



Public consultation – Civic Centre redesign and Central Library relocation

For Reading Borough Council



Report from RedQuadrant

21 August 2023

Reading Libraries & Civic Centre Consultation

Executive Summary

Introduction and context

Reading Borough Council commissioned RedQuadrant to engage with and consult stakeholders, staff and the public on two key, intertwined projects – redesigning the Civic Centre reception, and relocating Reading Central Library to the Civic Centre.

The vision for the new Civic Centre Reception project is:

To create a safe, welcoming and accessible space for visitors and colleagues alike, that serves as a hub for community engagement and support for existing and new users, alongside a professional and effective welcome for business visitors.

Our goal is to provide a high-quality customer service experience that is efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of our diverse stakeholders.

We understand that the council would like to step away from a traditional service centre towards a modern, technologically enabled space. Consideration must be given to the different needs of customers, from those seeking a bed for the night, registration of births, deaths and marriages, council tax and education queries, to corporate visitors and guests. All these people should have a positive and welcoming experience when they visit the Civic Centre.

Services that will be accessed via the new reception will include Registration Services, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), Adult Social Care and Housing. The reception will also serve as the main entrance and first point of contact for visitors to all parts of the building. It will be also be the main access for the new Central Library.

And for the Reading Central Library project, the Council is in the enviable position of building a new Central Library at the Civic Centre, as part of a project to revitalise the Minster Quarter and make it a vibrant cultural hub. The new library should increase its focus on digital skills, events, learning and meeting the needs of local communities. The library will sit adjacent to other council services and consideration must be given to creating the best environments for all customers.

RedQuadrant was asked to design, deliver and analyse a public and stakeholder consultation, to inform the design of the library and redesign of the Civic Centre reception.

We were also asked to make every effort for all voices to be heard, and views are considered, so that the consultation can inform both projects.

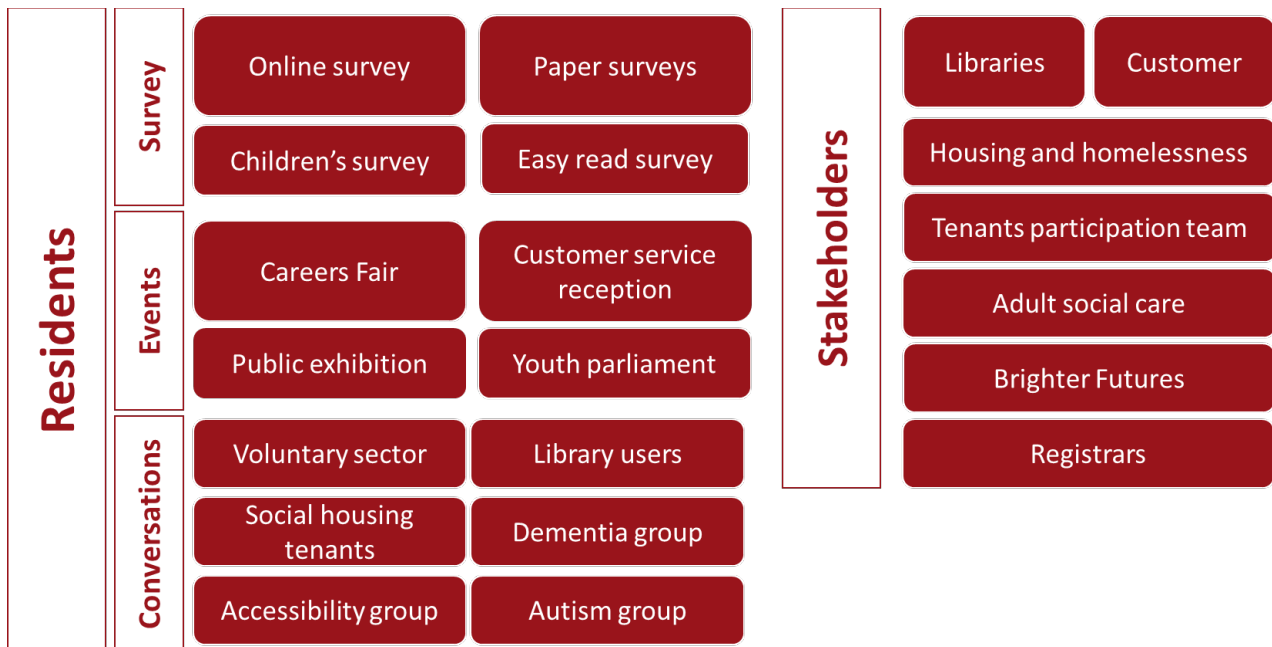
This report considers best practice in the design of co-located library and customer services by councils, and presents the findings of our engagement and consultation with residents and stakeholders.

Best practice

We reviewed current practice, in the UK and elsewhere, for examples of co-location of libraries and other council services to see what benefits this might bring, and what lessons can be learned for the project. There is now a wealth of experience of this kind of multi-use, campus-style approach, and some examples are given in section 2 of this report. A model for best practice includes the integration of services where this makes sense and does not dilute purpose, soft boundaries between different services and making use of existing and emerging technologies to reduce costs and enhance the customer experience.

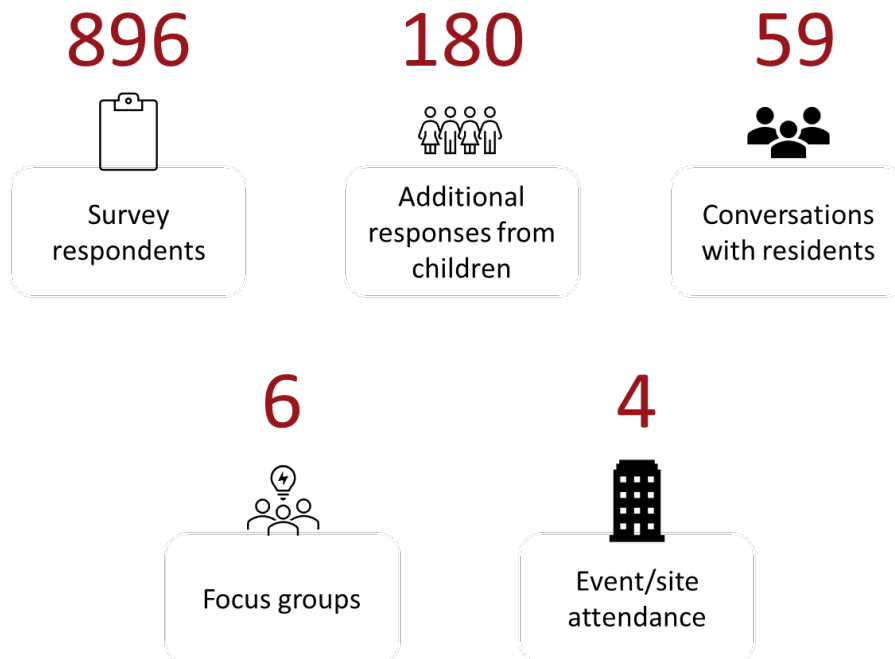
Methodology

In all, we had responses from 1035 people. The range of engagement methods across the consultation are shown below:



Reach

The scale of the consultation is outlined below:



Summary conclusions

- There is strong support for a new Central Library located in the Civic Centre. 75% of respondents to the survey question thought it would have a positive impact on them and 60% were in favour of co-location with the Civic space.
- There is broad agreement among our consultees with the Council's principal aims of increasing library use and improving customer satisfaction overall.
- 50% of library non-users surveyed said they would be interested in using the new Central Library.
- Respondents think that the most important considerations for the new library are retaining and extending opening hours, and having an improved stock of books. Wi-fi/computer facilities, events, children's provision (stock and activities), and study space were also seen as important. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of support for digital self-serve to access other Council and public services via the Library.
- Our survey shows the current provision at the Civic Centre is appreciated by its users: 63% felt safe using it and over 50% say it is accessible and professional. However, there was some criticism of the ambience and atmosphere as bureaucratic or off-putting. Constructively, many respondents both in the survey and focus groups, suggested ways this could be changed.

- Respondents were mostly in favour of the availability of face-to-face services, particularly where this supports elderly, disabled and digitally-excluded people, although some suggested that the phone and online services be improved instead.
- Key requirements identified in our consultation for the improved Civic Centre include assistance for people who find digital/online services difficult to use, improved disabled access, comfortable seating, free wi-fi, printing and scanning services, and accessible toilets and parking for disabled badge-holders.
- As can be seen, there is much crossover with what respondents wanted as part of the new library, suggesting useful synergies and efficiencies in design and operations. Improving the online offer together with enhanced support for self-service is one obvious example of where the Library and Civic Centre customer service can work together.
- There was some interest among our survey and focus group consultees about what will happen to the existing library building and its surroundings. There were also concerns about the new Library making the most of its potential through good design so that it is accessible and welcoming, and has good availability of staff to support and enable users. These issues could be addressed through engagement and communication during the next phases of the projects.
- The knowledgeable, extensive and informed comments of residents, staff and stakeholders were an impressive part of the response to the consultation, and the key points have been reflected in this report.
- We also note in more detail in the body of the report that the survey, whilst wide-ranging and generating a large number of responses, had an under-representation certain groups compared to the Borough of Reading's population. Whilst this is mitigated by focus group and individual conversations, there is a risk that the needs of these groups may not be fully recognised, so we also recommend the Council takes steps to ensure their views and needs are reflected in the subsequent stages of designing and implementing the new Library and Civic Centre customer area.

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1. Introduction and context

This report sets out in detail the results of the public engagement held to inform two linked projects:

1. Moving Reading Central Library to the Civic Centre building

With funding from a successful Levelling Up bid, Reading Borough Council is in the enviable position of building a new Central Library at the Civic Centre, as part of a project to revitalise the Minster Quarter and make it a vibrant cultural hub.

The new library will increase its focus on digital skills, events, learning and meeting the needs of local communities. The library will sit adjacent to other council services and consideration must be given to creating the best environment for all customers.

2. Redesigning the Civic Centre Reception

The vision for the new Civic Centre Reception project is:

To create a safe, welcoming and accessible space for visitors and colleagues alike, that serves as a hub for community engagement and support for existing and new users, alongside a professional and effective welcome for business visitors.

Our goal is to provide a high-quality customer service experience that is efficient, effective and responsive to the needs of our diverse stakeholders.

Services that will be accessed via the new reception will include Registration and Ceremonies, Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC), Adult Social Care and Housing. The foyer will also serve as the main entrance and first point of contact for visitors to all parts of the building and will be shared with the new Central Library.

The council would like to step away from a traditional service centre to a modern, technologically enabled space. Consideration must be given to the different needs of customers, who include those seeking a home, people registering a birth or death or seeking to get married, council tax and education queries, as well as corporate visitors and guests of the Council. The ambition is for all people to have a positive and welcoming experience when they visit the Civic Centre, for whatever purpose.

2. Best practice - Customers and library co-location

We carried out a review of current best practice of library and council service co-location, and the full version is available separately. These are some highlights to help consideration of this public consultation report.

2.1 Background

The Local Government Association (LGA) says, “libraries are trusted spaces, free to enter and open to all. In them, people explore reading, information, knowledge and culture.” It recommends that libraries are always considered as alternative council service delivery option, based on the universal nature of the service. ([Delivering local solutions for public library services](#), LGA 2017)

The government, through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) endorses this approach and [announced](#) last autumn that a new strategy for public libraries is in development, led by Baroness Sanderson, who visited Reading Central Library as part of her factfinding tour in November 2022.

The universal service libraries provide can support initiatives and provision, and co-location can be helpful to reach more people and have greater impact. Examples of public libraries working collaboratively with other services include:

- Well-being and achievement for children, such as the multi-agency approach of Redbridge’s [Fit, Fed And Read](#) programme, and the Blush programme delivered through libraries in [St Helens](#) which aims to tackle underachievement in literacy, language and speech among boys
- Public health outreach such as [Healthy Libraries](#) in Norfolk, offering a range of activities and resources to support better mental and physical health where obesity, childhood inactivity, and dementia all present huge challenges
- Libraries being Dementia Friendly spaces, recognising the importance of friendly, local spaces for people affected by Alzheimer’s disease or similar conditions
- Co-location with leisure to provide health benefits with the library supporting mental well-being and the leisure provider helping people get and stay active such as [Manchester's Arcadia Centre](#).

There is often a focus on ‘open access libraries’ using smart card tech*, which reduces the need for staff to be on duty simply to cover the hours the site is open – this allows repurposing of staff resource to where it can be of most impact, helping people to navigate choices and signposting resources. **see also footnote to s6.4 for a further explanation of this*

2.1. Examples of library and council customer service or civic space co-location

Complementing the broader civic offer, libraries and other front-facing customer services can be co-located successfully in a way that enhances the user experience. Examples include:

- Warwickshire County Council, quoted in the LGA's *Delivering local solutions* report, delivers a wide range of council services through their libraries, including concessionary travel/blue badge processing, council tax enquiries, and registration services and ceremonies. Library staff handle some enquiries/processes while other council staff deal with more complex enquiries. Since 2016, 12 libraries have [housed a police front desk](#).
- London Borough of [Camden](#) opened its new civic centre in 2014. It includes a library, leisure centre, café, and Contact Camden face-to-face services. The library and other public desks were relocated from elsewhere which required careful engagement with local people as a busy main road presents a major barrier. The library benefits from greatly extended hours through being predominantly self-service and located in a building which has a security presence and is open to the public from early morning to late evening. Providing public-facing services in the new council offices was seen as important to deliver visible public benefits and give a sense of ownership so that any Camden resident feels welcome
- London Borough of Brent opened its award-winning civic centre in Wembley, combining previously separate town hall and library functions. Visitors to the civic centre can now use a full range of library and registration services (including ceremonies), council customer services and meeting facilities. The civic centre is currently undergoing a [redesign programme](#), building on experience since it opened to improve aspects of the customer journey.
- [Morden library](#) in London Borough of Merton is a very well-established co-located facility, having opened as a library relocation and civic property consolidation in the early 1990s. The council acquired an under-occupied office block, and to give the council a more approachable face, an extension was added, with a library, public reception desk and council chamber, as well as a landscaped open space. A café and public toilets were later added, and the borough's heritage and local studies collections have also moved in. The site near a transport hub and local shops is ideal. Merton Council provides a number of services through its libraries including health zones and access to adult learning.
- Kent County Council's [Margate library](#) is co-located with [Thanet District Council's Gateway Plus](#) service. There is a shared reception (separate from the council offices) and the library handles accessible travel enquiries and registration of births and deaths, while the Gateway service offers face-to-face appointments and drop-ins for

more complex district council service enquiries that can't be resolved online or by phone.

- In Oxfordshire, [Bicester library in Franklins House](#) is a county council service co-located with services provided by Cherwell District Council. These include 'Bicester Connect', the registration service, and community facilities. The joint development is funded by developer contributions.
- [Number One Riverside](#) is Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council's flagship: 33 council buildings, including the central library, were consolidated on a single campus in 2014. The site also includes the customer service centre, a café and hireable meeting rooms and office spaces.
- [Library of Birmingham](#) is probably the best-known recent library building to have opened in England. It shares space with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and along with the Symphony Hall is considered by Birmingham City Council as the "cultural heart" of regeneration in the city centre. It includes two outdoor garden spaces and a roof terrace, and is adjacent to an amphitheatre for open air performances.

Internationally, there are also examples of good practice to draw on, where libraries have successfully co-located with galleries, museums and front-facing services such as civil registration and citizenship, and advice services. Examples:

- [Aarhus, Denmark](#)
- [Budel, Netherlands](#)
- [Library at the Dock, City of Melbourne, Australia](#)
- [Biblioteque de Parc-Extension, Montreal, Canada](#), co-located with a lifelong learning and arts centres
- [Singapore's public libraries](#), which offer a range of learning, creative and tech functions linked to the country's goals to be a high tech high wage economy.

2.3 A model for best practice

- A centrally located, clearly visible library space that encourages casual and purposive users and cross-fertilisation of services by giving people opportunities to access different offers in a familiar and friendly environment. Other services use the library to draw in groups they find hard to target, and the library benefits from higher footfall due to proximity to other services.
- Convenient, long opening hours facilitated by self-service and open access, either through technology solutions or shared staffing resource with other services to support building opening and security.

- Services should be co-located and look for opportunities to integrate where this will enhance service without blurring responsibilities or statutory requirements.
- A good 'mix' of services that work well and complement each other including customer-facing, information and advice, culture and events, and services supporting citizenship. This could include third sector.
- Soft boundaries between different service areas – physical and conceptual – and cross-training of staff to provide a seamless customer experience with “no wrong door”.
- Keeping a watching brief on AI and tech developments that will further streamline services in future.

3. Methodology: how we consulted

3.1. What we asked

We engaged on two key areas:

- The **redesign of the customer service area** in Reading Civic Centre – how and why the space is currently used, ideas for improvement
- The **relocation and redesign of Reading Central Library** – how the space is currently used, priorities for the new library space.

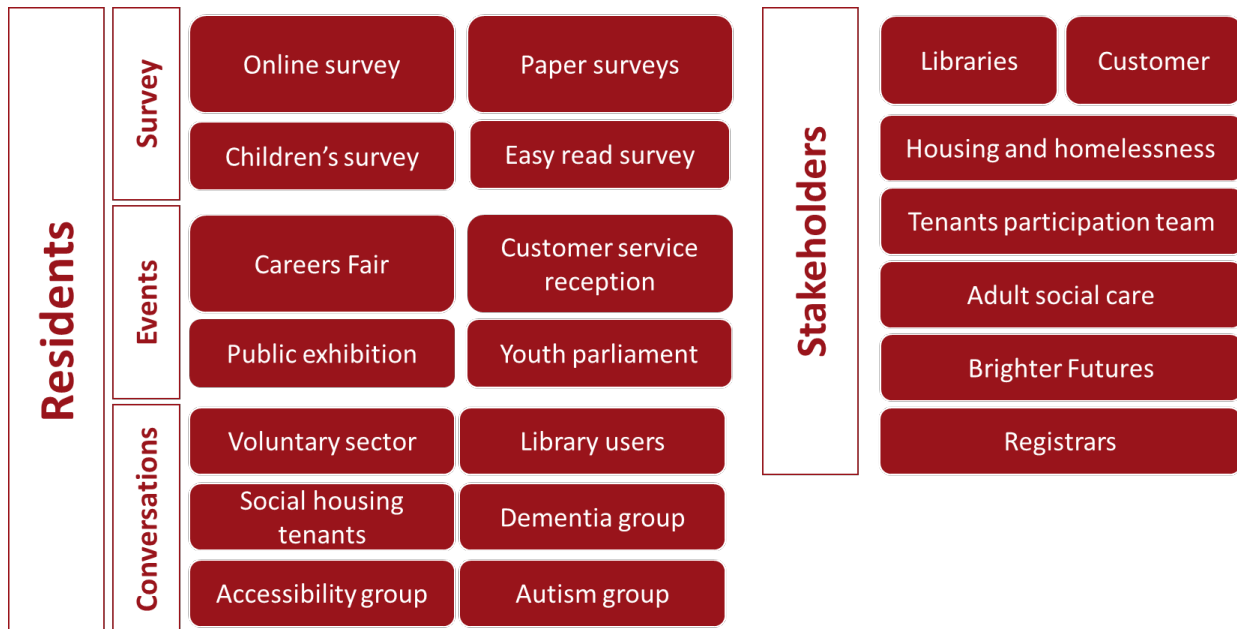
We worked closely with workstream leads from Customer Services and Libraries in the development of the consultation plan and the survey questionnaire. We liaised with the Communications team and a number of other council services to ensure that the consultation was both wide ranging in its scope and well publicised through a range of media.

3.2. Getting a wide range of views: recruitment and publicity

Both customer services and libraries are universal services for all residents, and it was important to try to canvass as many people as possible to get their views. We used a range of council and community channels to publicise the survey and recruit to focus groups:

- Libraries
- Housing and Communities - Tenant Services and Homelessness service
- Registrars
- Adult Social Care
- BfFC
- Social Inclusion & Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Partnerships Manager
- Accessibility, dementia and autism support groups
- Reading Citizens' Panel
- Reading Youth Parliament
- Council's social media channels.

The range of engagement methods across the consultation is shown below:



Consultation in the summer can be challenging so we made sure that events were spread across June and July. We were also flexible to maximise participation.

3.3. The survey

A key element of our engagement was a survey open to any member of the public. It asked questions on the existing Central Library and Civic Centre, the future co-located facility and the use of the Council's website.

The purpose of the survey was to:

- Inform the design of a co-located Central Library and Civic Centre
- Understand current and potential future usage of the Central Library and Civic Centre, and of the Council's website.
- Understand both the positives and the negatives of the current service
- Understand customer needs and wishes
- Collect ideas for the future based on experience of using the current facilities and facilities elsewhere.

A further benefit to the survey was to inform respondents of all the services available in libraries and at the Civic Centre, and of ways of interacting with the Council through the website.

There was a discussion about whether to run two separate surveys – one for the Library and one for the Civic Offices – or to combine them. A combined survey ran the risk of being very long but had the potential to attract responses from library users who do not use the Civic Centre and vice versa – it is often difficult to collect information from non-users. It was decided that the combined survey was the better approach, and the risk of people not completing a very long survey was mitigated by allowing respondents to opt out of questions about either the Library or the Civic Centre. This approach proved successful in gaining the views of those who do not currently use services – 32% of people who answered questions about the Library had not used Reading Central Library in the last year; for the Civic Centre the proportion was 77%.

We produced an initial draft of the survey following discussion with key Council officers and the Project Board. In order to reduce the time taken to complete the survey, for many questions respondents were asked to choose from a list of answers expected to be popular with the option to add any further answers or comments. Demographic data was also requested. The draft was amended and expanded by the Project Board.

The survey was published online via the Council's website and paper copies were made available in all Reading libraries, at the Civic Centre and in other Council locations. The survey was open from 26 June until 11 August 2023 (six weeks and five days). It was promoted on the Council website, through a variety of media and by advertising, and staff contact in libraries and other Council services. Paper copies of the survey were available at council locations and also available to be posted to residents. Large print and translated surveys were also available on request, as were versions for children and an easy read survey for people with learning disabilities.

During the period of the survey, the demographic composition of respondents was reviewed periodically, and gaps identified. Library staff and other Council officers were asked to encourage completion of the survey to ensure a broader range of respondents.

The survey was analysed both from quantitative and qualitative perspectives and principal themes identified. There were many useful suggestions, some immediately applicable to the project and some for the wider role of the services.

4. Reach of the consultation

5.1 Breadth of engagement

We sought to engage as widely as possible, canvassing views of current users of the Central Library and Customer Service area and also reaching out to people who are not regular users, and those whose views are less frequently heard.

In addition to offering people a number of ways to complete the questionnaire (paper copies, online survey, easy read, children's survey), the combined offer of online and in person engagement activities enabled residents and stakeholders to share their thoughts in the way that was the most convenient for them.

We also attended a number of existing venues and events in order to maximise opportunities to hear from residents and service users.

The range of engagement methodologies employed, combined with the collaborative approach and the commitment demonstrated across the council, enabled us to develop a good understanding of the range of views.

4.1. Scale of consultation

The consultation programme ran from 26 June to 11 August 2023, and we received views in a range of formats.

4.1.1. Surveys

A survey questionnaire (online with paper copies available), widely promoted:

- 896 responses
- 32.5% of respondents had not used Reading's library facilities in the last year.
- 77% of respondents had not used Reading's Civic Centre in the last year

Surveys are excellent for getting a large range of views across a number of key questions. Free text questions gave respondents opportunity to share specific points. From our experience, the survey completion rate was good and many respondents wrote passionately in their open responses.

A children's survey/competition:

- 180 responses

The children's survey focused on views around the library. The survey was circulated to all schools in Reading and then after school closed for the summer holidays, it was promoted alongside the Summer Reading Challenge in libraries, at the Brighter Futures summer programmes and on social media.

Easy read survey:

An easy read survey was also developed and this was used to incorporate views from some Adult Social Care service users.

4.1.2. Attendance at existing venues or events

In order to maximise the opportunities to hear a range of views, from people who are regular users of the library and customer service area, and those who are not, we attended the following areas/events to meet specific audiences:

Event	Target audience
Customer service area in the Civic Centre	Current users of the customer service area
Careers Fair run by Brighter Futures	Young people – under-represented in survey responses
Youth parliament session	Young people – under-represented in survey responses
Observation at public exhibition	Residents demonstrating interest in the design process

Customer service area in the Civic Centre

We visited Reading Civic Centre Customer area for four hours on 26 June and three hours on 26 July. Whilst there, we spoke to 29 customers who were waiting to be served, and also spoke to the Operations Manager, Customer Fulfilment Centre.

At peak queue length, there were six customer groups standing in line to speak to the receptionist. The peak for customers sitting in the waiting area was eight on our first visit. (Many of these eight customers were accompanied by others, so the total number waiting was thirteen.) On our second visit, there were two larger groups waiting alongside regular customers – these groups were waiting for the taxi licensing test and for a youth mentoring meeting.

Targeted focus groups and/or individual conversations

We also held focus groups and/or carried out conversation with targeted groups to ensure that we heard from groups who either have a particular stake in decisions or are often not heard from in public consultations with the following reasons:

Event	Target audience
Library user focus group (online)	Current users of the library
Reading housing tenants focus group (online)	Residents who may not currently make use of the library or civic centre

Event	Target audience
VCS organisations focus group (online)	Voluntary and community sector organisations
Accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at the Access and Disabilities Working Group meeting • Online focus group • In-person focus group 	Disabled people who face accessibility issues in using the library and civic centre
Autism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at Autism Group board meeting • Online focus group • In-person focus group 	Autistic people who may face accessibility issues and/or benefit from changes in provision at the library and civic centre
Dementia: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussion with a representative who had contacted us via our conversations with the accessibility working group 	People with dementia who may face accessibility issues and/or benefit from changes in provision at the library and civic centre

Online focus group discussions had between one and eleven attendees which enabled participation from all attending. Although these numbers of attendees are small, the information gained was rich. Participants were able to build on others' opinions and share the reasoning behind their views.

The VCS focus group took place during the usual meeting of the VCS Information Forum, and so benefitted from a good level of attendance. The library users' online focus group had five attendees, and a lively and useful discussion took place. Unfortunately, engagement at the other focus groups was not so strong, although we were able to elicit engagement in other ways. Despite promotion via mailing lists and attendance at events, we had only one attendee each for the housing tenants, accessibility, and autism focus groups. We managed this situation by pivoting to treating the planned focus groups as one-to-one interview sessions, and we were able to get a lot of detailed information which can be generalised to other members of the targeted group. Enquiries revealed that whilst residents had been aware of the focus group offering, they preferred to complete the online survey instead, so their views have still been captured. Some representatives from the accessibility and autism groups sent emails with information and suggestions, in lieu of participating in a focus group.

5.3 Geographic reach

5.3.1 Survey respondents

The survey asked respondents for the first half of their postcode. 92% of respondents gave an answer. Whilst postcode areas do not always align entirely with local authority boundaries, broadly speaking RG1, RG2, RG4, RG30 and RG31 represent the Reading Borough Council area.

30% people who provided a postcode lived in RG1, 11% in RG2, 24% in RG4, 19% in RG30 and 5% in RG31.

Using this as a basis, 89% of all respondents who answered the question lived in Reading. 90% of respondents who answered questions about the Central Library lived in Reading. 13.5% of respondents who answered questions about the Civic Centre and who gave a postcode lived outside Reading.

5.3.2 Focus group and individual conversations

Individual and focus group respondents were recruited from across the borough in partnership with council officers from a number of service areas.

5.4 Equalities breakdown

5.4.1 Survey respondents - demographic distribution

896 people took part in the survey. As well as questions on the Central library, Civic Offices and Reading Borough Council's website, people were asked some information about themselves. All questions in the survey were optional, and so not everybody gave an answer to each of these questions.

We have compared the answers from the survey to the results of the 2021 census¹ to see how well the survey represents the whole population.

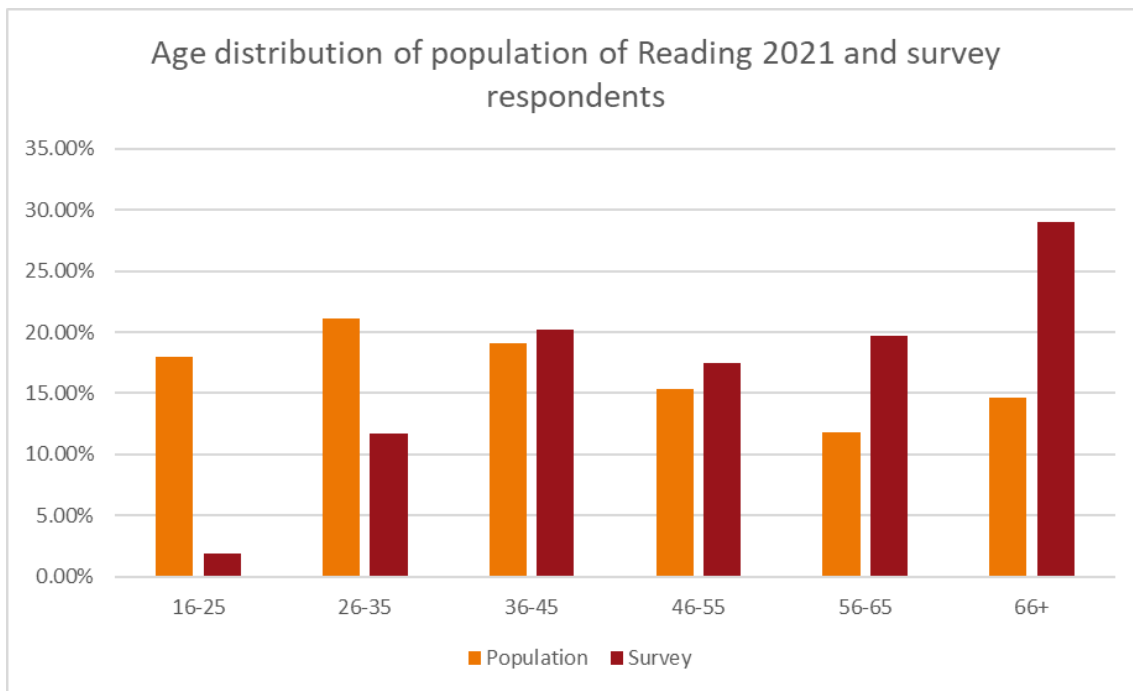
1

https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/reportcompare=E06000038#section_5

Age

Almost 93% of respondents gave their age. The survey was open to people aged 16 or above although three people below this age also took part. Only sixteen people aged from 16 to 25 took part.

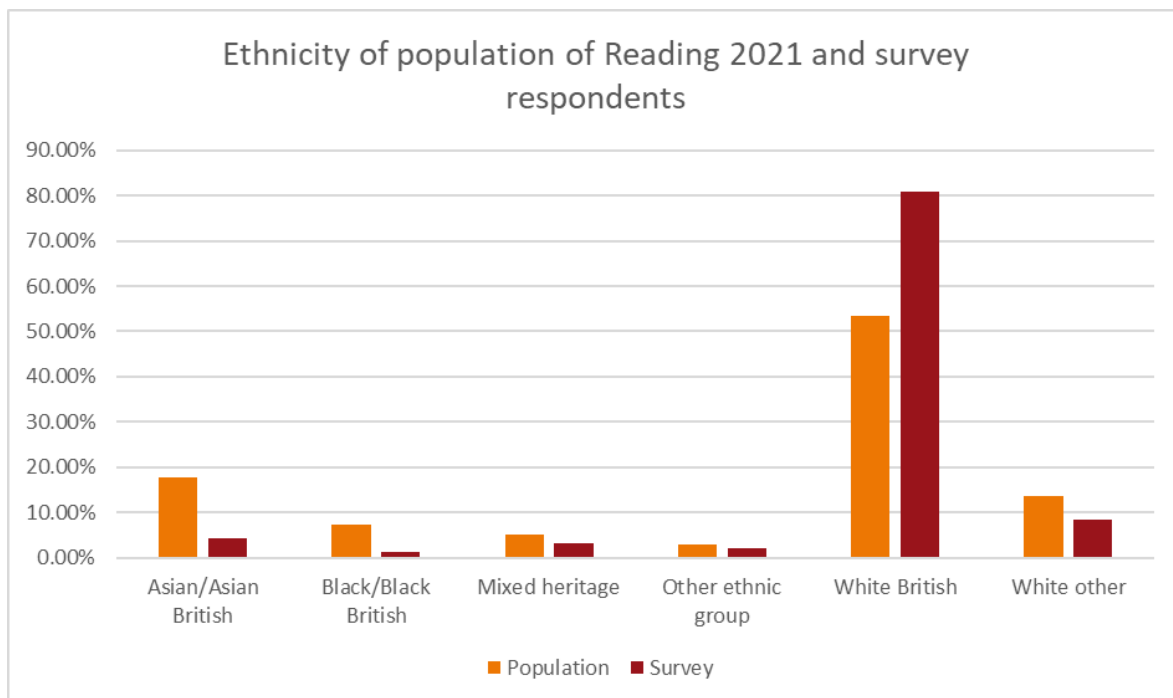
The age distribution of respondents is shown the graph below.



There is clearly an under-representation in younger age groups and an over-representation in older groups, most markedly in the over 65. The responses from under 16s have been omitted from the graph because this would produce a misleading comparison.

Ethnicity

Over 88% of respondents answered this question. The ethnicity of those respondents who answered this question is shown below in comparison to the Borough population:



Survey respondents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups were under-represented, and White British respondents over-represented. There were only about 16% of responses from Black people and 24% from Asian people compared to the results that would be expected if participants in the survey had reflected the population at large in the Borough. Whilst 12% of survey respondents did not answer this question, this is not a large enough proportion to explain these differences.

Religion

84% of respondents answered this question.

The overwhelming majority of respondents who gave an answer were either Christian (41%) or had no religion (52%). Other religions accounted for only 7% of responses, but at the 2021 Census, other religions accounted for 17.2% of the population of the Borough of Reading.

Sex

91% of respondents answered this question.

Of those people who answered the question, over 65% were female, 34.5% were male and three respondents self-described. The general population of Reading is 50.2% female.

Sexual orientation

77% of respondents answered this question.

Of those that did give an answer, 89% of respondents said they were straight/heterosexual, 5% gay or lesbian, 4% bisexual and 2% self-described. This is broadly similar to the census results, although fewer people in the census described themselves as being lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Gender identity

82% of respondents answered this question. Four survey respondents described themselves as trans (0.6% of those that answered the question). This is broadly similar to the census results.

Disability

87% of respondents answered this question.

Of those that responded, 18.5% had a disability and 81.5% did not. This question is not exactly the same as the census question, but 80% of people reported no disability in 2021.

Conclusions on demographic distribution

Whilst the results of the survey are meaningful, the views of some sectors of the population of Reading are not fully reflected in the results. During the time that the survey was live, this issue was identified, and Council officers made efforts to attract more people and to advertise more widely, and with some success, but significant gaps remain in the demographic profile of survey respondents. There are many possible reasons for a lack of response – for example, a lack of time to complete the survey or not seeing the relevant publicity.

The lack of younger people completing the survey suggests that there will be less emphasis on facilities for young people or the need for study space than might otherwise be the case. The needs of Black and Minority Ethnic communities may also not be fully reflected, although some respondents were at pains to point out that they were not answering simply from the point of their own need, but also for the needs of the wider community.

However, when making any decisions we recommend that the Council ensures that it considers the needs of those sections of the community who did not participate in the survey as well of those who did.

5.4.2 Focus group and individual conversations



We targeted our focus groups and individual conversations at people who might be less likely to engage with the library service, council communications and a formal consultation. In these groups, we saw greater representation from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, an even gender split and more people under the age of 30. The rich information we heard goes some way to balance the underrepresentation of people in the survey from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, young adults and men.

5. Findings from consultation

5.1. Library redesign

5.1.1. Survey

Of the 896 people who answered the survey, 97% (869 respondents) answered questions about the library. In contrast, 74% answered questions about the Civic Offices and the Council's website.

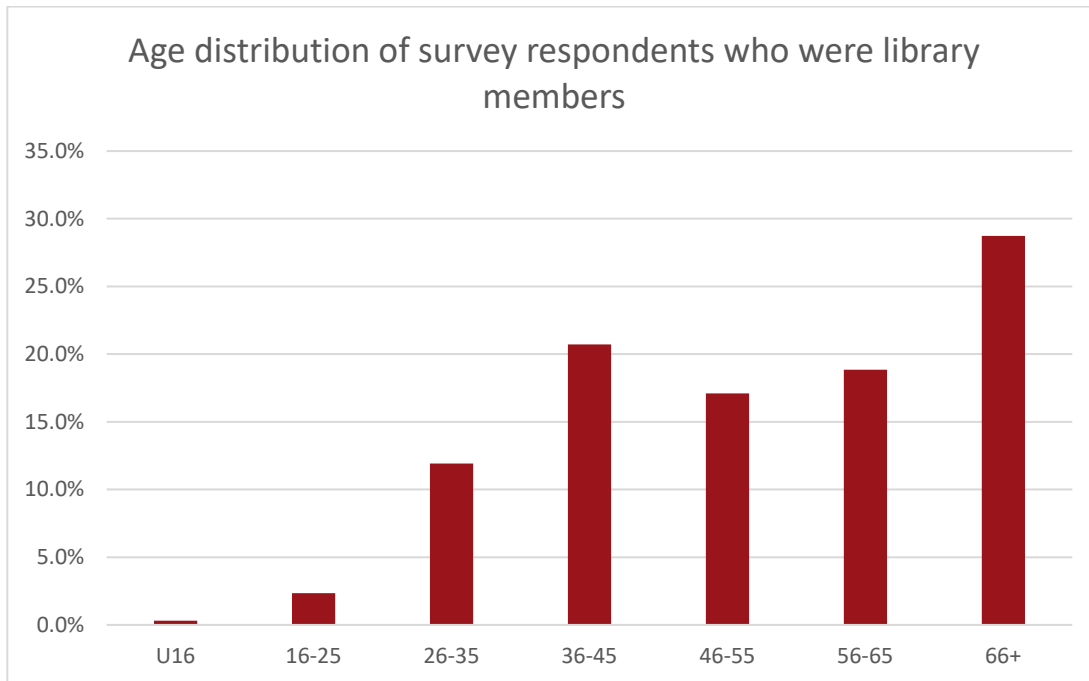
There were four questions about the library where respondents were invited to make comments. In total there were 1,698 of these free text comments about the library and 222 about the Civic Offices. Comments have been reflected throughout the report.

Since almost all of the people completing the survey answered questions on the library, it is no surprise that the demographic profile of people answering the library questions was almost exactly the same as that of people who completed the survey.

Library membership

The survey asked if people were members of the library. Of those that responded to the question, 79% said they were and 5% were not sure. This does mean that at least 15% were not currently members of the library and is useful in helping to design a new service which can attract new people.

The age distribution of library members is slightly less skewed towards older people.



Use and non-use of Reading Central Library

Respondents were asked whether they had used Reading Central Library in the last year. Altogether 68% had, although of these 5% had only used the service online. Of the people who said that they didn't use Reading Central Library, 21% said that they used a different library.

The survey asked the 283 people not using the Central Library to pick up to three reasons why they did not. The most frequent were:



53 people also made individual comments, some of which built on topics covered above. These are summarised below.

Library location

- The location is away from other facilities.
- Anti-social behaviour and unpleasant approach outside the existing library.
- The cost of parking is high, and there is little Blue Badge parking in the vicinity.
- Another library is more convenient.
- I do not live in Reading.
- I do not know where the library is.

Accessibility including opening hours

- The opening times don't suit me.

Facilities

- The space is not welcoming.
- The toilets are unpleasant.
- The study space is not suitable or too noisy.
- There is not enough comfortable seating.
- There is no secure cycle parking.

Programming

- Rhyme Time on Saturdays was discontinued.

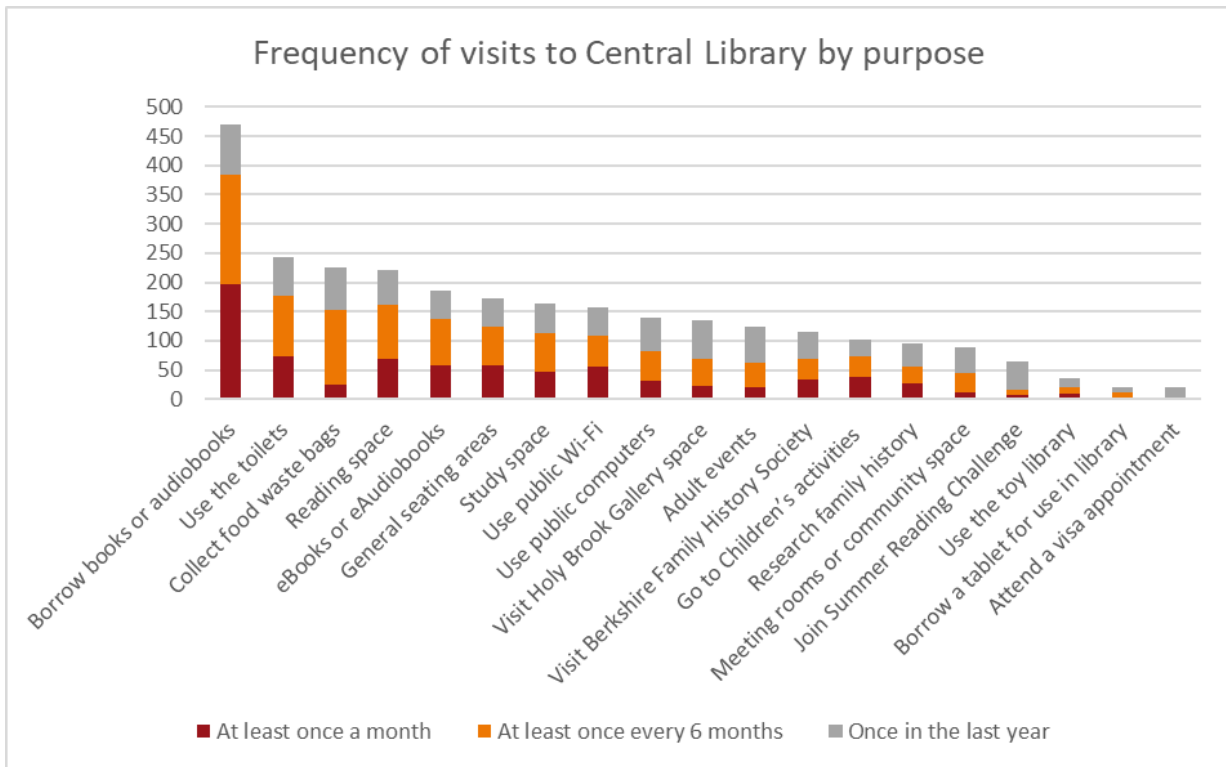
Stock

- I use online books.
- Cancellation of journals.

Other

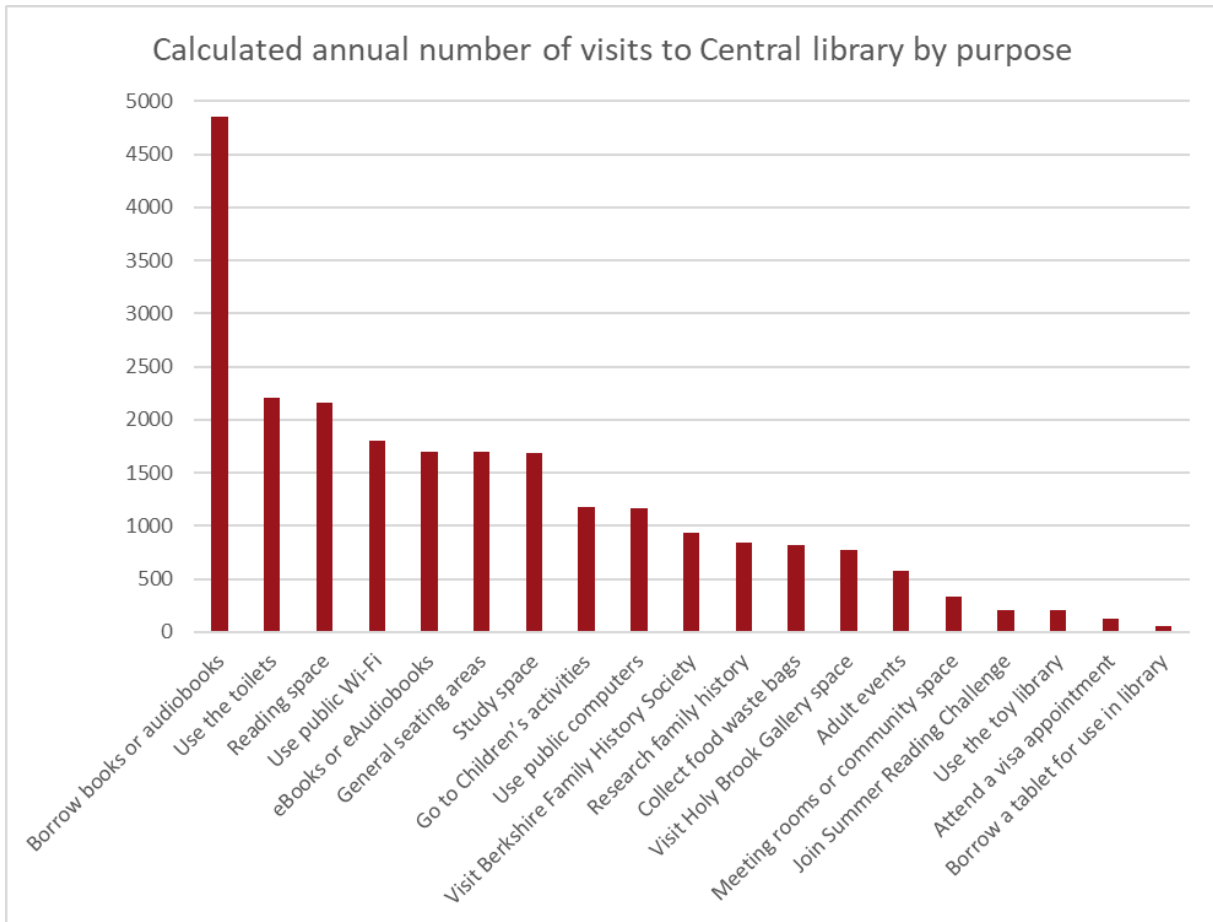
- I haven't resumed using the library since the pandemic.
- I haven't got around to it.
- There is a lack of publicity of library activities.

Respondents were asked about the services that they used in the library and the frequency of their visits:



By far the most popular was to borrow books or audio books. This was also the most popular activity of people using the library at least once a month. Loans of e-book and e-audio books very also important, and reading space, seating areas and study space were also frequently undertaken activities. The demographic profile of respondents may have been a factor in the relatively low responses on activities for children, the toy library or the Summer Reading Challenge.

The survey broke down the frequency of visits even further with visits defined by at least, weekly, monthly, three-monthly, six-monthly and annually. This was simplified for clarity in the previous graph. The full data allows us to calculate the annual number of visits by respondents and the results are shown in graph below:



This approach emphasises the pre-eminence of book borrowing. Other particularly popular activities were reading space, Wi-Fi, e-books, seating areas and study space. Although collection of food waste bags appears high in the list of reasons to visit the library, collections were made infrequently so are less prominent in the graph above.

The current service at Central Library

Respondents were asked to give comments on the service provided in the library. 300 people did so; there were many well considered and thoughtful answers giving informed views, and sometimes referencing other libraries in the UK and abroad as exemplars. Responses were often nuanced with some respondent giving thoughts on what they saw as positive and negative aspects of the service.

Many respondents were positive about the library and the wider library service, and its role in supporting the community in offering a range of activities. Library staff were generally praised. In other aspects of the service respondents were often divided in their opinions.

General comments

- Many said libraries are an important service which many people rely on.
- Many very appreciative of the current library with an excellent service with good range of activities.
- The excellent staff are responsive and friendly.
- The library should be staffed by qualified librarians.

Library building

- The library is a pleasant environment.
- Multi floor layout separates functions well.
- The wi-fi is good.
- The library serves as a warm space in winter.
- The book drop is useful.
- Many respondents were critical of the toilets and said that they were often closed
- Several respondents felt that the current library is sufficient and that there is no need to move. Some suggested that the current building should be updated to save money.
- One respondent said that the current library is fit for purpose in design but poorly maintained and inadequately staffed.
- Some areas are unstaffed making them unwelcoming.
- Some said that the air conditioning, lighting and lifts are inadequate, and that the library is gloomy.
- Some felt that there was a lack of study space or that the current space was not suitable because of noise.
- Some felt that the move towards customer-led transaction (for example self-issue kiosks) was unwelcome. Because people preferred to see a person.
- Some felt that there is a lack of comfortable seating .

Library location

- Some respondents felt that the library is in a good location with a bus stop outside, although others disagreed, especially in regard to buses from north Reading.

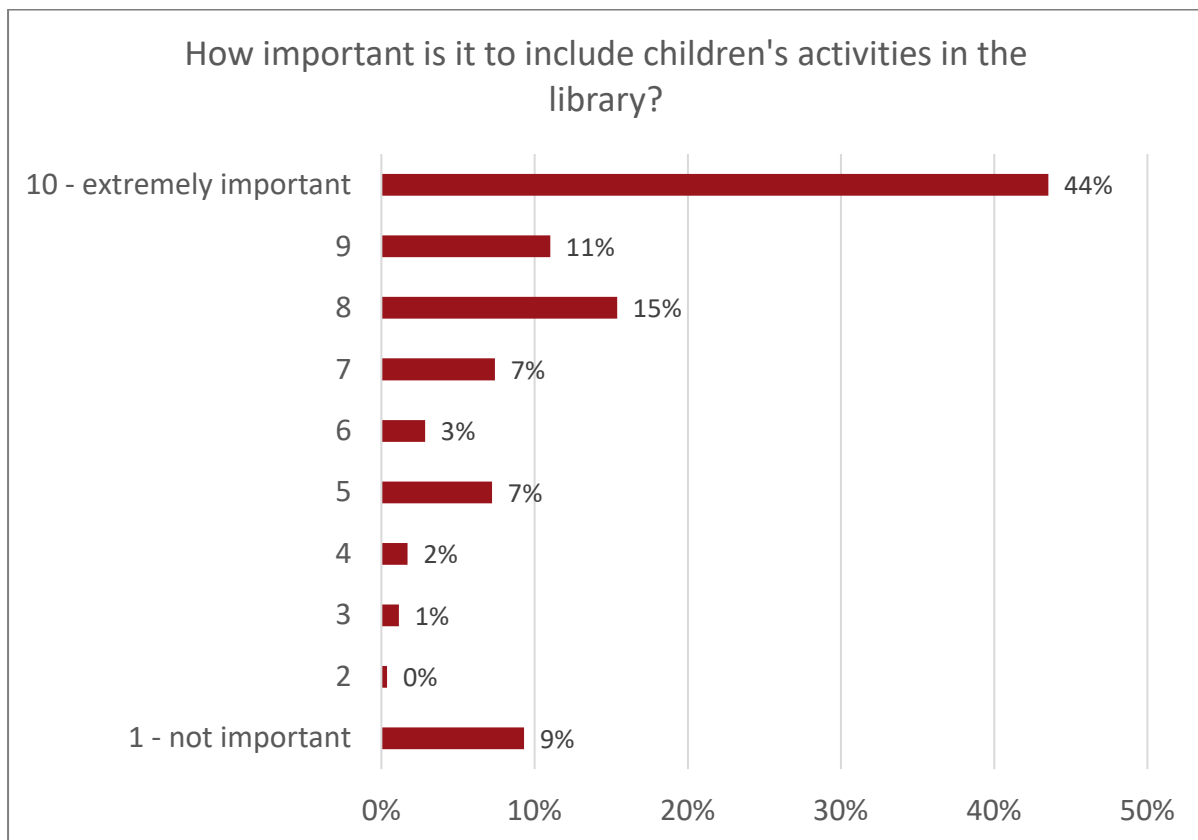
- Some felt that the approach to the library is unattractive and unsafe.
- Some felt that car parking is inadequate and expensive.
- Some people did not know where the Central Library is.

Library activities

- Many respondents were appreciative of the children's library and activities for children (and 33 comments mentioned the importance of activities for children) but some felt that they could be improved, for example by zoning according to age. Noise from children's area was also an issue for some. The toy library was appreciated although the opening hours were restricted.
- The music collection, book groups and the toy library are liked, although some respondents felt that the opening hours of the toy library could be extended.

Services for children in the library

The responses in relation to the importance of services for children show an interesting split where most people see them as very important, but a significant minority (9%) do not see them as important.



Library stock

- Retention of physical stock as well as e-stock is seen as important by many.
- Some said the range of e-books is limited.
- Some said the book stock is old.

Community provision

- Many respondents found the community space valuable.

Other service provision

- Several people felt that the opening hours could be improved especially outside of normal working hours.
- Children's activities are not always at convenient times.
- Some felt the reservations system is good, others did not.

- E-books and e-audio books can be difficult to access and small range of stock and some found difficulty using e-resources.
- The website very dated and catalogue difficult to browse.
- Adult activities are not well publicised.
- There are some issues with public PCs and self-issue kiosks, PCs have dirty keyboards. The internet is slow.
- There should be more stock on shelves and stock should be rotated more frequently.
- Food waste bags bring in more customers, although the 95% of people who collected food waste bags were library members.

Local studies and Berkshire Family History Society

- Local studies and Berkshire Family History Society are important resources. The newspaper archive is better than that available at Berkshire Record Office.
- Provision should be made for relocation of Berkshire Family History Society.
- Some commented on reduction in size since relocation to third floor in the current library.

There were a number of suggestions for an improved service:

- Children's play area
- More activities would engender a more vibrant atmosphere
- More activities for children, especially at weekends. Toy library open at weekends
- Services aimed at adults often take place during working hours
- Wider range of stock and more stock on shelves
- Café
- Better signage, especially with regard to areas where food can be consumed. Water fountains and café would be welcome
- More opportunity to request new stock, although some customers praised the current reservation system
- Use Holybrook gallery more for displays
- More charging points
- Parent and child facilities

- Have physical copies or newspapers and magazines, and more subscriptions to online resources
- Citizen’s Advice and Tourist Information
- Other services could be present – for example the police.

Use

- Two common comments were that people would use the library more if it were less unwelcoming and that people were unaware of the range of services provided until they completed the survey indicating a need for better publicity.

Some examples of what respondents said about Central Library

Central Library staff deliver a superb service and are, in my opinion, unsung heroes. The building is a delight - with exceptions for lack of funding from RBC for maintenance and updates etc

[I have been a] library member for 68 years. Fantastic staff all libraries, especially during lockdown

We love the children’s area in Central Library and Rhymetime. There are very few places in Reading town centre to let young children be out of their buggy safely so the library is a great place for them to have a break. If I need to come into Reading for a shopping trip, I try and plan this around a Rhymetime session.

I think libraries are an underrated service. I use them periodically and I feel they are silent heroes of information. I have just learnt some of the services available that I didn’t know about by doing this survey. More PR is needed for our wonderful library

I want a library with engaging books and spaces for young readers & carers, community rooms for classes/courses/and book/board games/craft groups, free Wi-Fi and computer stations for people without home access, comfortable spaces for books to be sampled and enjoyed, resources for students to research and study with their peers, loads of eBooks for everyone who struggles to get to a physical library, free movement of a book from one spoke library to a different spoke library patron, opening hours to capture the many demographics in our community-- not just people who can visit on weekdays. I absolutely love libraries where the staff are excited to get people into reading or help them with finding resources. I'm very happy to hear of the investment being made in Reading's central library.

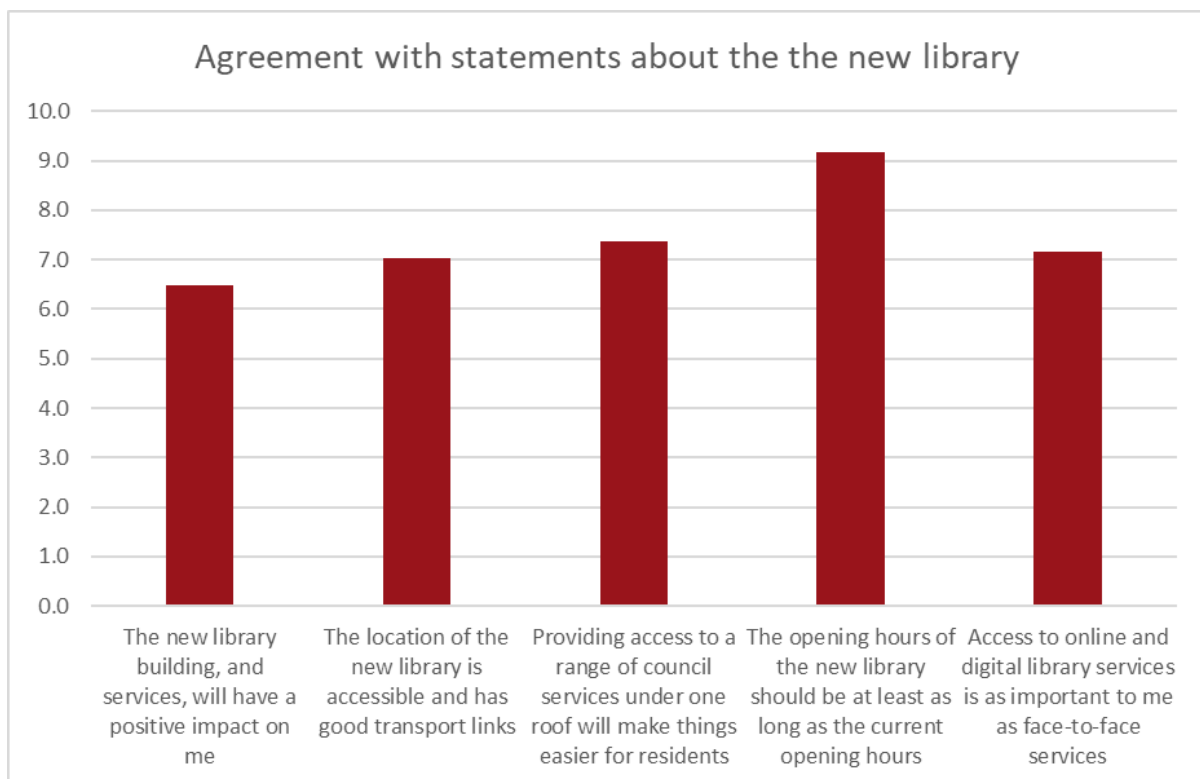
The Library needs to be a community hub - somewhere people want to go to rather than somewhere people need to go to. Needs to have sufficient knowledgeable staff who can support, guide and encourage users to negotiate their information needs (whether those needs are about curiosity, learning, or support).

The current library service is good in its essentials, but in need of modernization in several key ways.

The facilities are old, grubby and smelly. There seems to be a lack of staff. The books are old and out of date

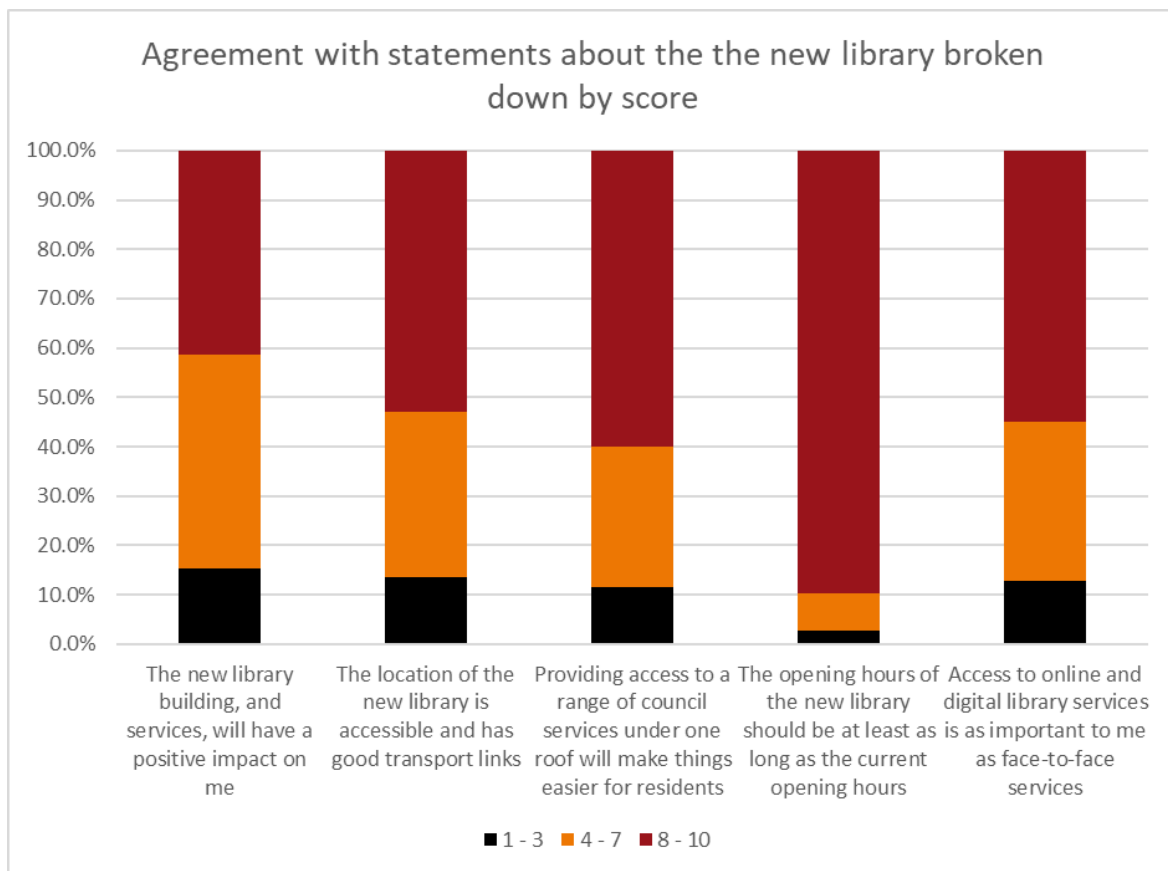
Perceptions of the new library

Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the new library on several criteria from 1 to 10, with ten being the highest. Although the number of people answering individual questions varied slightly, response rates were generally above 90% of all respondents. Average scores are shown in the graph below:



All of these criteria had positive responses on average, by far the most positive being retention or increase of opening hours.

The graph below shows a more detailed breakdown of the responses:



We have grouped the responses into negative (rating 1 – 3, neutral (rating 4 – 7) and positive (rating 8 – 10).

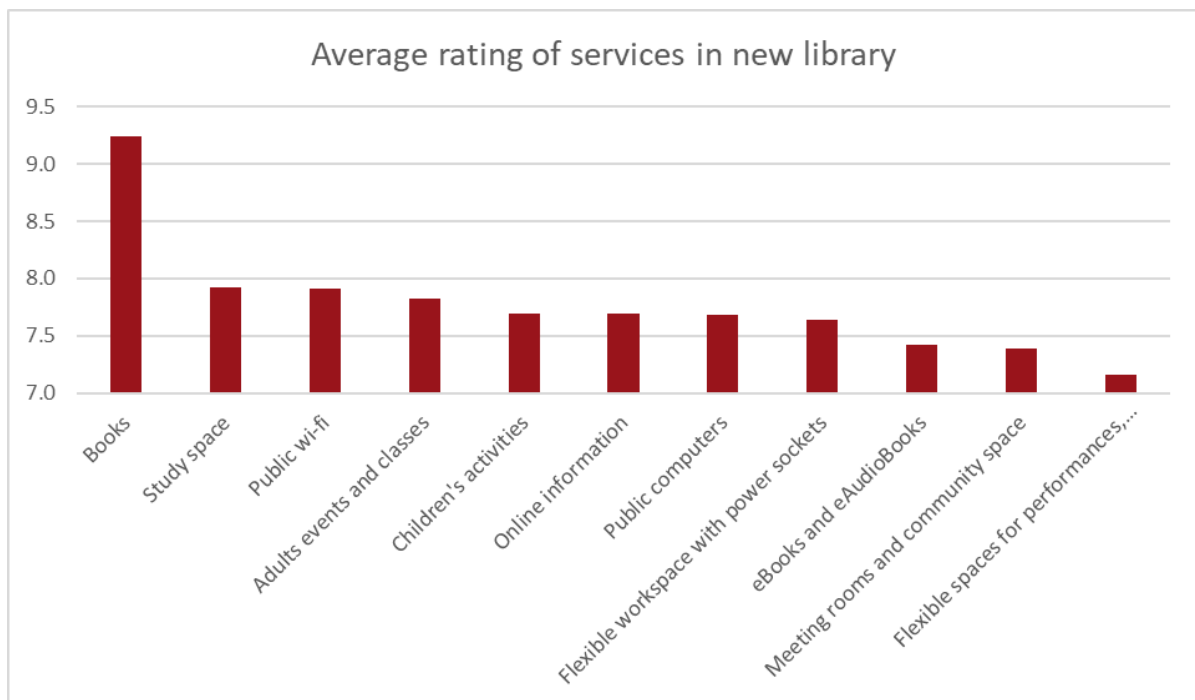
Although about 15% of respondents did not think the new library would have a positive impact on them, the remainder were either fairly neutral (44%) or positive (41%).

Over half of respondents were positive about the location of the library and 60% thought that providing council services under one roof would be positive. The overwhelming majority (90%) thought that opening hours should be at least as long as the current library, and 28% of respondents rated this 10 – the highest score. 55% were positive on the question of whether online and digital services are as important as face to face library services.

Rating of importance of services in the new library

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of certain services in the new library from 1 to 10, with ten being the highest. Although the number of people answering individual

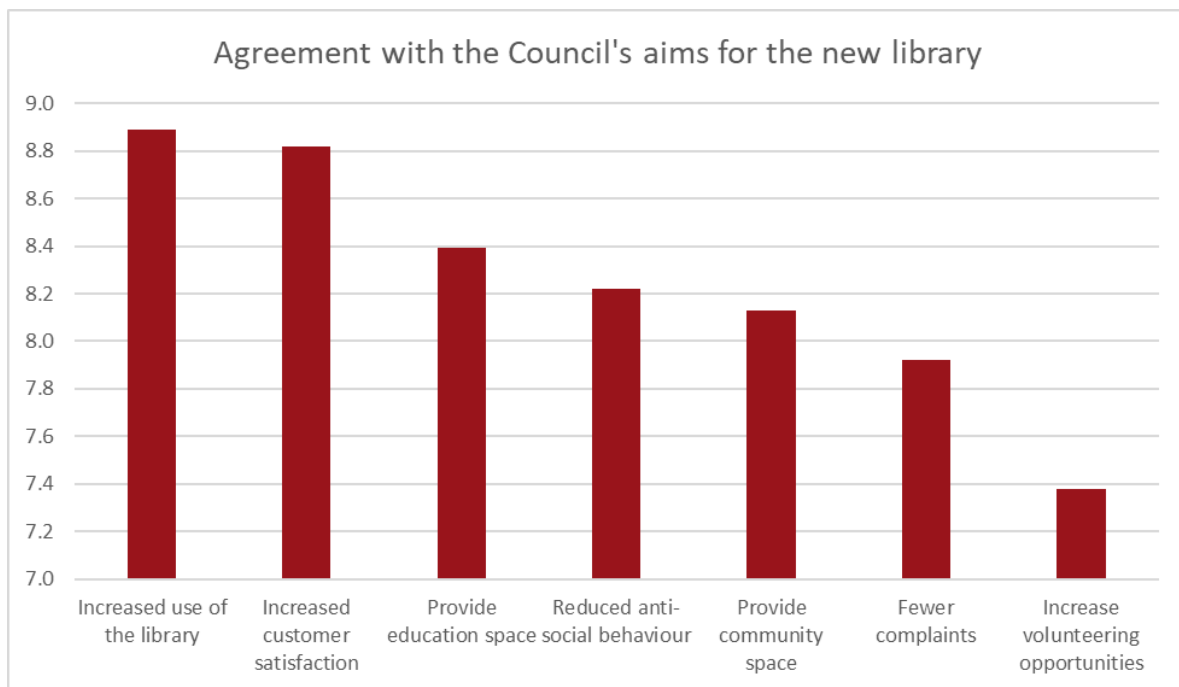
questions varied slightly, response rates were generally above 90% of all respondents. These are shown in the graph below. To emphasise the differences between different ratings, we have omitted the bottom part of the graph, so that even the lowest scoring services in the graph have averaged a score of over seven out of ten.



Once again, as might well be expected in a survey about libraries, the most important service was books. Study space, Wi-Fi, adult and children’s events, online information and power sockets also scored highly, with e-stock, meeting rooms and performance space scoring slightly less well, although these too were well above the potential average rating.

Rating of the Council’s aims for the Central Library redesign

In the same way, respondents were asked to rate the Council’s aims for the new library. The graph below shows the average scores for each aim. Once again, the bottom of the graph is not shown to emphasise differences – all aims received an average score of more than seven out of ten with response rates of over 90%.



There was general agreement with all of the aims. 86% of respondents rated increased use of the library 8, 9 or 10 and 83% rated increased customer satisfaction in the same way. All of the aims were rated 8, 9 or 10 by more than half of the respondents, although 9% rated increasing volunteering as 1 – 3.

Additional comments on aims

In addition to the aims suggested, there was an opportunity in the survey to give comments. There were 371 responses which included a great range of diverse comments. The most frequent are summarised below but there are many other useful suggestions.

We have grouped the most frequent comments by theme below. Where comments were made particularly frequently, we have written them in bold.

Increased customer use

- There should be improved opening times, especially for working people.
- There should be increased accessibility inside and outside the building including disabled parking.
- Improved and cleaner toilets.
- A safe space for teenagers and young people.

- Some people felt that the library would be less easily reached than the current library with customer numbers suffering as a result.
- There should be better promotion of library activities.

Reduce anti-social behaviour

- Providing a safe and welcoming space.
- Some questioned whether much anti-social behaviour takes place in current library.
- Tackling anti-social behaviour may be incompatible with assisting the most vulnerable in society.
- There should be increased security.

Fewer complaints

- There was some scepticism that a new library will reduce complaints.

Increased customer satisfaction

- Provide better stock.
- Maintain number of physical books.
- Upgrade computer systems.

Provide educational space

- More dedicated study space with charging points.
- More and quieter study space.

Provide community space

- Affordable community spaces.
- Better space for babies and toddlers.
- Include a café and catering facilities for meeting rooms.
- Bookable spaces, especially for external meetings and during evenings

- More art displays and activities.

Increased volunteering opportunities

- Do not replace paid staff by volunteers.
- Some people felt that using volunteers to extend library hours would be acceptable and that volunteers could assist customers with self-service kiosks.
- There should be more voluntary organisations working with council.
- Improved volunteer opportunities welcome.

Other aims and objectives

- Ensure a high quality design:
 - Look at good library designs elsewhere
 - Achieve a balance between quiet space and those for activities
 - Ensure library is well lit, unlike the existing building
 - Retain high level of book stock
 - Install fully accessible including induction loops
 - Make this a vibrant community place with an outdoor plaza.
- Retain and improve local studies:
 - Some people felt that the space should be increased
 - Concern about future of Berkshire Family History Society space.
- More than providing space, provide activities as well.
- Encourage reading and love of reading:
 - Retain printed word as well as online resources.
- Children and young people:
 - Need larger children's spaces
 - More activities for children especially at weekends
 - Engender reading in children
 - Activities for home schoolers
 - Resource packs for schools
 - Enclosed children's library to prevent young children from running off
 - Increased work with local schools
 - Extend toy library hours.
- Business:
 - Employment including work experience, offer for job seekers

- Smart working spaces and encouraging remote working
- Opportunities for young people, especially entrepreneurship
- Involvement of local businesses.
- Inclusivity:
 - A library for all – not just a traditional library
 - Intergenerational work
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages and related activities
 - More adult activities
 - Combatting digital exclusion.
- Cost of living crisis:
 - Libraries functioning as warm spaces during winter for those unable to heat their homes.
- Tackling social isolation.
- Should be mindful of climate change:
 - bicycle storage.

Other comments covered the following points:

- A concern that new space is smaller than the existing library.
- Lack of funding in future a threat.
- Without sufficient high quality staff the library will not succeed.
- Do not move library to a new location - use budget for something more valuable to the people of Reading.
- Retain links with historic environment of Reading including the Holybrook.
- There should only be one library in Reading.
- There was some opposition to co-location with civic offices because libraries were seen as neutral spaces, less so the Civic Centre.
- Retain existing library but also open one at the Civic Offices, possibly with different functions.
- Do not sacrifice physical stock in favour of e-resources.
- Co-locate with other activities including Citizen's Advice.
- Cater to the needs of University students.

Some examples of what respondents said about the Council's aims for the new library

I think incorporating a community cafe into the space with more relaxed and comfortable seating would be very powerful in encouraging people to see it as a place to meet up with friends and relax and learn together.

RedQuadrant consultant report for Reading Borough Council

Excellent aims. The library was at the centre of my life as a child & teenager & as I raised my own children. Now I have retired I look forward to it being central to my new life.

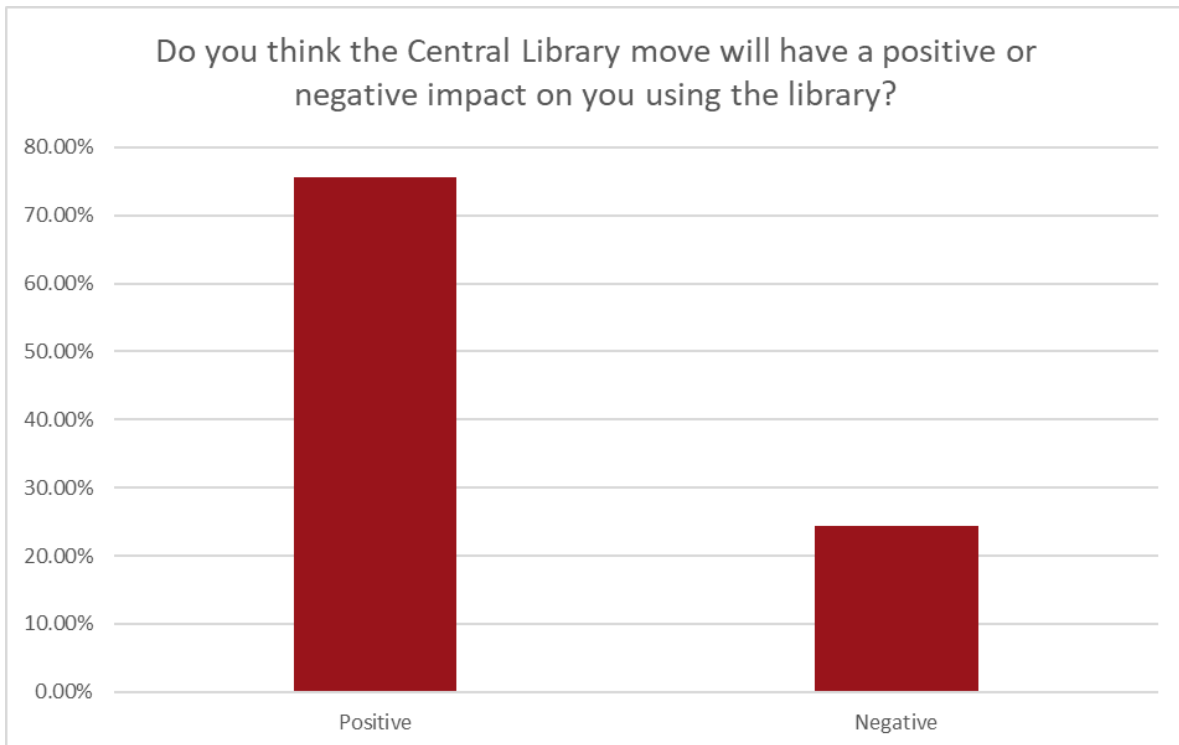
The Local History section is an absolute goldmine.

Because the current Central Library is too old, too dark, too dirty, we have no choice but to go to the new library in Wokingham Cultural Hub. Hopefully the new Central Library will be something for us to be proud of living in Reading.

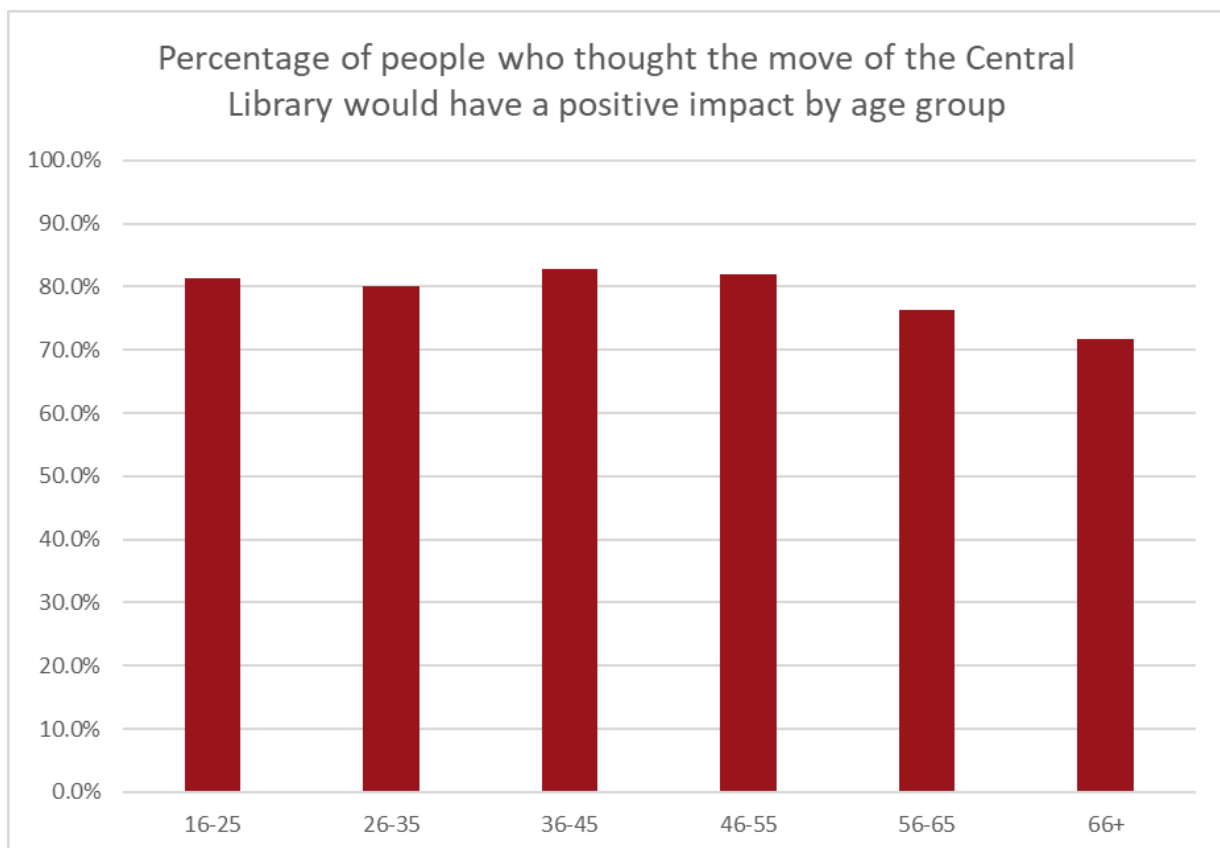
Please keep the children's area as a space that they are free to roam and laugh out aloud to books in. The teen area should be adjacent for ease of families with children of different ages.

Impact and use of the new library

The survey asked whether the new library would have a positive or negative impact on the respondent. 830 people answered this question. Over 75% answered positively.



To understand the responses more, we analysed those replying positively by age group. The results are shown in the graph below:



There is a slight decline in positive responses in older age groups, but even in those aged over 65, where there was the lowest degree of positivity, more than 71% of people gave a positive answer.

Respondents were asked whether they were more likely to use the Central Library once it is relocated. 96% of respondents answered this question. Of those that answered, 46% said yes, 20% said no and 34% were not sure.

Of those who had responded that they did not currently use the Central Library, 50% said that they would use they would be more likely to use the new library.

The survey asked people to comment on the reasons they had for saying whether the library move would have a positive impact on them. There were 690 responses to this question, which covered an enormous range of topics. As with the comments on the current library,

there were many considered and knowledgeable comments and suggestions. The most common are referred to in this report below, although there is much to learn from a full examination.

We have divided the comments into those people who thought it would have a positive impact, those who thought it would have a negative impact and those who did not answer this question

There were 478 comments from people who thought the move would be positive. 220 specifically welcomed the new building and the facilities that it would offer and 211 thought the location was better, although 37 thought it was no improvement. 20 specifically expressed the view that co-location with the Civic Offices would be an improvement.

Of those, who though the move would be negative, 188 made comments. Of these, 134 thought the location was worse than the existing library. 21 expressed concerns that the new library may be smaller than the current library and 12 people thought that the cost would not be justified.

Except for those who completed the survey in the last week before its closing date, respondents had not seen detailed design and therefore speculated on what new library might be like. A small number of respondents would have chosen 'neither positive nor negative' if the option had been offered on the survey.

Some respondents said that their positive opinion was conditional on certain features of the new library. These included:

- Improved parking
- Retention of local studies and/or Family History
- The need to retain physical stock
- The need to retain current service provision
- The need to extend opening hours.

Despite being positive about the relocation, some people had misgivings about co-location with the Civic Offices on the grounds that it may be noisy or potential customers may be put off by the busy environment.

Several respondents were concerned that the new library would be funded at the expense of other libraries in the Borough.

Other themes emerging from those who thought the library move would have a negative effect on them were:

- The existing library is good/adequate or could be improved
- Co-location would be bad for the library because of customer numbers or noise
- The Borough's other libraries should be retained and receive investment
- 9 people thought the new library would be an improvement on the old but would not use it more. One person liked the co-location but not the new site
- New library will not have links to Reading's past as existing one does, especially the Holywell Brook
- A concern that the focus of new library on community space and not core activities
- Local studies or the Berkshire Family History Society may be marginalised in the new design.

Of the 24 people who did not give an opinion on whether the move would be positive or negative but made a comment, the most frequent theme was that they would wait until the new design was available to the public before forming an opinion.

Quotes from those who support the proposed move of Central Library

Many people praised the current offer and were keen to see it enhanced by the planned move of the Library.

The redesign should make more space for books that I may be interested in using.

If it's well designed, I will use it to work in and study in and find out things from

The existing library is perfectly placed, a perfect size, is perfectly laid-out - apart from the toilets, decoration, toy library and welcome desk

I'll go more often if it's a nicer environment to study and browse. And if it's open at more convenient times.

A more modern and pleasant space would be somewhere I would pop in during my lunch break from work

The old library is looking very tired - but do keep wonderful children's area design.

[The new library] Will hopefully be lighter and airier than Central Library. If there is a cafe and toilets and activities, I will bring my grandchildren. They have been to story sessions at Central Library but it means parking at Queens Road, and we could come on bus to the new site

The current building is poorly placed, shabby, ill-lit and doesn't feel welcoming. So long as resources and staff skills and are maintained, the chance to put library services in a fresh, and hopefully more secure and welcoming location should offer me a better all round experience

I expect the new place to be light, bright and designed to inspire creativity. My children love as it's not always a safe space or clean.

We want a dedicated Library (which we currently have) not one that is ensconced in the Civic Centre.

Further comments

The survey concluded with a request for further comments. There were 337 responses. Many of these supported themes that had emerged from other questions in the survey. The most common themes are below.

The building

This attracted most answers to the question. Some reflect points highlighted in the impact of the new library section above.

- 49 people felt that the new building will be an improvement on the old.
- 28 people felt that the existing building is adequate.
- The design of the new library should be of a high quality.
- The design should take into account the needs of less mobile people and that this should be a key element of the design.
- 10 people were concerned that the new library would be smaller than the old one, and that stock levels would be reduced.
- There should be an attractive outdoor space.
- Some respondents hoped that the design principle of the existing library of segregating noisier from quieter areas should be retained in the new building.
- Some felt that the design should include a café and/or a shop.

Access

- Good opening hours are important.
- There were concerns about the cost of car parking.
- There were concerns by some about access by public transport and cycling, although others felt that the new location would be an improvement on the old.

Library services

- Services for children are very important.
- The space should be suitable for teens and young people, and the design should ensure that young children remain in a secure area and cannot wander out.
- There should be more events and services for children.
- Retaining the Local Studies and Berkshire Family History Society accommodation is important.
- The library service should retain other libraries in Reading.
- There were concerns that staffing levels may be reduced.
- Human contact is important and should not be replaced entirely by technology.
- Access to Wi-Fi and tackling digital exclusion are really important and good opportunity to address this.
- Activity sessions for adults and children should be offered outside normal working hours.
- If more services are digital, there should be staff to assist.

Co-location of the Library and Civic Offices

- Some people welcomed co-location with the Civic Offices on grounds of convenience but others disagreed, particularly on the grounds of noise affecting library users and privacy.

Partnership

- Some respondents suggested that Citizen's Advice should be accommodated in the Library.
- The Library should partner more with health providers.
- The Library should establish strong bonds with local schools.
- The Library should be in partnership with arts organisations.

The existing Central Library

A number of respondents raised questions about what would happen to the existing library building and its environs:

- Some felt that the building should be retained in some form
- The Reading Conservation Area Advisory Committee stated that the current building is a significant contributor to the streetscape of King's Road and adjacent streets
- Some respondents felt that there was a risk of a decline in that part of the town if the library were relocated
- The site or the capital receipt from its sale should be ringfenced for library activities.

Other comments

- One person was concerned about library provision during the period when the existing library had closed and the new library had not yet opened.
- Rather than move the entire library, consider moving & creating certain services to the Council Offices.
- Instead of having a separate Reading library card, the Borough should either have an app-based registration card or a physical card where multiple services can be accessed by residents.

Some examples of responses to the further comments question

This could be fantastic for the community in Reading if done well, please please do as much as possible to build in the services that are needed. Please also consider how users will access the site from a transport point of view ...both public transport and parking. The Civic Offices aren't in an ideal location [for parking] especially for users with disabilities.

Libraries are an integral part of society, enabling people to learn when study space and resources may not be accessible at home, bringing people together at groups such as children's events, and providing a safe community space for vulnerable members of the community. Libraries also help reduce youth anti-social behaviour by providing young people with somewhere safe to go when not in school. It has been proven that reading improves mental health and academia, therefore we need to be investing in libraries to encourage society to read more to make the wider community happier and healthier and more likely to succeed.

I totally agree that the library should form part of an information and services hub. You've got to get the 'flow' of the library to work effectively; with welcoming decor, good signage and clearly printed instruction on how 'to do' and 'access' all library services. The children's area is vitally important; positive early experiences lead to an increased future customer base. I feel it's important to offer cultural events, visiting authors, talks, history and other societies to share information.

The approaches to the new library matter as much as the interior design. Let's have approach routes that are safe for vulnerable pedestrians

The Civic office site is fairly easy to reach , but is not visible. I think it is really important to publicise the new location, so that everyone is aware of it.

I feel it's important to keep a safe place for younger children.

Please make the children's area large, friendly and welcoming and a space which children are encouraged to enjoy.

Think innovatively - go and learn from others who are doing it well

Any welcoming community space is an asset - see for example, how well the Biscuit Factory is used for diverse activities

I am hoping you will aim high, both in terms of the services offered and the building itself. It would be truly excellent to have a library/civic offices reception that Reading could be proud of. We deserve much better, as a town aspiring to be a city.

I support asylum seekers so I'm in the library quite frequently but mainly to support them to access books and other resources. They are very impressed with the facilities but a brighter more modern space would be preferable.

Huge congratulations on securing funding for this project - it's wonderful that Reading's putting such effort and focus into the library service.

5.1.2. Conclusions from the survey about the library

The proposals for the new co-located library were generally well received by participants in the survey. Of the 830 people who answered the question, over 75% thought that the library would have a positive impact on their use of the library.

45% of people answering the question said that they would be more likely to use the new library, against only 20% who said they would not be more likely.

When asked to rate the question 'The new library building, and services, will have a positive impact on me' on a scale of 1 to 10, the average rating was 6.5 and 41% of people gave a rating of 8 or more.

There was a good deal of agreement with the Council's aims for the new library, and respondents also suggested other possible aims. These included:

- Ensure a high quality design
- Retain and improve local studies
- More than providing space, provide activities as well
- Encourage reading and love of reading
- More facilities for children and young people
- Cater for business and employment
- Ensure inclusivity of access
- Tackle the cost of living crisis.

Throughout the survey there were many considered and knowledgeable comments and suggestions about the design of the new library and the operation of the library service, many welcoming the new library and others raising concerns.

- Respondents were particularly concerned that **the library opening hours should remain the same or be improved.**
- **Ease of access to the new library proved a divisive issue.** This criterion received an average rating of 7.0 of 10, and many respondents felt that the new library would be better placed for them. However, a significant minority felt that it would be worse, with the principal reasons cited being lack of or expensive parking, inadequate disabled access and parking, and the distance from some bus routes.
- **Physical books were particularly important.** Although more than half of respondents said that access online and digital library services were as important as face to face, access to e-books was rated as considerably less important than access to books. Accessing books was also by far the most popular activity in the current library. There was some concern that the new library will not have space for so many books as the current one.
- **Study space was also rated highly,** and there were suggestions that not only should sufficient space be provided at the new library but also that the design should ensure that it is a quiet space.
- **Access to wi-fi, events** for both adults and children, **online information, and public computers** were also seen as important.
- **The retention of local studies and space for the Berkshire Family History Centre** was considered important.





- **60% of respondents thought that co-location with the Civic Offices** was very positive but there was some concern from some that this would detract from the library because of noise and activity.

The people completing the survey were both older on average than the population of the Borough at large and less ethnically diverse, despite efforts by the Council to encourage participation. This does not invalidate the results of the survey, but it does mean that there are sectors of the community the views of whom are not represented here. This should be taken into account when finalising the design and operation of the new facility.

5.1.3. Other surveys

Learning disability day services

One of the groups for Reading residents with learning disabilities at Strathy Close Day Centre discussed the upcoming changes and their views are summarised in the graphic below:

	<p>What would you use libraries for?</p>	<p>Interactive stories, Reminiscence boxes, information about local events, to join story time type activities, Social inclusion and a safe place to stop in whilst out in the community.</p>
	<p>What would you want in the new library</p>	<p>For it to be bright and airy, for there to be zones where you don't have to be quiet, More sensory resources to take out, and items for us to interact with in the library. Visual stimulation, wheelchair access and inclusive toilets, accessible seating. Drop in activities that are good for people with learning disabilities.</p>
	<p>What don't you want to see in the new library</p>	<p>Narrow aisles, anti-social behaviour, red walls and "office" style lighting.</p>
	<p>Who are you and where are you based?</p>	<p>KC, MD, SN, JW, SA, SB, SS, LN, LA, TC, CAB We come to the Learning disability day service at Strathy Close but live in Whitley, Caversham, Town centre, New town, Woodley</p>

Children's survey

Our children's survey focused on the use of libraries. We asked:



What are libraries for?

Those answering the children's survey highlighted the traditional role of a library in particular – focusing on books and reading.

Education, study and learning also featured.

Key words around the environment were: fun, welcoming, relaxed, peace, quiet, calm, soft chairs

Selected comments are provided below:

People who are poor get to read

Entertaining yourself and gaining more knowledge

Education instead of internet

Libraries should be a place of wonder/ intrigue and adventure a hub to explore

Centre of community getting people together

To study things that people don't want you to study or to study in a quiet place

In terms of the environment, respondents are:

Looking for....

- “Welcoming, spacious, separate imaginative space”
- “Modern, fun and welcoming ”
- “free to roam and laugh out aloud”
- “large, friendly and welcoming”
- “Light, bright, designed to inspire creativity”

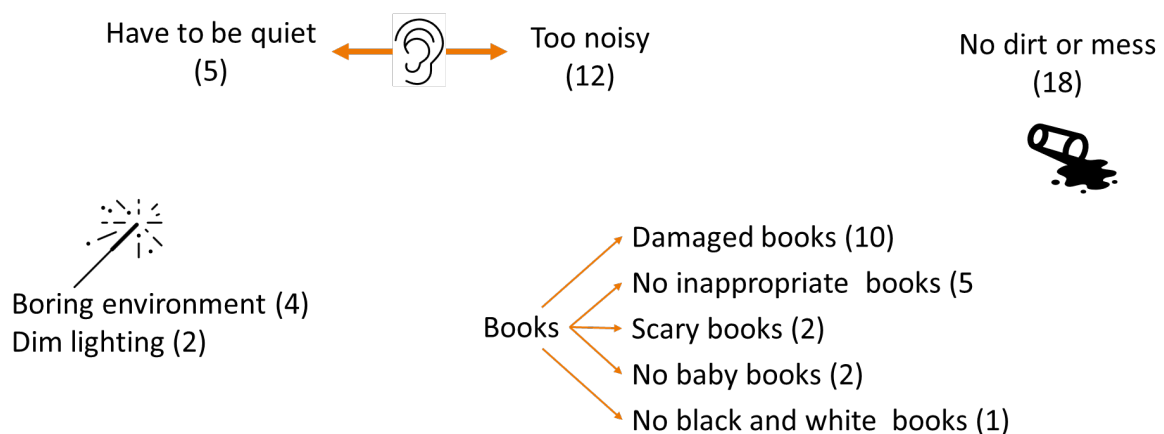
Moving away from ...

- “Tired”
- “Dark and pretty utilitarian”
- “Dark and dingy”
- “Unwelcoming and ugly”

Good examples mentioned: Worcester, Wokingham, Oxford

What do you **not** want to see in the new library?

There were lots of comments about what people don't want to see and not everyone was in agreement – they are summarised in the graphic below:



Conclusions from other surveys

For both children and adults in the learning disability day centre group, the environment is key. They want the new library to be light, airy, colourful, welcoming, clean, well-organised and comfortable. They also want the new space to offer sensory activities and appropriate zoning, especially for differences in noise levels.

For adults with learning disabilities, the drop-in activities are also important.

For children, books remain incredibly important and there is a desire for a wide range of books, including for teenagers and/or older readers. Behaviour of people in the library, including adults, is key to making the place welcoming.

5.1.4. Focus groups

The following is a summary of comments received in the focus group sessions.

- The importance of keeping a distinct and comprehensive library presence within the Civic offices was emphasised several times.
- Library space shouldn't be compromised in the new joint location; there needs to be adequate space for, e.g., browsing books and studying.
- Better signposting required to raise awareness.
- Road safety needs to be considered for young people using the library.
- Opportunity for the library to flourish as a 'living room for residents' within the new facilities.
- Traffic issues at the Civic Offices and available bus routes were discussed, with some positive and some negative
- Some concerns were raised at how everything currently in Reading library will fit into the new Central Library
- The library should be an aesthetically pleasing space within the wider building.
- The library needs to be a light & airy space (lighting levels in the current library are thought to be poor).
- Ventilation is important in the context of environmental considerations – air source heat pumps are recommended.
- Open Access* technology could work well in the new location to enable the library to be open for longer hours unstaffed, particularly on evenings when council meetings are taking place as it would enable people to use the library/borrow books at same time as attending functions/meetings in the Civic offices.

- Signage and signposting, partitioning, customer care, and staff training are important priorities.
- A suggestion was made to install three doors; one for the library, one for customer services and one adjoining door between the two areas.
- People flow is an important consideration; customer services customers may wish to use the library after their customer service transaction, particularly using computers in the library for form filling, and applications etc.
- Dementia friendly checklists should be used to inform design principles.
- The organisation Dimensions could be used to audit and advise on requirements for neurodiverse people.
- Co-location of services will be an “interesting” project: one stakeholder viewed the Civic offices as having “toxic” associations as opposed to the friendly and neutral feel of the library

**this uses technology to enable customers who have registered to access premises using a swipe card or similar – it has been used by some library services both in the UK and elsewhere to open libraries for much longer hours with no or low staffing at off-peak times. See best practice review (section 2).*

Accessibility

- Opening hours need to be as extensive and logical as possible eg being closed on Wednesdays has resulted in advice workers struggling to remember when exactly the library is open for referrals for computer use, printing etc.
- Consideration should be given to opening on Sundays.
- The self-service terminals in the foyer of the current library are unwelcoming; they should be more user friendly and intuitive with staff visible and available to welcome visitors.
- General agreement that it would be disappointing if the new library doesn’t have a different look and feel to the current building.
- It is highly important that the space designs reflect the needs of people with sensory impairments, dementia and learning disabilities; e.g., the choice of colours is especially important.
- Fully accessible computers are required – including for visual impairments.
- The library needs to be welcoming and accessible for visually impaired people.
- It’s important to have library services for the elderly (e.g., large print books and a home delivery option).
- It’s important to cater for needs of neurodiverse people – be safe and welcoming spaces as “libraries are marvellous resources” for autistic people.

- Library staff support for autistic people is mixed – there are some very good/helpful staff but some less so – perhaps more training is required to enable staff to recognise/assist people with autism.

Partnership working

- Consideration should be given to setting up a help hub: creating a rota for organisations to provide advice and information in the library on a drop-in basis on set days each week eg Tuesday for refugees, Wednesday for young people's organisations etc.
- Reading Voluntary Action would be interested in having an information-only presence in the new library but not a more substantial role unless the design is suitable; they are currently looking for a shop front presence.
- Public health sessions would work well in the safe space of the library.
- Opportunities for a better partnership between Reading University and the local history library; the library can offer a huge amount to university students in general so this needs to be developed to encourage more usage of the library.
- A work experience scheme could be implemented in partnership with local providers.
- Links with Autism Berkshire should be developed.

Programming

- Importance of providing a varied and vibrant range of library events and activities was highlighted.
- Family History Society does a lot of talks in the current library – will there be space for them to do these in the new library?
- Soundproofing needs to be good to accommodate all the different library activities - zoning important (eg children's activities vs quiet study).
- 'Meet the collection' sessions could be held in the library.
- More events and reading groups for teenagers.
- More IT support sessions are required for people with low IT skills.
- New programmes – story-times for autistic children, more liaison with schools for anti-bullying programmes (to support autistic children), socializing groups to broaden communication and tackle loneliness.

Stock

- It is not essential to have the entire book stock on display, if it's reasonably accessible and staff are on hand to provide guidance.
- Movable shelving is essential to house stock whilst enabling the creation of flexible space.
- The current range of stock for young people is limited; wider choice and better promotion is a priority.
- Local history materials should be housed in fit for purpose section of the library.
- Needs to have a good stock of books – including books people didn't think of reading before.
- Book display stands and non-cluttered displays are a priority
- More books about autism would be good to help people have a better knowledge and understanding.

Young people

- Priorities for Youth Parliament members were accessibility, good transport links, zoning to control noise levels, user friendly shelves and themed displays, well designed open plan space, a good mix of study and casual seating space, and digital whiteboards
- "At the existing Central Library, you go in, get a book and leave quickly," was an anecdotal comment received from the Youth Parliament.
- Think about the retaining the boundaries between library areas for young people and the wider library, and train staff to work with them with a view to avoiding clashes with older users.

Miscellaneous

- It's important to have the right mix and balance of services across Central Library and the smaller branch libraries; branch libraries are good for meeting reading needs, but Central must cater for a wide range of individual and community needs.
- There is a danger that trying to be all things to all people can lead to conflicting requirements and operational issues: importance of planning ahead to find manageable solutions.
- Public toilets are essential.
- Perception of a lack of adequate staff at the current library.

- Meeting rooms are important facilities and good for income generation
- It would be good to have “pods” and places/areas/alcoves where you can sit and gather your thoughts.
- Marketing and promotion of the library is important, eg can coverage/stories on local BBC radio be explored or advertising placed at the station.
- The current library is well organised, has diverse selection of books and comfortable seating – these need to be considered for new library.

5.1.5. Views on the Library from Civic Centre users

Civic Centre customers expressed a range of views on the library relocation including:



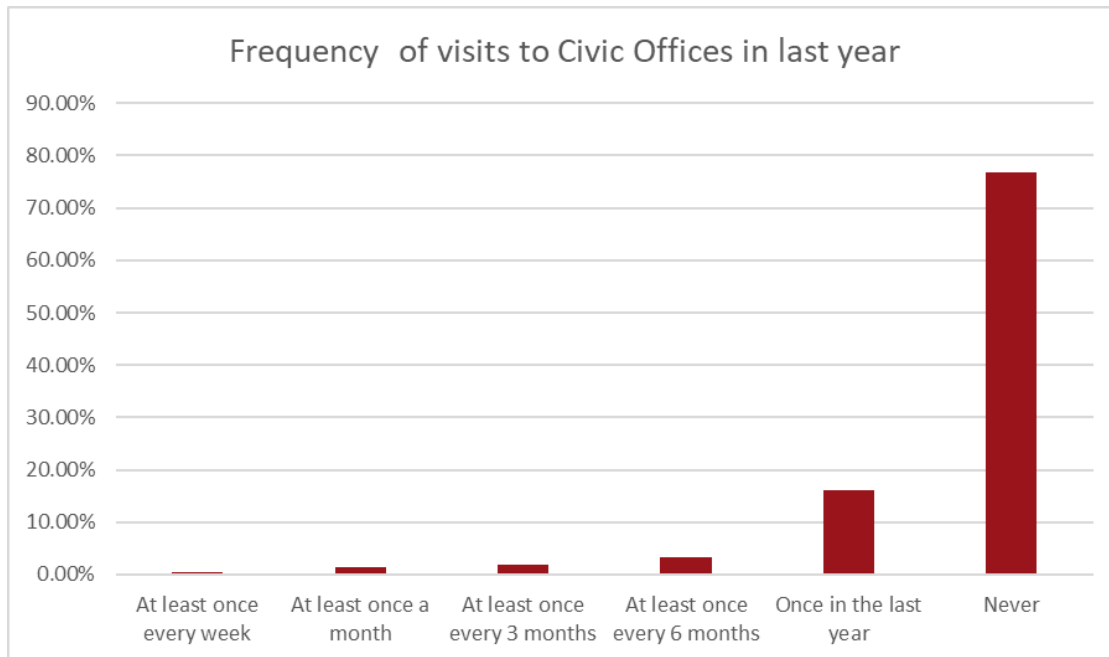
The majority of people we spoke with felt it would be positive to have the Library in the same building as the Customer Service area.

Queries were raised about whether the ‘quiet’ environment of the library fits with the Customer Service area. It was also felt that conversations with the VCSOs based in the current central library will be critical.

5.2. Civic Centre redesign

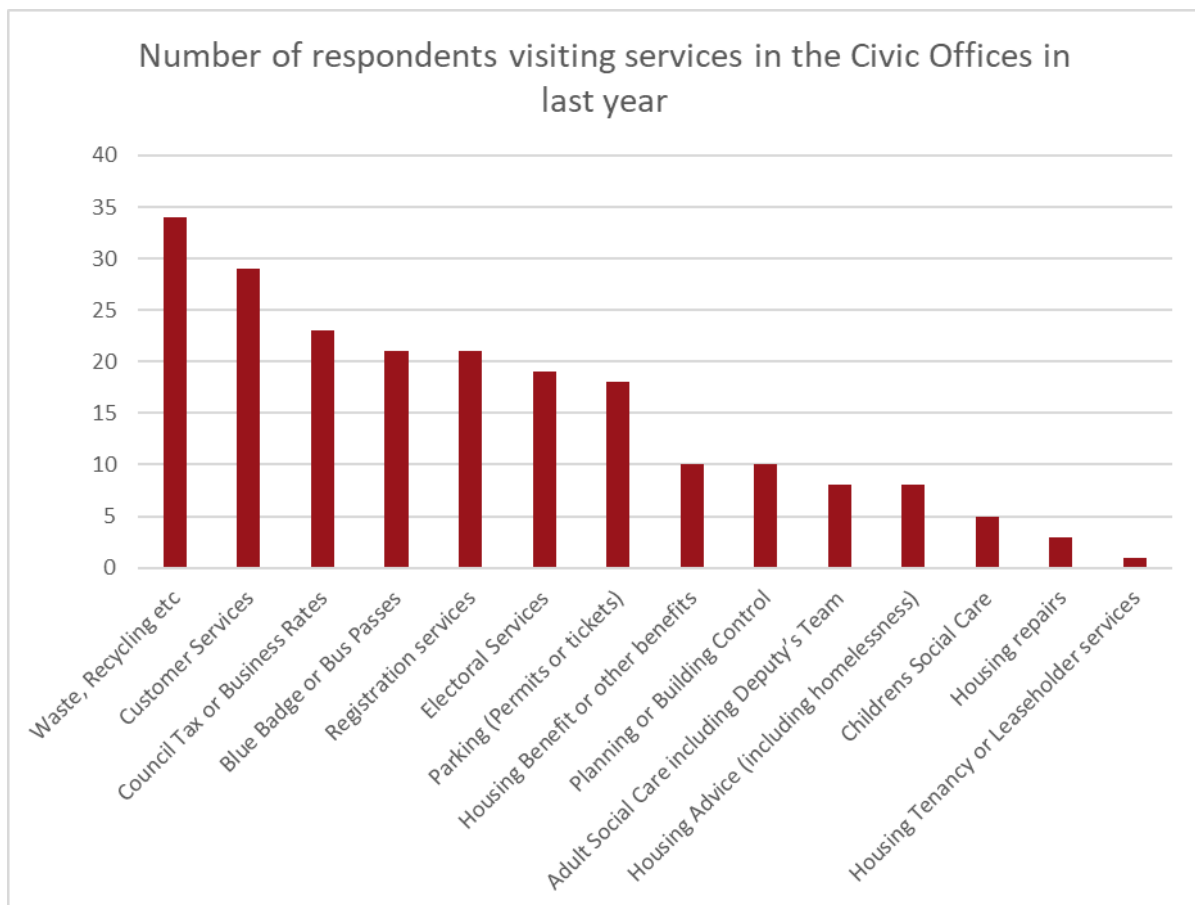
5.2.1. Survey

The survey asked how frequently respondents had visited the Civic Offices:



Not surprisingly, most people did not visit the Civic Offices frequently since, unlike the library, most routine transactions with the Council do not require face to face contact and are carried out either automatically, like paying a direct debit, or by telephone or online.

Respondents were asked why they had visited the Civic Offices. It should be noted that these responses came from only those people who had actually visited during the last year and about 150 people completed this section.



The most popular purposes for visiting by survey respondents were Waste, Customer Services, Council Tax and Business Rates, and Blue Badge or Bus Passes. One option given was School Admissions and Transfers but no respondent had visited the Civic Offices for that reason.

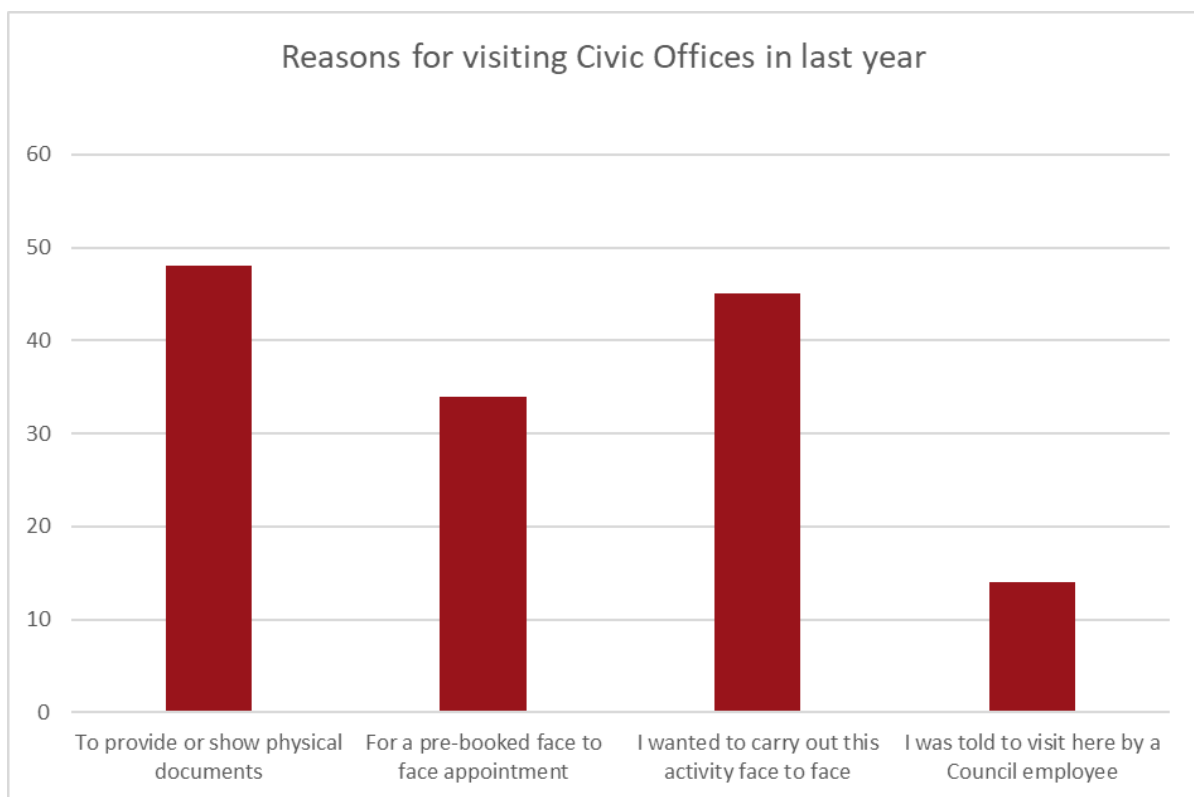
In addition, people attended for:

- Events and receptions
- As a staff member employed at building or elsewhere
- Attending Council meetings including Council committees
- To attend advisory group meetings
- Tree services
- To visit the Mayor, Councillors or senior officers
- To make enquiries about highways

- Tenant participation
- Cycle Forum Meeting.

These results do not entirely reflect the actual usage of the Civic Offices. Data provided to us by Reading Borough Council which showed that in the period May – July 2023, the top reasons for visiting the Civic Offices Council Tax, Registration, Benefits and Housing.

The survey asked the reason that respondents had visited the Civic Offices. The results are shown in the graph below.

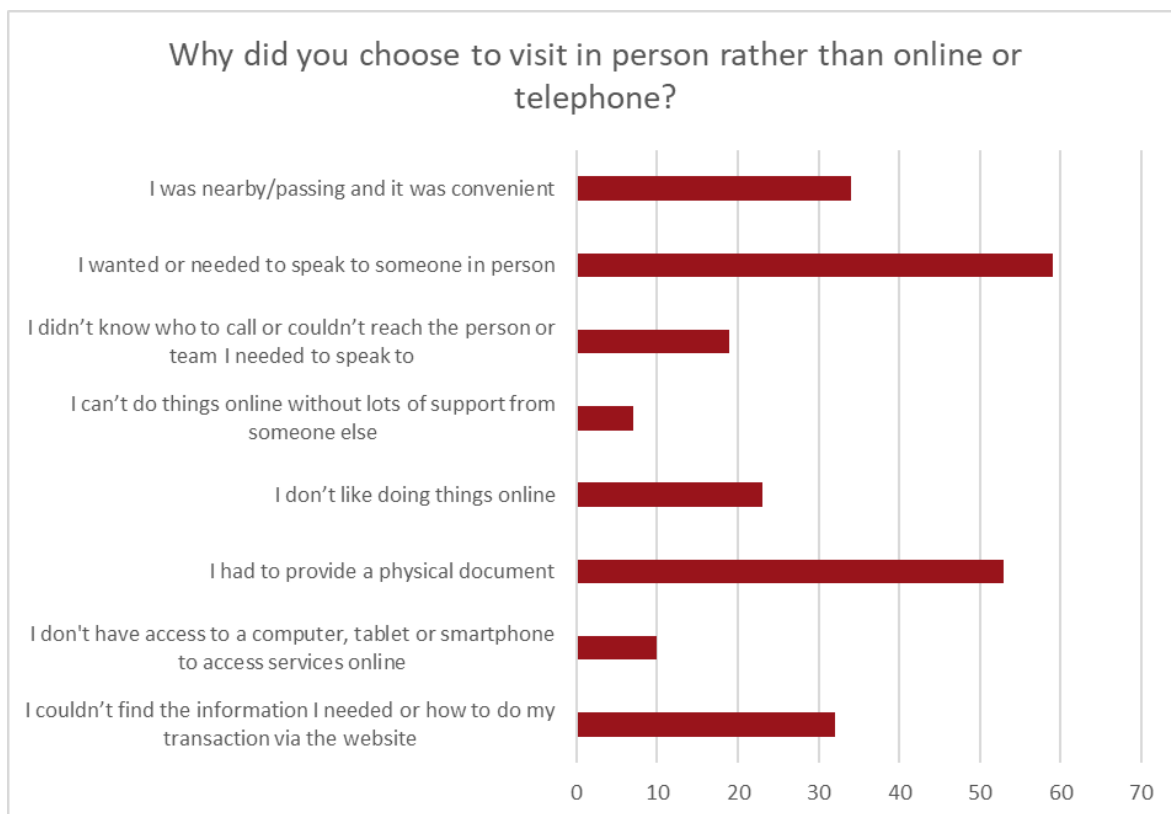


Other reasons people attended Clvic Centre:

- Meetings and committees, including those of partner organisations
- Events
- For work
- To make complaints

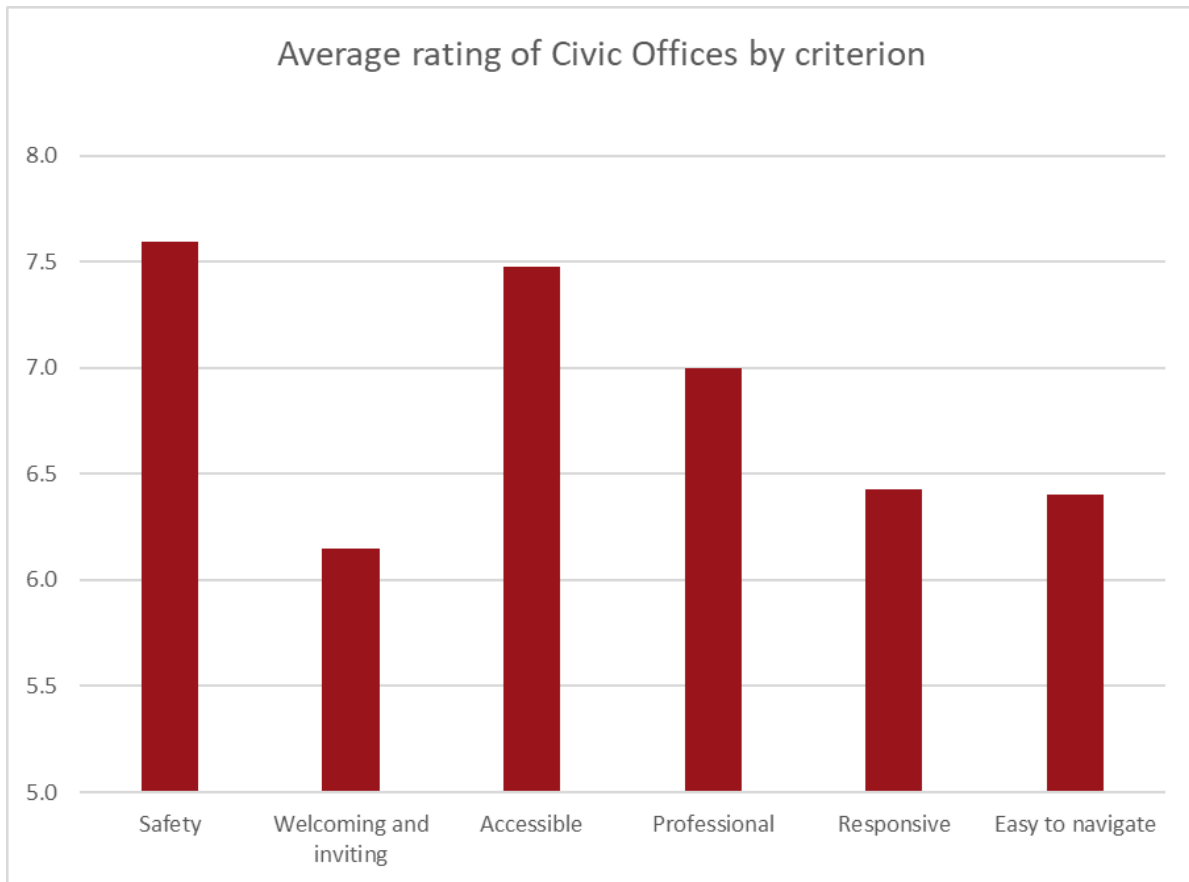
- For training
- When they could not get a response online
- When they were not able to complete the activity online.

The survey asked why respondents had visited rather than telephone or complete their transaction online. The results are shown in the graph below.



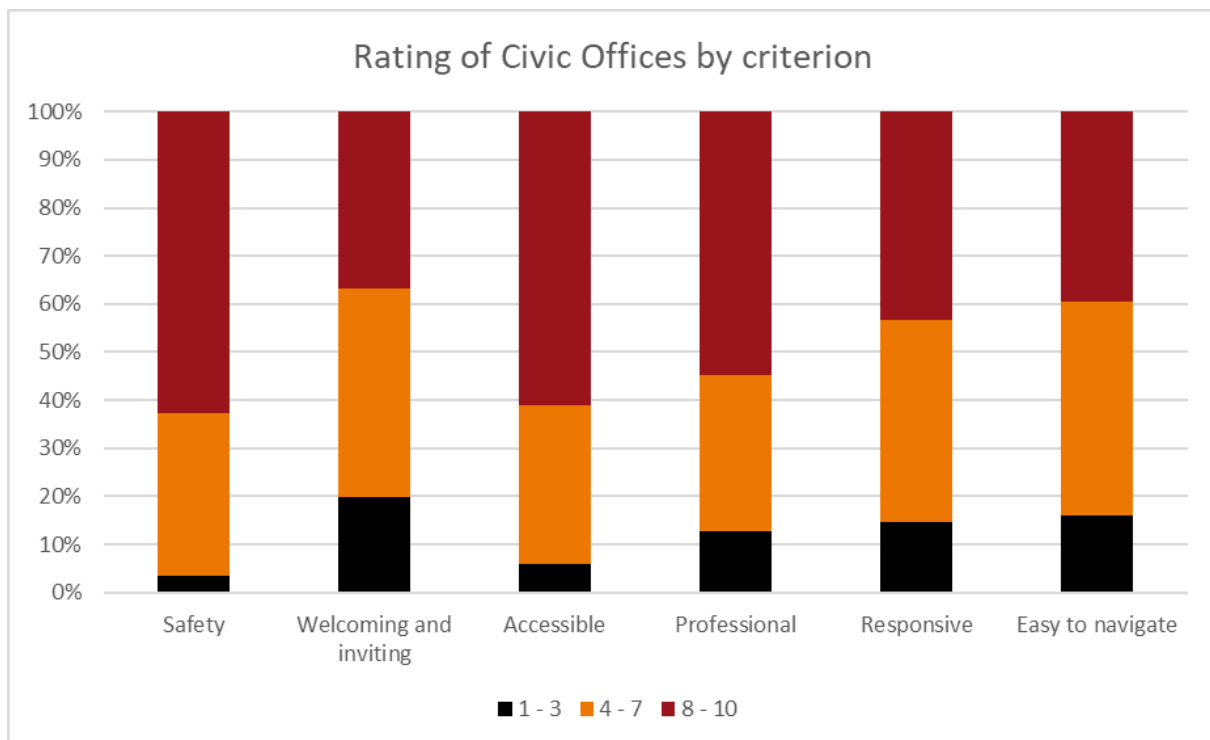
A large proportion of respondents who visited in person did so because they had no access to online services, were uncomfortable with online or couldn't find the information online. This represented 48% of people who answered this question.

Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the Civic Offices on several criteria from 1 to 10, with ten being the highest.



The responses to all criteria were on average positive. We have only shown the top half of the graph to emphasize the differences in the responses. The Welcoming criterion scored lower than the others. Whilst the average rating for the Accessible criterion was 7.5, amongst the 39 respondents who said they had a disability and answered this question, the average rating was 6.9. One person commented that the pavements from Broad Street to Bridge Street are difficult to use with a mobility scooter because they are narrow.

The graph below shows a more detailed breakdown of the ratings for each criterion:



63% of respondents gave high ratings for safety, and more than 50% of respondents rated Accessible and Professional in the same way. However, there was a significant minority which gave low ratings for Welcoming and Inviting, Easy to Navigate and Responsive.

Respondents were asked what they would like from a refreshed customer service area. Since all people completing the Civic Offices section had the opportunity to answer this question there was a much higher responses rate. The most common responses are shown below.

Requirement	Number of responses
To speak to customer services	503
To attend pre-booked appointments	390
Comfortable seating	340
To use self-check in for appointments	311
Information on screens / noticeboards	301
To use public wi-fi	245
To print / scan documents	234
To use computers / kiosks for self-service	219
To use free telephones to contact other Council services	210
To make a payment	195

A ticketing system	154
To use mobile phone charging points	139

Additionally, 86 respondents made suggestions or comments. These are summarised below.

General

- A welcoming environment.
- Drinking water.
- Friendly and approachable staff.
- Be able to attend without an appointment.
- Be able to speak to staff in person.
- Obvious queuing system with seating, and clarity on procedures.
- Safe and clean toilets.
- Good signage.
- Staff to assist those who have limited computer skills.

Accessibility

- Disability friendly space with lower desks for wheelchair users, and good disabled access outside.
- Accessible toilets.
- Free parking, especially for Blue Badge holders.
- An accessible service for those of all abilities.
- Information screens will not be of use to the visually impaired. Induction loops should be provided.
- Being able to reach the correct officer.

Facilities

- A single reception point.
- Separation of payment for birth/death certificates from other functions carried out at reception.
- Sufficient private meeting space.
- A safe waiting area.

Suggestions for additional services

- Facilities for parents and children, children's play area.
- Tourist and community information, and assistance for visitors to Reading.
- A café or coffee and cake stall.
- A post office.
- Art exhibitions.
- A communal living room or plaza outside.

Other comments

- Opposition to spending money at time of limited resources.
- It is fine as it is, spend the money on the library.
- Opposition to entirely online service.
- There are poor public transport links at the location.
- A small number of respondents expressed a preference to speak to relevant officers directly, rather than going through a customer services team.

Some examples of what respondents want in the Civic Offices:

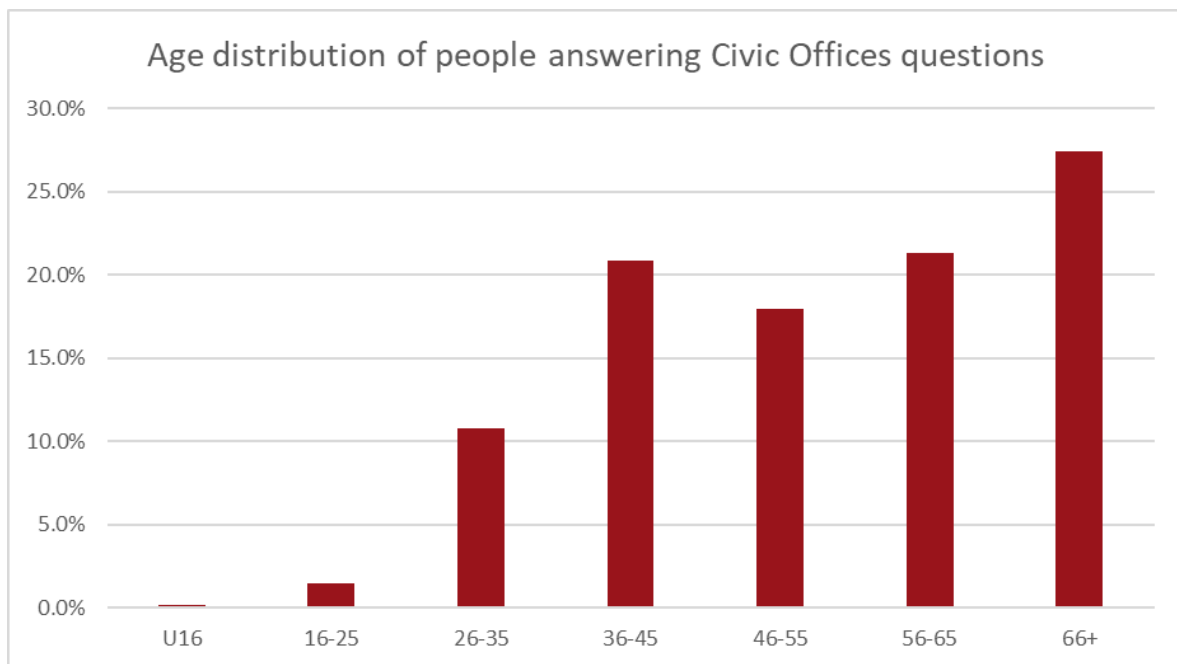
- Ability to speak to customer services who will direct to appropriate department and speak to a person face to face
- To have friendly approachable staff who know how to answer personal queries
- Easy disabled access
- Lots of people to assist with those who can't manage modern technology
- Easy access to information about Reading and community activities
- Greater clarity in terms of directions and procedures.

Hiding all decision-making officers behind a screen of 'customer' service staff is detrimental to public access and engagement. While these staff do their best, they are no substitute to being able to speak directly to an officer at a public-facing enquiry desk.

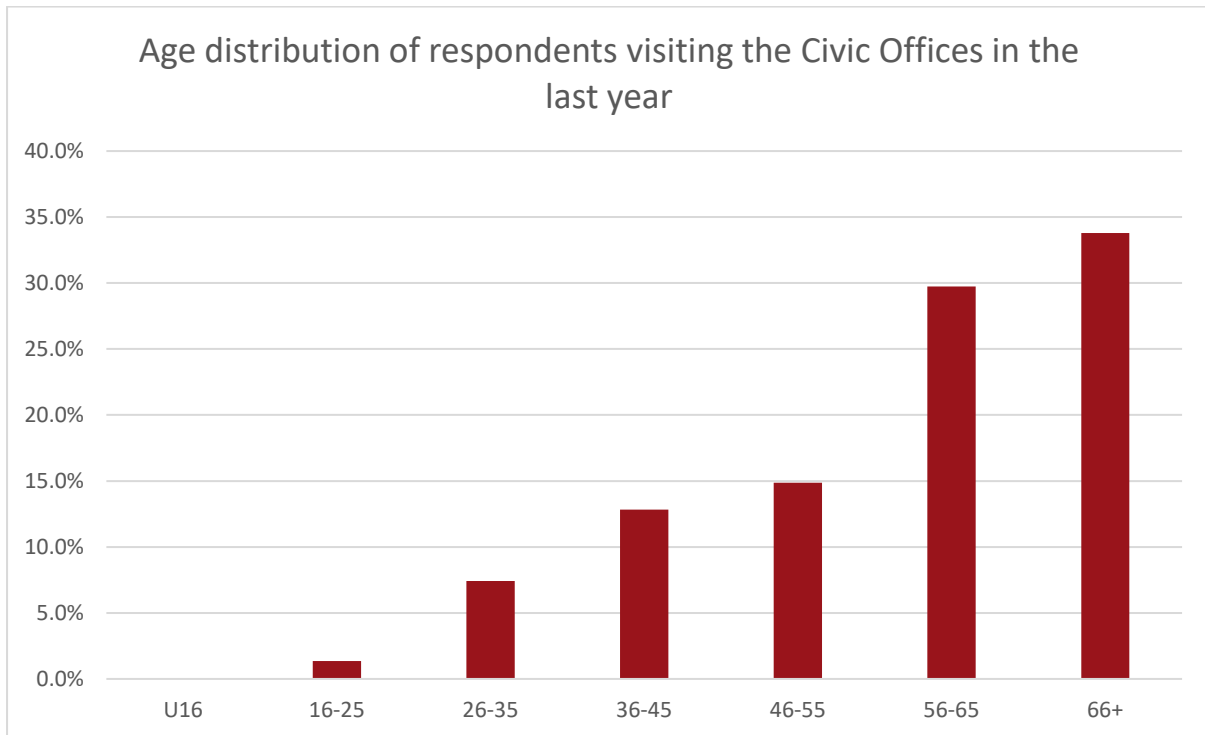
Others focused on the other methods to contact the Council, for example:

I think you should concentrate on improving phone and Internet services - no need to come into town

The graph below shows the age distribution of people answering the Civic Offices questions. Like the overall survey, it is skewed towards older people.



This trend was even more pronounced when those people who had actually used the Civic Offices are analysed.



This age profile did not match our observations during our visit in person to the Civic Centre, but nevertheless the Council should consider the needs of older people when designing the Civic Centre customer space.

5.2.2. Conclusions from the survey about the Civic Centre customer service area

The Civic Centre is visited by exception, rather than routinely. The most popular purposes for visiting were Waste, Customer Services, Council Tax and Business Rates and Blue Badge or Bus Passes.

Of the respondents who had visited the Civic Centre in the last year, 27% gave a reason that they had no access to online services or were uncomfortable with online. 21% said that they couldn't find the information they needed online.

Generally, respondents rated the services in the Civic Centre well with safety and accessibility scoring highly. Respondents rated the Customer Service space slightly less well on how welcoming it is.

People thought customer services and attending pre-booked appointments were the most likely reasons they would attend.

In looking for services in the new design, comfortable seating, self-check in and information screens were the most popular choices, with wi-fi, ability to print and scan and self-service computers and kiosks also popular. Many people requested drinking water.

There were a number of suggestions for the new Civic Centre customer service area, including a welcoming environment, safe and clean toilets, sufficient private meeting space and an alternative to information screens for the visually impaired.

Some additional facilities were suggested including facilities for parents and children, a café, tourist information, a post office and art exhibitions.

Outside the Civic Centre, people wanted free or cheap parking especially for Blue Badge holders and there was a suggestion for a 'communal living room' or a plaza outside.

As with the Library, people completing the survey were both older on average than the population of the Borough at large and less ethnically diverse, despite efforts by Council officers to encourage participation. This does not invalidate the results of the survey, but it does mean that there are sectors of the community whose views are not represented in the survey findings, and this should be taken into account when finalising the design and operation of the new facility.

5.2.3. Focus groups

The following is a summary of comments received in the focus group sessions.

Co-location and Civic Centre customer services location

- Some stakeholders felt that it's currently unclear whether the council actively wants people to make physical visits – this will need to be clarified, given the number of visits that the new Central Library will attract to the new facility.
- The new facility presents an opportunity for the Council to open up local democracy to people and to undertake meaningful engagement.
- One user queried whether the library relocation would overly compromise the customer service space, whilst another felt that there is a lot of wasted space in the current facility.
- Customer Services need to continue to provide adequate space and staff for face-to-face customers, not just an online offer.
- Reading is seeking re-accreditation as a City of Sanctuary for refugees and asylum seekers; the design should reflect this aspiration, eg by including a prayer room.

Ambience

- Several stakeholders commented that the Civic space should be softened and humanised with clearer connections to Reading as an entity.
- One participant mentioned the current staff offices are more welcoming than the public side – eg images relating to Reading’s history and culture displayed on walls – could this be extended to public areas?
- Several stakeholders stressed the importance for the new facility to be a positive, comfortable and welcoming space; some felt the current energy of the Civic Centre is a “no, you can’t” vibe.
- A security presence will be needed but it should be welcoming rather than forbidding.
- Improved wayfinding and signage will be required.
- Greater privacy for customers in the reception area should be a priority.
- Perceptions in some parts of the community that the civic offices and the council are seen as being “them”, and that they either do things to people, or are to blame for things not happening.
- Civic Centre was welcoming and more open to the public prior to COVID, but less so now with people encouraged to do more online.

Accessibility

- It’s crucial that the new facility provides full access for people with disabilities eg mobility scooter users.
- Disability rights days held at the Civic Centre are very poorly attended in contrast to those held at community venues.
- Will the new facility provide accessible services for young people, or will it just be a building for older people?
- Civic Centre reception staff will need a good level of awareness of the range of services currently on offer.

5.2.4. Civic centre customers

We visited the Civic Centre customer service area on two occasions for a total of seven hours’ observation and engagement.

Overall environment and first impressions

On arrival, there is some potential confusion for customers as the security desk (booth on left) is the first staff member visible. Customers are directed to wait behind the stand in front of reception which is visible if no one else is waiting. Corporate customers speak directly to security. If there are several corporate customers waiting to be seen, this can get in the way of the customer queue. It can also create some confusion for those arriving as it is unclear where they should wait – by security or by reception.

On arrival, customers report to the reception desk where they are expertly directed on:

- Interacting with Council services eg School Admissions – apply online or fill in a paper form - available behind the desk
- Getting advice about non-council services, eg contacting Thames Water to pay a bill
- Checking in for appointments with council staff in the building – reception call or email staff to let them know the person has arrived;
- Where to wait - either the separate Registrar's waiting area or the main waiting area.

The main waiting area includes people who are waiting to see a customer service agent, and also those waiting to see council staff from other departments.

There are three PCs and three phones in the customer area. Currently the PCs are not operational so assisted self-serve is not available and no customers were observed using the telephones.

Customer Service staff are seated at booths (between one and four at the time of our visits), some behind screens. At times, customer service staff were taking customer calls in order to relieve current staff shortage pressures, as opposed to seeing customers in person.

Council staff working elsewhere in the Civic Centre tend to use the same entrance as customers and therefore walk through the customer service area. Around lunchtime, the volume of staff walking through the Customer Service area was high, often as many staff as customers, or more. Staff were sometimes in small groups, chatting as they walked through the area. Staff do not appear to be aware of customers as they walk through.

There is a queuing system in place, and screens, albeit with small text, which outline the number of people waiting for each queue.

The general environment, when we attended, was calm. Some people wait a long time to be seen (particularly in relation to homelessness), but this tended to be accepted by those we spoke to. Others made comments about the lack of people serving what is apparently a large number of customers. It is not clear to customers whether or not the other people in

the waiting area are waiting in the 'same queue' as them. On our second visit, this created the impression that there would be a long wait to speak to a Customer Service staff member, but in fact this was not the case.

When customers are seen by Customer Service staff, they spend a relatively long time with them – typically over 10 minutes. Though we didn't observe any customer conversations, to maintain confidentiality, these extended conversations appeared to be because customer questions are being resolved – people appear to have been given the information they need and are leaving satisfied.

The majority of customers we spoke to had English as an additional language. The service manager pointed out that whilst the main Council website can be translated, the embedded forms cannot, and this may mean that some customers come to the customer services area to get help to fill in forms for this reason. A number of customers also highlighted face to face communication as being easier for them to understand. It was also clear that some customers who use this method have additional vulnerabilities and/or learning disabilities.

Reasons for visit

We asked customers why they had visited the Civic Centre - a range of reasons were stated:

- 14 customers were attending in relation to housing advice or homelessness, 8 in relation to council tax, 2 for housing benefit, 1 for the Deputy Team, 1 other had query about bulky waste and 3 others were there for the taxi license test or youth mentoring. This profile was more in line with usage data provided to us by the Council than the survey results.
- Some customers had a booked appointment with a council service (primarily housing or homelessness)
- 2 customers had been asked to attend to show documents
- One customer was dropping off keys
- Some customers were observed using the document drop.

Motivation

- Customers chose to visit face to face, rather than using online methods because:
 - they found it easier to understand, or had received a letter that they didn't understand
 - online/phone methods had failed to resolve queries previously (or they had not received a response via another method), or because the wait on the phone lines was too long.

- Other customers were here because they had been asked to attend, but would prefer to do as much as possible by phone or online methods.
- Many customers said they were happy to do things online when it was straightforward but more complex queries worked better for them in person.
- The manager felt that people more likely to trust what they are told face to face, and this may drive some of the visits.

Customer perspective of customer area environment

Generally, customers we spoke to were positive about the customer area. Given that we spoke to them while they were waiting to be seen, the view they shared may have been influenced by not wanting to disrupt their place in the queue, for example by giving a negative view of their experience. That said, the views given were very positive.

All customers said that the customer service area felt safe (the security guard was noted), accessible and easy to navigate. Views on how 'welcoming' the space felt were more varied. The receptionist was clearly very knowledgeable and welcoming, including knowing one customer by name.

Additional comments were as follows:

- Safety - one young adult noted that there was only one security guard
- Accessible – “better than the previous customer service area”
- Responsive – although customers who were attending for the first time couldn't answer this question
- Professional – many customers noted the kindness and politeness of staff
- Welcoming – a few customers noted the environment was not necessarily 'welcoming' but 'functional'
- Spacious and useful – includes toilets
- “I'm happy here”
- “It's fine – but a bit of a waste of space”.

Suggestions for improvement include:

- One customer suggested that it would be helpful for them if Housing Allocations was located in the building.
- One suggestion was to have a person at the door, greeting and signposting people. This would provide more clarity on arrival. Someone mentioned this had been the case on their last visit.
- A small number of customers mentioned the apparent lack of queuing system. In fact, there is a queuing system in place - the text on the digital screens is rather small, and since the 'next customer' number is only called out for those seeing customer services, there can be long periods of time where there is no obvious numbering system.
- One customer, who is himself well connected with a number of VCS organisations, suggested that banner information screens advertising local support organisations (instead of leaflets) would be impactful.

Many customers talked about very long waits – for example seven hours – this in relation to needing accommodation after temporary accommodation ended. That said, most customers we spoke to were accepting of the wait times.

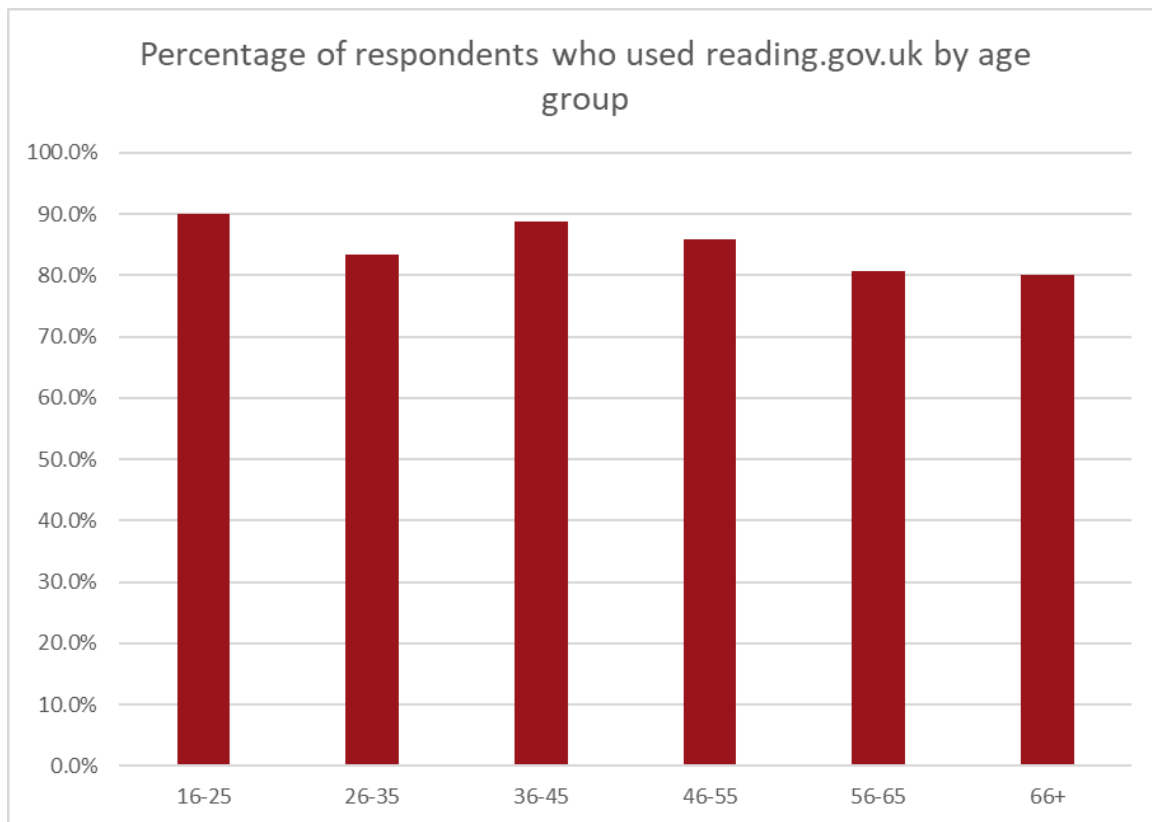
5.2.5. Conclusions from speaking with customers in the Customer Services area

- Need for a high quality, self-service and staff scanning facility – the current document drop has the potential risk of losing documents.
- Retain the ability to have confidential conversations with customers.
- Preparations for higher footfall, since co-locating with the library is expected to bring greater footfall.
- Assuming long wait times continue for some customers, consider the implications of this; eg comfortable seating, toilets etc.
- Enable self-serve to check in for appointments to save receptionist time and customer waiting time.
- Clearer queuing system – larger text, more clarity around how long your wait will be.
- Consideration of the dual space – staff entrance and customer waiting area – from the customer perspective, it can appear that staff have 'free time' (as they go on their lunch break) while the customer is made to wait.

6.6 Reading Borough Council Website

The survey asked questions about the use of the Council’s website. The first was whether respondents used the website. 76% of people completing the survey answered the question and of these 84% had used the website.

There was a high proportion of respondents in all age groups who said they used the website:



Although the numbers of people from Black and Minority Ethnic groups completing the survey were small, and therefore there is a potential for a misleading result, of the people who do not use the website, the proportions of people from Asian or Black background was much higher (around 22%) than people from a White British background (12%).

Of those who did not use the website, the reasons for non-use are shown in the table below:

Reason	Number of responses
I can't easily find the information I need or the website isn't user friendly	21
I don't have access to a computer, tablet or smartphone to access services online	5
I can't do things online without lots of support from someone else	7
I don't like doing things online and/or I prefer speaking to someone	20
I don't need to use it	75
No reason given	6

The survey asked people who did not use the website if they knew that all Reading libraries have computers that are available and free to use by the public. 98 people said yes, 10 said no and four were not sure.

56 of this group also said that they would consider using library computers, a further six said that they would use them but only if there was somebody to help them, seven were not sure and 46 said that they would not use the computers.

The same group of people who did not use the website were asked what other ways they used to engage the council in the last year. The results are shown in the table below.

Reason	Number of responses
None of the ways listed in the previous question	40
By phone either through our general enquiries line, or directly to council services	37
By email to either general enquiries or directly to council services	27
Face to face by visiting the Civic Offices	25
Online via an app e.g Spydus (Library members app), Love Clean Reading	17
Face to face by visiting another Council building	5
Speaking to elected members	2
Through work	2
By post	1

Conclusions

There is clearly some potential to encourage people who do not engage with the Council via the website to use library computers for this purpose, but it will be important to ensure that appropriate help is on hand.



As with all responses to the survey, there are sectors within the community who are not represented, and their needs must also be considered. There is some limited evidence to suggest that people of Asian and Black heritage may be less likely to use online services than other groups.

6. Summary of key findings

Encouragingly, there is a lot of support for the Council's proposals and aims for the Central Library relocation and Civic Centre redesign projects. Residents and stakeholders can see the advantages of a new Library in improving some aspects of the current service and opportunities in reshaping services to better meet current need. There was a warm welcome for the Council prioritising culture and libraries in this Levelling Up bid.

Respondents were also generally in favour of co-location with the Civic Centre customer service space, and feedback suggests there is an important crossover in services, support and usage that will really maximise the benefits of these changes if designed and managed carefully.

There are some provisos though. Our survey, though generating a substantial volume of responses, did not fully represent Black and Minority Ethnic communities or younger people – respondents skewed towards older, and White British. As noted elsewhere, care should be taken to continue to engage with under-represented groups through the design, build and mobilisation stages to ensure their needs are reflected.

There was also a substantial minority with reservations about the two projects, whether out of concern that the new Library will not live up to expectations, or the old building will not be disposed of in a way they feel happy about, or because they are unconvinced by either the need to move or the benefits of co-location. We think these issues can be resolved in design, operation or by continued engagement and communication.

6.1. Central Library relocation

- There is strong support for a new Central Library linked to the Civic Centre redesign. Over 75% of respondents to the question thought it would have a positive impact on them and 60% were in favour of co-location with the Civic space.
- There is broad agreement among our consultees with the Council's principal aims of increasing library use and improving customer satisfaction overall.
- 50% of library non-users surveyed said they would be interested in using the new Central Library.
- Respondents think that the most important considerations for the new library are retaining and extending opening hours, and having the same or an improved stock of books (electronic resources were also considered important but not as much as books). Wi-fi, events, children's provision (stock and activities), and study space were also seen as important.
- There is some concern among our survey and focus group consultees about what will happen to the existing library building and its surroundings. This could be addressed through engagement and communication of plans for the site.

- There is also concern that the new Library be “maximised” by making the best and most extensive use of it so that the investment produces tangible improvements. This includes making the library more accessible to those who do not currently use it, or use it very little making it inclusive for people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, and opening it up with more cultural events. More traditionally, some mentioned encouraging learning and love of reading. Whilst respondents in the main understood that self-service and volunteering could help the library do more, many wanted to see face-to-face interaction, and sufficient levels of staffing to both maintain/extend hours and support users.
- The current library praised for its staff and activities, but there are negative views of the building’s condition and ambience. Library users in our survey said that there was scope for increased use if it were more welcoming, open for longer and better publicised, all of which could be achieved in the proposed new Central Library.
- Key concerns for the new site in design and operational terms include facilities and accessibility, with provision of toilets, parking availability for disabled people, induction loops for people with hearing aids, and dementia-friendly and autism-friendly designs mentioned by numerous respondents. Whilst some had mixed feelings about co-locating a group of services, primarily due to noise, privacy and being made to feel welcome, it was clear that careful design to mitigate or design out any issues or conflicts would overcome these reservations.
- There are also some clear crossovers identified by respondents between the new Central Library and the Civic Customer Service area. Examples include need for support going online, access to free wi-fi, and printing services, but could also extend into information and advice, and voluntary sector presence in either or both spaces.
- We were impressed by the depth of knowledge, interest and understanding residents and stakeholders showed in response to the ‘give us your views’ freetext sections of the survey and in focus groups. Many of them took time to give detailed responses showing interest not only in their own reasons for using libraries and council services, but also the wider community’s.

7.2 Civic Centre redesign

Although the response rate to the questions on Civic Centre use and redesign was lower than for the Library, and usage is more on an occasional or one-off basis compared to library users who were more likely to visit regularly, our consultation provided some rich feedback with clear views on what residents and service users want, together with constructive suggestions for improvements.

- People use the Civic Offices (rather than go online or phone) because they either do not have or aren’t comfortable with digital options, or they aren’t able to get what

they want from the existing digital offer. In some cases, production of a physical document was required, which is only possible in person or by post, whilst for some users, they may simply trust a face-to-face interaction more than going online, a view supported by staff.

- Our survey shows the current provision at the Civic Centre is appreciated by its users 63% felt safe using it and over 50% say it is accessible and professional. However, there was some criticism of the ambience and atmosphere as bureaucratic or off-putting, and constructively, many respondents both in the survey and focus groups, suggested ways this could be changed.
- There were suggestions such as accessibility improvements (free parking for disabled badge-holders, lowered desks for wheelchair users, accessible toilets) to improve services particularly for these groups. Some respondents were in favour of the availability of face-to-face services, particularly where this supports elderly, disabled and digitally-excluded people. However, it should be noted a minority objected to spending money on improving the Customer Service area at a time of financial constraint for local government, and a suggestion that the phone and online services be improved instead.
- Key requirements identified in our consultation for the improved Civic Centre include friendly approachable staff and lots of assistance for people who find digital/online services difficult to use, improved disabled access, comfortable seating and free wi-fi, printing and scanning services, the availability of drinking water and (accessible) toilets, and parking.
- As can be seen, there is much crossover with what is wanted or could be provided as part of the new Library, suggesting useful synergies and efficiencies in design and operations. One good example of this, which was also borne out by the survey of website users, is improving the online offer together with enhanced support for self-service, something Libraries and Customer Service can collaborate on.