should be made aware that staffing costs account for by far the largest proportion of the costs of delivering the library service and the proposed 25% cut in the annual book budget will deliver only £50,000 of the total savings required.

"Publish a regularly updated list of desired stock items which users could donate after reading them. Many of us get good new items which we don't need to keep and would be happy to share with our community via the library. Some people may be willing to buy items specifically for the library."

Whilst these measures may not deliver the full savings, there could be merit in some of the suggestions, which included:

- Reducing the spend on books by encouraging donations from the public or charities. (115 responses)
- Reducing purchase of hard back books (44 responses)
- Reducing spend on newspapers (14 responses)
- Reducing non-book expenditure (12 responses)
- Reducing spend on computers (9 responses)
- Improving rotation of items between libraries (8 responses)
- Charging for craft bags (2 responses)



84 people identified ways to reduce energy use in libraries (mostly by switching lights to be controlled by motion sensors or by turning down the heating) or suggested that library buildings could make better use of renewable energy through solar panels.

- 15 people thought the council could go further in reducing the management costs of the library service.
- Five people thought that librarians could add cleaning the library to their list of duties.
- Five others wondered if there was scope to make savings by reviewing procurement processes to cut spend on things like wifi costs and licences
- Two people thought there was no need for each library to have a tv licence given the limited use.
- Another respondent thought there was a cost saving to be made through only offering virtual library cards rather than a physical printed card.

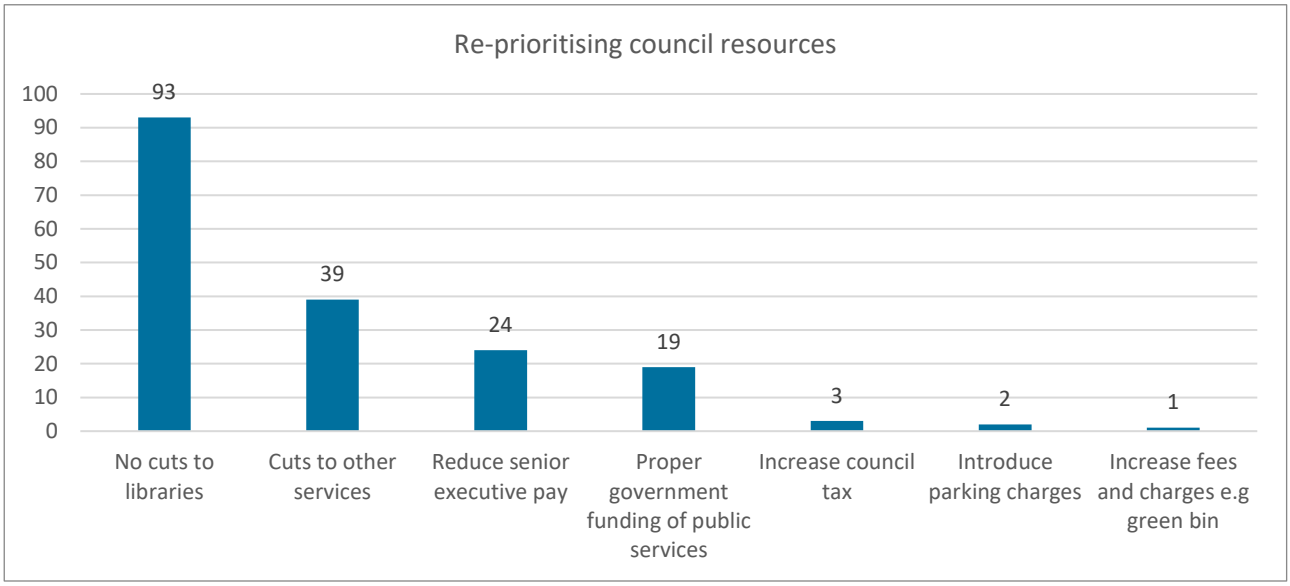
Other respondents believed cutting the range of services libraries provide was the best way forward, with online services and activities for children identified as opportunities to save money.

Re-prioritising council resources

The high number of responses to the consultation shows the affection that is held for the services provided and many respondents felt that the answer was to re-think the savings target attributed to the library service.

- 39 people wanted cuts to be made to other council services.

- 24 people thought that money for libraries could be found by reducing the pay of senior executives at the council.
- 19 respondents believed the issue lay further up the food chain and wanted proper funding of public services from Central Government.
- Three people were happy to pay more in council tax to pay for library services to be retained.
- A further three respondents believed more money could be saved from the other proposals put forward in this year's budget consultation: parking charges and green bin charges.



Income generation ideas

110 survey respondents felt the easiest way to generate income would be through hiring out space in library buildings (with many suggestions for what the space could be used for); a further 37 believed with the footfall in libraries especially amongst parents with young children, there might be income generation opportunities from offering café facilities or charging for refreshments. Young parents were also the target market for six respondents who believed there was potential to use libraries as venues for parties for toddlers and younger children.

"Expand and generate income to keep libraries as a focal point for the community. How about the coffee shop - library experience? (it goes down very well in Waterstones)."

"Organise events in libraries and charge for them (see https://programminglibrarian.org/programs/laser-tag-library

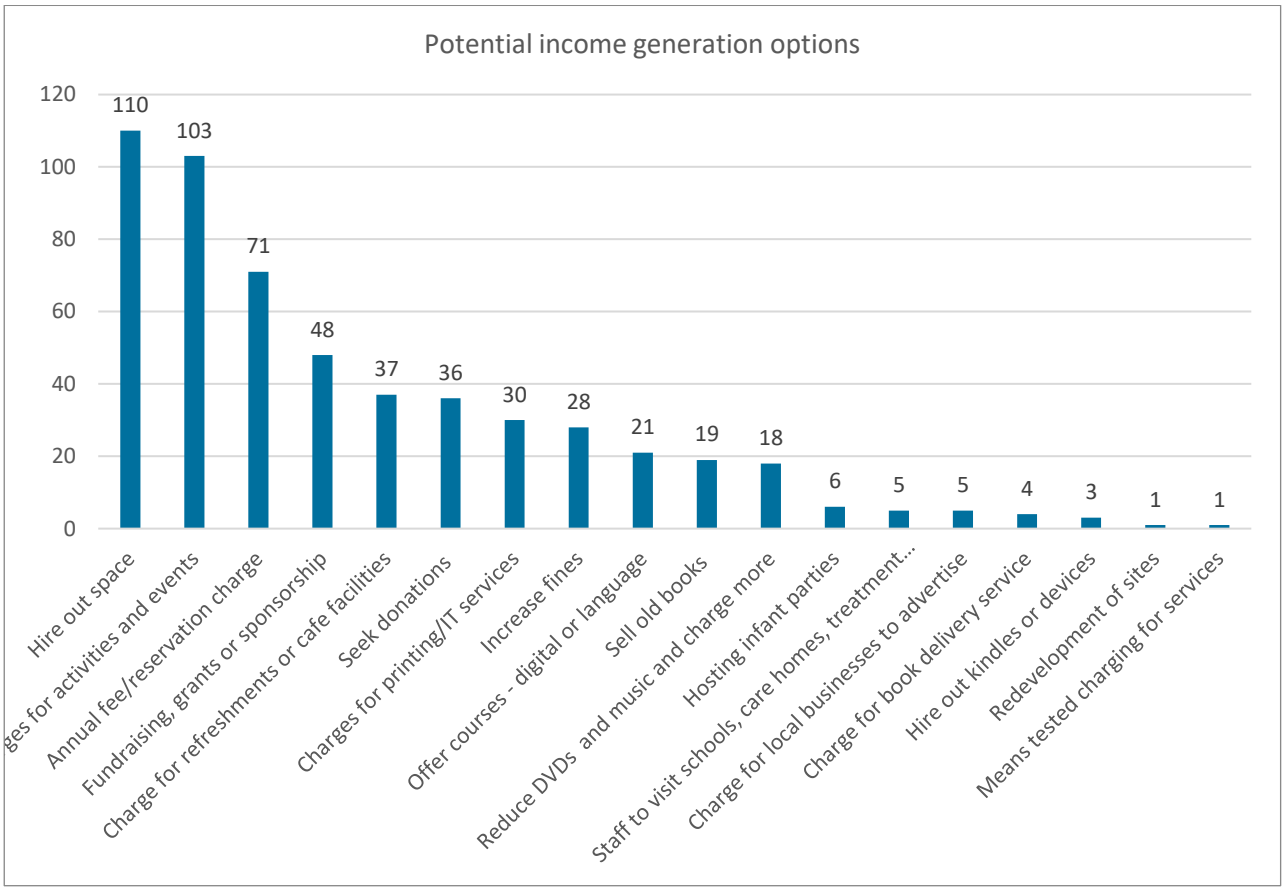
https://programminglibrarian.org/programs

Author events! book fairs! Loads of options!"

One respondent discussed ideas for redeveloping the site which Thornbury library sits on to generate income for the council.

Several people asked if the council could generate income by charging (or charging more) for various library services:

- Introducing charges for activities and events (103 responses)
- Annual fees for using library services or reservation charges (71 responses)
- Charging/charging more for printing or IT services (30 responses)
- Increasing fines (28 responses)
- Charging for hiring out DVDs and music (18 responses)
- Charging for book delivery service (four responses)
- Charging for services (means tested) (one response)



Others thought that with reduced funding available from the council that to preserve services, alternative financing sources would need to be secured by fundraising, grants or sponsorship (48 responses) or by seeking external donations (36 responses).

"Libraries could run a lottery similar to charity shops where books etc could be won monthly."

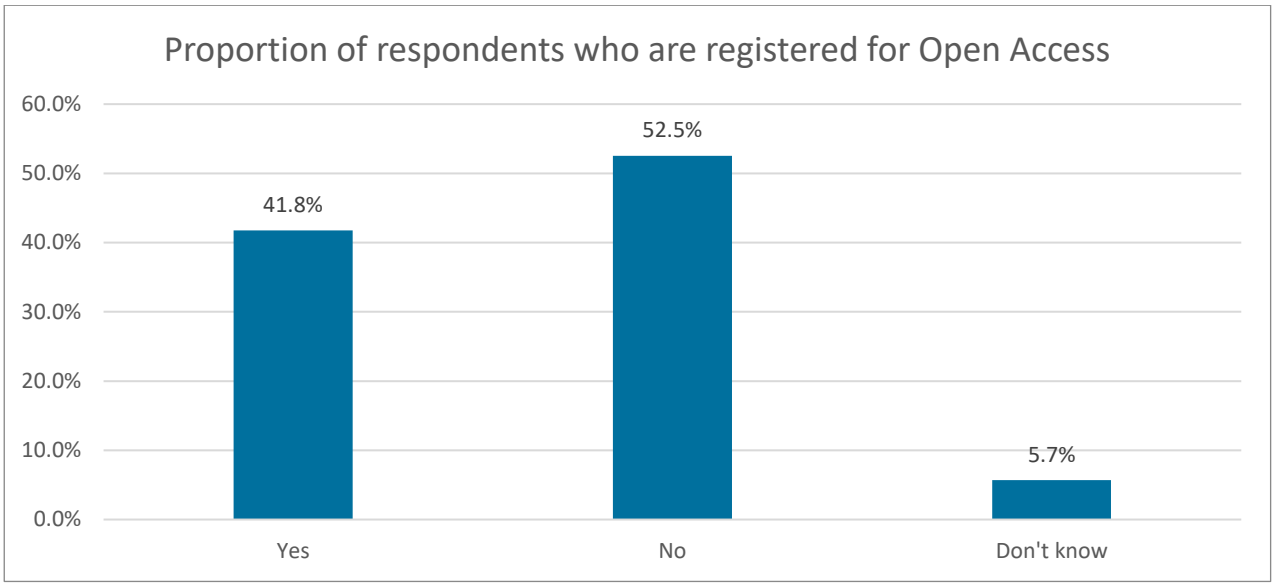
One particularly enthusiastic respondent came up with numerous suggestions, which are detailed in full in the appendices.

Finally, there was also sympathy from some quarters about the challenging financial position the council faces and support for the way the proposals had been designed to make saving whilst keeping library branches open.

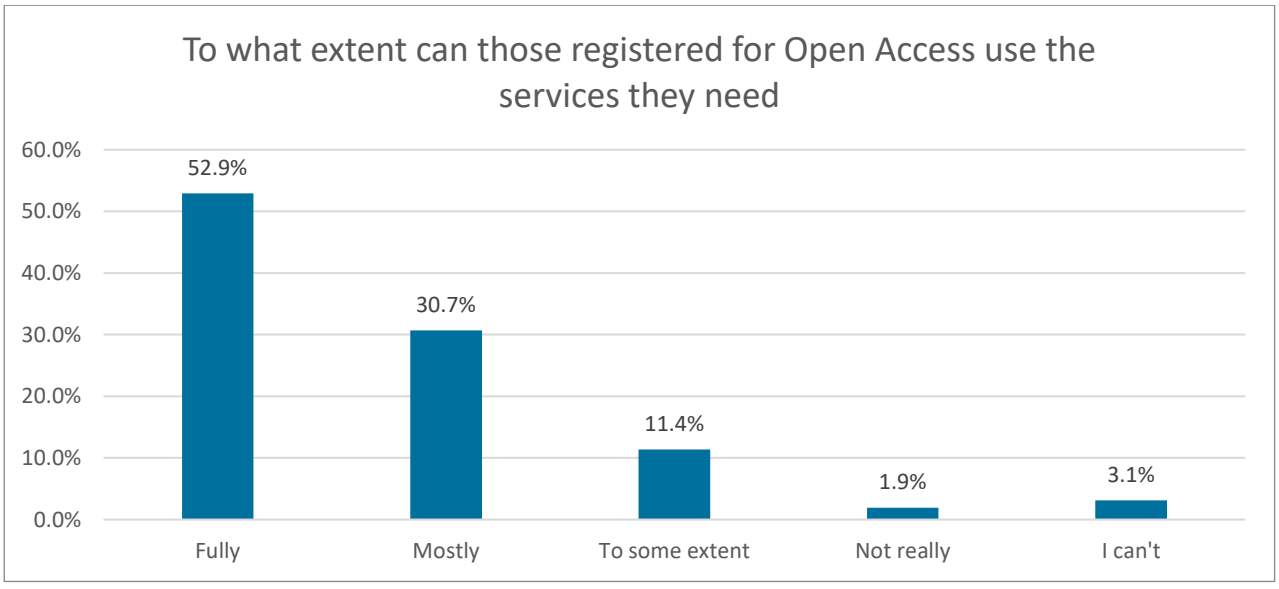
"Given the decisions you are having to make, the proposed hours look sensible. We appreciate that you are not closing any libraries."

Open Access

41.8% of respondents to the survey told us they were registered for Open Access – this compares with our observed data, which….



Feedback on Open Access from people who are registered is positive, with 83.6% of this group of survey respondents saying they can either 'fully' or 'mostly' access the services they need during Open Access hours.



For most people who have said they can't access what they need during Open Access, it is not typically library *services* that they are primarily talking about, it is the value add that comes from having staff in a library:

- Recommendations from librarians,
- Support if something goes wrong,
- Children's activities e.g. Rhymetime,
- Loss of a 'community hub'.

The key practical things which respondents highlight as not being available during Open Access include toilets and photocopying.

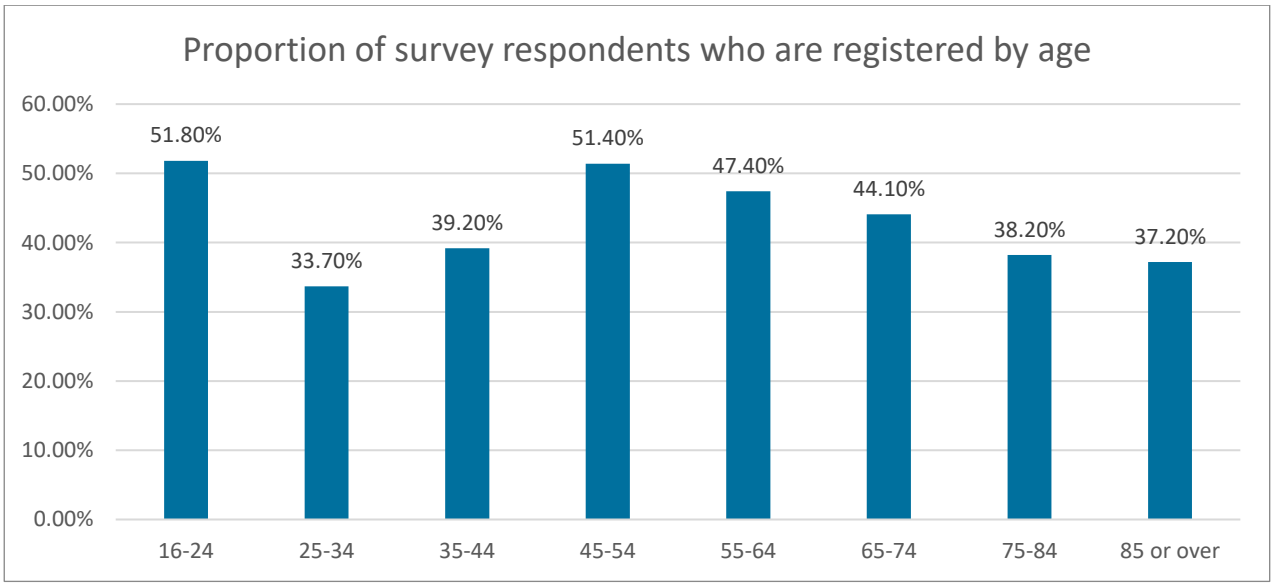
"It is a completely different feel during Open Access. It is eerie and unsettling without anyone else there. Libraries are supposed to be a community hub."

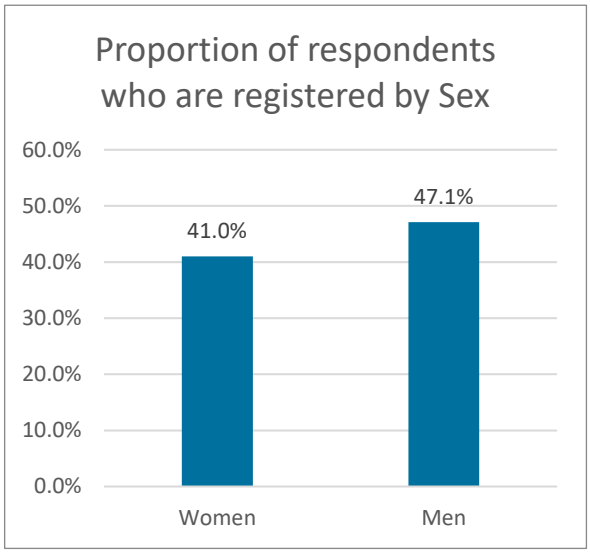
Which groups are more likely to have registered for Open Access?

Within our survey sample, there were some groups who were more likely to be registered for Open Access. This includes:

- People aged between 16-24 or 45-54
- Men
- People registered with Emersons Green, Bradley Stoke, Filton or Winterbourne libraries.

This reflects the pattern amongst all registered library users, suggesting our sample group is representative.

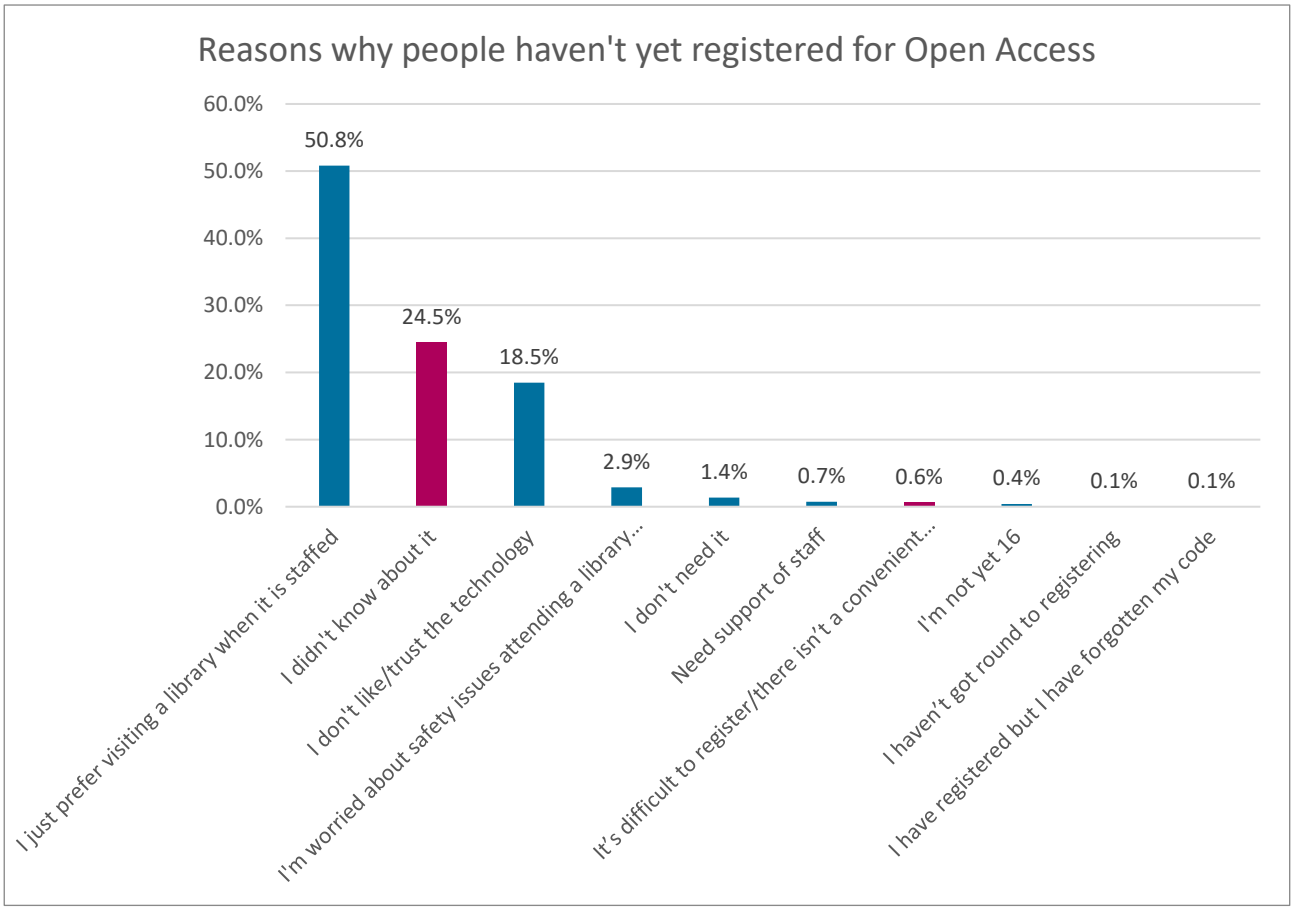




Library	Percentage registered for Open Access
Emersons Green	53.1%
Bradley Stoke	50.5%
Filton	50.5%
Winterbourne	47.6%
Thornbury	42.5%
Kingswood	42.3%
Cadbury Heath	42.0%
Staple Hill	42.0%
Patchway	41.5%
Downend	37.4%
Hanham	37.3%
Yate	31.0%

Of those who aren't yet registered for Open Access, there is potential for more people to sign up. 25.6% of respondents told us they weren't aware of Open Access, found it difficult to register, were not yet old enough to register for Open Access or just haven't got round to registering.

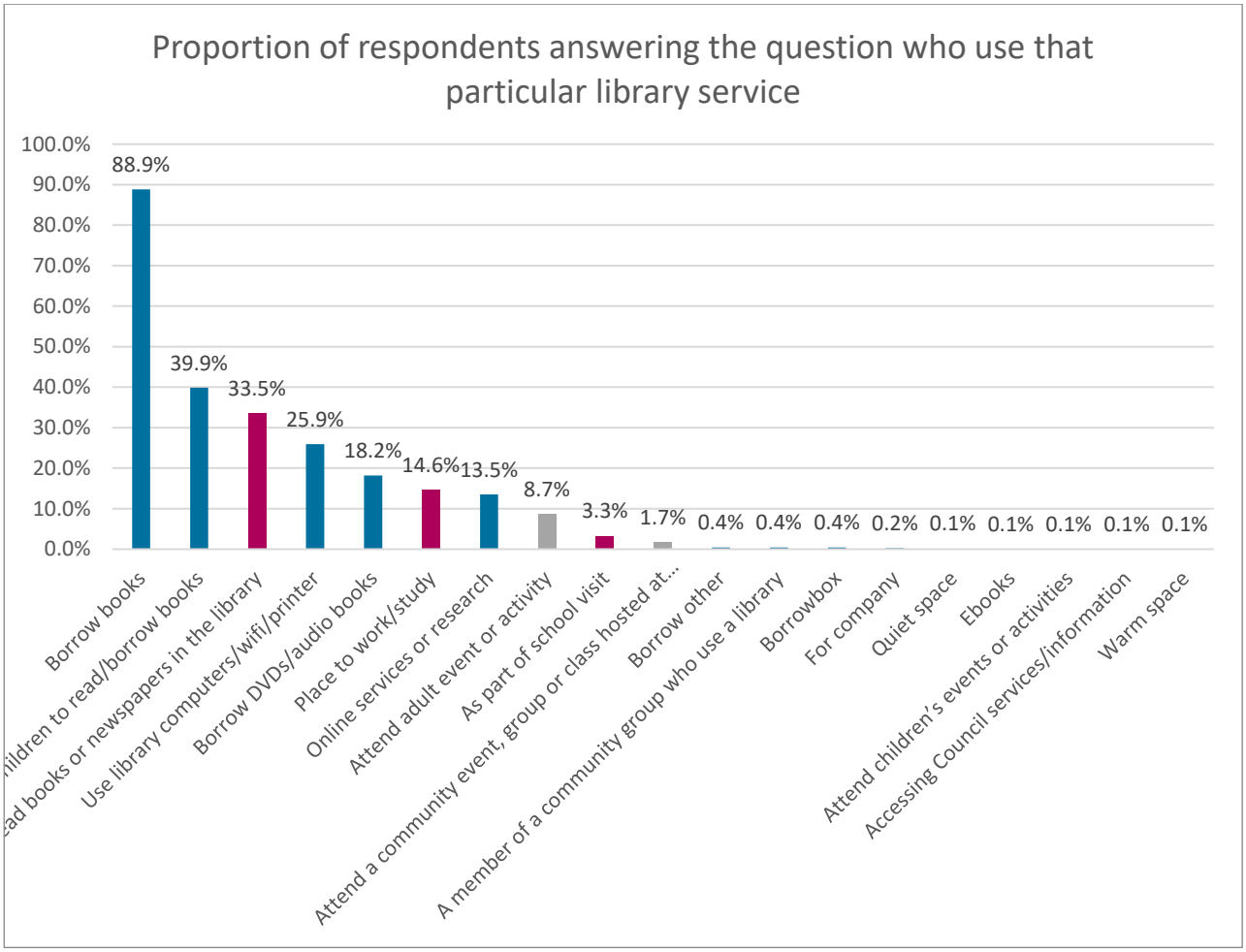
This leaves three quarters who are still to be convinced about the need for/benefits of Open Access. Most of this group said they just prefer visiting the library when it is staffed, but there are others who are concerned about the technology or the safety aspects of Open Access.



What people use the library for

Libraries today are so much more than just a place where you can borrow books, although this remains their core function, with 88.9% of people who responded to this question saying they borrowed books. A large proportion of the survey respondents are either parents or grandchildren and 39.9% of people who answered this question said that they visit the library with children and young people (Rhymetime and Lego clubs organised by libraries were especially popular).

Whilst most people attend a library to take advantage of core services like borrowing items, using computers or completing research, libraries also perform the function of a community hub. Many people talked about spending time in libraries to enjoy reading, as a place where they could find company (or indeed quiet!), and a further group who visit library buildings to attend events – both organised by the library service and other community groups.



Blue bars: Use core library services
Purple bars: Pleasant place to be
Grey bars: Attend library for events (both organised by libraries and community groups)

Broader suggestions, comments and feedback

Concerns about consultation

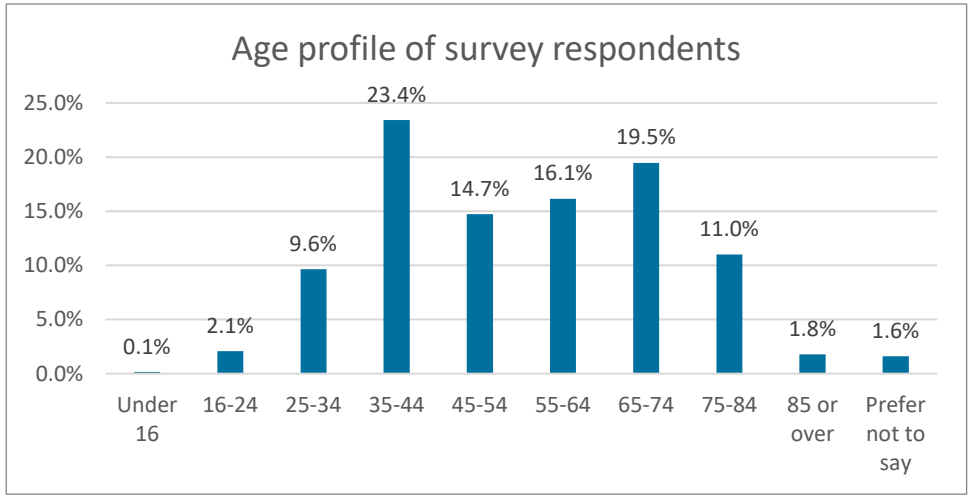
The council is regularly accused of not listening to local people and several respondents commented through the consultation that they didn't think it mattered what they said, and that decisions have already been made. This report, which will be shared with decision-makers to consider alternative ideas and proposals and help them agree if and how to proceed with any proposals, will also be published in full, giving respondents the chance to see what others have said.

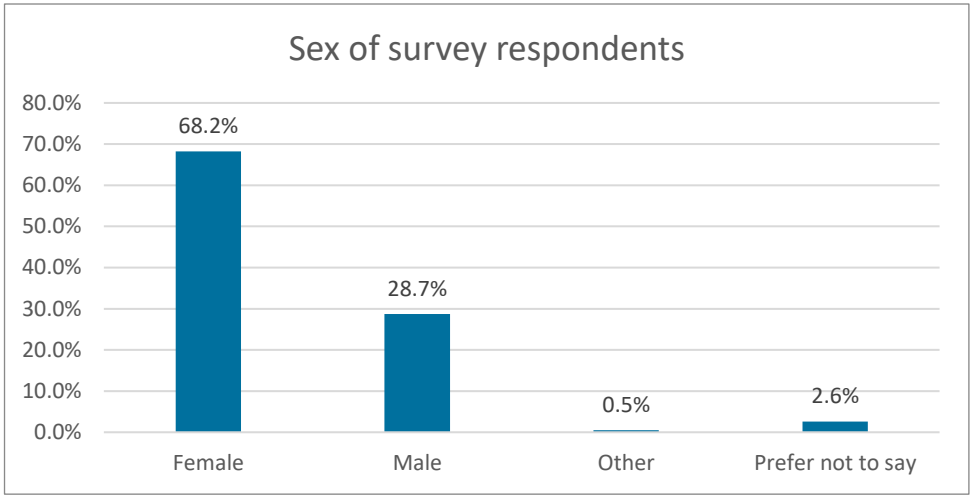
General feedback on the service

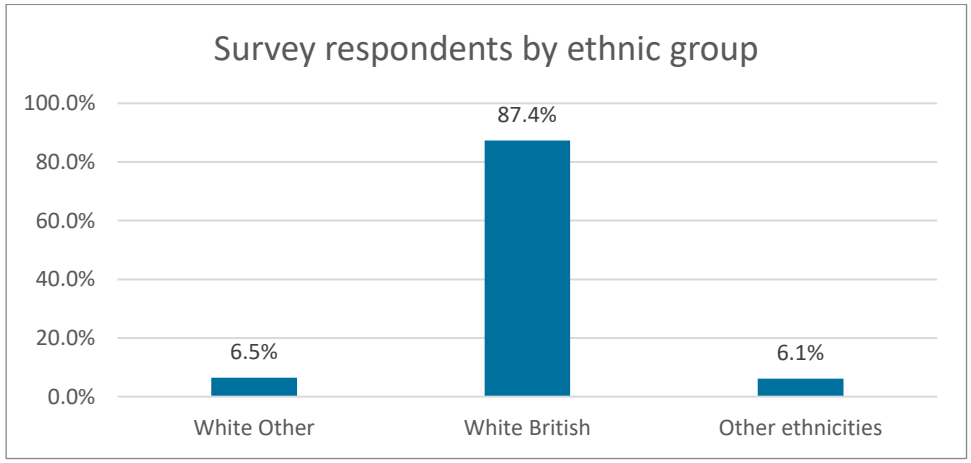
People took the opportunity through the survey to comment on library staff and services, with overwhelmingly positive feedback on librarians and the professionalism and care with which they perform their roles. Many individual staff were highlighted with comments about the positive difference library services make to people's lives. Comments have been sent to the service to be shared with library staff.

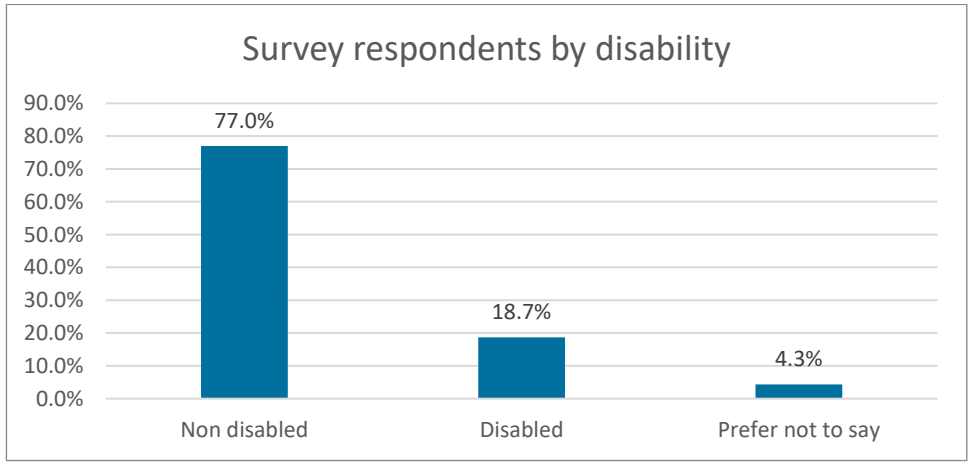
Appendix 1: Survey respondents

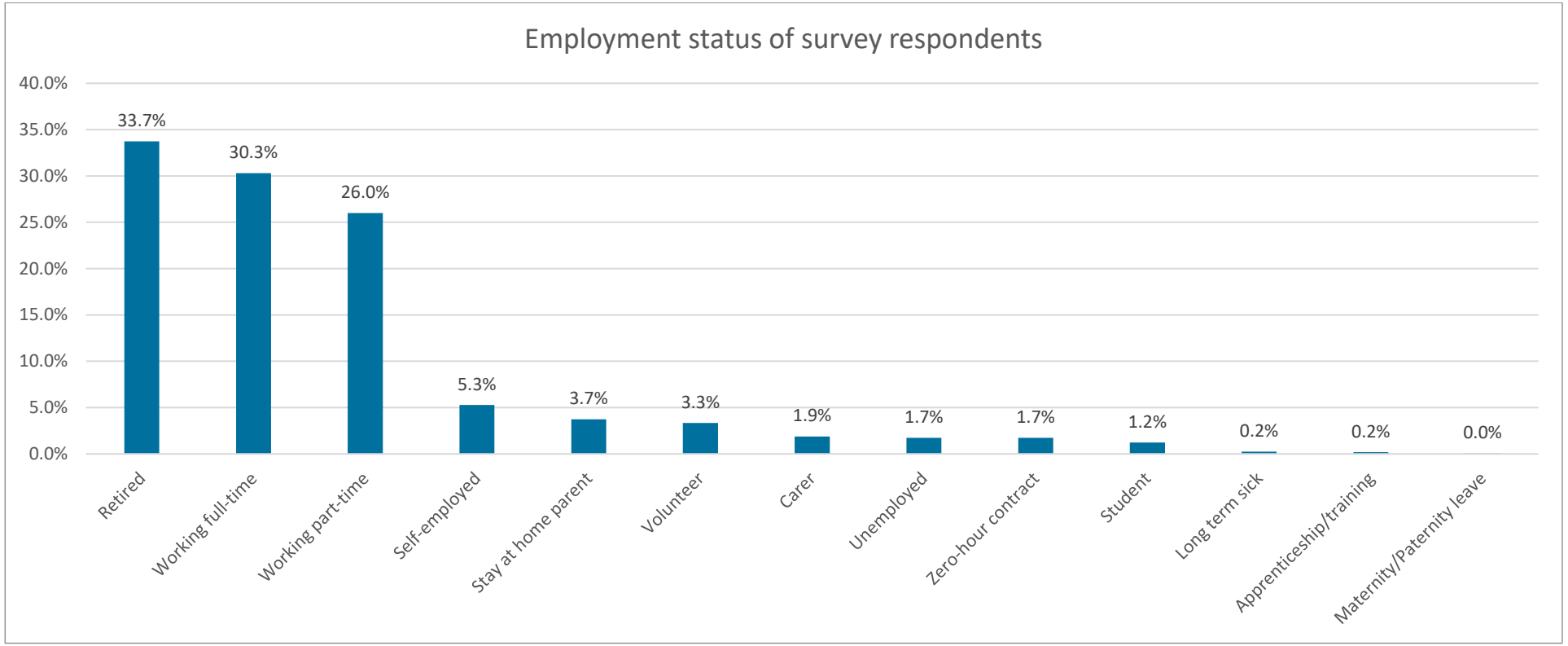
Whilst the survey sample is large, it is not fully representative of the local population. There were fewer responses from people aged under 35 and women were much more likely to complete the survey than men. It would have been especially helpful to capture a first-hand account from young people –there were only four responses from people aged under 16 and much of the analysis about potential impacts comes from their parents' or grandparents' perspective.










Employment status of survey respondents
40.0%
35.0%
30.0%
25.0%
20.0%
15.0%
10.0%
5.0%
0.0%
33.7%
30.3%
26.0%
5.3%
3.7%
3.3%
1.9%
1.7%
1.7%
1.2%
0.2%
0.2%
0.0%
Retired
Working full-time
Working part-time
Self-employed
Stay at home parent
Volunteer
Carer
Unemployed
Zero-hour contract
Student
Long term sick
Apprenticeship/training
Maternity/Paternity leave

Appendix 2: Specific income generation opportunities

- Readathons to raise money, in collaboration with schools across South Glos. I've seen other libraries raise thousands of pounds by asking parents to sponsor their children to read for 1 hour.
- Organise events in the spaces we have and charge for them (see https://programminglibrarian.org/programs/laser-tag-library & https://programminglibrarian.org/programs) Another example is author events! book fairs!
- Charge for promotion space
- Annual book sale - properly marketed, this could be a very lucrative source of income from something we really have in overflow already. Currently we earn about 0.15p for each discarded book - in an annual book sale you could charge £2 per book and make tons, from the exact same source material.
- Rent out library space after hours! To put on markets for businesses, or activities or clubs or pilates or anything, really.
- Charging for film showings. Many libraries in the UK already do this and we have projectors installed and ready to go.
- Put on lunches with collaborative help from other organisations. A new food place wants to promote their menu? A local community class of refugees wants to encourage their students to integrate? Get them to bring the food, we provide the space, and charge for admission or per bowl.
- Run exercise classes. We could literally stream a video but charge a small admission.
- Reach out to local artisans (such as wineries, breweries, and restaurants) to host tasting events - books and beverages are an easy pairing!
- Ask corporate sponsors to donate goods to your fundraising events; they can contribute big-ticket items in silent auctions, raffle prizes, and book bundles to help drive donations.
- Put on training courses to help people get certified in skills that they really need and charge for them. Coding courses, we have the PCs ready to use. Graphic design, architecture, etc.
- Offer a paid-for home library service and market it accordingly. You could even run a local subscription box style for local residents.
- We used to run visa applications in the libraries - what happened? that was super popular.
- Have lots of donated books that didn’t sell at your last book sale? Sounds like an opportunity to host a “blackout poetry” night! Instead of piling unsold books onto next year’s pile, invite community members to a night of book-ruining fun! Not only will this event help you raise funds, but you’ll also be spending less money on supplies.
- Move your events outside the library walls to benefit a local business. Find a local restaurant and learn what their least busy day is. Offer to host your weekly book club there for 10-15% of the profit made during that time.
- Charge for local opticians to have a space to do eye tests and promote their services.

- You could also re-introduce the reservation charge. Charge per reservation or get users to sign on to a kind of monthly or annual membership which waives the per-use cost for a one-off payment instead. Say, £3 per month, etc.
- You could encourage local plant sharing, and even turn some of the library gardens into allotment space people could pay a membership for as well. Seed swap events are chargeable, too. Clothes-swaps, too!
- Live music, food sharing, cultural events, craft clubs, health events - the list goes on. There are SO many ways a library could be used beneficially to generate income - and you're going to be paying for the upkeep and maintenance of the buildings any way you play this.

Appendix 3: Written submissions

Feedback from in-person Community Conversations events

Four in-person consultation events were held as part of the council's 'Community Conversations' initiative in autumn 2023, to help people discuss proposals with decision-makers and directly feed in their views to consultation that were live at that time. The events were held at:

- Thornbury Library, Thornbury Monday 6 November – estimated attendance of 110
- Kings Chase Shopping Centre Skills Hub, Kingswood, Saturday 11 November – estimated attendance of 50
- Yate Library, Thursday 23 November – estimated attendance of 30
- Willowbrook Shopping Centre, Bradley Stoke, Tuesday 28 November – estimated attendance of 60

Comments about proposed changes to the library service

Comments centred around the value of staff, and the potential loss of access to groups like RhymeTime which were highly valued. Some suggestions were made for cost savings, for example selling off buildings or turning off the lights, and some changes to service, for example moving Kingswood library to the High Street. Some felt that people would be willing to pay more for existing library services to be retained.

Thornbury

- Should sell buildings to make money for the libraries
- Libraries incredibly important for children
- Author events are important
- We can turn the lights off overnight in the libraries?
- Why don't we charge for reservations?
- Vans that take books around are very expensive

Kingswood

- The library should move to the High Street to help create a destination area
- Library staff invaluable
- Groups very important for parents, concern about losing them
- Rhymetime helped massively during maternity leave
- Library is a community hub
- Staff fantastic and always help with children and questions

Yate

- Groups and activities will lose out if hours change
- Staff 'make' the library
- Groups like Rhymetime essential for parents and grandparents
- Wouldn't know where else to go for free access and warm safe place to bond with child

Bradley Stoke

- Would be willing to pay an extra precept to maintain the library service

Report prepared by library staff: Impact of savings on children and families

'Library services in England can **generate social benefits** to their communities to a value of at least **£3.4bn per year.** Libraries' **return on investment** is at least **six times the known cost**
of running libraries nationally.'

'Libraries are places of living literacy, raising children's literacy levels and with the potential to **return a value of up to £60,000 throughout each child's lifetime.'**

Libraries for Living, and for Living Better: The value and impact of public libraries in the East of England (University of East Anglia, CreativeUEA and Health Economics Consulting, June 2023).

Summary

South Gloucestershire has one of the best children's library services in the country. Children and young people make up 46% of all library users and 57% of all library issues, meaning the proposed reduction in staffed open hours will have a disproportionately negative impact on children and families.

All children's activities are organised and run by staff during staffed opening hours. Children under 16 are not permitted to use the library during Open Access hours without being accompanied by a parent/ carer. Safeguarding means that activities for children and young people cannot take place without adult supervision.

It is therefore imperative that children and families are given the opportunity to respond to the impact of the proposed reduction in staffed open hours. Children have not been able to take part in the consultation via the questionnaire.

This report gives voice to the children and families who will affected by a reduction in staffed opening hours. Over 400 responses have been collected from children and families to provide a snapshot of how much they value staffed children's library services.

Below is a summary of the responses highlighting the areas where libraries make the most impact: Cost of Living, Learning & Development, Inclusion, Community & Social Capital and Mental Health & Wellbeing.

Key Statistics

- **20,966** children and young people are library members.
- **Over half a million** children and young adult books have been borrowed in 2023.
- **6,350** children in South Gloucestershire took part in this year's Summer Reading Challenge during staffed open hours. This is the highest participation rate in the Southwest.
- **1,384** children took part in free activities organised and run by staff during the October school holiday.
- The total attendance for free children's activities in 2023 is **66,745.**

The demand for children's library services has increased significantly from pre-pandemic levels:

- Attendance at children's activities has **increased by 12%** compared to 2019.
- The number of children's books borrowed has **increased by 20%** compared to 2019.

1. Cost of Living

"At the moment everything is so expensive so ***having something free to break up the holiday and get the children out of the house for a while is such a weight off my mind****."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, October Holiday Activity.

"Fabulous Event! My little girls had a great time. ***As a single dad, disabled and struggling these events are invaluable."*** Parent / Carer, Yate Library, October Holiday Activity.

*"****We can't afford other baby groups so these sessions are our main activity of the week.*** *My child (2yo) has become so much* ***more social and confident because of them.*** *And we've made friends who we see the rest of the week."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"This is a fantastic group! One of very very few free groups for kids! Children absolutely love it and ***if not for this group I wouldn't be able to go out."*** Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"We come every week, ***since my injury I cannot afford to go to more expensive sessions so these are the most important part of our week for socialisation my 2 yr old and also for me.*** *They have made a huge difference to his language development - when we haven't been able to attend for a few weeks I really notice the difference in his progress. Having worked with small children, I know the amount of worktime and expertise that goes into prepping and running these sessions at the quality that they are run at. Protecting staffing levels is vital for these activities to be able to keep running and support ALL people in South Glos****, especially in a priority neighbourhood****."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"It was a great opportunity to develop my child's creativity. ***We can't afford any Lego at home so my kids would miss out on the experience without Lego club.****"* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

"My children really enjoyed the crafts today. ***It gave them something to look forward to on the holidays*** *as* ***we can't afford days out or holidays****."* Parent / Carer, Hanham Library. October Holiday Activity.

"First of all, I wanted to say a big thanks to anyone who organised this event. I think ***Bradley Stoke area really needs more activity for children as there is not that much to be enough for amount of kids who lives in this area****."* Parent / Carer, Bradley Stoke Library, October Holiday Activity.

"We love coming to the library and meeting our friends ***as it is the only place in the village we can come for free.****"* Parent / Carer, Winterbourne Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

2. Learning and Development

*"****My child has made several milestones here****, from copying other children - first standing, first colouring, first time holding a book independently.* ***The social aspect of these sessions cannot be underestimated especially as lots of parents cannot afford other sessions****."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"Rhymetime is fantastic at Emersons Green Library. Very inclusive and fun event. **It is a safe space for young babies and children to express themselves and learn lead by**

brilliant librarians!! They make a difference!!! Encouraged social skills, co-ordination skills, music experience, sensory experiences. To start when babies and encourage then to continue as a good introduction to the library and reading. Emersons Green staff are brilliant!" Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"My grandson really enjoys these sessions, he loves listening to the stories, and is now helping to make the craft relating to the story. ***I have really noticed his development has improved, listening and engaging with the activity."*** Parent / Carer, Staple Hill Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

My son has become more interactive and responsive to words etc. as a result of rhyme time sessions. *It is the highlight of our week. A* ***safe friendly environment*** *and songs that will stay with my baby & family for a very long time."* Parent / Carer, Hanham Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"****The development of speech and language is really good from all of the singing****. The social interaction and group work allows my child to experience this.* ***It's really important to do this group****."* Parent / Carer, Cadbury Heath Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"****Rhyme time and storytime have been such a help.*** *A great place to bring babies and children to* ***encourage language and a love of libraries and books.*** *We have always loved sharing books and I am sure this has* ***added to my children's reading and vocabulary****."* Parent / Carer, Bradley Stoke Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"Rhyme time is ***helping my 2 year old socialise, grow in confidence and gets excited about books when we visit the library. INVALUABLE service to the families****."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"We love coming to Lego club! It has been ***great helping my son improve his speech and mixing with other children before he goes to school.*** *Thank you to all the staff who are so friendly."* Parent / Carer, Winterbourne Library, Lego Club.

"The events at the library make ***SUCH a difference in the education and wellbeing of our family****. My 6 year old's* ***reading has improved vastly thanks to the summer reading challenge*** *and my* ***toddler's speech has improved thanks to rhymetime songs.*** *My older children also visit the library with the school and are always excited and inspired by the stories the staff share. The craft sessions are also great for my son's gross motor skills."* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library.

"A fantastic event combining a love of nature and reading. ***My son (often reluctant reader!) was keen to take a book and start reading straight away!"*** Parent / Carer, Winterborne Library, October Holiday Activity.

3. Inclusion

*"****We took away one of the craft bags for their little brother who is in hospital.*** *He'll be very happy to be able to do the same as his sisters as he misses out on a lot."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, October Holiday Activity

"The event was amazing, ***myself and my 3 foster children enjoyed things they hadn't done before.*** *Found out about the event from joining the library yesterday."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, October Holiday Activity

"Really enjoyed this event. ***My child has additional needs*** *and it was a good pace. It made my child look for and take out books on reptiles! The library is a calm* ***place that my child feels happy and comfortable at****."* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library, Mini Builders.

"I speak ***English second language. Story time helps my son learn English and he likes singing.*** *He makes friends here. He loves coming every week. Me too!"* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"Today's event excellent as usual. My granddaughter was ***born during covid and was deprived of the social aspect of mixing with other children.*** *She loves Story Time and is involved with all the activities. Sally is a super story teller/reader. _____ goes home singing each week.* ***Having a story related to a Black child during Black History month was a plus."*** Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"All Children enjoy story telling. _____ particularly enjoyed collecting the stickers in his Book Trust booklet and showing his siblings at home. _____ ***was born during Covid and has missed a lot of the usual activities of mixing with other children and locations.*** *Using this storytime is giving him a different experience which is* ***teaching him confidence to mix and explore."*** Parent / Carer, Bradley Stoke Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"Greeted by familiar friendly members of staff that take the time to read a story to lead the group of children and adults in the morning activity of Lego building. ***This activity of Lego building is so important for the emotional needs of the children as they socialise,*** *as well as* ***intellectual needs*** *they discuss and build mini worlds and machines etc with the Lego.* ***The staff are excellent at meeting the needs of children with additional needs as they provide a safe and bright environment****."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

4. Community and Social Capital

"So well organised and engaging for local children. ***A great opportunity to meet local families and feel a sense of community in an inspiring environment.*** *A great way of naturally then gravitating towards the books!"* Parent / Carer, Filton Library, October Holiday Activity.

"We love the baby singing event. ***It is so important for us and everyone to see staff in the library. I would never come here if nobody is here - would feel unsafe."*** Parent / Carer, Downend Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"It was so well organised, lots of fun activities for the children, friendly and knowledgeable staff and very well attended. ***It is such an important place for our community where people of all ages feel welcome."*** Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, October Holiday Activity.

"Love it. ***Helped create a sense of community.*** *Looking forward to returning and seeing how bug hotel is getting on over winter. Added encouragement to visit (not that we need much encouragement)."* Parent / Carer, Winterbourne Library, October Holiday Activity.

*"Always happy to help and recommend to others! Most **welcoming staff who interact and encourage the children and whole family.** Joyful activities. Lots of fun activities for the school holidays. Best library in S Glos. 5 Stars!"* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library.

*"We thought it was great fun. Staff were friendly and helpful. The atmosphere **with lots of generations was lovely. It makes a library a heart of a community."*** Parent / Carer, Yate Library, October Holiday Activity.

*"Singing session use of props. Fabulous staff led session with joy. **Very needed session for our community.** Use of numbers and rhyme to develop literacy and maths."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

"**The library is an essential part of the community. The Lego club is a highlight to my son's week**." Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

*"Rhymetime is a fabulous resource. **It really gives a sense of a vibrant local community, offers chances to meet other local parents and familiarises children with the library.** Our children love coming to the library & this encourages their love of reading."* Parent / Carer, Winterbourne Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

5. Mental Health & Wellbeing

*"**Attending Lego club has been a lifeline for us as a family.** It's given _____ a great boost for his love of books and helped his reading and comprehension skills. It also has given his mother a well deserved break every Saturday morning. It also enables _____ to improve his social interaction skills as he loves helping and interacting with other children in his age group."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

*"Change of scene and socialising skills for children**. Helping mothers' mental health**. Sensory lighting would really help with calming."* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library.

*"We love the storytime session on a Friday morning. These kinds of activities are a **godsend to parents with young children - a chance to meet other parents** and access books, songs and craft ideas. I think a lot of families appreciate it."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"Rhyme time sessions are fantastic! They have been a brilliant introduction to nursery rhymes and our baby loves the sessions. **It has been a great way to meet other local parents which has been so valuable especially in the early weeks/months of becoming a parent.** Furthermore it has helped us discover the children's section of the library. We look forward to bringing our child to the library to enjoy the books as she grows older."* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"Lego club is the catalyst of our weekend activities I share with my son. It may not seem like a big activity but **it makes a significant difference**."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

*"Really **enjoy coming to the Rhyme time sessions at Patchway as much for myself as for my 2 year** old, **gets me out and talking to other mums** etc and the ladies in the library are lovely."* Parent / Carer, Patchway Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

***"Builds my child's confidence**, great activities keep them engaged. Always wants to come and constantly wants to come back for books."* Parent / Carer, Kingswood Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"To **interact with others and encourage independence**. The great activities you offer both in term time and holidays!! The huge variety of books to borrow is great with the offering of audiobooks too. The craft sessions vary which is great and it's always spoken about for sometime after."* Parent / Carer, Emersons Green Library.

*"It is a great event. The ladies are very engaging and hold very young child's attention**. It helps children to feel confident and happy to be around books."*** Parent / Carer, Staple Hill Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

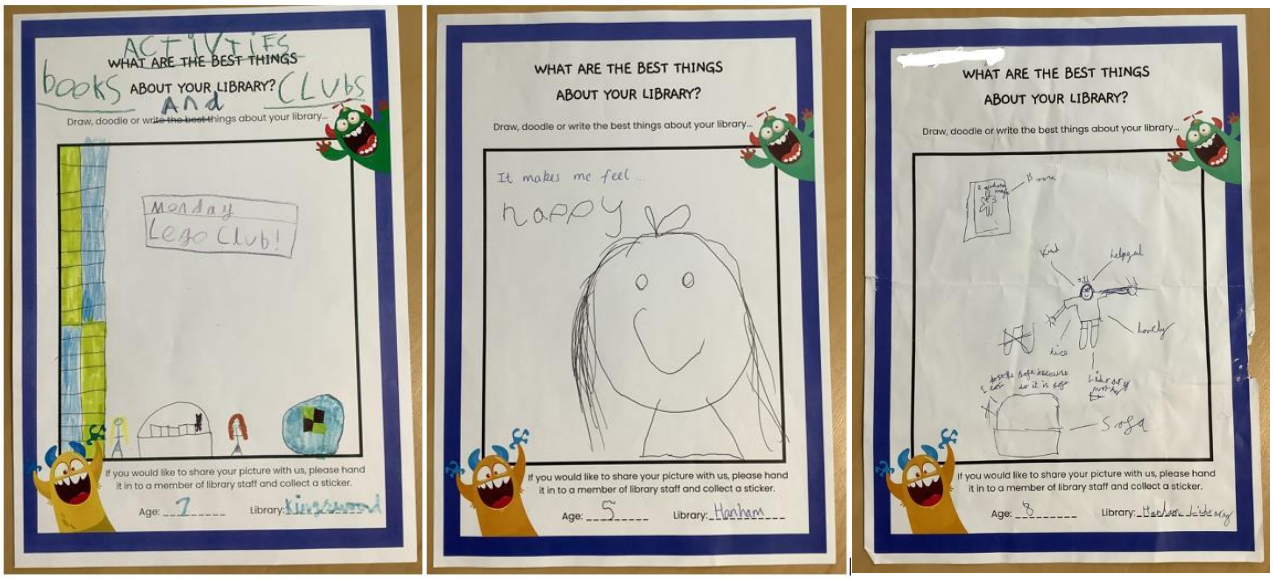
*"We loved today's event. **It's our highlight of our days together.** We read afterwards too. The staff are fabulous and always make the children feel welcome and engaged."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

*"As usual it was very busy with children, who were all building and sharing brilliantly! The Lego building is **great for focus, concentration and creativity and we see it as an important and fun part of _____ week**. We always come."* Parent / Carer, Thornbury Library, Lego Club.

***"Life with two small children can be intense and you need fun things you can do that are good for them and enjoyable for you.** Everyone at the library is so welcoming and it's a highlight of our week. Thank you for all you do."* Parent / Carer, Winterbourne Library, Rhymetime & Storytime.

What the library means to children and young people in their own words

This is a summary of the responses submitted by children and young people.





Response from Unison on behalf of library staff union members

10th January 2024
Re: Proposal to Cuts in Library Funding

This report covers a wide range of concerns and issues raised by our members since the library Consultation went live in October 2023.

South Glos is required (by law) to provide a Comprehensive and Efficient Library Service under Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. UNISON have sought legal advice to suggest this will not be being provided with continuing cuts to the service.

The reduction in staffed hours will have a major impact on the remaining staff and service as a whole. Significantly, there will be no equivalent reduction in workload.

There will be an increased burden of work on a reduced compliment of staff. The Council does not recognise how much back-room work is done in libraries to enable the public part of the service. Also, an increase in OA hours may lead to an increase in disruption for staff coming back in during staffed times – increase of overloaded trolleys, full letterboxes etc. There are also major implications to the reduction of staff, resulting in a backlog of work and resources e.g. crates piling up and health and safety around the workplace/risk to members.

If there are fewer posts with more hours, this would mean that staff would have to work between locations. This would increase staff costs, and time involved travelling to and from work and would make posts highly undesirable. Part-time posts, which would be further reduced, already create an issue for staff retention, and are highly undesirable, especially for younger people who are likely to need full time hours.

UNISON would like to make it absolutely clear that members are unable to take on an increased workload. Since the previous cuts in 2016, staff have seen unprecedented increases in workload and a further increase would be unsustainable.

Equalities issues
Further to the Staff Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), libraries have proportionally higher level of part time, female and disabled staff. While listing the basic impacts on staff with protected characteristics, the EQIA does not however provide sufficient detail as to how the council would address these. Reasonable adjustments alone would not be sufficient in these circumstances, to mitigate the impact on large groups of members who will be affected by these cuts due to their protected characteristics.

Firstly, ‘the service is predominantly staffed by females when compared to both the departmental and whole council proportions.’ The vast majority of the roles affected are part-time which members of staff rely on for caring responsibilities. There is a therefore the implication of gender discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, which the council need to evidence they are not engaging in with these changes.

Secondly, there is a higher percentage of disabled employees when compared to both the departmental and whole council proportions. It has been confirmed in consultation discussions, that the changes mean that staff will increasingly need to lone-work, putting disabled staff and people with health conditions at high risk e*.g. if a member of staff had a heart condition who would be there to respond?* UNISON requested updated risk assessments at the first meeting of the

consultation period on 07/12/23 but have not received them. UNISON require these risk assessments to be considered by our Health and Safety officer before any decision is made.

Furthermore, 'in terms of socio-economics – the majority of the workforce are part-time workers on grades H11 within the council's grading system'. These cuts will have a major impact on the income of lower-paid employees in terms of job losses or reductions in hours. Members of staff already report having to take up multiple jobs to make ends meet. This would have a hugely detrimental effect on staff livelihoods and incomes, potentially pushing members into poverty during the continued cost of living crisis. The council has a Duty of Care to staff which should be taken into account when deciding on these changes.

Impact on communities
In addition to the impact on staff, this will also effect communities in South Gloucestershire, which many of our members in the UNISON branch belong to. Including:

- Reducing staffed opening hours would be discriminatory to young people who use the service for studying, as closing libraries earlier and a number of libraries losing a half or whole day would drastically reduce their accessibility. Many young people are still at Secondary School and are too young to sign up for Open Access.
- Libraries are publicised to be a 'Warm Place'. By reducing staffed hours, this would reduce the accessibility for many including people who don't feel comfortable using Open Access, or people who may need access to a toilet.
- Members are already being expected to work in buildings that are unheated in winter, overheated and no ventilation in summer, have ongoing water leaks, no hot water, no water. All of which are a health and safety concern for members and members of the public using our buildings
- Many libraries do not have access to a toilet during Open Access, which makes it difficult for
  members of the public to spend much time in the library.
- Reduction in staffed hours would result in a reduction of school visits and visits from outside organisations eg Scouts, Nurseries, and regular childrens activities.

In conclusion, UNISON are completely opposed to these cuts which reduces jobs for our members and targets a vital service in our communities. We suggest the council look at other options for savings, as detailed in our budget feedback, as opposed to loading the pain onto lower-paid, part-time members of staff and residents who rely on the service. For example, the council could draw on their substantial reserves, which UNISON were last informed amounted to around £12 million. Just 3% of these could prevent the need to cut staffing hours.

By making these savings, the council are furthermore at risk of breaking statutory obligations under both the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (as detailed above). UNISON would urge the council to consider whether an efficient and comprehensive service is able to be provided, and to look in more depth at the impact on female and disabled workers as part of these changes. Providing UNISON with a new EQIA as well as updated risk assessments before any decision is made.

Signed,

Dan Smart
Branch secretary, UNISON South Glos

Alex Maggs-White
Libraries steward

Alex Lowe
Libraries steward
Branch treasurer