



Caerphilly County Borough Council – Draft Library Service Strategic Vision

Consultation Report

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Background

In February 2024, the council's Cabinet endorsed a series of budget proposals for 2024/25, based on the council's financial settlement from Welsh Government and UK Government. The report outlined a savings requirement of £45m for the two-year period 2025/26 and 2026/27. In order to address this funding gap, a programme of transformation has been established to address the financial challenges the council is facing.

Caerphilly currently operates 18 separate libraries across the county borough – one of the highest number of sites in Wales.

The council also offers a 'Librarylink' service and digital library services, with an overall libraries budget of £3.4 million.

For further information contextual information, a description of the service and individual library data, please refer to the "Library Service Strategic Assessment" on the Caerphilly Conversation page for this consultation: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/draft-library-service-strategic-vision-2024-2028>

Purpose

Cabinet Member with responsibility for Library Services, Cllr. Carol Andrews said,

"When exploring the future vision for the library service, it was clear that they have already become so much more than a place to borrow and read books. We have seen how the evolution of digital services has enhanced the offer to become far more inclusive. We want to take that one step further and create a hub environment that acts as a one-stop-shop for residents. A warm and welcoming space that provides ready access to services in a town centre location with easy access to local transport links.

It is clear that the financial pressures have led us to consider the options to future-proof the service and that includes the potential rationalisation of the amount of sites that we have. That is why it is really important for us to seek a broad range of views on the proposal, so we are able to gain a greater understanding of the needs of our residents."

The consultation will help the council to better understand the needs of the community in order to shape the development of the hub vision. The vision indicates that the development of the hub model would result in an overall reduction in library venues, to allow the council to focus on the development of improved town centre hubs providing a one-stop-shop approach for community services.

Residents are asked to have their say on the 4 key objectives:

- Improve and develop the library services availability and offer.
- Help residents to access information, advice and support in a 'hub' location.
- Put community needs at the heart of our town centre hubs, to support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting.
- Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resources and improve the overall offer.

Methodology (What we did)

The consultation ran for a period of 6 weeks from **Tuesday 22nd October to Tuesday 3rd December 2024.**

The consultation was promoted in a variety of ways

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- A media release at the launch of the consultation <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/news/news-bulletin/october-2024/libraries-consultation-%E2%80%93-have-your-say-drop-in-ses>
- Regular social media posts at the consultation launch and throughout the duration of the consultation period (see **Annex 4**)
- Posters displayed in libraries and other public facing Council venues – detailing drop-in sessions and a QR code and link to the online portal.
- Regular information on the consultation via and the library service e-bulletin ‘Expand Your Shelf’
- Targeted engagement with stakeholder groups across the borough including groups and partner organisations who use libraries at a local level via libraries contact lists, schools via head teachers (please refer to **Annex 5** for full details of targeted stakeholder engagement)

A dedicated page was created on the council’s ‘Caerphilly Conversation’ portal outlining details of how to get involved, links to the survey and background information/documents that would enable respondents to give an informed view. The portal is linked directly to the home page of the Council’s website

English: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/draft-library-service-strategic-vision-2024-2028>

Welsh: <https://trafodaeth.caerphilly.gov.uk/gweledigaeth-strategol-ddrafft-y-gwasanaeth-llyfrgelloedd-2024-2028>

Whilst the primary consultation tool was a questionnaire, participants were encouraged to respond in a number of ways including attendance at face-to-face drop-in sessions either in person or online as detailed below.

Surveys

Adult survey

To enable all those who wished to give their views to take part, an adult survey was made available bilingually and in a variety of formats.

- Online survey accessible via <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/draft-library-service-strategic-vision-2024-2028> accessible via PCs at libraries
- Paper copies available at all libraries and on request
- Printable version on website
- Other formats available on request

Young person survey

A survey designed for young people and children was also created. This was made available at all libraries and a printable version and link to the online survey were shared with all schools/heads and deputy heads across the borough.

Face to face engagement

Drop-in sessions were arranged at all 18 libraries across the borough to enable those who would prefer to engage in this way to have their say. As far as possible, the drop ins were scheduled on different days and at different times of the day (within the constraints of normal opening hours of individual libraries) to coincide with periods of highest footfall and to enable working residents to attend.

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Drop in sessions

Table 1: Face to face drop-in sessions:

Location	Date and time	Number of attendees
Oakdale Library	Tuesday 29 th October (4-6pm)	28
Bedwas Library	Monday 4 th November (3-5pm)	24
Llanbradach Library	Wednesday 6 th November (10am-12noon)	28
Abercarn Library	Thursday 7 th November (3-5pm)	40
Abertridwr Library	Monday 11 th November (4-6pm)	35
Newbridge Library (Memo)	Tuesday 12 th November (4-6pm)	40
New Tredegar Library (White Rose)	Wednesday 13 th November (3-5pm)	50
Machen Library	Thursday 14 th November (4-6pm)	24
Nelson Library	Friday 15 th November (10am-12noon)	40
Deri Library	Wednesday 20 th November (4-6pm)	25
Aberbargoed Library	Thursday 21 st November (3-5pm)	12
Caerphilly Library	Friday 22 nd November (10am-12noon)	3
Blackwood Library	Saturday 23 rd November (10am-12noon)	5
Rhymney Hub Library	Monday 25 th November (4-6pm)	2
Ystrad Mynach Library	Tuesday 26 th November (10am-12noon)	5
Risca Palace Library	Wednesday 27 th November (11am-1pm)	8
Fleur de Lys Community Centre	Thursday 28 th November (11am-1pm)	3
Bargoed Library	Thursday 28 th November (3-5pm)	1
		376 total

Online drop-in sessions:

Date and time	Number of attendees
Wednesday 6 th November (5-7pm)	4
Thursday 14 th November (11am – 1pm)	0
Tuesday 19 th November (4-6pm)	3
	7 total

Results/Key Findings

*Note: The statistical data (percentages) presented within this report relates to survey responses only. The number of responses received for individual questions may be lower than the total number of completed questionnaires returned. Percentages are therefore based on the number of responses to individual questions (n=number of responses) and not necessarily the number of completed surveys received. Qualitative analysis incorporates both the open-ended responses to the survey **as well as** the qualitative feedback from conversations. **Participation in the consultation was self-selecting. The data should be considered within this context.***

The annexes to this report contain a summary of feedback from face-to-face engagement (**Annex 1**) and a redacted digest of survey comments – both adult and young person survey (**Annex 2**).

1110 completed surveys were received by the closing date.

506 people completed the young person survey. It should be noted that not all were completed by children/young people. Some were completed on behalf of younger children and others were completed by adults who preferred to complete the shorter survey.

383 people attended the drop-in sessions and engaged face-to-face. As expected, and summarised in **Table 1**, attendance at smaller libraries i.e. those not proposed to be included as one of the 6 town centre hubs in the draft Strategic Vision was much higher than attendance at the proposed hub sites.

The level of response to the survey in relation to attendance levels at drop-in sessions and the relatively high number of young person surveys returned reflects some negative feedback received in relation to complexity of survey and the language used in the draft Strategic Vision/survey.

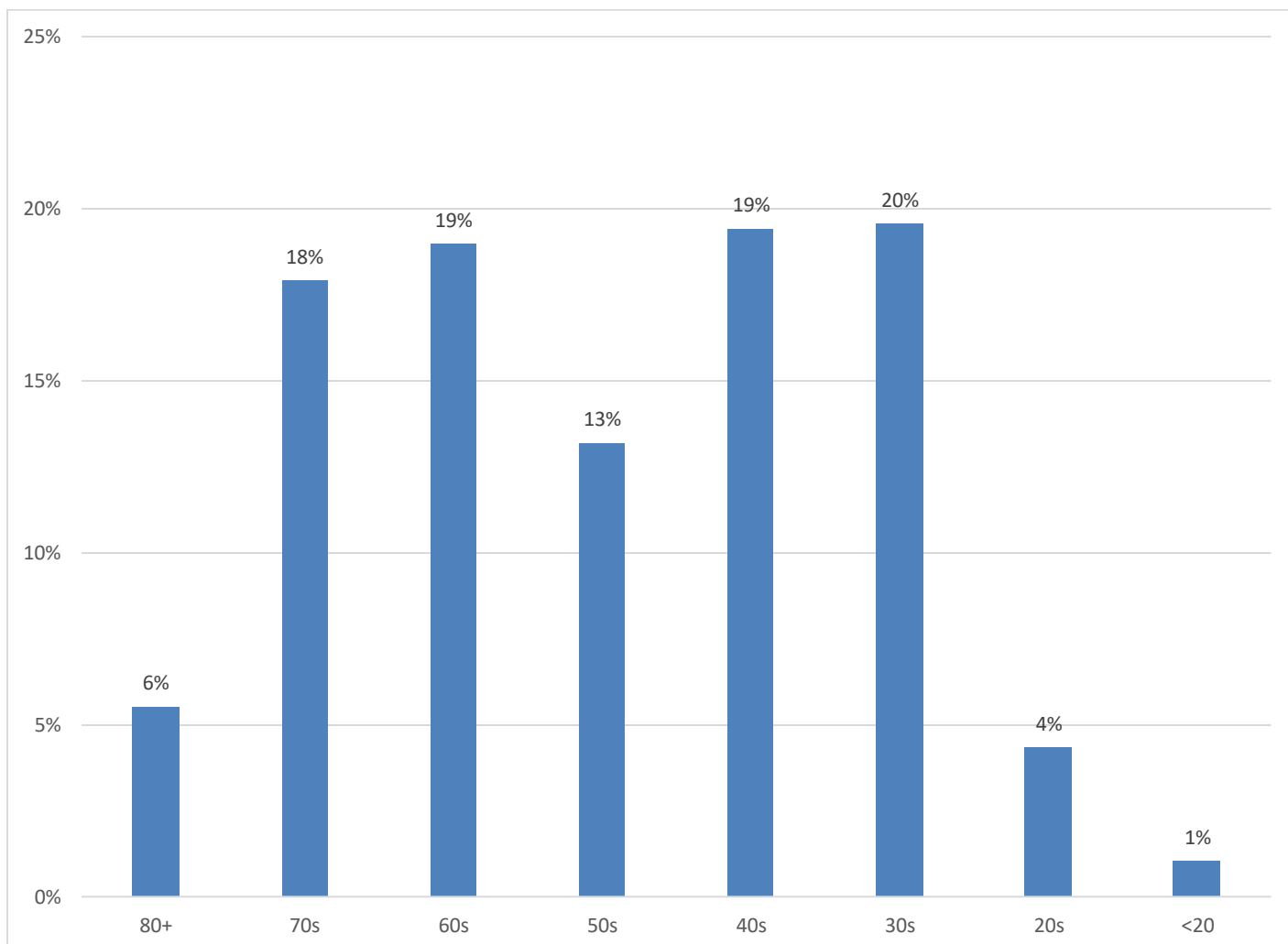
Respondent profile

- In the adult survey 93% indicated that they were residents of the borough. A further 3% were Caerphilly County Borough Council staff and 1% were elected members. All young people were residents of the borough.
- 96% of adults were library users. 98% of young people were library users (a small number said that they used their school library).
- The main mode of transport to libraries for adult respondents was on foot (58%) with 35% using private transport and 5% using public transport. By far, the most frequent way of visiting the library amongst young people was on foot (70%) with 22% saying they were driven there, 2% using public transport and the remainder using a bike/scooter or skateboard.
- 35% of respondents to the adult survey had visited their library at least several times a week with 43% visiting several times a month whilst most of the young people were also regular visitors with the largest number stating that they visit once a week.
- 37% also indicated that they visit other libraries within Caerphilly County borough.
- Most respondents had access to at least one device (smartphone/PC/laptop or tablet) whilst a small number (102 individuals) indicated that they don't but use the computers at the library with 42 people saying that they can't or don't want to access the internet.
- 15% of respondents (n=974) said that they had no affordable internet access. 78% had access to affordable internet at home, 4% had access at home and elsewhere whilst 3% had access elsewhere but not at home.

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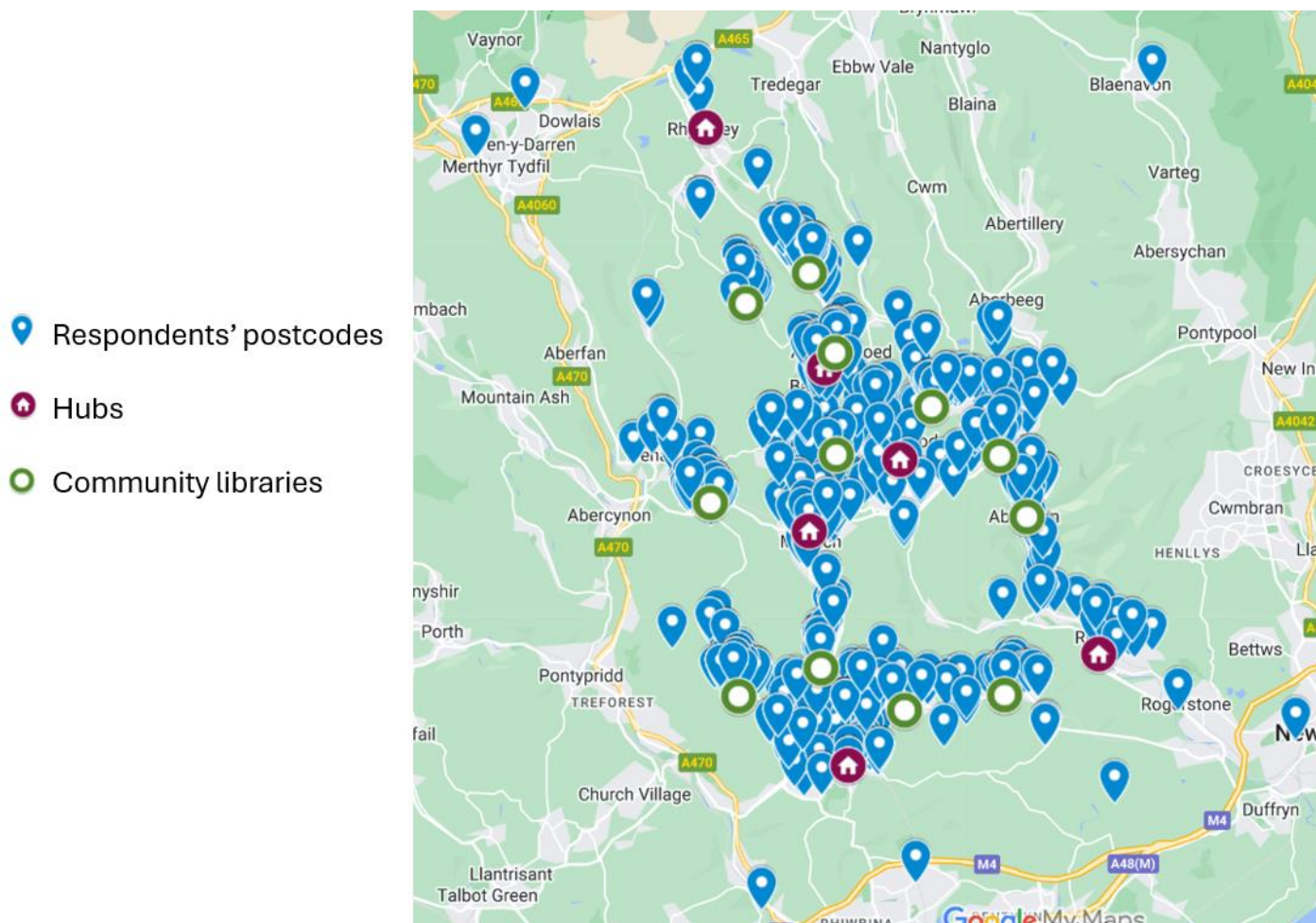
- **Graph 1** summarises the age profile of respondents to the adult survey (n=849) with 20% of respondents being in their 30s, 19% in their 40s, 19% in their 60s and 18% in their 70s.
- 71% of respondents were female, 24% male with 1% preferring to self-describe and 4% preferring not to say (n=1012)
- 28% considered themselves to have a disability (n=1003) and of those with a disability, just over half (51%) indicated that their disability reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities a little or a lot (n=543)
- 48% of respondents were employed/self-employed and 36% of respondents were retired.
- 93% of respondents said that their preferred language was English with 4% indicating that their preferred language was Welsh
- **Map 1** shows the geographical distribution of survey respondents in relation to library locations. The online Google map can be found by following the link below:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1VGI8j4W34_P9OK0rYSM65YmvvtqMCu4&usp=sharing

Graph 1: Age profile of respondents to adult survey (n=849)



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Map 1: Postcode distribution of adult survey respondents



Libraries visited most often

Graphs 2 and 2a summarise the number of responses received to both the adult and young person survey regarding which library respondents visit most often.

The highest proportion of respondents to the adult survey visited Caerphilly, Nelson, Newbridge and Abercarn most often.

The highest proportion of respondents to the young person survey visited New Tredegar, Machen and Abertridwr libraries most often.

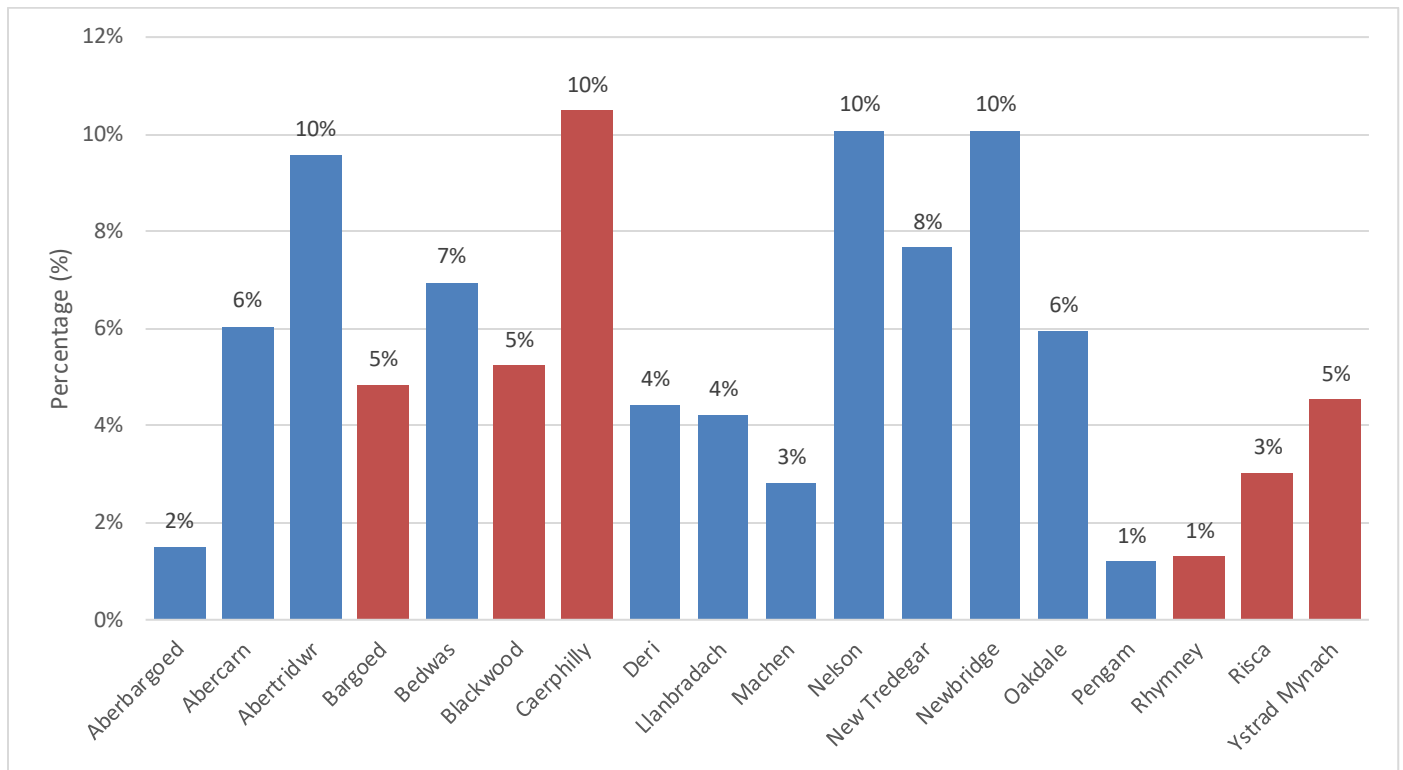
For further context, Table 2 summarises the number of survey responses to both the adult and young person surveys alongside number of attendees at drop-in sessions and the number of active users for each library in 2023/24.

The level of response for each library location is somewhat reflective of the strength of feeling in smaller communities where libraries have not been identified as potential hub locations. However, due to the self-selecting nature of the consultation, other factors such as the way the consultation was promoted at a local

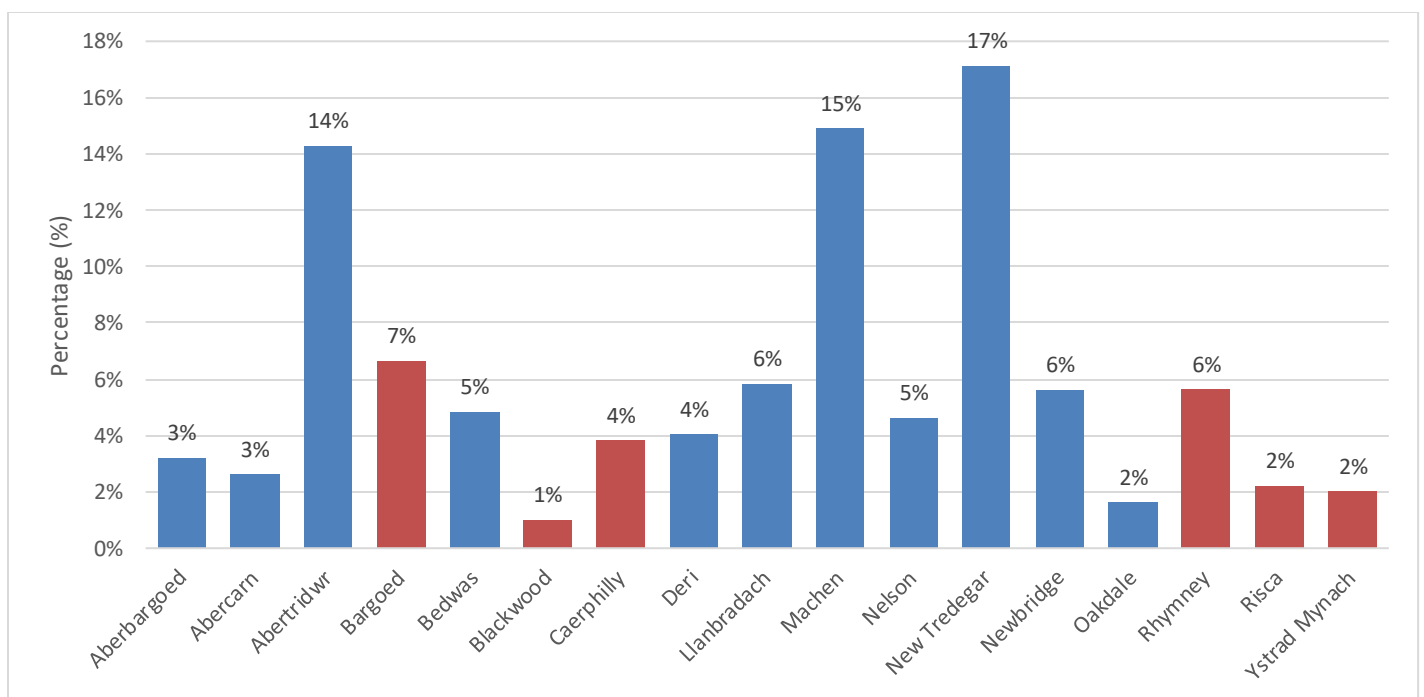
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level will also have influenced response rates, e.g. where local schools have completed surveys with their classes etc.

Graph 2: Percentage response to adult survey by library visited most often (n=992)



Graph 2a: Percentage response to young person survey by library visited most often (n=497)



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Table 2: Response rate to adult and young person surveys, attendees at drop ins and

	Active users 23/24	Adult survey response (number and % of total response n=992)	Young person survey response (number and % of total response n=497)	Attendees at drop-in session
Aberbargoed*	210	15 (2%)	16 (3%)	12
Abercarn*	567	60 (6%)	13 (3%)	40
Abertridwr*	600	95 (10%)	71 (14%)	35
Bargoed	1898	48 (5%)	33 (7%)	1
Bedwas*	602	69 (7%)	24 (5%)	24
Blackwood	2251	52 (5%)	5 (1%)	3
Caerphilly	6282	104 (10%)	19 (4%)	3
Deri*	Full year data unavailable (closed due to storm damage)	44 (4%)	20 (4%)	25
Llanbradach*	299	42 (4%)	29 (6%)	28
Machen*	350	28 (3%)	74 (15%)	24
Nelson*	661	100 (10%)	23 (5%)	40
New Tredegar*	610	76 (8%)	85 (17%)	50
Newbridge	1138	100 (10%)	28 (6%)	48
Oakdale*	498	59 (6%)	8 (2%)	28
Pengam*	Full year data unavailable (closed for refurbishment)	12 (1%)		
Rhymney	Full year data unavailable (closed for refurbishment)	13 (1%)	28 (6%)	2
Risca	2799	30 (3%)	11 (2%)	8
Ystrad Mynach	1797	45 (5%)	10 (2%)	5

*single staff locations

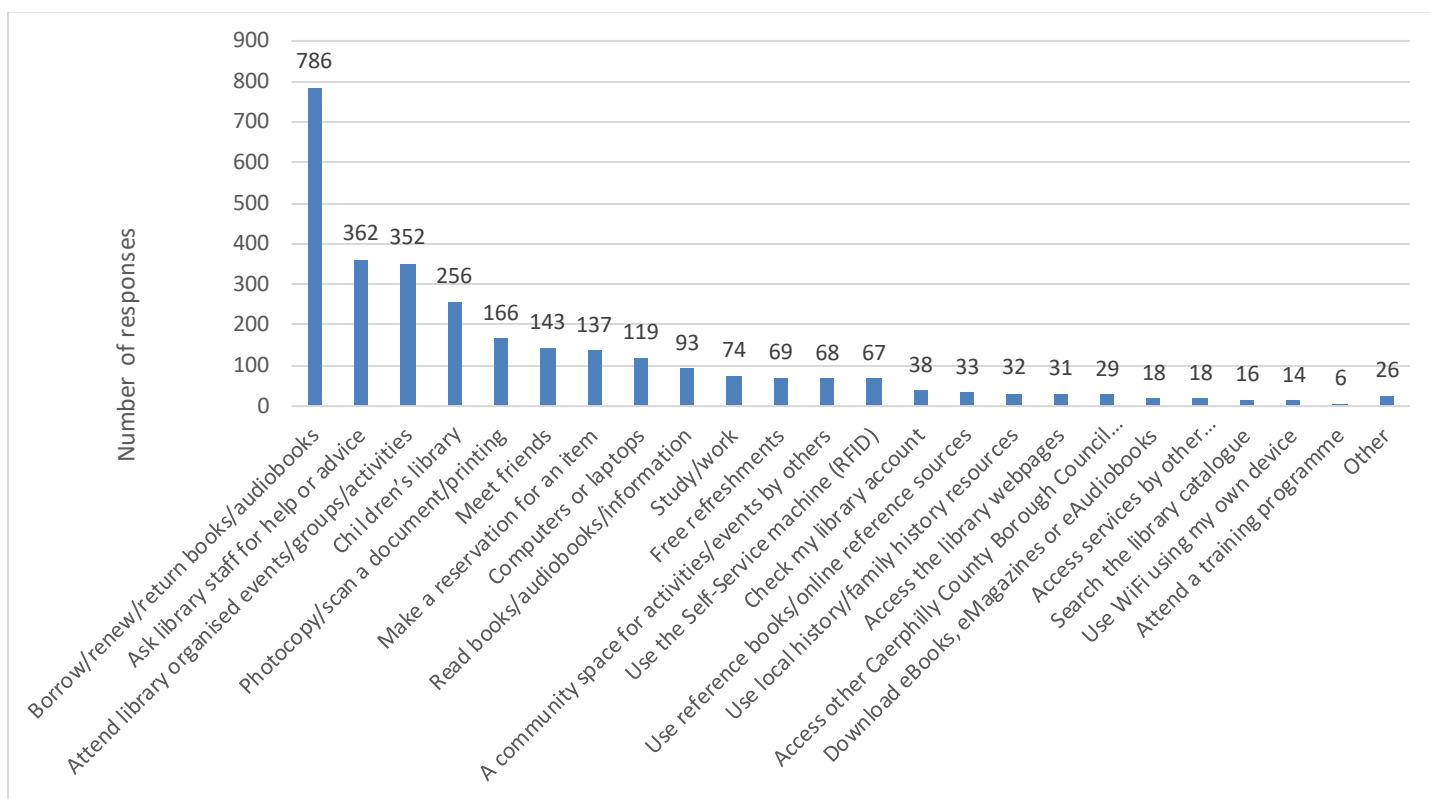
Main reasons for using the library

Adult survey

Respondents were asked to select their main reasons for using the library. **Graph 2** summarises the total number of people who selected each response and highlights that that by far, the main reason given was to borrow, renew or return books or audiobooks (with 786 respondents selecting this option). Asking library staff for help or advice (362 responses) and attending library organised events, exhibitions, clubs, groups or activities (352 responses) were the next most frequently selected reasons for using libraries. (Note: respondents were able to select up to 3 options therefore the total number of responses to this question exceeds the total number of responses to the survey itself.)

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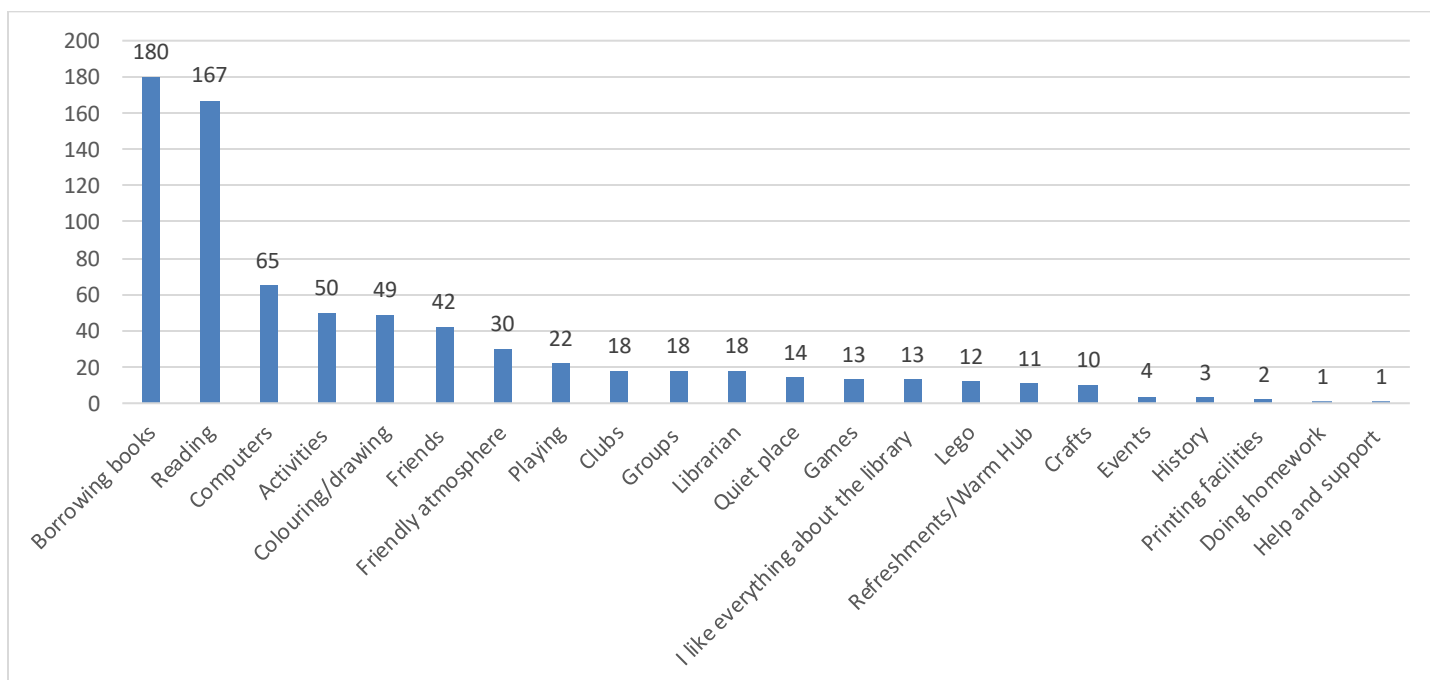
Graph 2: Main reasons (select up to 3 responses) for using the library (adult survey)



Young person survey

Graph 2a summarises the most popular reasons for using the library amongst young people. By far, borrowing books and reading were the main reasons for visiting the library. (Note: the survey allowed open ended responses to this question and often, more than one reason was given for visiting the library.)

Graph 2a: Main reasons for using the library (open responses) – young person survey

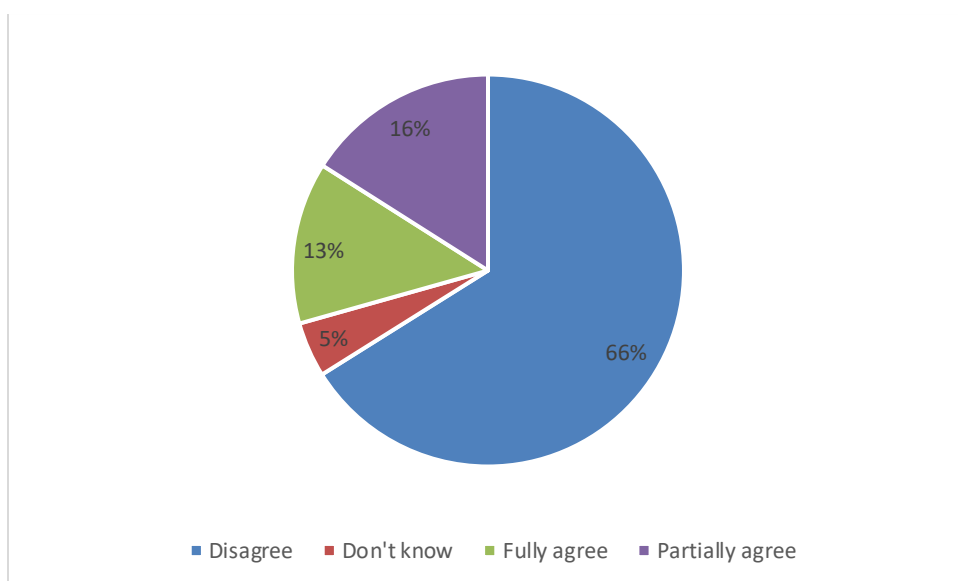


Proposed Vision Statement

Our vision is to deliver a welcoming and sustainable Library Service by integrating into a hub model, to provide all residents with the opportunity to access library resources and other support, in town centre locations across the borough.

66% of respondents disagree with the proposed vision to deliver a welcoming and sustainable Library Service by integrating into a hub model, to provide all residents with the opportunity to access library resources and other support, in town centre locations across the borough. Just under a third (29%) fully or partially agreed with the statement with a further 5% indicating that they don't know.

Graph 3: Percentage of respondents (adult survey) who agree or disagree with the proposed vision (n=1110)



Key themes: elements of the Strategic Vision agreed/disagreed with and why

Through both the surveys and face to face engagement, the main reasons given for disagreement with the vision were

- transport issues, including lack of public transport, lack of parking at hub/town centre locations and associated difficulties accessing library (and wider hub services) including the associated increase in cost and time
- an inability to walk to a hub location was also key for those who currently visit the library on foot and do not have access to transport for whatever reason (70% of young people who completed the survey and 58% of adult survey respondents currently walk to their local library).

Many of the themes overlap and there were concerns raised regarding the impact that the removal of libraries would have on isolation within smaller communities. A number of people attending drop-in sessions particularly said that the libraries were a “lifeline” for them.

There were particular concerns relating to impact on those who are most vulnerable in our communities

- areas of higher deprivation (where there are few or no other community facilities) and
- those with protected characteristics, especially age (older people and younger people) and those with disability, mental health issues and those who find the larger hub locations overwhelming and less personal.

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Whilst just under a third of survey respondents fully or partially agreed with the hub model. The main reason for agreeing with the hub model was that it would enhance services at these locations, however, most disagreed that the hub model should be implemented alongside the removal of community libraries. This feedback was highlighted strongly at drop-in sessions, particularly at community libraries, however those at proposed hub libraries also expressed concern with the closure of community libraries.

In the survey, respondents were asked specifically to outline why they agreed or disagreed with the Strategic Vision. The comments have been themed as shown in **Table 3** and these strongly reflect what was raised at drop-in sessions.

Table 3: Key themes – reasons given for agreeing/disagreeing with the Strategic Vision

Disagree – reasons	
Transport issues/unreliable public transport	312
Local service within walking distance	217
Impact on communities	201
Yes to hubs, no to others closing (inc accessibility of hub locations)	85
Impact on older population (esp relating to reduced mobility)	76
Area with high deprivation levels, taking away more facilities	72
Social impact	69
Do not close the library	63
Impact on children's skills (reading/education)	62
Impact on people with disability/limited mobility	46
Economic impact (inc cost of transport/activities and impact on local businesses in smaller communities)	45
Impact on clubs/groups using the library buildings	41
Lack of parking in the proposed 6 hubs	41
hub will be too busy and less personal	20
Other areas to reduce council's debts	16
Mental health impact	15
Impact on schools	14
Financial impact of having to travel to hubs	13
Environmental impact	12
Only access to Internet	9
Impact on staff	7
Safeguarding issues	4
Isolating vulnerable communities	3
Loss of service/service underused if relocated	2
Agree – reasons	
Better services in fewer locations	58
Improve communities where hubs are located	8
Increase in footfall to town centres	1
Libraries are not used	2

Annex 1b summarises key issues and concerns raised at each library. Whilst there were some differences in the focus of discussion at each library, the overarching themes were very similar in their nature and aligned closely with the survey responses.

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The young people survey asked, “What do you think libraries could look like in the future?”. The most popular response was

- the same as it is now (97 responses) followed by
- a bigger selection of books (57 responses),
- more technology (49 responses) and
- more activities (40 responses)

Young people also commented that they want their local community library to stay open or that their library should be close enough to walk to and some said that their local community could be a hub.

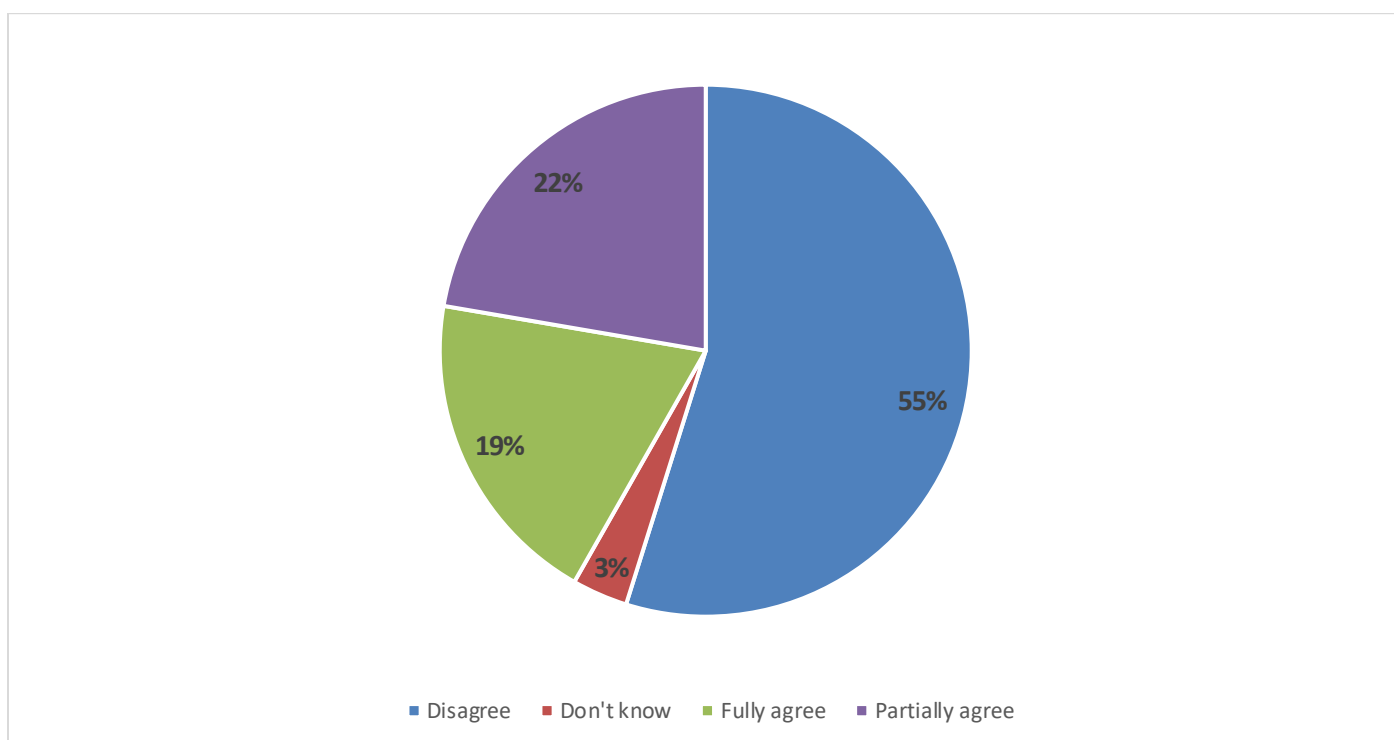
There were suggestions about how libraries might look in the future and that libraries should be welcoming, fun and a place to meet friends.

Key themes in relation to each of the objectives closely mirror those highlighted in relation to the overall vision. The following sections of this report draw out additional issues and concerns raised specifically relating to each objective.

Objective 1: Improve and develop the library services availability and offer

As summarised in **Graph 4**, when asked views on the objective to improve and develop the library services availability and offer, just over half (55%) of respondents disagreed, 41% fully or partially agreed and 3% indicated that they don't know.

Graph 4: Percentage who agree/disagree with Objective 1: Improve and develop the library services availability and offer (n=1100)

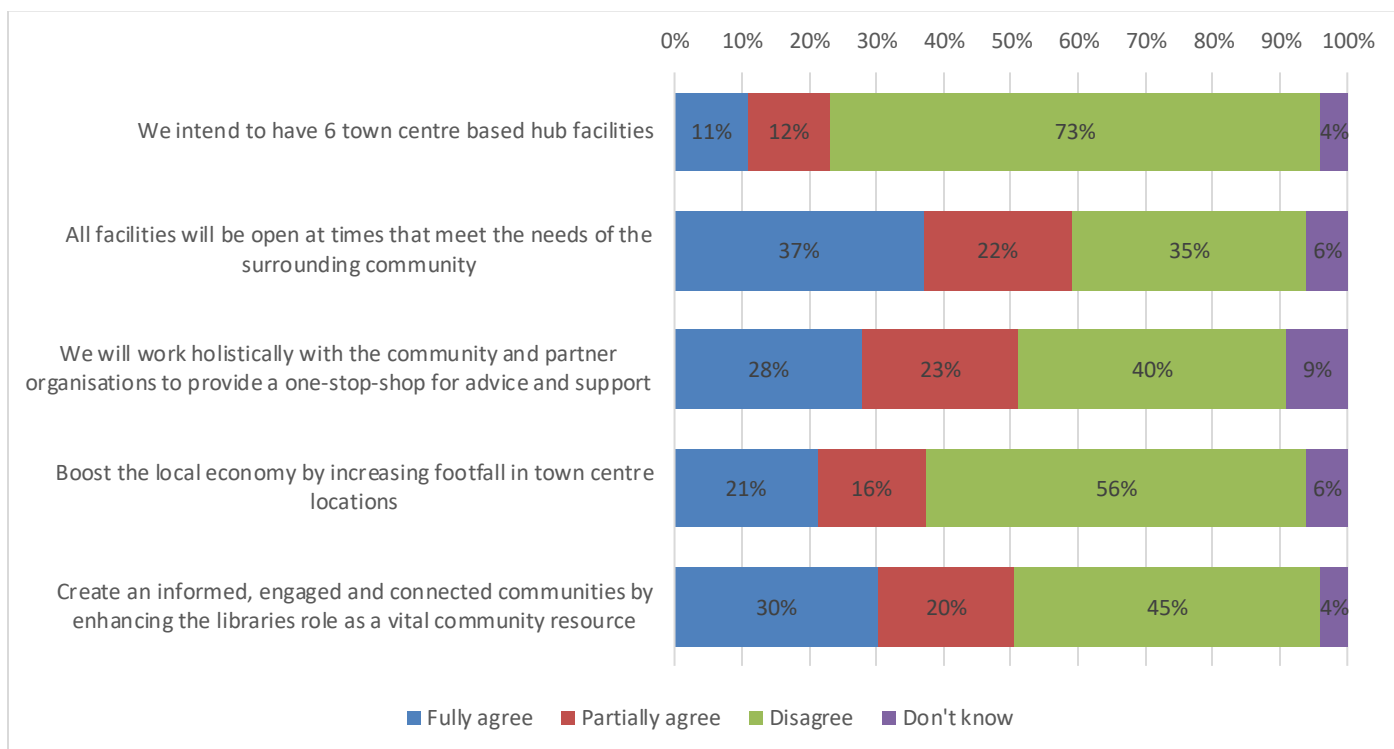


Views on the proposed outcomes within Objective 1:

Five outcomes were identified under Objective 1 within the draft strategy. **Graph 5** summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes.

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Graph 5: Percentage respondents who agree or disagree with the proposed outcomes under Objective 1



- There was **strong disagreement** with the intention to have 6 town centre-based hub facilities with 73% indicating that they disagree with this outcome whilst 23% fully or partially agreed. The remaining 4% said they don't know.
- 59% of respondents agreed partially or fully that all facilities will be open at times that meet the needs of the surrounding community whilst 35% disagreed. The remaining 6% said they don't know.
- 51% agreed and 40% disagreed with the objective to work holistically with the community and partner organisations to provide a one-stop-shop for advice and support. The remaining 9% said they don't know.
- 56% disagreed with the outcome to boost the local economy by increasing footfall in town centre locations whilst 37% agreed fully/partially with this outcome. The remaining 6% said they don't know.
- 50% agreed fully or partially with creating informed, engaged and connected communities by enhancing the libraries role as a vital community resource. 45% disagreed and 4% indicated that they don't know.

Key themes: Views on Objective 1 and its associated outcomes

Those who agreed with Objective 1 did so because they felt that it would enable better provision and additional opening hours and enhance communities/increase footfall in hub locations. A number commented that libraries are not currently well used.

The high degree of disagreement with Objective 1 was due to potential impacts on more vulnerable residents in smaller communities due to the loss of services locally.

There was agreement that libraries should meet the needs of residents and the introduction of lunchtime opening hours at key hub locations however, it was felt that closing community libraries would not meet the needs of communities in those locations.

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Respondents noted that libraries are already working holistically with the community and partner organisations to provide a one-stop-shop for advice and support. Community libraries already offer more than books and do so close to the communities who access them.

A number questioned whether the closure of community libraries would result in an increase in footfall at town centre locations or whether this change would increase overall membership as residents will not be able to access these locations easily. Alongside this, a closure of community libraries could have a negative impact on local village centres and their economy by reducing footfall in these locations.

The main concerns around the outcome to create informed, engaged and connected communities by enhancing the libraries role as a vital community resource were relating to lack of accessibility for those who currently walk to a library but would no longer be able to do so. Examples given include children unable to walk to the library after school/with friends/after school who would now rely on their parents to drive them to a hub and older people who cannot drive and live in areas where public transport is infrequent and unreliable.

Barriers to accessing hub locations

67% of respondents to the adult survey indicated that they would *experience barriers* to accessing services at one of the key town centre hub locations. The main barriers to accessing town centre hub locations were: access to parking, transport, accessibility and the cost of travel.

- Currently able to walk and would no longer be able to do so
- Travel and distance/time taken to visit
- Reliability of public transport
- Increased cost of travelling further– financial impacts
- Lack of parking in town centres
- Addition time required
- Lack of familiarity with the area and not feeling safe.

All of these barriers were considered to be more impactful to older people/younger people , those who have disabilities, and those from less affluent communities.

76% of those who responded to the young people survey said they would not be able to get to a hub if their local library closed.

Of those who would be able to access the hub locations, young people noted that this would be

- by car /public transport often where they are currently able to walk alone
- with difficulty
- less frequently

Similarly, the main reasons given for not being able to access hub libraries

- distance
- cost
- additional time needed to get there
- hubs being too busy
- it would be difficult
- unable to walk anymore
- little or no public transport – also unable to use public transport alone

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- someone would have to take them (distance or unsafe to walk alone)
- disability

Is there anything missing from Objective 1?

Key areas of concern were in relation to how this may impact on communities, (particularly those with high deprivation where there are already fewer facilities), ensuring that local services are within walking distance and considering the lack of transport provision.

Do you have any suggestions for additional services that could be delivered from one of the proposed town centre Library hub buildings?

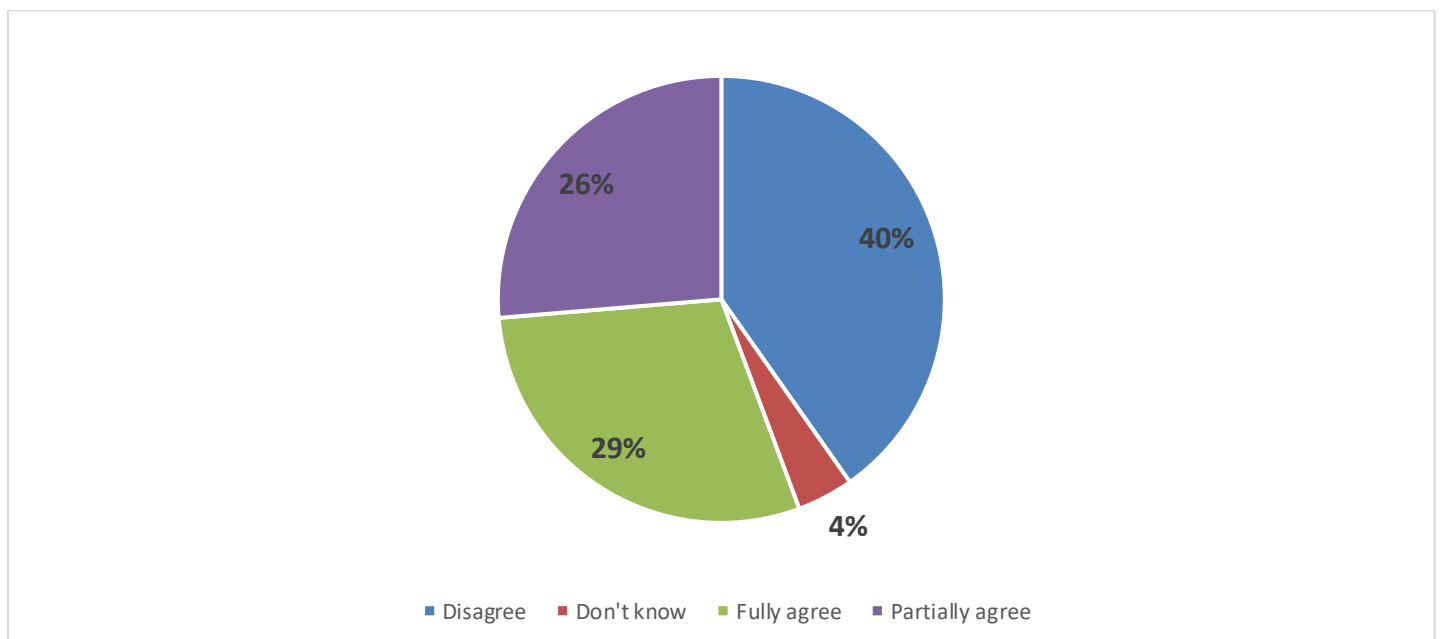
Suggestions for additional services that could be delivered from one of the proposed town centre Library hub buildings include:

- Banking
- IT support
- Citizens advice
- Social housing support
- Author talks
- Art and photography exhibits
- Study sessions
- Foodbanks
- Financial help and support
- Health and wellbeing groups

Objective 2: Help residents to access information, advice and support in a hub location

Graph 6 shows that 55% of respondents to the adult survey agreed partially or fully with Objective 2. 40% disagreed and 4% said they don't know.

Graph 6: Do you agree or disagree with the objective to "Help residents to access information, advice and support in a hub location"? (n=661)



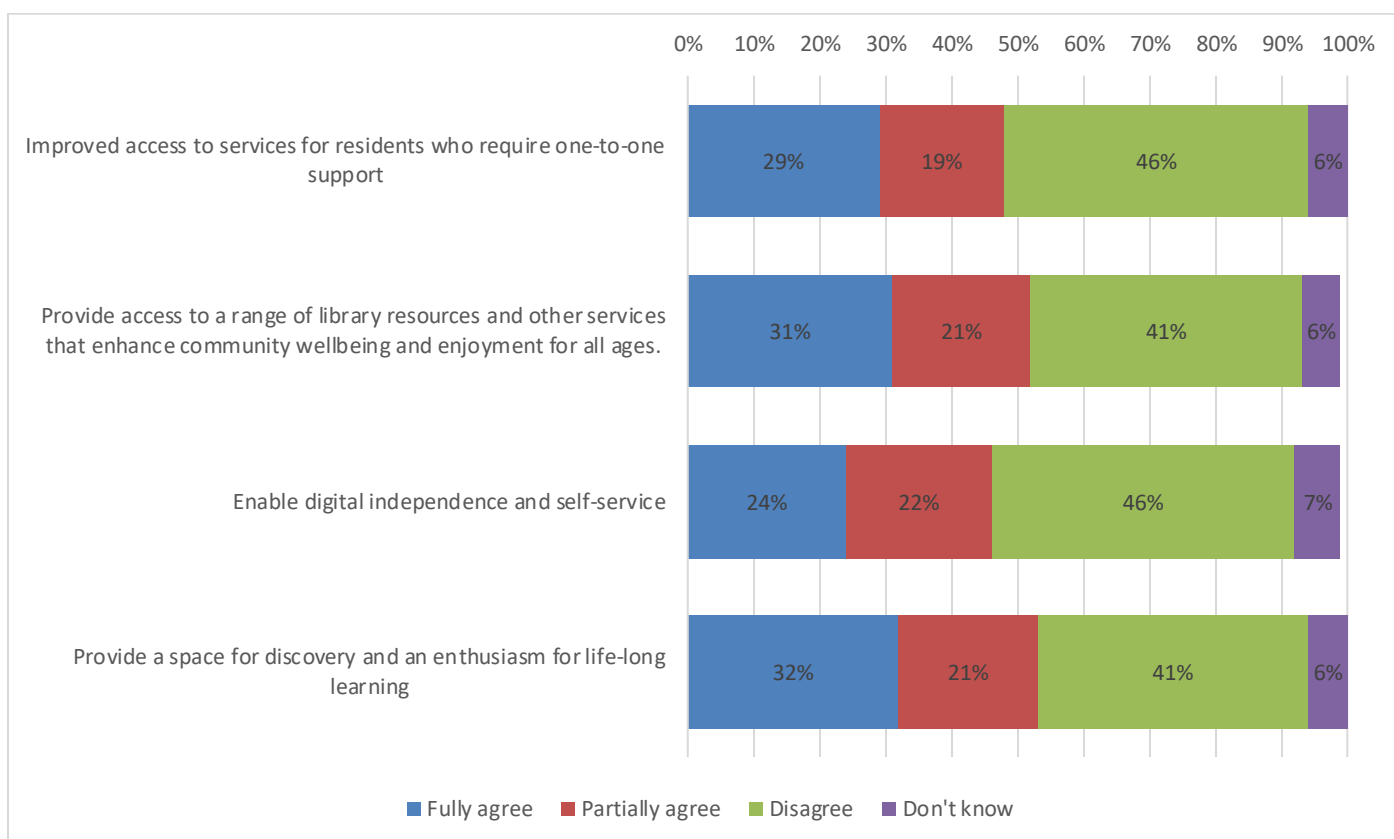
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Views on the proposed outcomes within Objective 2

As illustrated in **Graph 7** there were mixed views in relation to the outcomes under Objective 2:

- 58% of respondents fully or partially agree with the outcome of improved access to services for residents who require one-to-one support. 46% disagreed with the outcome whilst the remaining 6% indicated that they “don’t know”
- 52% fully or partially agreed with the outcome of providing access to a range of library resources and other services that enhance community wellbeing and enjoyment for all ages.
- 46% agreed with the outcome to enable digital independence and self-service
- 53% agreed fully or partially with the outcome to provide a space for discovery and an enthusiasm for life-long learning.

Graph 7: Percentage respondents who agree or disagree with the proposed outcomes under Objective 2



Key themes: Views on Objective 2 and its associated outcomes

As with the vision and objective 1, the key themes in the comments related to loss of local services, distance to hubs and the disproportionate impact on certain communities and groups within the community.

Comments related to the impact that the removal of community libraries would have in enabling the outcomes under objective 2 to be met. It was felt that removing community libraries would be counterproductive in delivering on these outcomes and would in fact reduce access to support and services having a negative impact on local communities’ wellbeing through removing the library space within these communities. It was felt that community libraries are “more than just books” and offer many hub services already.

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Whilst digital independence was generally seen as a positive, concerns were raised in the comments that some individuals currently use the libraries to access digital services and computers and either do not have the skills or access to devices/internet elsewhere. There is limited availability of printing and photocopying services outside libraries in most communities. Job seekers were mentioned as a group who rely on the library to get support and access computers and the financial impact of visiting libraries further away would have a negative impact on this group.

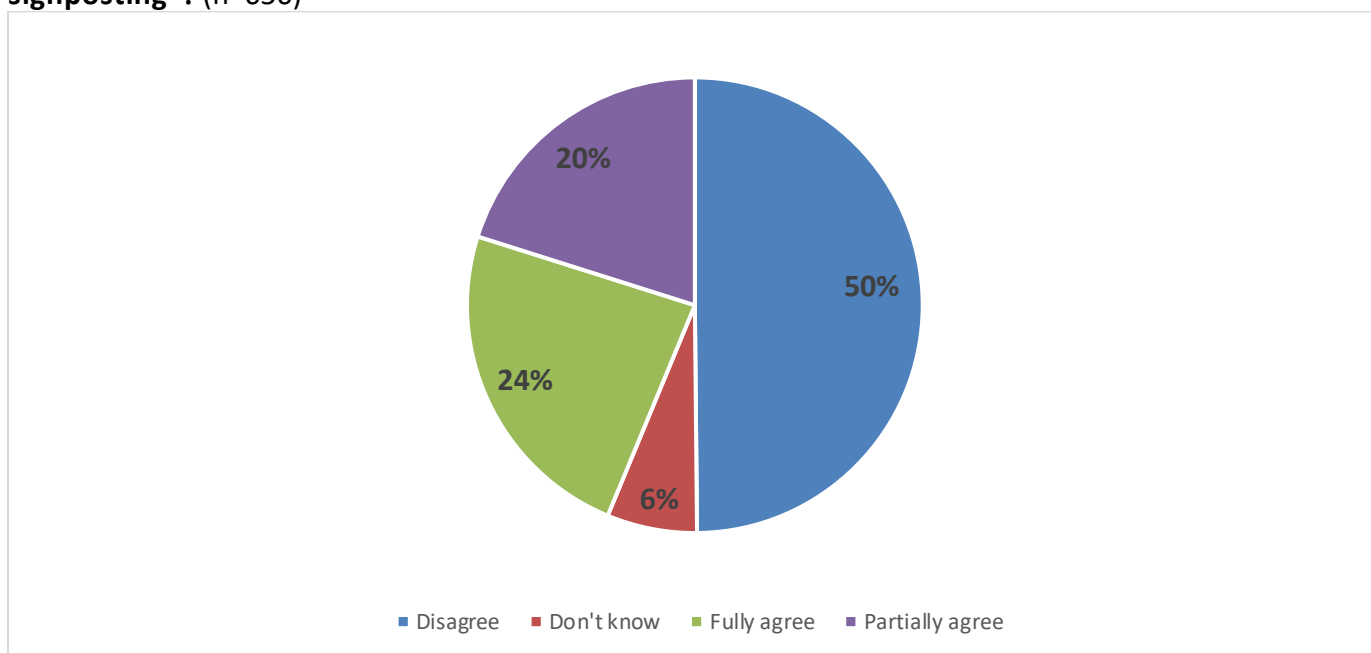
Is there anything missing from Objective 2?

No additional themes were identified under this question for Objective 2.

Objective 3: Put community needs at the heart of town centre hubs

Put community needs at the heart of town centre hubs, support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting.

Graph 8: Do you agree or disagree with the objective to "Put community needs at the heart of town centre hubs, support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting"? (n=656)



Do you agree or disagree with the objective to "Put community needs at the heart of town centre hubs, support and encourage greater resilience for individuals through support and signposting"? 50% of survey respondents disagreed with this outcome. 44% indicated that they fully agree or partially agree and 6% don't know.

Views on the proposed outcomes within Objective 3:

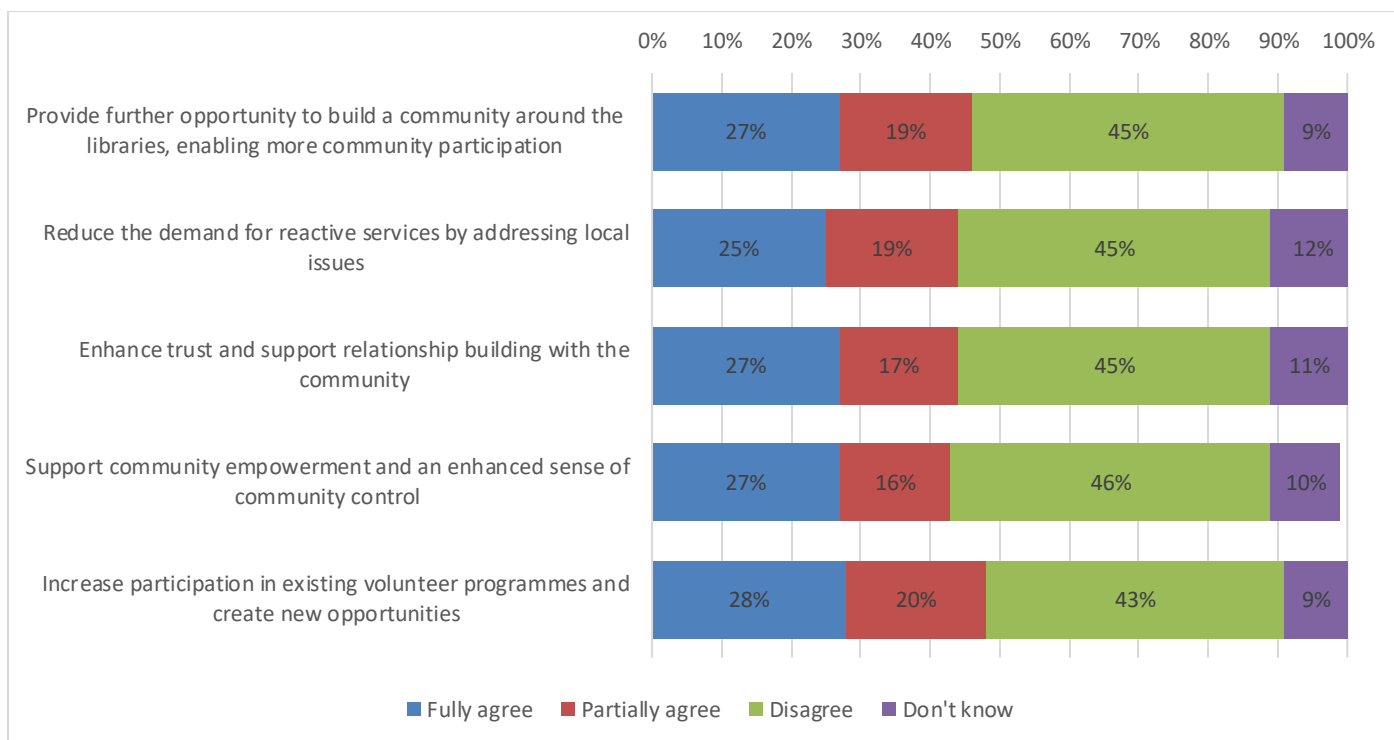
Five outcomes were identified under Objective 3 within the draft strategy. **Graph 8** summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes.

- 46% agreed with the outcome to provide further opportunity to build a community around the libraries, enabling more community participation,

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- 44% agreed (partially or fully) with the outcome to reduce the demand for reactive services by addressing local issues and to enhance trust and support relationship building with the community.
- 43% agreed with the outcome to support community empowerment and an enhanced sense of community control and
- 48% agreed with the outcome to increase participation in existing volunteer programmes such as Digital Fridays and create new opportunities

Graph 8: Percentage respondents who agree or disagree with the proposed outcomes under Objective 3



Key themes: Views on Objective 3 and its associated outcomes

Respondents questioned how the proposal to remove community libraries would help achieve the outcomes under objective 3. They questioned whether the council would listen and respond to the needs of communities and whether, by removing community libraries and centralising services in town centres this would reduce the opportunity for community participation and volunteering.

As with the vision and other objectives, there were concerns that those in smaller, more deprived communities would be more affected by the proposals and the most vulnerable within those communities would be disproportionately isolated and impacted by the removal of community libraires due to reduced accessibility to services. Lack of transport (and associated cost/time etc) to visit town centres was a recurring concern.

In relation to volunteering, there was concern that volunteers would lack the skills (library staff are trained) to deliver services and that some communities would not have volunteer capacity to support delivery of library and other services.

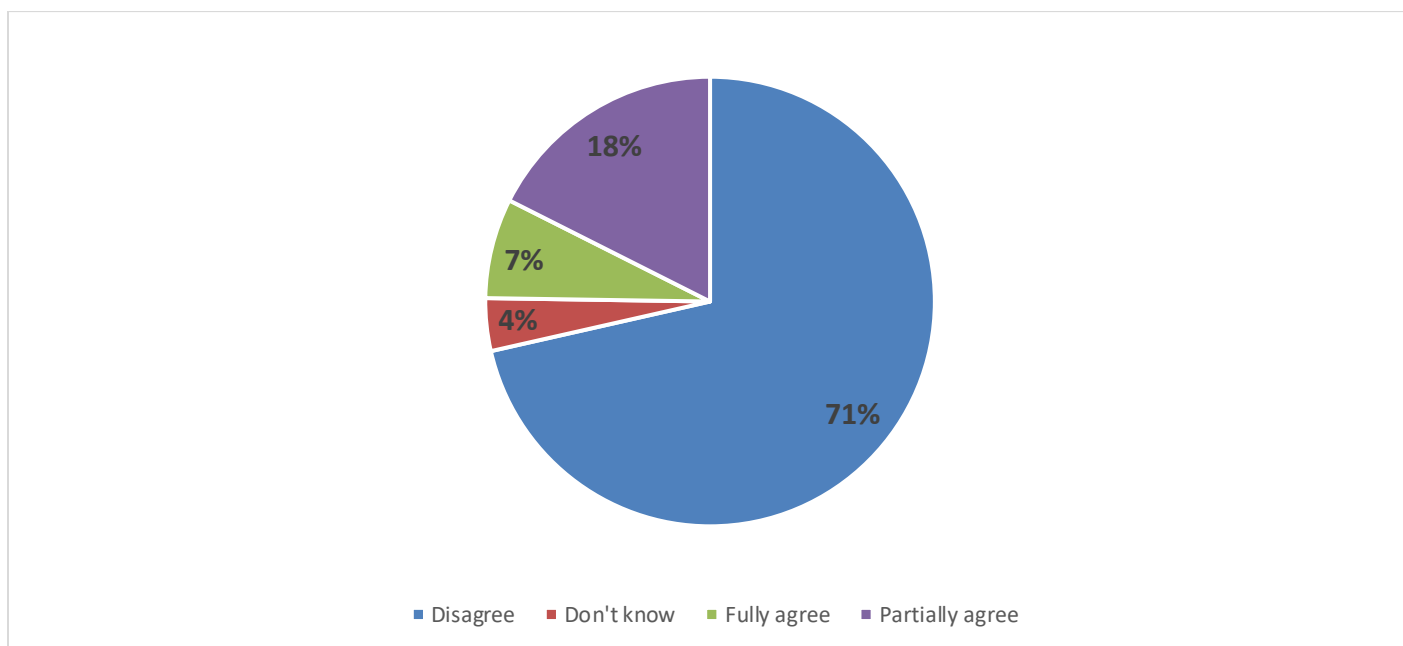
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Is there anything missing from Objective3?

No further themes were identified under this question for Objective 3 with comments reflecting those already identified.

Objective 4: Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resource and improve overall offer

Graph 9: Do you agree or disagree with the objective to "Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resource and improve overall offer"? (n=1030)



71% of respondents disagreed with the objective to "Rationalise the number of buildings to maximise resource and improve overall offer" with 25% indicating that they fully agree or partially agree and 4% saying they don't know.

The proposal to remove local libraries was also strongly disagreed with by those who completed the young people survey (please refer to section on Barriers within this report) with three quarters saying that they would not be able to access the hub locations (easily) as these libraries would no longer be within walking distance.

Views on the proposed outcomes within Objective 4:

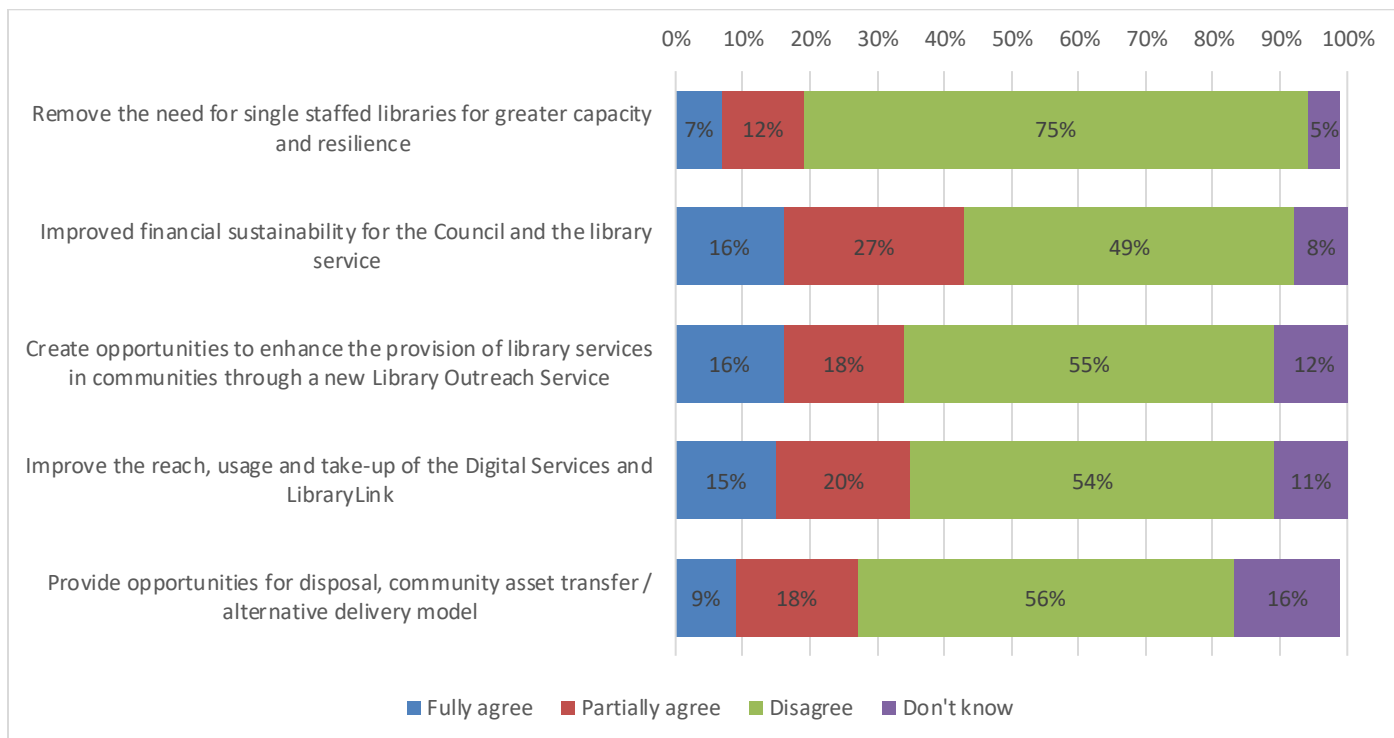
Five outcomes were identified under Objective 4 within the draft strategy. **Graph 10** summarises the views of respondents in relation to each of these outcomes.

- Three quarters of respondents (75%) *disagreed* with the outcome to remove the need for single staffed libraries for greater capacity and resilience
- 49% disagreed with the outcome of improved financial sustainability for the Council and the library service
- 55% disagreed with the outcome to create opportunities to enhance the provision of library services in communities through a new Library Outreach Service

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- 54% disagreed with the outcome of improving the reach, usage and take-up of the Digital Services and LibraryLink and
- 56% disagreed with the outcome to provide opportunities for disposal, community asset transfer or other alternative delivery model where a suitable business case can be made

Graph 10: Percentage respondents who agree or disagree with the proposed outcomes under Objective 4



Key themes: Views on Objective 4 and its associated outcomes

Reasons given for disagreement with these outcomes were linked to concerns raised throughout the consultation in relation to the proposed hub model.

Disagreement with the proposed removal of single staffed libraries was aligned with concerns about losing local community libraries. Local community libraries are considered to provide services for those in our communities who need the most. Single staff libraries are considered to be valuable community resources provide a friendly warm and welcoming environment for local residents. Library staff at these locations are able to develop closer relationships with library visitors and it is felt that this community feel would be lost within the larger hub locations.

In relation to improved financial sustainability survey respondents and those who attended drop-in sessions felt strongly that savings could be made in other ways and that financial savings made through closing local community libraries would be counterproductive as libraries offer preventative service.

In relation to the expansion of the community outreach service respondents felt that more detail was needed to understand what this may be and how it would help mitigate against the negative impact of closures in smaller and more isolated communities.

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Whilst **Graph 10** shows that more than half of respondents disagreed with the outcome to improve the reach and usage of digital services, many respondents felt that the expansion of digital services is a positive thing. The main reasons for disagreeing with this outcome was not wanting community libraries to be simply be replaced with a digital provision. Respondents felt that community libraries are important in offering digital access to residents, particularly in more deprived communities and that the removal of community libraries would in fact have a negative impact on access to digital library services. The LibraryLink Service was also seen to be a positive service but not everyone will be eligible, and this may need to be expanded as our population is ageing.

Is there anything missing from Objective 4?

Themes considered missing from objective 4 were:

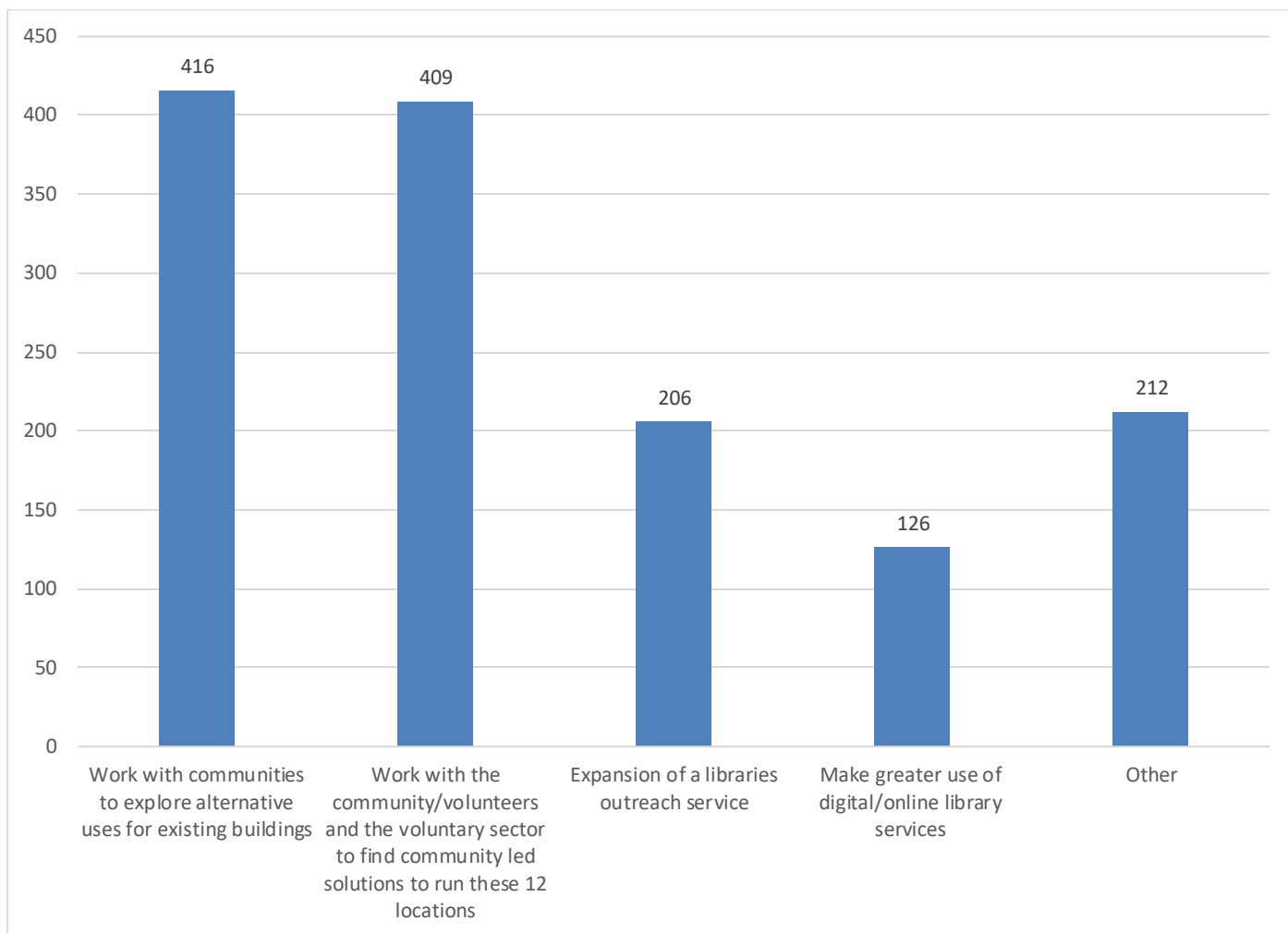
- to consider other ways of saving money across Caerphilly County Borough Council
- encourage better use of the facilities at all library locations and not just the proposed town centre hubs

Views on how to effectively achieve Objective 4

As highlighted in **Graph 11**, working with communities to explore alternative uses for existing buildings and working with the community/volunteers and the voluntary sector to find community led solutions to run these 12 locations were seen as the preferred way of effectively delivering the rationalisation of library services moving forward. Residents felt that more information is needed in relation to what the expansion of a libraries outreach service would involve and as noted previously, digital exclusion needs to be considered when looking at the option to make greater use of digital and online library services.

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Graph 11: Effective ways forward to help achieve Objective 4 (multiple response question)



Other suggestions include:

- exploring the use of schools, leisure centres/health centres and other community venues (where available)
- exploring community asset transfer where existing groups have the capacity to deliver services
- further reducing opening hours to keep more libraries open
- many respondents further commented a preference for a maintenance of the current delivery model and disagreement with the proposal for an alternative offer

These options will need to be considered further at stage 2 of the consultation once the Strategic Vision document has been adopted.

Equalities

The potential impact on those with protected characteristics, in particular age and disability and those from socio-economically disadvantaged communities has been highlighted throughout the report.

Specifically, respondents felt that the proposed move to a hub model would impact on them and their families due to

- children and adults with additional learning needs

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- age – both younger people/children and older people in terms of being able to access town centre locations and impact on education and access to learning/reading materials

Many people who attended the drop-in sessions shared concerns about the impact the decision could have on children and their education. Being able to access free books, groups and activities, and IT facilities are very important, especially when considered within the current financial climate.

- those who are physically disabled and have mobility issues (with reference to this also being age related)
- neurodiversity and use of larger libraries (noise/overwhelming)
- isolation and impact on mental health
- removal of a place of safety for those who feel excluded on the basis of their protected characteristic(s)

In relation to the Welsh language, 85% of respondents felt that the proposal will not affect the Welsh language less favourably however, there could be a more negative impact in reducing access to Welsh language books and services if this is not considered in designing library provision moving forward.

Overarching themes

There is a benefit to the hub model, but disagreement that these only being in town centre locations. Those who live in/near to town centres already have access to many services and amenities, for many small villages the library is one of the only things they have left. Therefore, it was suggested that these smaller community libraries are perhaps more vital, as without them, some people will no longer have any access to services.

Points were raised around the cumulative impact on some communities with other services being withdrawn and whether this is being considered.

People have also given feedback that the language used in the survey and document was not easy to follow and hard to fill in. We have responded by explaining that the survey needs to reflect the strategy document and that the drop-in sessions are for people who want to have their say but can't/don't want to complete the survey.

Next steps

The outcomes of the consultation will be considered by Cabinet on 9th January 2025.

The findings from the consultation will form a key part of a report which Cabinet will consider alongside other supporting information including an updated Integrated Impact Assessment and the Strategic Assessment document.

The full consultation findings will be publicly available at that time on the Council's website:

<https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/draft-library-service-strategic-vision-2024-2028>

A more detailed analysis of feedback broken down by library is being prepared and will be used to develop the integrated impact assessments and considered prior to the second stage of the libraries consultation process.

Stage 2 of the libraries consultation will commence on 15th January 2025 and continue to 12th March 2025.

APPENDIX 3:

List of annexes

Annex 1a: Feedback from face-to-face engagement

Annex 1b: Summary of Feedback from face-to-face engagement

Annex 2: Digest of survey comments

Annex 3: Additional written feedback received

Annex 4: Social media feedback

Annex 5: Stakeholder engagement