



Leicester
City Council

**Community Services & Library Needs
Assessment - Phase 1 primary research
findings report – appendix**

Leicester City Council

Activist Group

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Confidential

This report was produced on behalf of Leicester City Council by Activist Group.

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Contents

Contents	2
1. Introduction	7
Purpose of the report	7
Background to the report	7
Our approach and scope	8
How we've engaged with people	8
Summary of each section	8
2. Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester.....	10
Introduction	10
Summary of what's on offer	10
How it's organised	10
The Council's Neighbourhood Services function.....	10
Wider changes in the economy and society	11
How these services are changing	12
Summary of findings	14
Key findings.....	14
Table 2.2: Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester - our key findings ...	14
3. Our primary research methodology	15
Introduction	15
Our approach	15
The scope of our engagement work.....	15
Our research brief.....	15
Our Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs)	15
Table 3.1: our Key Lines of Enquiry for Phase 1	16
Overview of our approach.....	17
Interviews (internal) - overview	17
'Main' public survey - overview	17
Table 3.2: Sample profile – by ethnic background.....	18
Table 3.3: Sample profile – by gender	19
Table 3.4: Sample profile – by age	19
Children and young people's survey - overview	19
Table 3.5: 'Tell us all the languages you speak at home'	20
Table 3.6: the 'different' languages mentioned (with duplicates removed)	21

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Staff workshops - overview	22
Focus groups - overview.....	22
The strength and breadth of people's perceptions and opinions	23
Who we've spoken with	23
Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to this report	23
Table 3.7: list of interviewees and organisations we have spoken with	23
4. KLOE a: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision': what our analysis tells us	25
Introduction	25
What people have told us	25
What's come out of the interviews.....	25
What's come out of the main public survey	29
Table 4.1: What are the greatest concerns in your life at the moment?.....	29
Table 4.2: What are you hoping to change about your life in the future? Please tick up to three options	31
What's come out of the CYP survey.....	32
Table 4.3: How do you spend your free time?.....	32
What's come out of the staff workshops.....	33
What's come out of the focus groups	35
Summary of findings	38
Key findings.....	38
Table 4.4: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision' - our key findings.....	38
5. KLOE b: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city': what our analysis tells us	39
Introduction	39
What people have told us	39
What's come out of the interviews.....	39
What's come out of the main public survey	42
Table 5.1: How frequently do you visit a local library?.....	42
Table 5.2: Regular and occasional use of libraries.....	42
Table 5.3: Thinking about the public library you visit most often (apart from the Central Library) what are the most important things on offer there for you?.....	44
How well do library services support users' needs?	44
Reasons people said they 'never' use a local library.....	45
Table 5.4. Reasons for 'never' visiting a local library.....	45
Use of the Central Library	46

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 5.5: How often have you visited the Central Library in the past five years	46
Table 5.6: What are the main reasons you don't visit the Central Library? Please tick up to 3 options.	46
Table 5.7: What are the most important things on offer for you at the Central Library? Pick up to 3 options.	47
Patterns of use of community centres	48
Table 5.8: How often have you visited your local community centre over the last five years?	48
Table 5.9: Patterns of use of community centres	49
Table 5.10: main community centre and secondary community centres used by survey participants	50
Table 5.11: Thinking about the community centre you visit most often, what are the most important things on offer there for you?	52
Table 5.12: What are the main reasons you don't visit a community centre run by Leicester City Council? Tick up to 3 options.	53
Table 5.13: When you visit a library or community centre how do you usually get there?	55
What's come out of the CYP survey.....	55
Table 5.14: When did you last visit a library?	55
Table 5.15: Which of these libraries have you visited?.....	56
Table 5.16: What do you think about your local library?	56
Table 5.17: What things have you done at the library?	57
What's come out of the staff workshops.....	58
What's come out of the focus groups	60
Summary of findings	64
Key findings	64
Table 5.18: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city' - our key findings.....	64
6. KLOE c: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future': what our analysis tells us.....	66
Introduction	66
What people have told us	66
What's come out of the interviews.....	66
What's come out of the main public survey	68
Table 6.1: What would encourage people to visit their library more often.....	69
Table 6.2: Illustrative selection of responses.....	70
Prioritisation of local library services	70
Table 6.3: To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, what local library services would you prioritise? Please tick up to 3 options.....	70
Future use of the Central Library	71

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 6.4: What would encourage you to visit Central Library more often (please tick up to 3 options)	72
Table 6.5: To help us support the changing needs of the people of Leicester, which Central Library services would you prioritise?	73
What services people would prioritise in community centres.....	74
Table 6.6: To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, which community centre services would you prioritise? Please tick up to 3 options.....	74
What's come out of the CYP survey.....	75
Table 6.7: What do you think would get you to go to the library more often? Tick all the ones you agree with.	75
Table 6.8: What would you put in your dream library?	76
Encouraging more people to visit community centres	77
Table 6.9: What would encourage you to visit a community centre more often?	77
What's come out of the staff workshops.....	78
What's come out of the focus groups	79
Summary of findings	83
Key findings	83
Table 6.10: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future'- our key findings	83
7. KLOE d: 'What models and good practice exist': what our analysis tells us	85
Introduction	85
What people have told us	85
What's come out of the interviews.....	85
What's come out of the main public survey	88
Table 7.1: Many councils are changing how they operate community centres and library services in order to better meet the needs of residents. Please tick up to three ideas that you think we could look at."	88
What's come out of the staff workshops.....	89
What's come out of the focus groups	91
Summary of findings	94
Key findings	94
Table 7.2: 'What models and good practice exist' - our key findings	94
8. What we've found out about libraries and community centres in Leicester.....	95
Introduction	95
Our approach to identifying the needs being met and not met	95
Libraries Connected's Universal Offers	95
The needs that currently are, and aren't, being met	95
Reading	95

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Health and wellbeing	95
Information and digital	96
Culture and creativity	96
Employment and learning	97
Children's promise	97
Community centres.....	98
The diverse and vibrant communities of Leicester	98
9. Conclusions.....	99
Introduction	99
Summary of findings	99
Appendices	104
Appendix i - Research brief.....	105
Appendix ii - Main survey – question list.....	115
Appendix iii - CYP survey – question list	117
Appendix iv - Staff workshop notes from September 2023, led by Leicester City Council.....	118

1. Introduction

Purpose of the report

- 1.1 This report sets out **the primary research findings from Phase 1** of Leicester City Council's Community Services & Library Needs Assessment programme, **with a set of key findings to be explored in Phase 2**.
- 1.2 This report covers the period for Phase 1 of the programme (May to October 2023).

Background to the report

- 1.3 Public services across the UK have been facing extreme financial challenges for over a decade, thanks to central government policy choices. Like many other Councils, Leicester City Council needs to make significant savings, but it wants to protect services by modernising to improve efficiency and target the areas of greatest need.
- 1.4 The Community Services & Library Needs Assessment programme is planned to assess the needs of Leicester residents, to develop options for services which will be fit for the future and to implement decisions flowing from this work. The purpose of the programme is to transform library and community services to provide for the needs of Leicester residents in the current economic climate and against the background of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.5 The programme is split into two phases - the period for Phase 1 (May 2023 to October 2023) and Phase 2 (November 2023 to June 2024).
- 1.6 Initial anticipated programme outcomes include joining up council services, supporting the city's health and wellbeing priorities and ensuring services recognise new communities in the city.
- 1.7 The purpose of the Phase 1 engagement work has been to understand current patterns of use for library and community services and what people will need for the future. This summary report has been developed at the end of Phase 1 to summarise the engagement work and capture the key findings for exploration in Phase 2, alongside the Council's own secondary research completed during Phase 1.
- 1.8 For Phase 2, the Council will develop proposals for changing library and community services for formal consultation.
- 1.9 The Council commissioned Activist Group, specialists in research and advice on libraries and community services, to provide independent support in collaboration with the Council's project team for the Community Services & Library Needs Assessment programme.

Our approach and scope

- 1.10 The Council commissioned Activist Group, as specialists in engagement, research and advice on library services, to provide independent support working in collaboration with the Council's project team.
- 1.11 Our work covers the engagement and primary research element for this phase of the project, exploring and analysing the views, ideas and aspirations of the people and organisations who live, work and study in Leicester. In our work, we have sought to identify a wide range of perspectives of the Council's library and community centre offer, its ambitions, and peoples' ideas for the future, and presented our findings to the Council in this report.

How we've engaged with people

- 1.12 We used five main methods for gathering people's views:
- **Interviews** with key Council stakeholders, library and community centre partners.
 - **An online and paper copy 'main' survey**, available to all members of the public in up to six different languages.
 - **An online 'children and young people's survey**, aimed at under 16s.
 - **Staff workshops** with a cross-section of library and community centre staff.
 - **Focus groups** with library service users and non-users.
- 1.13 We have summarised our approach to each method in Section 3.

Summary of each section

- 1.14 This report document is structured using the headings below:
- *Section 1 - Introduction*: an overview of the purpose of this report.
 - *Section 2 - Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester*: an overview of Leicester's library and community centres, including a summary of the current service offer, how the services are organised, and explore broader sector and societal changes that may influence the future direction for these services.
 - *Section 3 - Our primary research methodology*: we describe our engagement methodology, the role of our research brief and Key Lines of Enquiry, and list the various individuals and organisations that we have engaged with during this phase of the project.
 - *Section 4 - KLOE a: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision'*: we explore our first Key Line Of Enquiry, reporting what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- *Section 5 - KLOE b: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city':* we explore our second Key Line Of Enquiry, reporting what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.
- *Section 6 - KLOE c: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future':* we explore our third Key Line Of Enquiry, reporting what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.
- *Section 7 - KLOE d: 'What models and good practice exist':* we explore our fourth Key Line Of Enquiry, reporting what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.
- *Section 8 - What we've found out about libraries and community centres in Leicester:* we explore what's driving the required changes to libraries and community centres in Leicester, the needs that are, and aren't, being met by the current offer, and present our observations on the sites currently run by the Council.
- *Section 9 - Conclusions:* we summarise our findings compiling the headlines in this report.
- *Appendices:* a set of appendices containing additional information and details that support the main report sections.

2. Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester

Introduction

- 2.1 In this section, to help set the scene, we provide an overview of Leicester's library and community centres. We summarise the current service offer, how the services are organised, and explore broader sector and societal changes that may influence the future direction for these valuable public services.

Summary of what's on offer

- 2.2 As of 2021, Leicester is a diverse city with a population of 368,591 people¹, consisting of 41% White British, 43% Asian or Asian British, 8% Black or Black British, and 8% Mixed or Other.
- 2.3 As well as the Council's own library and community centre network, there are a number of community centres and spaces located across the city run by a diverse range of local charities, faith groups, voluntary organisations and other categorisations.
- 2.4 Some of these centres are independent and more focused towards supporting the specific needs of particular faiths and communities in Leicester, such as the Chinese Community Centre or the Jalaram Community Centre.
- 2.5 Together, Leicester's library and community centre sector, and its offer to residents, conveys vibrancy, energy and a sense of being deeply embedded within the whole city.

How it's organised

The Council's Neighbourhood Services function

- 2.6 The Council's Neighbourhood Services provides an integrated network of 25 public library, multi-service centre and community centre facilities. This includes 9 "multi-service centres", 16 statutory library service points, 14 community centres, Children's Book Bus, a Ward and Community Engagement Team, and the "Libraries from Home" online library services. We note that The HMP Leicester Prison Library is a commissioned area of work for the Council, however it is not in scope for this particular project.
- 2.7 Details about the service's vision, strategy, management structure, governance and staffing numbers are included in the Secondary Research report that accompanies this document.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Leicester, with 2021 Office for National Statistics data.

Wider changes in the economy and society

- 2.8 Recent years were already seeing rapid changes in the economy and society, both in the UK and the wider world, prior to the profound impact of the Covid-19 pandemic during 2020 and much of 2021. Certainly not all the effects have been negative, but combined with other factors such as the war in Ukraine or the recurrence of extreme weather events, this context must be taken into account when planning for the future provision of local services.
- 2.9 There have been rapid advances in technology and its application to almost every aspect of daily life. The pandemic necessitated a rapid adjustment to online working, shopping, study and social interaction, and although for many things there has been an adjustment back to more personal, direct contact, the legacy of these changes is that many providers now prefer users to access online, but also many individuals have got used to this and find it more convenient.
- 2.10 One obvious example is the use of smartphones: in 2023 87% of UK adults own a smartphone, up 27% points since 2014 when it was only 60%. Unsurprisingly 96% of 16- to 24-year-olds have a phone and even 69% of those aged over 65 have one. Furthermore, 93% of UK households now have internet access at home².
- 2.11 However, these statistics reveal an alternative reality, for example that 7% of UK households cannot access the internet at home, which represents some 4.6 million UK residents. Not everyone is equally confident or comfortable with using technology, or indeed wishes to. Hence there are still a significant minority of people who are excluded from this 'online world', not just for the activities where there remains the in-person option, such as shopping, but also to access a range of public services, to search and apply for jobs, or to look for a home to rent.
- 2.12 Behind this is the further reality that many people are now struggling with the cost of living. In 2022 the Office for National Statistics reported that the rising cost of living was a worry for 77% of adults in the UK and this figure has almost certainly increased since then.
- 2.13 Leaving aside the knock-on effect of not having immediate access to new technology and the internet, inflation, rising interest rates and a general slump in the economy is undoubtedly a daily issue for many people who are struggling to pay bills, heat their home or buy food (in 2022/23 approximately 2.99 million people used a food bank in the UK³).
- 2.14 Of course not everyone is feeling equally the slowing down of the economy, but this in itself has led to a starker division in society between, put simply, those who have and those who do not, or who at any rate feel that that they do not. Unsurprisingly there are wide demands for an increase in wages, with consequent strike action in many areas when these demands are not immediately met.

² www.finder.com

³ www.statista.com

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 2.15 All of these stressful impacts on daily life, not least the pandemic itself, have had an effect on people's health, and for many their mental health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2022 reported a 25% spike in global anxiety and depression, which may have reduced somewhat moving further out of the pandemic but many of the other factors mentioned above will have had an adverse effect. WHO indicates that young adults and women have suffered most ill-effect, as well as people with disabilities and people with lower income, but older people often experienced increased loneliness.
- 2.16 What we see in all of these changes is that national and local government, and other service providers are having to adjust how they deliver services to meet these changing patterns of need.

How these services are changing

- 2.17 Within the context of changing society and local needs, against a backdrop of ever-increasing financial pressure on public services, many local authorities are now seeking to review the vision for, and delivery of, their library and community services.
- 2.18 For libraries and community services reviewing a service that has in the past two decades had to keep pace with rapid changes, among these an increasingly digital and technology focused world, and the particular pressures brought to bear on a public service by the Covid-19 pandemic, brings with it particular challenges.
- 2.19 Libraries and community centres remain much-loved local services and, notwithstanding a trend towards reducing levels of use over recent decades, any suggestion that the service offer may change frequently brings a significant public reaction. At the same time the provision of a public library service remains a statutory obligation under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, and while what constitutes 'a comprehensive and efficient service' lacks definition, there is clear legal precedent that indicates the care with which any change in delivery or quality of the service must be approached.
- 2.20 All libraries had to close public access for a period during the pandemic, and although many responded imaginatively with a click-and-collect offer, more e-books and other materials, and even online story-times and activities, visitor numbers as well as the number of loans slumped drastically during 2020-21, only very slowly recovering during 2021-22.
- 2.21 During 2023-24 many libraries are reporting good recovery in terms of physical visits in loans, with use of online materials understandably falling back somewhat though not to pre-Covid levels. The challenge of falling use is unfortunately in some areas of the country becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: "Nobody uses the library, so reduce the funding, reduce the hours" ... and of course even less people then use the library and closure comes up for discussion.
- 2.22 Government has over the past two decades undertaken a seemingly repetitive series of reviews of public library services, all reaching similar conclusions but delivering little real change. Currently there is work led by Baroness Sanderson 'to support the development of new government public libraries strategy'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 2.23 For the moment the Universal Library Offers, published by Libraries Connected⁴, continues to be the most helpful framework. The new Universal Library Offers aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity. We have provided an overview of these in Section 1.
- 2.24 Over the years public libraries and community centres have often tried to be all things to all people and therein perhaps the key to successfully reshaping library and community centre services and taking them forward. The 'all things' approach is no longer financially viable, and in any case probably dilutes the service focus, so now is perhaps the time to decide where the key priorities lie locally for the service.
- 2.25 Public libraries in the UK are a local authority provided service and this gives the opportunity to shape the service so that it may best respond to local need.
- 2.26 An increasing number of local authorities are, like Leicester City Council, undertaking an exercise to identify the key areas of need locally – which will of course be shaped by the national picture outlined above, but may vary including between the different communities that make up the city.
- 2.27 Having identified need it then becomes possible to focus the service, be that on learning and reading, cultural opportunities, social interaction, access to and help with using technology, accessing services as well as where and how 'library and community services' rather than 'libraries and community centres as buildings' should be located and how they should be delivered. This may, for example, mean some libraries with a focus on book and other stock for loan, or community centre sites with a greater focus on bringing people together, or others with perhaps a heavy emphasis on technology.

⁴ www.librariesconnected.co.uk

Summary of findings

Key findings

2.28 In the table below, we have summarised our key findings from this section:

Table 2.2: Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester - our key findings

- The impact of **socio-economic events have exacerbated the existing challenges facing Leicester residents**, and of library and community centre users in Leicester. These challenges present new support needs, and opportunities for these valuable services to reach more new communities and service users. The existing library and community centre support offer could be tailored to be more immediately relevant to the current needs of more Leicester residents.
- Leicester's library and community centre offer **needs to convey the vibrancy and energy of the city's diverse communities**, whilst also **helping to address the pockets of inequality** that sit within the city. They are a trusted public service.
- Public services, especially **library and community-based services, have suffered from chronic central government underfunding for the past decade**. It is timely to explore the best use of Neighbourhood Services' available resources to meet local needs, including its ways of working with local residents and partner organisations, whilst also **being ambitious but realistic about what will, and won't, be possible** to do in the future.

3. Our primary research methodology

Introduction

- 3.1 In this section, we describe our engagement methodology, the role of our research brief and Key Lines of Enquiry, and list the various individuals and organisations that we have engaged with during this phase of the project.

Our approach

The scope of our engagement work

- 3.2 Our work covers the engagement and primary research element for this phase of the project, exploring and analysing the views, ideas and aspirations of the people and organisations who live, work and study in Leicester. In our work, we have sought to identify a wide range of perspectives of the Council's library and community centre offer, its ambitions, and peoples' ideas for the future, and presented our findings to the Council in this report.
- 3.3 It is important to note that those who feel strongest about libraries and community centres in Leicester are likely to be over-represented among those that we have engaged with. Equally, we have found that those with a passionate interest in libraries and community centres were a rich source of views and ideas that have underlined the importance of these services' role in Leicester.

Our research brief

- 3.4 Together with the Council's project team, we developed and agreed a research brief for the primary research to be completed in Phase 1 of the programme.
- 3.5 The research brief covers the types of research we intended to complete, a target completion date for the research and the subject areas that were to be explored.
- 3.6 We agreed the principal themes for our research, the contributors to the work to be completed and the key programme hypotheses and early assumptions we wanted to test and explore through our engagement and research.

Our Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs)

- 3.7 Key Lines of Enquiry (or KLOEs) are a set of key research themes we aim to explore in our research. Together with the Council's project team, we identified and agreed the important themes we wanted to learn more about for Phase 1 of the programme.
- 3.8 We also explored and agreed the preferred engagement method(s) for exploring each KLOE. In Phase 1 of the programme, these formats included interviews, surveys, staff workshops and focus groups. We also agreed whether the use of each format would ideally provide us with direct (first hand experiential) or indirect (opinion based, perception) evidence.
- 3.9 We summarise our KLOEs for Phase 1 of the programme in the table below.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 3.1: our Key Lines of Enquiry for Phase 1

Key line of enquiry (KLOE)	Areas for further exploration
<p><i>a. Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are people's needs for health and wellbeing and where are services available? • What are people's needs for accessing information and services online and where are these services available? • What are the reading and literacy needs of people across the city and where are these services available? • What sort of cultural and creative activities would people like and where can they access them? • How does the offer for Children and Young People map against the changing needs of CYP in the city? • What are people's needs for community spaces?
<p><i>b. How people are currently using library and community services across the city</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are patterns of use changing among different groups and in different places? • What do people think about the services on offer to each locality and for different groups of people? • What barriers do people experience accessing the support they need or participating in activities? • What might encourage people to use libraries and community centres more?
<p><i>c. What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What services would people prioritise most if available resources are declining? • What would be their priorities for investing in community services? • What would people like to see within a new central library offer?

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Key line of enquiry (KLOE)	Areas for further exploration
<i>d. What models and good practice exist elsewhere</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have successful central library projects been delivered recently? • What is the evidence of the impact of investing in new technology, including self-access? • What is the evidence of the impact of community asset transfer on provision of community centres? • What evidence exists about the benefits of further co-location/integration of services? • Where is the best evidence about library impacts on key impact measures? • What are the workforce needs to deliver a future library service? • How should 'universality' and 'targeting need' within the library model be balanced?

Overview of our approach

3.10 We used five main methods for gathering people's views:

- **Interviews** with key Council stakeholders, library and community centre partners.
- **An online and paper copy 'main' survey**, available to all members of the public in up to six different languages..
- **An online 'children and young people's survey**, aimed at under 16s.
- **Staff workshops** with a cross-section of library and community centre staff.
- **Focus groups** with library service and community centre users and non-users.

Interviews (internal) - overview

3.11 We conducted 15 interviews and small group conversations with 17 key library and community centre stakeholders, including Council officers, managers, library and community centre partners and representatives of the voluntary, education and creative sector in Leicester. Their practical knowledge and experience has been invaluable to the findings in this report.

'Main' public survey - overview

3.12 We ran an online public survey, hosted by the Council using Citizen Space - aimed at all people and organisations living in Leicester. The public were invited to share their thoughts on the city's libraries and community centres; their priorities and ideas for what could change in the future (see Appendix ii for survey questionnaire).

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 3.13 The survey was designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete and was available online. The survey was widely publicised via the Council's communication channels and in each library. The survey was launched on Monday 3rd July and was closed on Sunday 24th September.
- 3.14 We received 2,340 survey returns (comprising 930 online surveys, 1,244 paper surveys and 166 community language surveys) We were grateful for the number of returns to the survey for this first phase of the project. This figure is impressive in comparison to other library surveys that Activist is familiar with, given that no proposals for change were being tested at this stage. The Council and Neighbourhood Services' promotion of the survey proved highly successful and should be commended for their hard work and efforts to achieve such a high number of responses.
- 3.15 Whilst the return rates are impressive, we stress that it should be kept in mind that the survey was openly publicised and available to anyone to complete. As a result, the participants were self-selecting, and their views may not be representative of the diverse demography of the people and communities who live, work and study within Leicester.
- 3.16 In fact, analysis of the sample shows that it is unrepresentative of the population of Leicester in a number of ways:
- Current users of public libraries are over-represented. This is to be expected, given the survey was promoted through the library service. Users of Belgrave Library are especially over-represented, totalling 678 respondents, reflective of the hard work which library staff at this site made in marketing the survey.
 - The demographic profile of the sample is over-representative of White British residents (35.6%) and under-representative of a number of other ethnic groups. However, compared to many library surveys the proportion of survey returns from ethnic groups other than 'White British' is much higher than is typically seen.
 - Women (55.21%) outnumber men (26.97%) among respondents who gave their sex by over 2 to 1.
 - Compared to the population, older age cohorts (particularly those over 65 (26.97%) are over-represented while younger adults (16-34) are under-represented (13.91%).

Table 3.2: Sample profile – by ethnic background

Option	Total	Percent
White British	833	35.60%
Indian	648	27.69%
Other White	83	3.55%
African	62	2.65%
Other Asian	43	1.84%
Pakistani	37	1.58%
Other Mixed	25	1.07%
White Irish	24	1.03%
Caribbean	22	0.94%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Bangladeshi	16	0.68%
White and Asian	16	0.68%
White and Black Caribbean	11	0.47%
White and Black African	7	0.30%
Chinese	5	0.21%
Other Black	4	0.17%
Prefer not to say	94	4.02%
Not Answered	410	17.52%

Table 3.3: Sample profile – by gender

Option	Total	Percent
Female	1292	55.21%
Male	631	26.97%
Prefer not to say	54	2.31%
Not Answered	363	15.51%

Table 3.4: Sample profile – by age

Option	Total	Percent
Under 16	34	1.45%
16-24	84	3.59%
25-34	218	9.32%
35-44	404	17.26%
45-54	279	11.92%
55-64	317	13.55%
65+	631	26.97%
Prefer not to say	45	1.92%
Not Answered	328	14.02%

- 3.17 Overall, we have treated the results of the survey as indicative and tested its results against our own observations and feedback from the interviews, children and young people’s survey, staff workshops and focus groups.

Children and young people’s survey - overview

- 3.18 We also ran an online children and young people’s survey, hosted by the Council using Citizen Space - aimed specifically at under 16s living in Leicester. Young people were invited to share their thoughts on the city’s libraries and community centres; their priorities and ideas for what could change in the future.
- 3.19 The survey was designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete and was available online. The survey was widely publicised via the Council’s communication channels and in each library, as well as through the homework clubs at eleven of the Council’s libraries. The survey was launched on Monday 25th September and was closed on Sunday 22nd October.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 3.20 We received 511 survey returns. Again, we were grateful for the number of returns to the survey for this first phase of the project.
- 3.21 We stress that it should be kept in mind that the survey was openly publicised and available to anyone to complete. As a result, the participants were generally self-selecting. In addition the survey was heavily marketed to regular library users attending organised events. Respondents' views, therefore, may not be representative of the diverse demography of the children and young people who live, work and study within Leicester.
- Girls were moderately over-represented (53.62%) compared to boys (44.62%)
 - Younger children (aged 7 to 10) were significantly underrepresented compared to the profile of CYP library users. Conversely the overwhelming majority of respondents were aged 11 to 16.
 - Very few non-users of libraries completed the survey.
 - Rather than asking for respondents' ethnicity, we asked what languages they spoke at home. This elicited the following overall response:

Table 3.5: 'Tell us all the languages you speak at home'

Option	Total	Percent
English	472	92.37%
Gujarati	308	60.27%
Hindi	92	18.00%
A different language (please tell us)	61	11.94%
Punjabi	48	9.39%
Urdu	17	3.33%
Polish	6	1.17%
Romanian	2	0.39%
Not Answered	9	1.76%

- 3.22 The 61 responses which cited 'different' languages give an insight into the huge cultural diversity among families in Leicester, with 25 different languages cited, mostly commonly Tamil, Malayalam and Kurdish, but combinations of multiple African, Asian and European languages cited by individual respondents point to the rich dual heritage of many children and young people in Leicester for which the library service has potentially much to offer.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 3.6: the ‘different’ languages mentioned (with duplicates removed)

Arabic
At bit of French
Bengali
Bulgarian, Turkish
Dari
every single language
French
I even speak italian
I speak a bit of Gujrati
i use bits and bobs from indian languages but mainly english
I used to know Italian , but I forgot how to speak it but I still understand it .
I'm currently learning French at school.
Italian
Italiana
Kachi (malaiwain language)
Kannada
Korean.
Kurdish
kurdish and english
Kurdish sorani
Kutchi
Latvian
Mahrathi
Malayalam
Mangeli (mixture of gujarati and marathi)
Marathi
Ndebele
Nepali
Only little bits of Guajarati and Punjabi though.
Portuguese
Sinhala
Somali
Some French, Polish and Spanish
Some times
Sometimes I speak gujarati with my family
spanish
Swahili
Tamil
Tamil and a bit of Hindi and French
Tamil,sinhala
Yoruba
Yoruba , French and kinda of multilingual in Asian languages e.g Korean

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 3.23 Overall, we have also treated the results of the children and young people's survey as indicative and tested its results against our own observations and feedback from the interviews, 'main' public survey, staff workshops and focus groups.

Staff workshops - overview

- 3.24 We conducted two staff workshops with officers from Neighbourhood Services that work with libraries and community centres. Participants were also invited to share their views, and the views of their colleagues, with us by email post-meeting or if they were unavailable to join us in at the workshops.
- 3.25 Neighbourhood Services also ran one follow-up staff workshop to continue the discussions and gather further findings that we have reflected in this report.
- 3.26 The workshops were positive and we were again struck by the enthusiasm and knowledge shown by all of the attendees. We are very grateful for their time and input.

Focus groups - overview

- 3.27 We also conducted twelve focus groups and spoke with 80 members of the public who were a mixture of users and non-service users, of all ages and demographics. The focus groups were tailored to reflect the time people could realistically be expected to spare us and deliberately designed to explore the perspectives of library and community centre users and non-users from across the city.
- 3.28 Focus group participants were invited to volunteer through the survey and through Neighbourhood Services' existing network of partners and known users.
- 3.29 The discussion themes for the twelve focus groups were identified and assigned based on the Universal Offers, plus two additional themes of interest to the project team – the Central Library and the view of young people.
- 3.30 We are grateful to all focus group participants for taking the time to volunteer, attend and share their thoughts with us. In order to maintain participant confidentiality, we have anonymised their comments in this report.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

The strength and breadth of people's perceptions and opinions

- 3.31 We have not sought to evaluate or 'weight' people's perceptions or opinions, but we have drawn out those that we think highlight a key theme or shared viewpoint effectively. We have drawn out those views that were particularly common but have also included examples of significant or interesting 'minority' views that should be heard. At the end of each section, we have also highlighted our key findings.

Who we've spoken with

Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to this report

- 3.32 We are very grateful to the many people and organisations who have helped us and taken the time to share their thoughts. We have been struck by the passion and enthusiasm shown by the people who use Leicester's libraries and community centres and by the staff who serve them. We hope we have done justice to the force of the main points they and others have made.
- 3.33 We have also been impressed by the vast collection of background information, documents and evidence that we have been provided with that have helped inform our work and our engagement approach.
- 3.34 While the Council or the public might not accept all of our findings, we hope that they can find much that they can agree with and support as we look to use this report to inform Phase 2 of the project.

Table 3.7: list of interviewees and organisations we have spoken with

Name	Job title and organisation
Paul Angrave	Associate Director of Public Affairs, Leicester University
Kate Earl	Relationship Manager for Libraries in East Midlands, Arts Council England
Lisa Eldret	Book Start Relationship Manager, BookTrust
Laura French	Consultant in Public Health, Leicester City Council
Nicola Gale	'Whatever It Takes' Lead, Schools Development Service
Kate Galoppi	Director for Adult Social Care & Commissioning, Leicester City Council
Kerry Gray	Head of Adult Education, Leicester City Council
Lynda Hartley	Head of Service for Early Help, Leicester City Council
Gurjeet Kaur Minhas	Head of Housing, Leicester City Council

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Name	Job title and organisation
Tara Lopez	Executive Director, Spark Arts
Sophie Maltby	Principal Education Officer (job-share), Leicester City Council
Sarah Mears, MBE	Programme Manager, Libraries Connected
David Parkes	Director of Library and Student Services, De Montfort University
Steve Pinchbeck	Partnership Manager, DWP
Andrew Shilliam	Head of City Mayor's Office and Customer Support Lead, Leicester City Council
Sue Welford	Principal Education Officer (job-share), Leicester City Council
Steve Williams	University Librarian and Director of Library and Learning Services, Leicester University

4. KLOE a: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision': what our analysis tells us

Introduction

- 4.1 The key line of enquiry (KLOE) we explore in this section is '*Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision*'.
- 4.2 In this section, we have reported what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.

What people have told us

What's come out of the interviews

- 4.3 In our conversations, people have told us:

People's needs for health and wellbeing

- 4.4 **Existing inequalities across Leicester** are understood to have been **exacerbated by the impact of Covid**. This impact has then been multiplied by the current cost-of-living crisis pressures facing many people.
- 4.5 There are **a number of vulnerable residents living in Leicester** (including those living in Council housing) **with complex needs**. These people require tailored support packages, coordinated by the Council, to help them in their day to day lives.
- 4.6 We have heard that there are **a number of localized physical health challenges** in Leicester, including:

- *Oral health*: especially poor in Leicester.
- *Childhood immunization number*: recent drop-offs locally, perceived to perhaps be linked to trust levels in public services and prevalence of disinformation online.
- *Cancer screening*: low numbers.
- *Cardiovascular and diabetes type 2*: diverse communities (such as within Leicester) have particular issues that affect their demographics.

- 4.7 In addition, **mental health challenges** are affecting Leicester residents, in particular school-age children (perceived to be linked in part to the impact of Covid on adolescent life experiences). However, the role of community support and 'pulling together' to help people who may be struggling is considered by some to be a unique strength in Leicester.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

4.8 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support resident health and wellbeing**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):

- Council - Adult Social Care and Commissioning teams.
- Council - STAR (Supporting Tenants and Residents) / Housing team, including a pre-emptive neighbourhood-level issue resolution and face to face contact role.
- Council - Public Health team, including the work of Community Wellbeing Champions.
- De Montfort University: a valuable source of recent research work and ideas in relation to improving health and wellbeing.

People's needs for accessing information and services online

4.9 There is general recognition of the **broader societal, and Council, 'channel shift' towards accessing and provision of more services online**.

4.10 However, we have been told that **not all residents can, or want to, move to accessing services online**. There is a perception that there some Leicester residents will always require a degree of face to face support and contact, as well as those facing the barriers of data or device 'poverty'. It has been suggested to us that the Council should respect these needs and provide for these people accordingly.

4.11 A number of people have mentioned to us that **increased investment in multi-language/ESOL provision is considered essential**, due to the nature of Leicester's growing, and increasingly diverse, communities.

4.12 Libraries and community centres are considered by many to offer **a useful focal point for people to access information**, either verbally face to face, or by using the free IT.

4.13 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support residents with access to information**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):

- Council - STAR (Supporting Tenants and Residents) / Housing team.
- De Montfort University.
- Department of Work and Pensions.
- Council – Customer Services.

People's reading and literacy needs

4.14 As before, **increased investment in providing reading materials in non-English languages is considered essential**, due to the diversity of Leicester's communities.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.15 The **current Adult Education offer in Leicester is generally considered strong** and a strength to be built on and developed further.
- 4.16 It is apparent that **multi-agency partnership working (including with 'community gatekeepers') around improving literacy is well established**, popular and perceived as successful, offering another existing strength to be built on and developed. We have heard 'more of the same, please' messages from several of our interviewees, with the idea of 'keep doing what you're doing' seeming to be broadly popular in relation to literacy improvement efforts locally.
- 4.17 Anecdotally, we have been told **that the 2023 Summer Reading Challenge has been extremely popular (both locally and nationally)**, suggesting an ongoing appetite among young people and families for literacy-related support and activities.
- 4.18 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support residents with reading and literacy**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):
- Council - Whatever It Takes and Schools Development Service team.
 - Council - Adult Learning and Education Services team.
 - Council - Public Health team.
 - BookTrust.
 - Leicester University's library service.

People's cultural and creative activity needs

- 4.19 We have heard several times in our conversations that while libraries host a wide range of arts activities they aren't currently well positioned as part of a broader offer in the city and **need to be recognised better within cultural partnerships**.
- 4.20 It is clear that **Leicester is a hugely vibrant place, proudly made up of different communities** and unique local interests. We have been told that the library service and community centres should **offer a revised cultural and creative programme of activities to reflect this diversity**.
- 4.21 In the activities they currently deliver, Leicester's **Neighbourhood Services team are broadly perceived by their key local and regional cultural and creative activity partners as well engaged, enthusiastic and popular** to work with.
- 4.22 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support resident cultural and creative interests**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):
- The Sparks Arts For Children.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- De Montfort University.
- University of Leicester.
- City Mayor's Office.
- Arts Council England (regional).

Children and young people's needs

- 4.23 The local statistic that "**41% of children live in poverty**"⁵ is understood to be a particular challenge in Leicester, upheld by a range of complex multi-generational issues.
- 4.24 **The Family Hubs programme** is understood to be **playing a key role** in supporting and improving the lives of Leicester's families, children and young people. It is considered to have appropriately skilled staff and resources available, which could (and perhaps should) be working more closely alongside the Neighbourhood Services offer.
- 4.25 **Early years support is highly valued**, especially relating to school readiness. **The role of activity sessions for under-5's in libraries and community centres** is also considered important, however there is some underlying distrust of public services amongst Leicester residents and new communities that could be affecting uptake. This is perceived to be linked to the prevalence of disinformation online and local challenges with access to non-English information for newer residents.
- 4.26 We understand there is **a significant quantity of Early Years case work locally** to be managed by the Council, each with their own unique and complex support needs.
- 4.27 Again, we have heard that Leicester's **Neighbourhood Services team are broadly perceived by their key local and regional children and young people activity partners as well engaged, enthusiastic and popular** to work with.
- 4.28 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support children and young people**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):
- Council - Integrated Services team.
 - Council - Education team.
 - Council – Early Help & Disabled Children's Services.
 - BookTrust.

People's needs for community spaces

⁵ End Child Poverty Coalition, with the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University, June 2023 (<https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>)

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.29 **Community spaces** in libraries and community centres are **broadly considered 'essential'**, helping with community cohesion and addressing social isolation challenges. They are seen as 'trusted' and 'safe places' to visit.
- 4.30 We have heard **the suggestion that there is significant local voluntary sector provision of community space locally**, however we are yet to find out where up to date information about this (rather than historic examples or past perceptions of what's available) may be held centrally.
- 4.31 We have also heard opinions suggesting **that information about available community spaces**, whether on offer from the Council or other local providers, and the activities taking place within them **could be better promoted and shared with residents** to help improve awareness about what is happening and how to access spaces so that people (including new communities) can look to book and lead their own activities.
- 4.32 In addition to the existing role that libraries and community centres play, we have been told that there are a number of **other key services currently available in Leicester that help support residents with information about access to community spaces**, each with their own service priorities, including (but not limited to):
- Council - Adult Learning and Education Services team.
 - Council - Adult Social Care and Commissioning teams.
 - Council - Estates & Building Services and Regeneration Team.
 - The Sparks Arts For Children.
 - Reaching People (umbrella organised for CS groups in Leicester).
 - Voluntary Action Leicester.

What's come out of the main public survey

- 4.33 Survey respondents were asked two preliminary questions about current challenges and future aspirations to gauge the most pressing needs facing people in Leicester in the context of the current Neighbourhood Services offer. 'Cost of living', 'my physical health' and 'my mental health' were by a clear margin the most frequently cited concerns.

Table 4.1: What are the greatest concerns in your life at the moment?

Option	Total	Percent
Cost of living	1328	56.75%
My physical health	976	41.71%
My mental health	793	33.89%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Finding help when I need it	486	20.77%
My job or career	461	19.70%
Loneliness	355	15.17%
Completing a qualification or learning a new skill	304	12.99%
Being able to get online when I want to	219	9.36%
Something else	136	5.81%
I don't know	82	3.50%
Not Answered	253	10.81%

- 4.34 There were some disparities in responses between different groups. For example, among those who said they were 'unemployed' (200 respondents), the same three challenges were selected most often, but the balance between them was different: 'cost of living' (71%), 'my mental health' (46.86%) and 'my physical health' (33.33%).
- 4.35 Among the 200 additional free text responses given, the most frequently mentioned 'other concerns' were: local safety, climate change and the environment, housing and homelessness, and help with technology, with several pointing to perceived gaps in local provision across a range of needs.

Would like to go to exercise classes locally however there are none on the Wires Monsell [sic]

The world becoming digital with no regard for older people who don't have the tech equipment and either don't understand how to use it or don't have the internet or the equipment, and in my husband's case does not wish to, prefer to talk to people not a machine...

Not having any support in the area other than a food bank that is always closed and opened early hours the odd morning. Why is this centre not being used to help the people of this community

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.36 Respondents' hope for the future were also very revealing about needs and demand within the community for support and opportunities. 'Be more physically active' was very clearly the most pressing aspiration, with over 50% of respondents citing this. 'Meet more people in my local community' and 'Experience more arts, heritage, history and culture' were the also cited by over 30%, and 'Explore more of what is happening in Leicester' and 'Learn a new skill or complete a course/qualification' by between 20% and 30%.

Table 4.2: What are you hoping to change about your life in the future? Please tick up to three options

Option	Total	Percent
Be more physically active	1236	52.82%
Meet more people in my local community	784	33.50%
Experience more arts, heritage, history and culture	769	32.86%
Explore more of what is happening in Leicester	691	29.53%
Learn a new skill or complete a course/qualification	531	22.69%
Volunteer somewhere	300	12.82%
Change my job or career	288	12.31%
Try more things online	210	8.97%
Start a new business	159	6.79%
I don't know	156	6.67%
Something else	77	3.29%
Not Answered	284	12.14%

- 4.37 Again, some divergence between different groups was observed, with the 'unemployed' sample rating 'be more physically active' (52.66%), 'meet more people in my local community' (37.88%) but 'learn a new skill or complete a course/qualification' third highest (39.61%)

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.38 Among other significant hopes cited in the 105 free text responses, the most frequently mentioned subjects were within the themes of more security of home, job, and finances. However, many responses also revealed people actively considering or seeking new activities within the community or facing barriers in participating.

If they start courses in computers and online learning at Belgrave, then that will be better

I'd love to be part of a community choir but can't afford car parking to join the ones at Curve and can't use public transport to avoid it or get to others

I am an ex-teacher and would like to volunteer in schools to help students with reading

What's come out of the CYP survey

- 4.39 Respondents to the CYP survey were asked about how they like to spend time outside school. 'Watching videos, TV or films', 'spending time with family' and 'reading books' were the three most popular activities. Given current national data for the proportion of children and young people who are reading for pleasure, these responses reflect the fact that respondents are mainly regular library users. Among other activities cited in free text responses, 'music' and 'arts' were the most common themes.

Table 4.3: How do you spend your free time?

Option	Total	Percent
Watching videos, TV or films	377	73.78%
Spending time with family	327	63.99%
Reading books	301	58.90%
Being with friends	276	54.01%
Talking with friends online	261	51.08%
Helping out at home	262	51.27%
Playing sports	257	50.29%
Being outdoors	254	49.71%
Clubs and activities	245	47.95%
Playing with friends online	242	47.36%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Videogames	230	45.01%
Visiting a library	135	26.42%
Dancing	101	19.77%
Something else (please tell us)	53	10.37%
Not Answered	5	0.98%

What's come out of the staff workshops

4.40 In the workshops, staff have told us about the following **key user needs**:

Financial

4.41 Service users (and staff alike) are **concerned about what can be done with the limited financial resources** they have available to them.

Community, social spaces and cohesion

4.42 Libraries and community spaces are considered 'safe; free; friendly; welcoming' physical spaces to meet and socialize in. They are vital for '**cohesion**', offering a local '**sense of community**' and being '**supportive** and **welcoming** to 'those who have just arrived'. They should offer '**free** and/or '**cost efficient**' activities 'for the community', targeting 'certain demographics' **reflecting the cultural 'richness' and 'interests'** of the people of Leicester.

Digital access

4.43 Users require **access to IT and online services**. Libraries and community centres provide support and advice in the use of IT, free access to Wi-Fi and other online services.

4.44 The drivers for channel shift are considered to be broadly understood by the public, however 'some people can't/won't get online; they just need help'.

Face to face access to services, information and 'traditional' support

4.45 Libraries and community centres regularly provide **face-to-face advice and signposting** to '**no, or low, cost**' information and services that is considered important.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.46 The nature of the support required **ranges from general queries about public services and local activities**; to employment, housing, homelessness, ESOL and translation support, to **compassionate support** to people facing social isolation or those struggling with online access. Staff have described how users want **'help with access to services – all moved online'** and how they require **'better training to help the public with important life paperwork'**.
- 4.47 In addition, libraries and community centre staff recognise that their services perform a **traditional, but highly valued, support role** – a 'warm space'; 'a friendly environment' a 'place to sit and keep warm'; offering 'someone to talk to' and a 'place of safety that is free to access'.
- 4.48 It is widely perceived that staff are **regularly providing in-person support for people with multiple, interrelated and complex needs**. They are seen as 'trusted' contact points for the people of Leicester.

Reading, education and learning

- 4.49 Users, including children and young people, **value highly the 'free access' to reading materials, whether 'online or print'**.

Language and the changing demographics of the city

- 4.50 People have **increasing ESOL support needs**, including 'access to literature and information'. Support for non-English speaking people is considered a significant need - there are 'so many (*people we support*) who don't speak English'.

Health and wellbeing

- 4.51 Users sometimes require **wellbeing support**, including 'combating loneliness'. Specific services are needed to support **'housebound' users**, as well as providing opportunities to help people with **personal development**.

Children (and parents, carers)

- 4.52 Children and young people are perceived to have **'support and activity' needs, including 'events during holidays'**. **Parents and carers for those in education** are also considered to regularly require **'specific support'**.

Working with/being the point of contact for other Council/public services

- 4.53 Staff consider themselves to increasingly be filling the gap for other public services. There are various anecdotal reports of other Council services saying 'go to the library to sort something Council related' or 'explain where to go for help', and that 'other services (*are*) passing over to us'.

Changing user demands means the job has changed (significantly)

- 4.54 Staff shared their observations on this topic. Their detailed feedback will be discussed separately as part of ongoing internal team meetings focused on future service development.

What's come out of the focus groups

4.55 In the focus groups, members of the public told us about the following **key user needs**:

City centre offer

4.56 There were observations from some participants in several groups that they tended not to use the city centre (e.g. due to travel issues or the decline in the market) or were happy with the shops in their own area.

Childrens Promise

4.57 Libraries often perform a broader role (akin to youth services) than just the provision of books, study space and homework clubs. This was reflected in frequent mentions around **the 'lost role of youth clubs'**. Other related comments include:

- 'there is a need for something/somewhere safe and positive for young people to go and do, especially for those traditionally educated-excluded'.
- 'parents are afraid to let kids out'.
- '(a) sense of safety is key'.

4.58 One group shared their site-specific anecdotes of '**anti-social behaviour of very young children/parents inside libraries**', especially during holiday time, suggesting it 'needed to be managed in some inclusive way'.

4.59 We also heard some anecdotal assumptions where it was viewed by some younger parents and carers that 'schools (*should be*) taking responsibility for reading (*development*)', not parents themselves or libraries.

4.60 In response, many groups recognised that **reading opportunities**, and **libraries** and community centres more generally, were 'vital for CYP; to **share knowledge... (to *participate in*) activities**'.

Culture and creativity

4.61 We heard clearly from all groups that Leicester **residents of all ages have an appetite for activity programmes** taking place in their libraries and community centres.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 4.62 The groups recognised the need to provide **creative, and socialization, opportunities and activities that help address community issues**, 'especially isolation for older people'. We heard how libraries are perceived to be 'a good space... Talk to seniors, they feel a little left behind in online / social media world... Not online - they can come here and feel good', and how they help '(get) people out - especially older community... A social service - as well as an escalator to other things... About making friends'.
- 4.63 **Local provision** is also considered key, especially during the cost of living crises – 'you don't need to pay for the bus... it's handy', as well as **the pricing of activities** 'especially if for children - costs to attend - can bump price up'.
- 4.64 The **community cohesion role of cultural activity programmes**, particularly in a diverse city like Leicester, was recognised by many of the groups we spoke with. One group particularly acknowledged that Leicester people were 'keen to come and hear other cultures' and 'celebrate festivals of all cultures' across the whole city.

Health and wellbeing

- 4.65 We heard from several groups about the role of libraries and community centres in '**addressing isolation**' and **providing human contact** – one individual said "(I) think we do have a lack of human contact; Think people are craving human contact since Covid".
- 4.66 We were also told how **physical activity has a relationship with mental wellbeing** – one group mentioned how the 'main thing (*is to get people*) **out of homes**, into community - **have a bit of fun**' and that 'the company you're in does make a difference to (*your*) use of libraries'.

Information and digital

- 4.67 We understood from several groups that some '**people can't afford Internet/data access** on e.g. a smart phone' and that 'people go to community centres and libraries to **access what they don't have at home... some people don't have the devices**, so they need them or access to them - permanently or to borrow'.
- 4.68 There were some individual concerns about societal shifts in the use of technology and people 'being consumed by screens'.
- 4.69 A number of **contributory barriers** to accessing information were identified in our discussions, including **translation** and **ESOL support** needs, **general literacy** skills and '**digital literacy / digital poverty**'.

Reading

- 4.70 The group broadly recognised **the role of reading 'devices'** and 'changing usage patterns' for accessing reading materials. There was general recognition of **a growing demand for alternative reading materials** 'in all forms', such as '**ebooks**'.
- 4.71 **Children**, in particular, were recognised by many groups as needing '**access to reading materials**'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Youth (young people's focus group comments)

- 4.72 Local schools were perceived by the young people we spoke with to be doing good work in promoting reading: **'School encourages us to read'**.
- 4.73 The young people also recognised **the role reading, and visiting libraries, play in helping with their mental health**. We heard comments including:
- 'Books - reading, to help people get away from life - really helps with mental health'.
 - 'Libraries could do more to help with mental health'.
 - 'Libraries are a good place to go - if feeling a bit anxious'.
 - 'Go there, calm down a bit - read a book'.

Other headlines

- 4.74 There was general consensus at all groups about the strength of **strong community spirit**, and the role of libraries and community centres in supporting that.
- 4.75 Many people we spoke with raised **investment in local community facilities** as a priority, with comments including:
- 'We've got no resources to do more here'.
 - 'Resources are needed for deprived areas.'
- 4.76 **Site accessibility** was also flagged as a key resident need, including 'wheelchair ramps, easy parking'.
- 4.77 At one group, we were asked to be **mindful of the legacy of the 2022 unrest**, the causes and the future support needs of the communities that were involved in Leicester.
- 4.78 Some groups also indicated they would like **better clarity and understanding of how the Council's resources, and public money more generally, is spent**. One individual commented that 'as residents, we're not aware where money is being spent', with another group mentioning one former Council officer in particular perceived as being personally responsible for overseeing cuts to their local facilities.

Summary of findings

Key findings

4.79 In the table below, we have summarised our key findings from this section:

Table 4.4: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision' - our key findings

- Leicester is a **vibrant and diverse city made of many different communities and cultures**. The Neighbourhood Services offer needs to keep under review how it responds to these ongoing changes, including the need for **more ESOL support** and how it can work with other services to draw on their translation support and provision of advice in non-English languages.
- There are pockets of **significant inequality** across Leicester, where residents need **increasing amounts of help** to respond to their complex needs.
- The post-Covid impact on **people's physical and, also especially, mental health** is becoming increasingly apparent. People in Leicester are **now struggling more** and need more support.
- There is a role for libraries and community centres to play in supporting resident **health and wellbeing, community inclusion, and literacy and skills development**. The service, and its staff, appears to be **well positioned** with, and **well trusted by**, their partners. However, it is felt that the service could do more, and help even more residents, by building on existing multi-agency partnerships to better coordinate city-wide interventions together.
- There is an opportunity for the libraries and community centre offer in Leicester to be **more directly aligned with the city's overall cultural offer**, particularly around the provision of a diverse community activity programme across the city in coordination with the Council's partners.
- A **significant proportion of Leicester children** are understood to **grow up in poverty**, with related impacts on **school readiness** and **future life outcomes**. Libraries and community centres, alongside other public services, can play a role in helping children, young people and their families with these early year challenges.
- It is perceived that there **is a strong and well-trusted VCS sector in Leicester**, offering provision in various locations and venues across the city. The Council's own libraries and community centre network could, and should, complement this offer and could be coordinated in partnership with local VCS organisations. There is also understood to be **an appetite for a change in the Council's community presence locally**, whether that means changes in the physical network or alternative approaches to service delivery, such as increased outreach or delivery from different buildings.

5. KLOE b: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city': what our analysis tells us

Introduction

- 5.1 The key line of enquiry (KLOE) we explore in this section is 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city'.
- 5.2 In this section, we have reported what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.

What people have told us

What's come out of the interviews

- 5.3 In our conversations, people have told us:

Changing patterns of use amongst different groups and in different places

- 5.4 It is considered by some that Leicester residents' **face to face support requirements are growing**. Libraries, and library staff, are seen as one of the few remaining easy to access in-person Council presences that receive 'entry point queries' on behalf of the wider Council. It was mentioned several times that this reliance on libraries is in part due to other Council services having had their own in-person provision cut or stripped out.
- 5.5 We have heard clearly that Leicester is a vibrant, moving and shifting city, with a great many new communities now forming a part of it. **Some of the new, and existing, communities in Leicester have significant ESOL support requirements** that the Council is being asked to adapt and respond to.
- 5.6 We have heard loudly that **the people of Leicester are fiercely proud of its diversity, and the many different communities, that make up its population**. However, on the whole, people would like to see this diversity better reflected in the things they do, and the offers they have access to, across the city.
- 5.7 We have heard how **Leicester's communities (especially new communities) generally tend to 'stay local' to where they live**. Some people are rarely inclined to adventure or travel into the city centre, made worse by ESOL challenges, cost of living pressures and personal transport difficulties. Other people simply prefer to build close relationships with their local area only, including with the community centres and libraries that are located closest to them and have become a trusted and safe place for them to visit over many years.
- 5.8 Leicester also has **a significant young population (including academic students)**. They require things to do, and positive futures to aspire towards, in order **to keep them in Leicester**, especially once they have completed their studies.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.9 There are varying **perceptions of Leicester's city centre, both in its daytime retail offer and nighttime recreational offer with some reporting that they make little use of the city centre** due to issues such as cleanliness and street begging (which the Council is addressing). The cost of travel to the city centre was a barrier for some and there were different levels of awareness of the new free Hop! Service. Any work to promote the Central Library would provide an opportunity to address any outdated perceptions of the city centre.
- 5.10 We have heard that there are **pockets of significant deprivation in Leicester**, where the effects of **intergenerational inequality** have been worsened by Covid and the cost of living crisis.
- 5.11 **Job stability and financial uncertainty (incl. the cost of 'doing things' beyond the essentials) is a significant challenge** for many people in Leicester. This is restricting what people are able to do, and how much free time they have to spend on, life-enriching activities beyond the basics of paying the bills and putting food on the table.

Peoples' thoughts on the services currently on offer locally

- 5.12 The **Neighbourhood Services team are broadly perceived as well engaged, enthusiastic and popular by their key local and regional partners**, many of which have long-term working relationships and/or delivered longer-term programmes together. This is considered a local strength to be built on.
- 5.13 However, Leicester has changed significantly in the last decade or so, especially demographically. It is viewed by some that **the current Neighbourhood Services offer is 'a bit tired' and needs to adapt to these changes** (and that the service is receptive and open to doing so).
- 5.14 The current Neighbourhood Services offer includes a blend of online and in-person support, such as in libraries and community centres. However, there were some **requests for additional in-person provision and resources**, as it is perceived by some to be stretched.
- 5.15 **Access to services locally is considered of high importance to people, especially to Leicester's new and diverse communities.**
- 5.16 The Council's **library and community centre buildings are considered by many to be of mixed quality in terms of their physical fabric condition and locations**. The existing buildings network is understood to have been historically maintained by the Council in response to passionate support from the local communities who use them.
- 5.17 Building on this point, some felt that investing in the Central Library would not be a priority given that they made little use of the city centre but there were others who wanted to see a high-profile new library, citing examples from elsewhere in the country.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

The barriers people currently face when accessing support or participating in activities

- 5.18 Leicester is a city made up of many diverse communities, but **not everyone can speak English**. We have heard that information about Council services needs to be accessed by people speaking an increasingly wide range of languages.
- 5.19 We have heard examples where **some communities do not wish to be reached by, or will avoid engaging with, public services and the Council**. This means it is often difficult to explore what support requirements they may have as new residents in Leicester. It is perceived by some that this disengagement may be related to intergenerational disinformation being circulated and a distrust of public services relating to past persecution or the bad experiences of trusted community members.
- 5.20 Unsurprisingly, **cost is often a prohibitive barrier in Leicester**, particularly for lower earners, the precariously employed, and older or retired residents.
- 5.21 As many people don't want to, or can't afford to, travel, often preferring to stay local near to their homes, **the proximity of facilities to where people live** is considered to be highly important and continues to influence service use, preferred facility use and activity participation levels.
- 5.22 For those who are happy to travel to use services, **accessing transport can prove a challenge** for some people. We have heard how this is perceived to be down to a lack of private transport (e.g. a car) or the cost of public transport (e.g. buses), rather than the routes that Leicester's public transport currently covers.
- 5.23 **Data poverty affects some people**. Whilst many residents do have smartphones and devices, some do not. Alternatively, some people do not have enough data, or access to the Internet, as well as those who have no IT access (or IT skills) at all. This often means they rely on in-person support advice, or physical materials, instead.

Changes that might encourage people to use libraries and community centres more

- 5.24 A number of people have told us that they would welcome **a revised, and newly stylised and marketed, Neighbourhood Services offer from its libraries and community centres**. We heard that some people 'just don't know about what is currently on offer or how to access it - some people are pleasantly surprised when they find out!'. We have been told that any marketing of a new service offer should be 'multi-format' i.e. a blend of online and in-person, and a mixture of digital and physical support.
- 5.25 We understand that **any revised service offer should better reflect Leicester's increasing diversity**. It should consider non-English speaking residents, and be multi-cultural, multi-age, multi-activity, multi-location (and not necessarily city-centre focused).
- 5.26 We have heard that **maintaining a network of physical sites in close proximity to where people live outside the city centre**, meaning that they have 'local things to do' or places to go to, is important to people.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

What's come out of the main public survey

- 5.27 The survey asked how often people used local library services between 'frequently' and 'never.'

Table 5.1: How frequently do you visit a local library?

Option	Total	Percent
Frequently (daily)	263	11.24%
Regularly (every week)	716	30.60%
Occasionally (every month)	546	23.33%
Rarely (a few times)	370	15.81%
Never	249	10.64%
Not Answered	196	8.38%

- 5.28 For the purposes of analysis we have defined non-users as those who responded 'I never use a library' or 'Rarely (a few times)', (26.45%) of respondents. However, it should be noted that a number of notional 'non-users' on this definition also identified that they use the home library service. Within the sample of respondents there were few statistically significant differences in responses between users and non users of library services.
- 5.29 Non-users were marginally more likely to be in full or part-time work than library users, and among Non-users there were slightly more female than male respondents compared to library users. There were marginally more disabled non-users than users (fewer non responses) recording physical disability and mental health difficulty.
- 5.30 The survey asked which libraries were visited 'most often' or 'occasionally'.

Table 5.2: Regular and occasional use of libraries

	This is the library I visit most often		This is a library I visit occasionally	
	Total	%	Total	%
Aylestone Library	51	2.18	100	4.27
Beaumont Leys Library	147	6.28	124	5.3
Belgrave Library	575	24.57	103	4.4
Braunstone (The BRITE Centre)	141	6.03	86	3.68
Central Library	188	8.03	325	13.89
Evington Library	76	3.25	85	3.63

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

	This is the library I visit most often		This is a library I visit occasionally	
Fosse Library	72	3.08	69	2.95
Hamilton Library	119	5.09	79	3.38
Highfields Library	116	4.96	75	3.21
Knighton Library	145	6.2	76	3.25
New Parks Library	59	2.52	67	2.86
Pork Pie Library	121	5.17	78	3.33
Rushey Mead Library	87	3.72	67	2.86
St Barnabas Library	79	3.38	87	3.72
St Matthews Library	41	1.75	43	1.84
Westcotes Library	73	3.12	102	4.36

- 5.31 From this data we can see that among this sample of users there is significant use of multiple sites. Belgrave and Beaumont Leys users are 'over-represented' in the sample compared to data from registered library users.
- 5.32 Surprisingly, there are significantly more respondents using Central Library 'occasionally' rather than 'regularly', considering its role as the city's largest library.
- 5.33 We then analysed the data to examine whether individual users used more than one library. The following table presents for each library the number of users who said it was their main library, ie the one they use most often (in **bold**), and then the number who also used other libraries (what we have called 'secondary' libraries) which these users said they visited as well in the vertical columns.
- 5.34 For example, 575 respondents said that Belgrave Library was the site they visited most often. Of these 42 visit Rushey Mead library occasionally. Conversely, 87 people said Rushey Mead was the library they visited most often, but of these 62 also visit Belgrave occasionally. The survey then asked library users which services were most important to them. Five options were significantly more chosen than the others: 'books and reading material', computers, 'Wi-Fi and IT support', 'a social space to meet people' 'information and advice, including community information' and children's family activities such as Toddler time'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 5.3: Thinking about the public library you visit most often (apart from the Central Library) what are the most important things on offer there for you?

Option	Total	Percent
Books and reading materials	1284	54.87%
Computers, wifi and IT support	549	23.46%
A social space to meet people	524	22.39%
Information and advice, including community information	485	20.73%
Children's and family activities such as Toddler Time	445	19.02%
A quiet study space	332	14.19%
Health and wellbeing sessions and activities	302	12.91%
Cultural activities and events	299	12.78%
Warm spaces in cold weather	271	11.58%
Learning and skills activities such as Homework Help club	152	6.50%
Access to council services by phone or kiosk	104	4.44%
Support with finding a job	96	4.10%
Volunteering opportunities	88	3.76%
Housing enquiry desk	74	3.16%
Something else	71	3.03%
I don't know	40	1.71%
Not Answered	541	23.12%

- 5.35 These answers were consistent across different demographic groups, with few significant variations. People who said they were 'unemployed' rated 'children's and family activities' higher overall (28.99%) within the same 5 preferences.

How well do library services support users' needs?

- 5.36 The survey asked respondents to rate how different aspects of the library service supported their needs, on a scale from 'very well' to 'very poorly'. There was a significant drop-out rate (up to 37%) for this question.
- 5.37 All aspects of the service received higher positive scores than negative scores, but the three which received the highest number of 'very well' responses was for 'access to

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

books and reading material' (45.51%), 'access to computers, Wi-Fi and IT facilities' (32.61%), and 'having a warm space in cold weather (29.06%).

Reasons people said they 'never' use a local library

- 5.38 Among those people who said they 'never' use a local library (243 responses), the following reasons were chosen. 'I can access what I need online', 'I've wanted to, but just haven't had the free time', and 'I can access what I need elsewhere – such as local bookshops' were the most highly rated reasons.

Table 5.4. Reasons for 'never' visiting a local library

Option	Total	Percent
I can access what I need online - such as eBooks, online search	77	34.07%
Something else	44	19.47%
I've wanted to, but just haven't had the free time	42	18.58%
I don't know	38	16.81%
I can access what I need elsewhere - such as local bookshops	33	14.60%
I don't know what's on offer	23	10.18%
Too far to travel	20	8.85%
They don't feel welcoming	15	6.64%
I don't know where my local library is located	12	5.31%
The services I need aren't on offer	11	4.87%
I use a university library	4	1.77%
I use the BookBus	2	0.88%
I use the Central Library	2	0.88%
I use a school library	0	0.00%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.39 Among the 44 non-users who cited ‘something else’ as a reason for not visiting a local library, 11 people used the home library service. But among other non-users several different barriers around convenience were cited – including location, transport and opening hours. A few people cited issues of inclusivity and the welcome, particularly for those with anxiety or SEND needs. A few also said the library didn’t offer what they wanted in terms of reading material (including Indian language) and children’s activities.

Use of the Central Library

- 5.40 The survey asked similar question specifically of people’s use of the Central Library as opposed to local libraries. When asked how often they had visited the Central Library in the last five years, of 2054 responses, only 231 (11.24%) said they visited daily or weekly. 352 (17.14%) said they visited occasionally and 70.62% said they visited rarely or never.

Table 5.5: How often have you visited the Central Library in the past five years

Option	Total	Percent
Frequently (daily)	59	2.87%
Regularly (every week)	172	8.37%
Occasionally (every month)	352	17.14%
Rarely (a few times)	647	31.50%
Never	824	40.12%

- 5.41 Of the 824 respondents who said they never used it, 711 people gave the following reasons were cited.

Table 5.6: What are the main reasons you don’t visit the Central Library? Please tick up to 3 options.

Option	Total	Percent
I don’t visit the city centre often	275	38.73%
I use another library	270	38.03%
It’s not conveniently located	190	26.76%
I don’t know where it is	144	20.28%
I can access what I need online or using technology instead – such as eBooks, online search	105	14.79%
I’ve wanted to, but just haven’t had the free time	84	11.83%
I can access what I need elsewhere – such as local bookshops	55	7.75%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
I don't know	41	5.77%
Something else	31	4.37%
It doesn't feel welcoming	29	4.08%
The library is not open when I need it	19	2.68%
The library does not provide the services I need	18	2.54%
I can't find the books I want	17	2.39%
The library is difficult to enter	12	1.69%
Some areas of the building are difficult to get to	12	1.69%
The computers and/or wifi do not offer what I need	6	0.85%

5.42 Given that most of these respondents were local library users, the responses are quite revealing. 38.73% said they did not visit the city centre often. 38.03% said they used another library, suggesting the Central Library offer lacked any additional services unavailable in their local area. 26.76% said that the Central Library was not conveniently located. 20% said they did not know what it was located.

5.43 Among the 31 respondents that cited 'something else' as a reason for not visiting the Central Library, a few key barriers were apparent: the city centre as a place they felt comfortable or safe to visit, or was easy to get to or park affordably, or that the Central Library offer does not exceed that of their local library, or that they are not sure what the Central Library offers.

I don't feel particularly safe in the city centre
I don't know what they offer there
I visit a local library that is close to where I live.
It costs me to go to city centre
Any information I need is on line.

5.44 Asked what were the most important services on offer at the Central Library, 1168 people responded (significantly more than the number of people who said they used the Central Library at all), 'the range of depth of books available' was chose by over two thirds of respondents, more than twice than of the next most popular option, 'computers, Wi-Fi and IT facilities'. 'Quiet study space' was the third most popular option.

Table 5.7: What are the most important things on offer for you at the Central Library? Pick up to 3 options.

Option	Total	Percent
The range and depth of books available	803	68.75%
Computers, wifi and IT facilities	361	30.91%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Quiet study space	273	23.37%
Newspapers and magazines	242	20.72%
Specialist collections	240	20.55%
Family and local history resources	241	20.63%
Children and family events	236	20.21%
Reading and cultural events	230	19.69%
Space to meet people and socialise	162	13.87%
Learning and skills activities or courses	146	12.50%
Reference materials such as the electoral register	142	12.16%
Health and wellbeing advice	111	9.50%
Other	67	5.74%

5.45 Among 66 free text responses to the supplementary question about what 'other' things were important to them, a few additional themes were identified, principally:

- DVDs, CDs
- OS maps
- The convenience of the library for a small number of respondents

Patterns of use of community centres

5.46 When asked how often they had visited a community centre in the last five years, 2040 people responded, but of these 1271 (52.4%) had either rarely or never visited one. 448 (26.87%) had visited daily or weekly.

Table 5.8: How often have you visited your local community centre over the last five years?

Option	Total	Percent
Frequently (daily)	157	7.70%
Regularly (every week)	391	19.17%
Occasionally (every month)	221	10.83%
Rarely (a few times)	383	18.77%
Never	888	43.53%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.47 The survey then asked respondents to say which community centres they visited 'most often' and 'occasionally'. As with the library responses, Belgrave's high response rate compares to known usage patterns.

Table 5.9: Patterns of use of community centres

	This is the community centre I visit most often		This is a community centre I visit occasionally	
	Total	%	Total	%
Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre	412		108	
Braunstone Frith Recreation Centre	27		29	
The BRITE Centre	132		88	
Coleman Neighbourhood Centre	9		22	
Eyres Monsell Community Centre	58		36	
Fosse Neighbourhood Centre	61		60	
Gilmorton Community Rooms	4		11	
Netherhall Neighbourhood Centre	22		24	
Pork Pie Library and Community Centre	80		58	
Rushey Mead Recreation Centre	65		46	
St Matthews Centre	59		59	
Thurnby Lodge Community Centre	41		34	
Tudor Centre	32		28	

- 5.48 We then analysed the data to examine whether individual users used more than one community centre. The following table presents for each community centre the number of users who said it was the centre they visit most often or 'primary centre' (figure given in **bold**), and then the number who also used other community centres (what we have called 'secondary' libraries) which these users said they visited as well in the vertical columns.
- 5.49 For example, 412 respondents said that Belgrave was the site they visited most often. Of these 73 visit Rushey Mead library occasionally. Conversely, 65 people said Rushey Mead was the centre they visited most often, but of these 45 also visit Belgrave occasionally.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 5.10: main community centre and secondary community centres used by survey participants

Secondary community centre	Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre	Braunstone Frith Recreation Centre	The BRITE Centre	Coleman Neighbourhood Centre	Eyres Monsell Community Centre	Fosse Neighbourhood Centre	Gilmorton Community Rooms	Neitherhall Neighbourhood Centre	Pork Pie Library and Community Centre	Rushey Mead Recreation Centre	St Matthews Centre	Thurnby Lodge Community Centre	Tudor Centre
Main CC													
Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre	412	6	16	5	3	4	2	2	8	47	15	5	6
Braunstone Frith Recreation Centre	10	27	11	3	4	5	3	2	3	3	3	2	4
The BRITE Centre	14	9	132	3	4	21	2	3	16	5	16	4	5
Coleman Neighbourhood Centre	7	3	4	9	2	3	2	3	4	3	5	3	2
Eyres Monsell Community Centre	6	4	8	2	58	2	3	2	23	3	8	4	2
Fosse Neighbourhood Centre	7	7	27	2	2	61	2	2	12	4	11	2	6
Gilmorton Community Rooms	5	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	3	3	5	3	2

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Secondary community centre	Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre	Braunstone Frith Recreation Centre	The BRITE Centre	Coleman Neighbourhood Centre	Eyres Monsell Community Centre	Fosse Neighbourhood Centre	Gilmorton Community Rooms	Netherhall Neighbourhood Centre	Pork Pie Library and Community Centre	Rushey Mead Recreation Centre	St Matthews Centre	Thurnby Lodge Community Centre	Tudor Centre
Netherhall Neighbourhood Centre	7	2	3	3	2	2	2	22	3	5	4	6	2
Pork Pie Library and Community Centre	8	4	21	3	20	11	2	2	80	3	15	5	2
Rushey Mead Recreation Centre	73	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	3	65	5	3	3
St Matthews Centre	18	2	16	3	4	5	2	3	10	6	59	10	3
Thurnby Lodge Community Centre	11	3	5	3	3	3	3	8	4	5	8	41	3
Tudor Centre	8	3	5	2	2	7	2	2	3	4	3	1	32

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.50 Asked what the most important things on offer at the centre they visit most regularly, 1032 people responded. 'Attending a community group or activity', 'space to meet people' and 'cultural events and activities' were the most popular choices.

Table 5.11: Thinking about the community centre you visit most often, what are the most important things on offer there for you?

Option	Total	Percent
To attend a community group or activity	557	53.97%
Space to meet people	494	47.87%
Cultural events and activities	301	29.17%
A safe space which is welcoming to all	218	21.12%
Exercise or health related activities	207	20.06%
Community meetings such as ward meetings	174	16.86%
Leicester Adult Learning classes	167	16.18%
Space to hire for a community group	165	15.99%
Space to hire for a party, family or personal event	155	15.02%
A warm space in cold weather	138	13.37%
Lunch club or community kitchen	125	12.11%
Other learning and skills classes	105	10.17%
Children's learning or study session	105	10.17%
Nursery or playgroup	94	9.11%
Councillor's surgery	89	8.62%
The Housing enquiries desk	65	6.30%
Church or religious group event	61	5.91%
Other	54	5.23%
Space to hire for a commercial event	47	4.55%

- 5.51 90 people offered additional information in response to the supplementary free text question. These reflected the wide diversity of activities on offer at centres across the city, and also pointed to some barriers around knowing what's available and cost.

The Tudor centre used to be a hive of activity but cost of activity is one of the reasons for the Tudor's emptiness.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

I use the Brite centre as a volunteer working with adults looking for help with reading.

Fosse singers choir

Community centres must offer exercise groups for new mums or mums at home as they do for elderly people.

The Caribbean food cafe @Hot pot' is important to me in the African Caribbean Centre. I use it for meeting rooms and cafe

I use Hamilton library seat exercise on Friday morning, which is a mixed group of Asian, West Indian + European. After exercise we have a cup of tea , biscuit and a chat, which about half of the group around 10 people enjoy and mix well as a group, anyone is welcome.

- 5.52 Of those who had answered that they never visited a community centre run by Leicester City Council, 787 people responded to a question about the main reasons behind this. 'I don't know what's on offer', 'I don't know where they are', and 'the services on offer aren't of interest to me' were by a significant margin the three most important reasons among this group of non-users.

Table 5.12: What are the main reasons you don't visit a community centre run by Leicester City Council? Tick up to 3 options.

Option	Total	Percent
I don't know what's on offer	296	37.61%
I don't know where they are	236	29.99%
The services on offer aren't of interest to me	170	21.60%
I don't know	127	16.14%
I can access the services I need elsewhere such as local charities or library	87	11.05%
Too far to travel	83	10.55%
Something else	76	9.66%
I've wanted to, but just haven't had the free time	75	9.53%
They don't feel welcoming to me	41	5.21%
They aren't open when I need them	31	3.94%
I use another community centre not run by Leicester City Council	28	3.56%
The cost of room hire is too high	20	2.54%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

5.53 People who answered that they use another community centre not run by Leicester City Council gave the following alternative sites:

- Braunstone grove park, Emerald centre Northfields, bridge centre, various schools and colleges and local meeting rooms
- Christchurch LEP
- Highfields community centre
- I go to the one in enderby, but that's because that is where my kickboxing classes are held, not because i would use it.
- I live in the county and use facilities there.
- I use my local church
- Knighton Parish Centre; Holbrook Memorial Hall
- Leicester Forest East library
- Markfield
- My village doesn't have a community centre
- New Parks Team Hub
- New parks
- Royal British Legion, Oadby
- Scraftoft Community Hub
- Silverdale Community Centre
- The Oak centre
- The Oak Centre
- There isn't a community centre where I live
- Thornton
- Thorpe Astley
- Thorpe Astlrey
- Time
- woodgate

5.54 Among the 73 responses given by people who chose 'something else' a few revealing themes recurred, principally, lack of awareness of what centres might offer them, settled views that community centres weren't for them, and bad experiences of visiting community centres in the past.

Have never considered using a community centre

Mobility impairment issues

Never given it much thought as haven't had time before now

Not sure a CC would offer me anything of interest.

I don't know anything about them or what do

playing bridge, going to meetings

I see no need to go to such a place

Lack of funding doesn't make it a sociable place - it's been forgotten and it's

evident in it's usage by the local community. This is not a reflection of staff but of the lack of funding.

There isn't one local to me

There isn't one in Hamilton

I'm antisocial

I don't have need to use their services

I didn't even know we had a community centre

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.55 The survey also asked about people's mode of transport in visiting libraries and community centres. These responses revealed predictably varying patterns of use of different modes, walking, public transport and cars, with bus travel being most used for visiting Central Library.

Table 5.13: When you visit a library or community centre how do you usually get there?

Option	Local Library		Central Library		Community Centre	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Car	153	24.36%	179	28.50%	205	32.64%
Walk	373	59.39%	187	29.78%	290	46.18%
Cycle	28	4.46%	29	4.62%	29	4.62%
Bus	66	10.51%	224	35.67%	95	15.13%
Other	8	1.27%	9	1.43%	9	1.43%

What's come out of the CYP survey

- 5.56 The CYP survey asked when respondents last visited a library. This revealed our sample to be a group of predominantly heavy and recent library users, reflective of the marketing of the strategy through existing user groups including the homework club at 11 libraries.

Table 5.14: When did you last visit a library?

Option	Total	Percent
After the summer holidays (including today)	175	35.35%
During the summer holidays	124	25.05%
Before the summer holidays	38	7.68%
A year or more ago	89	17.98%
When I was little	38	7.68%
I've never been to my local library	31	6.26%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 5.15: Which of these libraries have you visited?

Option	Total	Percent
Childrens BookBus	46	9.81%
Aylestone Library	10	2.13%
Beaumont Leys Library	56	11.94%
Belgrave Library	335	71.43%
Braunstone (The BRITE Centre)	6	1.28%
Central Library	20	4.26%
Evington Library	35	7.46%
Fosse Library	13	2.77%
Hamilton Library	73	15.57%
Highfields Library	7	1.49%
Knighton Library	5	1.07%
New Parks Library	14	2.99%
Pork Pie Library	5	1.07%
Rushey Mead Library	152	32.41%
St Barnabas Library	27	5.76%
St Matthews Library	8	1.71%
Westcotes Library	8	1.71%

- 5.57 The survey then asked what children and young people think of the libraries they visit. User enthusiasm was very evident in their responses.

Table 5.16: What do you think about your local library?

Option	Total	Percent
It's a friendly place	379	81.68%
There are lots of books to choose from	362	78.02%
It's a good place to read and do my homework	263	56.68%
It's a good place to use computer and free wifi	203	43.75%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
There are fun activities to take part in	180	38.79%
The library is a great place for me and my friends to go to	179	38.58%
I like being able to download e-books, e-comics and audiobooks from the library website	67	14.44%
Something else (please tell us)	16	3.45%

- 5.58 Asked what things they have done at their local library, both ‘borrowing’ and ‘reading’ books and ‘using the computers’ were the most popular activities.

Table 5.17: What things have you done at the library?

Option	Total	Percent
I borrowed books to take home	414	88.84%
I read books while I was there	338	72.53%
I used the computers	228	48.93%
I visited with my family	198	42.49%
I took part in the summer reading challenge	197	42.27%
I met up with my friends	154	33.05%
I asked a member of staff for help or advice	153	32.83%
I looked up something I am interested in	142	30.47%
I looked up something for school	125	26.82%
I took part in holiday activities	111	23.82%
I went to the Homework Club.	88	18.88%
I looked for books in a language that’s not English	46	9.87%
I did something else (please tell us)	7	1.50%

- 5.59 Given the predominance of active library users among the survey respondents, a question directed at those who said they didn’t visit a library elicited only a small number of responses (29). The most frequent responses were ‘I can get what I need at home or school’, ‘I can’t get to the library easily’ and ‘there is no one to take me’.

What's come out of the staff workshops

- 5.60 In the workshops, staff have told us **how people currently use libraries and community centres:**

Reading and other materials

- 5.61 People are perceived to value access to **reading materials** 'books, ebooks, magazines; e-audio' and materials for 'CYP (*children and young people*)' and that '**we still have a strong book focus**'.
- 5.62 The **home library service** is considered to be 'very well used', with 'very grateful users'.

Activities and events

- 5.63 Staff recognise the high value placed on **cultural and social activity provision**, especially during 'summer holidays'.
- 5.64 Staff regularly receive user queries about 'things going on' including interest groups ('some sites have more than others; a lot of regulars visiting sites'), and about the Book Bus attending various events. With 'more development', some staff felt they 'could help in lots of other ways'.
- They also observed with pride the '**discovery**' role provided by their services ('unexpected finds in libraries – 'I didn't realise you did xyz'), including access to information and peoples' first use of eBooks.

Social space and community cohesion

- 5.65 We have heard various staff reflections on the different 'social' and 'community' cohesion role that their services provide, including:
- **Socialising:** 'We've recently moved furniture around to be more welcoming – we have more people coming in to read and have a warm space'.
 - **Voluntary role:** 'people like coming to volunteer, or seek help with building their own VCS organisations'.
 - **Anti-social behaviour:** 'the 'mitigation role' of our service'.
 - **Children and young people:** 'offering things to do... a space to come and be'.
 - **Community centres as homes for local community groups:** 'decade long users – e.g. community groups, who exist because they can use our buildings; we offer a fixed trusted focal point in communities', and the role of 'long standing groups – lunch clubs – **people who are down and just want a chat**, it's good that we can direct people to them; then we can see people blossom; it's really nice to see as a personal thing, to be able to help them'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Learning and study

- 5.66 Staff told us how users enjoy accessing their services **to 'learn'** and the **free 'multi-use' spaces that are provided for 'study... (and) to just be and keep warm'**.

Online and face to face access, support and advice

- 5.67 We understand that users view libraries and community centres as a place for **support with access to 'online... (and) face to face Council services'**, given how 'PC usage has changed; *(there are)* **more and more device users** and need more sockets etc / space for public use; currently v bunched together'.

- 5.68 The **'platform' role** that the services provide for user access to Council partners' services is well recognised by staff - **'without us, our partners wouldn't have access to our skills or the local communities they're trying to reach'**, with staff noting 'we do a lot; we work together' and **'our service's convening role'**.

- 5.69 Users also like **using services to access to face to face support and advice** – 'helping finding info; staff to speak with about concerns'. We heard staff perceptions about how 'people want F2F instead of phones and digital; some have access issues to online / digital services'.

In person support, and support to new communities

- 5.70 Staff recognised that 'they **listen to people'** and were proud that 'when we help them solve an issue, they're delighted; they just like the **empathy** and **someone who understands the situation with them...** not *(just being)* a number on a page, resolving a problem'.

- 5.71 Some staff shared observations about how **'new people and asylum seekers coming through'** frequently turn to libraries and community centres as **their 'first use of Council services'**.

'Things not being used'

- 5.72 It was interesting to hear some staff specifically mentioning **DVDs** as a service offer not in high demand ('reduced need, downloads instead'), with some others feeling that they **'can't think of anything people don't want in a library – they use everything'**.

- 5.73 Interestingly, there were also **a small number of staff who perceived there had also been 'some reduced service use than pre-Covid** (perhaps age / demographics / post-Covid fear/concerns related)?'.

Stock choices and local 'tailoring'

- 5.74 Reflecting on the service offer more generally, some staff queried whether **'does every site need everything...** do you need lots of stock at every site, or just locally relevant?... **Not everything all in one place, all together – do we need it?'**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.75 Other staff built on this, observing that **when it comes to 'community libraries', use of the library is 'v. different**; some want personal help with access to e.g. UC, housing, Council svcs; some want borrowing, some barely any; **need does vary between different comm libs** (the ones I've seen anyway)'.

Your own staff's use of services

- 5.76 One workshop noted that **the service's own staff were users of libraries and community centres** and that it would be interesting to explore 'how do our own staff use our services?'. One group suggested that 'insights into staff use may explain how service knowledge and recommendations are then passed on to the public'.

What's come out of the focus groups

- 5.77 In the focus groups, members of the public told us about **how people currently use libraries and community centres**:

City centre offer

- 5.78 We heard from a number of people that **Leicester city centre was only somewhere they used if they had a 'purpose' or a 'specific reason' to visit**. People also mentioned their concerns and perceptions in relation to the quality of the city market, the number of closed units in the city centre, street begging and the number of people experiencing homelessness. These are all issues that the Council is aware of and is addressing in various ways and it is important that these perceptions are addressed in any promotion of the Central Library.

- 5.79 The people we spoke with offered **a range of differing views on their use of the Central Library. Positive comments** included:

- '(It's the) biggest'
- '(It's) got more stock'
- '(It's got the) longer opening hours'.
- '(It's) good for e.g. newspapers',
- '(It offers a) quiet working environment for study'.

- 5.80 Equally, there were **negative comments** about Central Library, including examples such as:

- '(It) is an embarrassment for this city'.
- '(It) is not central'
- 'Don't even know where it is'
- '(It) doesn't attract students'

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 'Very old, traditional and silent' compared to the 'vibrancy' of other branches.

5.81 We also heard indications of the **barriers** for people trying to use Central Library, including:

- '(The) cost to get there'.
- 'Parking is difficult'.

Childrens Promise

5.82 From our conversations, we understand that the **school holiday activities on offer are generally perceived as 'good'**, but **can be 'a little too expensive'** for some. One group in particular mentioned how their local community panel helped subsidise activities so that more young people could attend. In the next round of engagement it would be helpful to understand whose school activities are perceived to be expensive as there is no charge for school holiday activities in libraries.

5.83 Whilst library and community staff were perceived by the majority of people we spoke with as 'friendly' and 'welcoming', we heard suggestions that they may need some extra **'support and training'** when handling the **anti-social behaviour** of young people in their use of specific sites and **how to better share information** with them about service offers.

Culture and creativity

5.84 Whilst the **'liveliness' of the activities** in some libraries and community centres is **'highly valued'**, we heard how some sites are perceived to be 'dead' and that **new activity offers were needed** to reinvigorate them.

5.85 The handful of community activity leaders we spoke with at the focus groups generally recognised libraries and community centres as **'good partners to do projects together** - very open and welcoming'.

5.86 A number of people liked the fact that the current library and community centre events offer was happening **'close to home'** and often had a **'cosy feel'**. One individual mentioned '(It) was nice to come to an event in the evening, arts and performance. (It) wasn't too big - kind of cosy to do an event here'.

5.87 The importance of **the variety of activities on offer**, and those being participated in, was mentioned to us several times. Popular examples given included 'jewellery making'; 'arts for children'; 'creative things'. One group told us that **'libraries should be about offering these** and the staff are good at making them happen', with another individual saying **'Times are changing'**; From being a silent place, you can see activities going on... You can see **kids having fun, being messy**. Kids can feel at home... The staff are not too worried about the mess... **It's a good thing, different'**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.88 The groups generally **recognised the 'cohesion' role of cultural activities** taking place in libraries and community centres. One comment we received was 'In terms of cohesion, *(it's)* important for different groups to understand cultures and traditions... Expand knowledge, so important'.

Health and wellbeing

- 5.89 Several groups mentioned the important role of libraries and community centres for **'socialising', 'companionship'** and finding **'friendship'**.
- 5.90 We were also told about the sense **of inclusivity, belonging and community** in the spaces – one individual said **'you feel the warmth of the welcome** from staff'.
- 5.91 We were given examples of the **positive signposting** that libraries and community centres do for physical and mental health activities, including 'community walks currently happen in places and are popular' and 'for adult education'.

Information and digital

- 5.92 Many people told us that **face to face support** and the provision of **in-person information** is highly valued. One individual said: 'Help with completing forms... is very important'.
- 5.93 Libraries were perceived by some as a **'starting point' for accessing free-to-use computers**, advice and guidance, especially if people were new to the UK, or the local area.
- 5.94 We heard some perceptions that the IT courses on offer had 'limited availability' and that they could be targeted differently – one individual indicated that 'Basic, Intermediate, Advanced IT use might be more suitable'. We also heard a handful of suggestions that some IT suites were 'underused' and 'only open a handful of times a week'.

Reading

- 5.95 Focus group participants' **passion for literacy**, and **books as their preferred reading format**, came through strongly in our conversations.
- 5.96 We observed that **a small number** of participants **didn't know the library service's ebook offer existed**.

Youth (young people's focus group comments)

- 5.97 Young people suggested to us that the city's **libraries can be a bit hard to find and needed better more obvious signposting**. Comments included '*(I)* didn't know it was there'; 'make it bigger', and '*(it's)* kind of hidden'.
- 5.98 There were broad perceptions of libraries being **"accessible but not exciting"**, We were told that libraries '*(need)* to be **more colourful**'; 'the walls *(are)* not great colours', and that '*(libraries are)* so **quiet and boring**'. One individual mentioned how 'last time I went in, *(I was)* not inspired by it... Doesn't **make reading feel fun**'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 5.99 We heard **some frustrations at the current stock options and searchability functions in certain libraries** – '*I've* never really found what I wanted at a library... Online *I've* always found I had a better option'; 'Highfields - definitely (has a good collection)... Aylestone less so'; 'If I can't find, then I just move on'.
- 5.100 Some young people also felt that '**odd' books were being chosen for promotion, which was putting off some readers**. One young person told us that '*It was* not a good story... It was promoted way too much - about domestic abuse... It was described badly - took the wrong messages and influence'.
- 5.101 The **Summer Reading challenge** was also recognised by young people, but as something '**more for little kids, children in primary school**'. Several young people told us they 'used to take part in it... *It* was really good; was fun at the time' and how 'primary school did a good job of promoting it – *but it's* not something I'd be interested in now' they were older.
- 5.102 We were also told about **the challenges some young people faced with study space availability in libraries and the booking process**. One young person told us they were frustrated that 'Sometimes you have to book them; Most of the time the older people use them, I have to use the ones in the middle – *I* bring my own laptop'.

Other headlines

- 5.103 Recurring things that participants told us they liked about, and was influencing their use, of libraries and community centres including **the proximity of facilities** to their homes, **parking availability**; the '**liveliness**' of the buildings; the **activity offer**, and being able to '**bring the young ones**' along.
- 5.104 Several people mentioned that they combined a **secondary visit** (e.g. to a Food Bank, or for voluntary work) with the primary reason for their visits to a library or community centre.
- 5.105 We observed **differing levels of knowledge** between the focus groups, and individuals, **about the current library and community centre service offer**.
- 5.106 A handful of people suggested that younger people may be more comfortable with the concept of Open+, or self-service access, than older people, or women on their own, might. On testing the concept during the young people's focus group conversation, it received a generally lukewarm appetite from the group, with one comment that it '*depends (it is used) what for*'.

Summary of findings

Key findings

5.107 In the table below, we have summarised our key findings from this section:

Table 5.18: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city' - our key findings

- Leicester's libraries and community centres play a **highly valued role**, meeting the **'traditional' support needs of residents**. This is mainly focused on the provision of: **reading materials; creative activities and events; socialization spaces; supporting community cohesion; study and learning spaces**, and **compassionate in-person support and advice**.
- As other public services' in-person presence has been eroded due to over a decade of austerity and the move to 'digital by default' there is **an increased pressure on services that do provide face-to-face support for residents**. The role of libraries and community centres as **one of the last remaining outposts to provide this support** is highly valued and **more support would be welcomed** by existing service users.
- Leicester residents who use the services especially love **the communal role of the libraries and community centre buildings** as physical places to meet and socialise with others. They especially value access to services, and buildings, **located in near proximity to their homes** – they like having nearby familiar facilities. These services, and activities, offer **relief from inequality and poverty** and **must remain free (or very low cost) in order to be accessible by as many people as possible**.
- New communities to Leicester will often have **language and information support needs**. **ESOL and translation support**, plus **advice provided in non-English languages**, are highly valued and **in increasing demand**. However, much of this is not the direct responsibility of neighbourhood services but the services need to continue taking this into account in their planning and partnership working. The unique needs of **some of the newer communities to Leicester still require discovery**, and may be accessed through more detailed engagement with trusted VCS leaders, such as local community groups and/or faith leaders.
- People are **proud of Leicester's diversity**. They enjoy participating in **cultural events** and **want to see their own communities 'reflected back' at them** in the Neighbourhood Services' offer being delivered in libraries and community centres.
- Despite its vibrancy and young student population, the city is perceived to face **challenges with retaining its talented young people (i.e. those who might be skilled across a whole range of disciplines, not just the academically gifted)**, and offering appealing career and life-enriching opportunities, especially in the city centre. **Libraries and community centres can help to address these perceptions and challenges and can factor this into their planning**.
- As well as the city centre, **the physical fabric** of the existing library and community centre network has been well-used for many years and is now **extremely tired**. **Targeted investment** should be considered **to improve the look and feel** of the Council's library and community centre buildings so that they are fit for future generations of Leicester residents to continue enjoy using.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- There is multiple evidence that the Central Library is not providing significant value within the overall library offer for the City. There is little enthusiasm for what it offers beyond what is valued within the services available in local libraries. Many library users and non-users appear to be put off using the Central Library by a number of factors including poor awareness of the services on offer and broader disincentives to visiting the city centre including safety and cost of transport.
- Recognising that survey respondents were predominantly enthusiastic library users, there was considerable apathy, scepticism and negativity about using community centres.

6. KLOE c: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future': what our analysis tells us

Introduction

- 6.1 The key line of enquiry (KLOE) we explore in this section is '*What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future*'.
- 6.2 In this section, we have reported what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.

What people have told us

What's come out of the interviews

- 6.3 In our conversations, people have told us:
- People's priorities for services if resources are declining*
- 6.4 We have heard suggestions that libraries and community centres could better position themselves, and their offer, by **being something much broader than 'a place for books'**. Instead, the services should consider proactively marketing themselves as offering something diverse, life-enriching and compassionate for Leicester's residents, and that the focus should be on the service offer, not the buildings being delivered from.
- 6.5 People have told us that they, and residents, value **the traditional basics that libraries and community centres provide**: cold and warm spaces in extreme weather; in-person advice and support to resolve issues; empathy for people in need; and increasingly, food and refreshment.
- 6.6 In addition, we have heard how people would also welcome **further help beyond the basics and with self-development, including 'hand-holding' more people with life-improvement activities**, such as learning new languages for the first time, exploring literacy, seeking employment, or developing new skills through training and education.
- 6.7 In order to free up limited resources, several people have suggested the Council should **explore and align with other local VCS offers**, understanding what partners (existing or potential) are already offering and each adjusting their support focus accordingly.
- 6.8 We understand that the informal in-person support provided by libraries and community centres is extremely important to local residents. They are perceived to be experiencing increased demand due to reduced in-person support availability from other Council services that have experienced cuts. **Any work efficiencies that can free up staff to provide more visible in-person support available at libraries and community centres could be a popular for existing users.**

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 6.9 Given the increasing diversity of Leicester, we have been told that **enhanced ESOL support would be highly valued**. We have heard suggestions including continuing to recruit staff to reflect the diverse communities of Leicester, and having multi-lingual staff available at each site based on the local communities' language needs.
- 6.10 People have mentioned anecdotal frustrations at pockets of IT issues (mostly around reliability and availability) at different library and community centre sites. It has been suggested that in order to better support general societal channel shift and improve accessibility, the Council must **make sure that all the available IT is reliable and works well** and that non-jargon online services are straight forward to find and access.
- 6.11 Recognising the inequalities across Leicester, we have been told that **keeping costs free, or as cheap as possible, is essential**, helping people by reducing financial barriers for accessing services and activities. It is perceived by doing so that more people will feel able to engage and participate, and that doing so will provide relief and life enrichment. There is less relevant to the free library service offers but might apply to services offered in community centres. The community concession rate for community room hire makes a contribution that would ideally be retained.
- 6.12 A number of officers have suggested to us it would be beneficial to **explore further how various public services could be strategically co-located in Council buildings (including libraries and community centres) and who those services should be**. It is generally perceived that this approach could offer benefits to Leicester residents including solving problems quicker, reduced 'ping-ponging' of people between services and sites, and also generally improve resident experiences of interacting with the Council (although this has not been highlighted to us as a particular issue at any point).

People's priorities for investing in community services

- 6.13 In line with broader societal change, we have heard strongly that **Leicester residents, especially those most in need, highly value the in-person face-to-face support provided by libraries and community centres**. It is perceived that increased demand, and more value, has been placed on these Neighbourhood Services' facilities due to changes in resident-facing facilities previously provided by other Council, or public, services. It has been suggested that this in-person support should be balanced alongside access to services online for those who are able to use them.
- 6.14 From our conversations, we understand that it is likely that Leicester residents would welcome a community service offer that is **locally tailored**, providing a **blend of 'the core basics'** (for those in most need) **and 'life-enriching' activities** (for those who would like them), **ensuring every individual ward across Leicester has something impressive (or 'delightful') on offer** to explore.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 6.15 Whilst it is recognised that the Central Library is 'tired' and not a flagship facility for Leicester as a destination, people we have spoken with generally seem to care, and **prioritise more highly, what is happening outside of the city centre and locally** to them.
- 6.16 **Improved ESOL provision, and accessibility to services for non-English speakers**, has been highlighted as a key priority, along with improved awareness raising of the existing service offer within non-English-speaking communities. The suggestion of a **revised multi-format marketing approach (comprising a blend of formats, such as word of mouth, social media, or paper documents)** came up several times in conversations.
- 6.17 Whilst partners have broadly told us there is a great spirit of partnership between them and the Council and that this is a particular strength to build on, it is recognised that the **community-level service offer alignment between the Council and its partners could be further explored and developed**.
- 6.18 People have frequently mentioned the inequality and cost challenges that local residents are facing. **Keeping activity costs free, or very cheap**, are generally considered to be something that would help improve accessibility, and participation, for people in most need.

People's thoughts on a new Central Library offer

- 6.19 Relative to perceptions of other more immediate concerns for local residents, **the Central Library offer has not been flagged to us in our conversations as a top priority**.
- 6.20 Whilst we have heard general comments that the current Central Library is 'tired' and 'underwhelming', there have been a handful of suggestions that **any new Central Library location should be somewhere that reflects contemporary patterns of footfall in Leicester city centre**.
- 6.21 We have been told about **other prestigious library developments in the offing for Leicester**, including a new main library building for De Montfort University and a new 'heritage hub' offer being developed by Leicester University.

What's come out of the main public survey

- 6.22 The survey asked what would encourage people to visit their local library more often. Comparing the total responses with those who 'never' use a library service, marketing and promotion was consistently the most frequently selected answer across both samples. However, while the data indicates that significant factors for library users would include 'a wider range of books' and 'a wider range of cultural activities and events' for example, for non-users only 'better promotion of what is on offer' was selected by more than 20% of respondents.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 6.1: What would encourage people to visit their library more often

Option	All responses		Non-users	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Better promotion of what's on offer	760	32.48%	68	31.34%
Different opening hours	311	13.29%	29	13.36%
Self-access opening, so I can enter when I want, without the need for staff onsite	247	10.56%	20	9.22%
A wider range of cultural activities and events	579	24.74%	33	15.21%
More space to read, study and relax	411	17.56%	19	8.76%
A wider range of books and other reading materials	625	26.71%	28	12.90%
A more welcoming environment	249	10.64%	32	14.75%
More support to use computers and online services	264	11.28%	18	8.29%
More support for health and wellbeing	435	18.59%	38	17.51%
More support for learning and skills	298	12.74%	35	16.13%
More support for finding a job	149	6.37%	15	6.91%
Nothing would encourage me to use it more often	125	5.34%	40	18.43%
I don't know	190	8.12%	52	23.96%
Something else	164	7.01%	14	6.45%
Not Answered	446	19.06%	68	31.34%

6.23 We received 242 free text responses in addition which were broadly consistent with these findings. Significant themes within these included:

- More activities for both adults and children;
- Access and opening hours being more convenient (and sometimes longer) but also contrasting strong views about self-service access outside staffed hours;
- More appropriate space within libraries for different users, e.g. quiet study alongside space for activities and children;
- As well as better books and materials generally, a significant number of people mentioning materials and staff support in community languages, particularly Gujarati and Punjabi.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 6.2: Illustrative selection of responses

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wider range of ebooks as well as physical books</i> • <i>We need a rotation of books. For example the young adult readers section has not been changed out/new books put in since before the pandemic.</i> • <i>Travelling museum exhibitions make the connection between library and cultural services</i> • <i>Support in setting up a book club for people of my age (20s) so that its more interesting to us</i> • <i>Quiet area specifically for private study. Sometimes too noisy because of other social/toddler groups happening in the same area.</i> • <i>Please do not have self access opening (as per leics county libs) as they are now rarely open</i> • <i>With the addition of the library access outside of normal hours I now have everything I need.</i> • <i>We have no community centre only porkpie library. Limited things to do. More people to be encouraged. Finding like minded ppl.</i> • <i>Open during weekends and holidays when people have more leisure time</i> • <i>No wokeness, cultural Marxism or Drag Queens</i> • <i>Need own culture books in Gujarati</i> • <i>More space to read, study and relax. More events for adults/ mental wellbeing, exercise</i>
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Prioritisation of local library services

6.24 The main survey also asked a series of questions about what services they would prioritise to support the changing needs of people in Leicester. With respect to local libraries, 'books and reading material', 'health and wellbeing support' and 'information and advice' were the most popular priorities, with 'cultural activities' and 'activities for children and families' also significant priorities. There were 1894 responses to this question.

Table 6.3: To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, what local library services would you prioritise? Please tick up to 3 options

Option	Total	Percent
Books and reading material	969	51.16%
Health and wellbeing support	706	37.28%
Information and advice	680	35.90%
Cultural events and activities	602	31.78%
Activities for children and families	582	30.73%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Learning and skills activities	534	28.19%
Activities for young people	418	22.07%
Providing warm spaces in cold weather	403	21.28%
Support for finding a job	232	12.25%
Providing self-access opening - so I can enter when I want, without the need for staff onsite	197	10.40%
Changing the opening hours	172	9.08%
I don't know	134	7.07%
Something else	73	3.85%

- 6.25 Among the 122 respondents who cited 'something else', themes consistent with the main responses above and previous questions about encouraging library use were registered. However, in these answers, there were also a significant number which specifically referenced issues around self-service access, the importance to them of having staffed sites and concerns about unstaffed access.

Self access is not always the answer. People/ families often require contact and not having it in that moment in time can influence whether they return. Self service suits some but many need the interaction.

The opportunity to personally talk to someone about Council Services Staff support in Libraries is really vital. Please don't take it away for more self-service opening. I need help and support with IT and the staff are brilliant with it. I'm learning lots

I would probably not visit if it was self access as there are sometimes kids being a nuisance. I wouldn't go it wouldn't feel like the right environment. You need staff.

library plus at all libraries

Future use of the Central Library

- 6.26 The survey then focused on what would encourage people to use the Central Library more. There was a significant drop-off in the response rate for this question (25.17% not answered). Among those who did respond (1751), 'more information about the services on offer', 'a wider range of activities', and 'more space for reading, studying and relaxing' were the most frequently selected factors would could encourage more visits.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Table 6.4: What would encourage you to visit Central Library more often (please tick up to 3 options)

Option	Total	Percent
More information about the services on offer	392	22.39%
A wider range of activities	371	21.19%
Nothing would encourage me to use it more often	311	17.76%
More space for reading, studying and relaxing	259	14.79%
A more welcoming environment	217	12.39%
A more central location	199	11.36%
Different opening hours	196	11.19%
More space for events	191	10.91%
Knowing where it is	187	10.68%
Improved appearance and decoration	179	10.22%
Better access to move around in	111	6.34%
I don't know	355	20.27%
Something else	152	8.68%

- 6.27 However a significant number of responses (311, 17.76%) said 'nothing would encourage me to use it more often'. As this could imply both satisfaction among users as well as refusal to consider visiting, we also looked at the free text responses to the supplementary question. Among these 311 only 15 people offered additional reasons for their answer. Of these 15 responses, 3 specifically said their local library served their needs, 2 people said they were already happy with using Central Library, but 10 respondents cited concerns about going to the town centre, transport, safety and the library location.
- 6.28 Among the 230 responses overall to this supplementary question a number of key themes were consistent with the answers to the primary question above. However, many people also cited concerns about visiting the town centre, for reasons of transport, safety or convenience

Last time i used it didn't have a cafe...if it still doesn't i think that would make it more of a place to visit while up town shopping, get a coffee and cake there, sit down and probably borrow a book while there.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Location for Central library is not right. It should be somewhere we can park for free without having to look for parking space to pay. It would be great if Central library was open on a Sunday. Living quite far from there, we can only access it by car but there is limited parking. Sundays with free parking would be great. With a disability, I have to drive, parking is well nigh impossible. For the same reason I hardly ever visit the city centre - I cannot get to shops, restaurants, restaurants - even by taxi. At least I can be dropped off at the library!

Why go to town, shops closed down. I am told are not clean, people sleeping rough and begging. Not a good idea!!!

I visit regularly and am happy with services and atmosphere and excellent staff

Its a bit confusing going in and out since it moved buildings and is less 'homely' feels 'clinical'

library plus at all libraries

They should advertise widely and tell us what on offer for kids

After school hours are always cramped, perhaps a better allocation of space for students

A modern environment, something less dated

I take my children in & often feel like I am disturbing people, a 'noise allowed' area would be of benefit.

- 6.29 In response to the question which services they would prioritise at the Central Library to help the council support the changing needs of people in Leicester (1799 responses), people highlighted 'health and wellbeing, 'books and reading materials' and 'events and activities' as the most popular priorities. 'Information and advice' and 'IT services, computers, wifi and printing' were also significant priorities.

Table 6.5: To help us support the changing needs of the people of Leicester, which Central Library services would you prioritise?

Option	Total	Percent
Books and reading materials	768	42.69%
Health and wellbeing support	568	31.57%
Events and activities	481	26.74%
Information and advice	476	26.46%
IT services, computers, wifi and printing	424	23.57%
Children's services	332	18.45%
Study and learning	320	17.79%
I don't know	309	17.18%
Books in other languages	265	14.73%
Staff support for IT users	221	12.28%
Family and local history	219	12.17%
Books in other formats such as large print and audio books	217	12.06%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Newspapers and magazines	191	10.62%
Business support	124	6.89%
Something else	45	2.50%

6.30 In the (75) free text responses received to the supplementary question of what else people would prioritise at Central Library, a number of significant themes were highlighted. As well as concerns expressed previously about its location, accessibility from outside the centre and transport, a number of positive suggestions were offered around the following themes:

- making the building more flexible and accessible with better designed spaces
- evening and weekend opening hours
- a wider range of cultural events and activities, often with partner organisations
- offers tailored for specific groups including young people and women.

Easier access to the upper floor as i can't use the stairs easily.

To be open weekends and bank holidays

Central library could be used in the evening for open mics and functions, it is a really aesthetically pleasing building and it could be used for private and public events and become profitable. I think it needs to be more flexible, it is a great building.

Better children services and support for college and secondary school kids to get support and study after school. So they don't hang around on the streets and get in trouble.

Opening hours need to go well into the evening up to 9 or 10pm

Additional support for people whose first language is not English

What services people would prioritise in community centres

6.31 In answer to which community centre services they would prioritise in order to support the changing needs of people in Leicester, 'support for health and wellbeing, 'learning and skills activities for adults' and 'cultural events and activities' were the top priorities chosen.

Table 6.6: To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, which community centre services would you prioritise? Please tick up to 3 options

Option	Total	Percent
Support for health and wellbeing	783	43.67%
Cultural events and activities	595	33.18%
Learning and skills activities for adults	637	35.53%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
Children and family activities	549	30.62%
Lunch clubs and community kitchens	522	29.11%
Learning activities for young people	426	23.76%
Affordable spaces to hire for community events	388	21.64%
Warm space in cold weather	347	19.35%
Support to access council services	328	18.29%
Self-access for community groups outside of staffed hours	137	7.64%
I don't know	280	15.62%
Something else	30	1.67%

- 6.32 Among the 56 additional responses to the supplementary free text question, there was a large diversity of responses with no clear themes emerging.

*Homework support for children, language support for mothers with small children
 Activities for well being for women over 50
 More events for older people. Exercise classes, health related talks, talks on topical issues, coffee mornings
 Youth centre to cater for young people-employing local residents who know the community not anyone in central office.
 Other lending/reuse opportunities such as toy or tool libraries
 SEN sessions, help and support for SEN families
 Sell the buildings to save money
 Non-faith specific events*

What's come out of the CYP survey

- 6.33 The survey asked what would encourage them to visit the library more often. There were 492 responses to this question. 'Better books, 'if it had more interesting activities', 'if it were closer to my home or school, 'if the computers were better', and if there were more space for reading and studying' were the most frequently selected.

Table 6.7: What do you think would get you to go to the library more often? Tick all the ones you agree with.

Option	Total	Percent
If it had better books	189	36.99%
If it was closer to my home or school	160	31.31%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Option	Total	Percent
If it had more interesting activities	158	30.92%
If the computers were better	130	25.44%
If there was more space for reading or studying	128	25.05%
If there was more space to meet my friends	126	24.66%
If there more events like music, dance and drama	125	24.46%
If I could get more help with my homework	83	16.24%
If I knew what's there	80	15.66%
If it had more coding clubs	70	13.70%
If there was a reading group for children	57	11.15%
If it was a more friendly place	49	9.59%
Nothing I can think of	101	19.77%
Something else (please tell us)	16	3.13%
Not Answered	19	3.72%

- 6.34 We also asked what respondents would 'put in their dream library'. We received 401 responses (including a small number of 'don't knows'. We have analysed the responses within the following categories and quoted one individual responses below which .

Table 6.8: What would you put in your dream library?

Category	Number of responses
Quality and range of books and reading material, including genre and age group.	243
Adequate and comfortable spaces for each activity and older/younger users, including furniture (beanbags) and bright décor, with space to socialise with friends.	121
Technology, good computers, fast wifi, gaming, coding.	109
Lots of activities, including clubs, music, art	82

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Category	Number of responses
The welcome at the library including support of kind, positive staff.	34
A location close to home/school	20
Refreshments, food, snacks available	20
Outdoor space or garden	3
Dedicated space for children and older people	3
Volunteering	1

My dream library would be within walking distance of my home, so I could go there and complete some homework or read some books in some peace and quiet. It would have lots of comfortable chairs where I could sit and read a book if I wanted. It would also have computers if anyone needed to access the internet if they didn't have any devices of their own. There would be desks and chairs so people could get their work done, and a coffee shop nearby so people could enjoy a snack while reading or doing some work.

- 6.35 The data is consistent with respondents' answers to the previous question about what would make them visit the library more often. While many respondents focused on one aspect of the library which appeals to them, eg. books or computers, many like the example above had a very holistic and wide-ranging vision of how libraries should support their individual passions and those of other children and young people and other library users, particularly the elderly.

Encouraging more people to visit community centres

- 6.36 The main survey also asked what would encourage people to use community centres more often. As with the comparable question on the Central Library, there was a significant drop-off in the response rate (586, 25.04% not answered). Among the 1754 responses, 'a wider range of activities' was the most frequently selected option by a significant margin. 'More support for health and wellbeing', and 'more support for learning and skills' were second and third most selected.

Table 6.9: What would encourage you to visit a community centre more often?

Option	Total	Percent
A wider range of activities and events	775	44.18%
More support for health and wellbeing	501	28.56%
More support for learning and skills	391	22.29%
More convenient opening hours	341	19.44%
A more welcoming environment	292	16.65%

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Nothing would encourage me to use it more often	235	13.40%
I don't know	406	23.15%
Something else	134	7.64%

6.37 Among 203 answers to the supplementary free text question, a number of key themes emerged mostly consistent with the responses to the main question but with some significant variations. These included specifically references to unwelcoming staff or lack of staff. Additionally, lack of awareness and demand for better marketing and promotion of what's available was a consistent theme in these responses. A number of respondents also mentioned affordability of activities and space hire being an important factor. The following quotations are clearly anecdotal and do not necessarily reflect common experiences of all service users.

*I already go regularly but i would be willing to go more if activities were available.
Welcoming is very poor, staff not friendly
Please keep the centre open, we enjoy coming here and it is convenient to visit BNC. Keep rent rates low for community groups
Knowing what services are on offer for me as a person of working age and not not retired that are low cost
Advertise what's happening - I have no idea what goes on here!*

What's come out of the staff workshops

6.38 In the workshops, staff told us **about their perceptions of the current gaps in service provision, and what people will need in the future.**

6.39 Staff shared their observations on the following topics. Their detailed feedback will be discussed separately as part of ongoing internal team meetings focused on future service development.

- Face to face support and advice, including language and translation support.
- Connectivity within the Council, and other agencies.
- Free, or low cost, activities, including for children, young people and schools.
- IT access, including for those bringing their own devices.
- Study space.
- Health and wellbeing support.
- The benefits of library membership and services available.
- The staff structure and people's roles.

What's come out of the focus groups

- 6.40 In the focus groups, members of the public told us **about their perceptions of the current gaps in service provision, and what people will need in the future:**

City centre offer

- 6.41 In our conversations, **the Central Library wasn't notable as a top priority** in comparison to investment in the libraries and community centres beyond the city centre. One group told us how 'investment should be targeted and done with (not to) local communities in consultation with them'.

- 6.42 When asked specifically, people in the focus groups did tell us about **a wide range of wishes and requests for any refreshed Central Library offer:**

- **Reading materials:** 'provision of physical books should be the main focus'.
- **Stock refresh:** there were some individual queries about where old book stock (such as previous extensive reference materials) had been relocated to, along with some perceptions of existing stagnant book stock that hadn't been refreshed recently.
- **In person support:** the 'role of face to face staff in helping people... (*acting as*) a starting point to resolve issues'.
- **IT access:** 'some computers take too long to load up so people don't bother with them anymore'; 'the up to date software is very handy'.
- **Cultural activities:** perceived by some individuals as 'a nice extra, but not at the expense of book provision' and 'something to complement the local area and perform a communal space role'. One individual suggested local academics from the universities could be invited to offer expert talks on various topics as part of a new cultural activity programme delivered in partnership with universities, libraries and community centres.
- **Health support:** 'helping mental health and socialising'; 'warm spaces provision';
- **Device borrowing scheme:** anecdotal example shared of poor communication and frustration at a lack of response from the service's email inbox after several months of chasing an update on their eligibility for a device.

Childrens Promise

- 6.43 We heard a few people express frustration at some branches having **resources for children** that other don't, and the importance of '**a consistent offer**'.
- 6.44 It was generally felt by the groups we asked that libraries and community centres do, and should, offer **an activities programme targeting children and young people.**

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Culture and creativity

- 6.45 Several groups told us that libraries should have **‘vibrant areas you can make noise in’**. A handful of examples were shared where the location of loud and quiet activities adjacent to each other in some buildings had caused minor tensions between groups.
- 6.46 The majority of people recognised **the existing programme of activities** taking place in libraries and community centres. One individual mentioned that “there's always something going on”.
- 6.47 We were told that **any future programme of cultural and creative activities should feature something ‘fun’ and appealing for all users** – ‘CYP need something’; ‘OAPs also need something – come and have a chat, read a book, have a coffee’; ‘children with parents could come and join’. Most groups told us that offering summer holiday activities for children and young people are especially popular.
- 6.48 We heard several times **the importance of cultural activities that celebrated and welcomed the different and diverse communities resident in Leicester**. One person told us it was essential ‘to put in the kids’ minds, we are a city, but we are all one... very important’.
- 6.49 One group suggested to us that community centres in particular needed to **‘reach out’** to people, especially children and young people, and draw them in with ‘fun’ activities – ‘the community centre needs to go out there and find people’.
- 6.50 A need for, and practical ideas for, **improved activity programme promotion and marketing** came up a handful of times in conversations. One individual suggested to us the idea of Neighbourhood Services producing **an all-in-one cultural activity event programme** that is well promoted - ‘I think promotion... A nice glamorous booklet for the libraries programme... (There’s) still the older impression of the libraries offer... A joint libraries and community centre booklet - a new branding’.
- 6.51 At one location, we heard the suggestion that **underused pockets of green space owned by the libraries and community centres could be revitalising activity locations** for the local area if used imaginatively - ‘(the patch) on the corner... (could) help people passing to see (it’s) nice and welcoming (in here) ’.

Health and wellbeing

- 6.52 One group made the observation that **improved confidence** and **‘trust’ comes with regular access and use of a social space**, such as a library and community centre – related comments included ‘people feel **safe** and **secure**’; ‘they’ve **become a family**’.
- 6.53 The complementary role of **physical activity opportunities in green spaces and parks near to libraries and community centres** was mentioned to us a few times. A handful of suggestions included:
- ‘Parks needs maintenance and activities; e.g. youth - pushing skateboards about, bikes; Could have a little thing, ramps etc’.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 'Also for older kids - e.g. seen for climbing, swing things too'.

- 6.54 Discussions with stakeholders about Belgrave Library suggested this is an excellent example of how adjacent parks, playgrounds and community gardens can complement each other and strengthen community cohesion and wellbeing.
- 6.55 The appearance of libraries and community centres was also mentioned as an influence on personal wellbeing - one person told us how "**if you come in, and it looks good, you feel good; If you see a shabby building, you feel shabby** - it's just the way it is". Another group talked about the importance of '*(fixing)* the basics, such as the leaky roofs', plus 'new floor coverings... they've been cleaned so many times... (*you can see the*) stains', with other groups making requests for 'nice furniture, carpets, seats'.

Information and digital

- 6.56 **Access to free IT and Wi-Fi** was identified by every group as essential. One group commented specifically on the importance of '*(keeping)* updated (*digital resources*); digital books; computers; access to Wi-Fi".
- 6.57 Several groups noted that some users 'aren't computer literate' with some 'things way over their head', requiring '**hand-holding support**' and '**training**... or know it's available'. We heard the suggestion that **more staff (whether paid or volunteers) were needed to help** those in need of support with using IT.

Reading

- 6.58 As mentioned previously, **reading, and free access to reading materials**, was noted by every group as a top priority for libraries and community centre.
- 6.59 A small number of people suggested offering **reading activities tailored for adults**, as well children and young people. One comment we heard suggested the use of 'visuals, audio, video - people like to see things (*that might*) encourage them'.
- 6.60 In line with other points, we heard often the importance of offering **reading materials for non-English speakers** and 'doing things in languages that people can understand' which were believed would help encourage more new users from diverse communities.
- 6.61 **The Book Bus** was mentioned a handful of times as a valued local resource. There were a handful of queries raised about the choice of its parking locations and some requests to use previous locations (that had since been changed) in discussion with local community centres and groups of users.
- 6.62 We heard one suggestion that book stock 'could be an area for savings' and that offering '**second hand book stock**' might be acceptable to some library users.

Youth (young people's focus group comments)

- 6.63 The young people we spoke with raised **a number of requests** for the future library and community centre offer and what they would like more of in future:
- **Physical books:** young readers liked having physical books - 'paper'; 'in my hand'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Computer access: primarily for academic studies - 'only when I have something to do - e.g. work from college with a computer'.

- **More thoughtful stock choices from diverse backgrounds:** it was implied by a few young people that the diverse reading materials on offer can occasionally feel tokenistic. Young people mentioned that they would like to see 'different cultures - African and Asian... Maybe East and East-European writers as well' and that it was 'nice to read about other cultures - but not just 1-2 options'.
- **Vibrant areas, but also quiet study spaces:** the group we spoke with wanted libraries to be more colourful and vibrant, but the quiet study spaces were also very important to them. One individual told us 'you think libraries as a quiet calm place... You'd need separation of some kind'.
- **Cater for different interests, not one size fits all:** the group recognised that they, and their peers, all had different needs and interests. Observations and comments included 'it's not one size fits all'; 'you have to cater - the different tribes - e.g. sports, e-games, fantasy, chess'; 'books'; 'culture, mental health and gaming – all in one'.

Other headlines

- 6.64 Building location, an 'appropriate' size, a sense 'of being embedded' and in 'the heart' in the community and with easy public transport links ('especially for older people' or within safe walking distance of homes) came up several times as important service characteristics to the people we spoke with.
- 6.65 We heard on a handful of occasions that library and community centre **staff demographics 'should' be more representative of the communities** they work with.
- 6.66 Other general requests of note that we heard from people about what they would like from their libraries and community centres in the future included:
- **Better, blatant and more obvious signposting:** 'When I drive along the street, why can't I see the big signposts saying 'it's just along here'?'.
• **'Bigger car parks'**.
• **'Longer opening hours'**.

Summary of findings

Key findings

6.68 In the table below, we have summarised our key findings from this section:

Table 6.10: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future'- our key findings

- Leicester residents see libraries and community centres **as something broader than a place to just access books**. They value the core Universal Offers being provided by the services, but also the **life improvement and enrichment** opportunities also on offer to them.
- People who need help and in-person advice value highly their **free access to libraries and community centres and their staff** and want to see **more in-person support opportunities** woven into the service offer.
- As even more new and diverse communities move into Leicester, an already diverse city, there is a **growing need for support and advice to be provided in non-English languages** and for **more ESOL support**.
- People are struggling financially across the UK, and especially in the known pockets of inequality within Leicester. **Free and cheap access to activities** and services provide relief to people and are highly valued. **A fun, interesting, enriching and culturally-relevant activity programme** could be better tailored to each locality in Leicester in discussion with local communities and service users, and then **marketed more widely and 'loudly' across the whole city** as part of **a revised cultural offer**.
- Leicester's libraries and community centres have been well-used for many years. **IT hardware, and other essential equipment, are now struggling with reliability**, and there are **site-specific issues** that need to be comprehensively mapped and resolved.
- It is clear that children, young people and those studying require **quiet study spaces, particular outside of classroom hours**. Libraries and community centres provide the **safety, warmth and quiet spaces** sought by many people, and some residents would like the existing study space offer **to be expanded and improved**.
- Residents **often see 'public services' as a single entity** – they don't see the silo lines that exist in reality. For that reason, they welcome opportunities to engage with services all in one place, so **the co-location of select Council and/or other public sector partner services** in the same building appears to make sense. Libraries and community centres already perform a 'front-door' and initial query/response signposting role for residents. **Deeper two-way connectivity, and mutual support, with other Council and partner services** to build on these existing natural relationships will be essential in the future.
- With that point in mind, it is recognised that there is **some 'toe-treading'** in terms of service offer provision across the city **with the VCS sector**. There are opportunities to **explore and align** how Council and the VCS sector support offer can **complement each other and maximise the use of available resources**, rather than compete or conflict in any way.
- People would like to see **more investment being targeted at the buildings in their local streets and communities**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- Upon exploration with residents, **investment in a new Central Library is not considered a top priority** against the other higher priority needs that have been identified. However, if it is to be explored as a capital project, it is timely to discuss it now with Council partners, such as Leicester University and De Montfort University, whilst they are also exploring their own future central library location options.

7. KLOE d: 'What models and good practice exist': what our analysis tells us

Introduction

- 7.1 The key line of enquiry (KLOE) we explore in this section is '*What models and good practice exist*'.
- 7.2 In this section, we have reported what people have told us about this, whether through the interviews, surveys, staff workshops or focus groups.

What people have told us

What's come out of the interviews

- 7.3 In our conversations, people have told us:

Examples of successful central library projects from elsewhere

- 7.4 In our conversations, people have pointed to **examples of local authority library projects they understood to be successful, or had personal experience of being involved in**, and organisations that the Council could look to learn from, including:
- Wolverhampton's place-based town centre tourism offer.
 - Warwickshire's community managed facilities.
 - Stoke's heritage offer.
 - De Montfort University's work with young people and the arts.
 - Shrewsbury's partnership working between Keele & local NHS.
 - Sunderland's new Culture House.
 - South Shields' new 'cultural venue / library' - The Word.
 - Att Voss' concepts about what future libraries can be.
 - University of East Anglia's research evidencing the economic impact of libraries.
- 7.5 In each local authority example shared, interviewees recognised **the role and importance of close partnerships with other Council, and public sector, services** in achieving success.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

The impact of investing in new technology, including self-access

- 7.6 Our interviewees were **less able to point to successful examples of the impact of new technology**, rather identify **opportunities to first be explored by the Council were it considering increasing investment** in this area.
- 7.7 From their anecdotal experiences, a number of interviewees told us **how libraries and community centres are considered to require capital IT investment**, and a sweeping programme of **comprehensive site-specific device and IT issues being identified and resolved**. Given the recent complete replacement of IT kit, further investigation is required and communication of the improvements made.
- 7.8 One individual passionately reinforced to us that ‘the way that people engage is so different now’ and that **‘modern digital infrastructure’ needs to be in place** within public services.
- 7.9 **Leicester University is understood to be exploring the potential of AI** in supporting its students, and may have emerging learning or experience that could be drawn on.
- 7.10 A strong technology offer is perceived by some to offer an opportunity for citizens to explore their curiosity, coming together to **‘exchange ideas’** and a reason **‘to use a physical space’** – e.g. in places like community centres or libraries.
- 7.11 A few individuals talked about **‘my kids’ learning new technological skills** and activities, such as coding clubs, and **the nature of the future employment market they would emerge into** in years to come.

The impact of community asset transfer on the provision of community centres

- 7.12 Our interviewees were **less able to point to examples of the impact** of community asset transfer on the provision of Council facilities and services.
- 7.13 The few who did express a view on the topic **advised caution**, citing the **mixed local reception of asset transfers to date**. A more detailed analysis of what worked well and the lessons learned would be useful to help communicate the option and its potential benefits and risks.

The benefits of further co-location and integration of services

- 7.14 From our conversations, we have heard various opinions that Neighbourhood Services should **specialise, ‘prioritise’ and ‘be themselves’ in an easily-understandable, identifiable and simple-to-describe way**, and various considerations around the concept of service co-location.
- 7.15 A number of interviewees recognised that **the contemporary purpose of a library and/or community centre has shifted** and is broadly open to debate. The **core traditional needs** around providing information, activities and compassionate support are broadly recognised, but people also told us how **societal needs and expectations have changed**, intensified by reductions in face-to-face public service offers elsewhere and the growing needs of Leicester’s diverse (and newer) communities.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

7.16 It was suggested in some conversations that, as those in most need in Leicester often have **complex support needs, complex multi-service solutions are frequently required**. Some interviewees suggested that these services should ideally be available 'in the same location' and 'on the same day'.

7.17 Several interviewees mentioned that **those in most need can occasionally cause disruption requiring police intervention** and how this should inform any considerations about service co-location. Examples were shared of angry, or violent, people (including ex-offenders) engaging with services and how this would present an even more significant challenge e.g. if children's activities were taking place in the same building.

7.18 We also heard the importance of providing services locally and '**not to expect people to travel to a city central location**'.

The workforce needs to deliver a future library service

7.19 From our conversations, we have heard various ideas, suggestions and requests about future workforce requirements, including:

- **Increased ESOL support and multi-lingual skills:** in order to better communicate, and the current workforce to reflect, Leicester's modern diversity.
- **Improved Neighbourhood Services offer awareness at all staffing levels:** all resident-facing staffing levels being able to answer basic (and more sophisticated) queries about the services on offer and provide signposting where needed.
- **Enhanced customer service skills:** there were some anecdotal experiences shared where first-point of customer care could be refreshed and improved.

7.20 Relating to the earlier observation around the contemporary purpose of a library and/or community centre shifting, a handful of interviewees explored **the idea that the requirements of people working in these services has also changed**, and that '**traditional library work**' may no longer exist.

Balancing 'universality' and 'targeting need' within the library model

7.21 As we have seen in earlier observations, there are perceived to be **a host of universal needs** across Leicester, including ESOL and translation support, addressing inequity and providing services with compassion, as well as offering life-enriching diverse and culturally representative activities, and hand-holding the personal development and the learning of new skills by residents. It is generally suggested that these universal needs could and should be reflected in **a revised 'core' (or universal) service offer** for Neighbourhood Services.

7.22 We have also been told that tailored offers, such as activities and events that 'reflect the local community', are also valued. These could be reflected in **a revised 'local' (or targeted) service offer** for Neighbourhood Services.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 7.23 On balance from our conversations, **developing a City Centre 'special offer' is not perceived to be a top priority** against the other priorities that matter most to people.

What's come out of the main public survey

- 7.24 The survey asked what ideas people thought the Council should investigate which are being tried elsewhere to better meet the needs of residents. 'more multi-service centres', 'reviewing opening hours to match peak demand' and 'involving community organisations in running services' were the most popular ideas to consider.

Table 7.1: Many councils are changing how they operate community centres and library services in order to better meet the needs of residents. Please tick up to three ideas that you think we could look at."

Option	Total	Percent
Have more multi-service centres to bring community centres, libraries and local services together	1014	58.78%
Reviewing opening hours to match peak demand	596	34.55%
Making more use of customer self-service in public libraries	375	21.74%
Providing more services online	294	17.04%
Making more use of volunteers	377	21.86%
Involving community organisations more in running services	621	36.00%
None of the above	211	12.23%
Other	91	5.28%

- 7.25 However, some caution needs to be exercised in inferring preferences from these responses, as people's understanding of each option is likely to vary or assume positive/negative connotations. By analysing the free text responses to the supplementary question we can see, for example, that those choosing 'reviewing opening hours to match peak demand' generally intended this to mean *extending* opening hours more than *changing* or *focusing* opening hours *only* on times of peak demand.
- 7.26 It is also not possible to disaggregate people's responses between libraries and community centres within this question.
- 7.27 However, from the free text responses it is clear that current users have concerns about the implications of some of these ideas for current services which they value.

Self service seems very impersonal. just like at the supermarkets, I like to have a chat with the staff
See if you can have more open hours on Sunday
Opening weekends and bank holidays

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Community centres should have a cultural collaboration feel to them from entering. Local groups should run activities and contribute to the aesthetic i.e the Afro Caribbean Centre is in Highfields as are other spaces like mosques. If several groups contributed to the running of these local centres they would feel more inclusive and culturally accessible

Approaching more private entities and CICs to run services for free and with subsidised rates

Please don't bring in more volunteers. Librarians and library assistants deserve to be paid and not have their jobs taken by "well-meaning" volunteers. Keep libraries as libraries. Don't dilute them and turn them into some "book corner" in a community centre. aim so proud that Leicester has proper good libraries run by paid employees.

Don't lose library identity. Perhaps things need to be more fluidly arranged if there are pressures and definite needs to do so, but access to reading changes lives -so please don't throw away our library status - it's precious especially for children who probably wouldn't necessarily be users or beneficiaries of multi-functional spaces.

I rely on the late/weekend opening at my local library.

Older people need local services, staffed by welcoming knowledgeable people. They do not need more on line services, centralised services or more self help services. Lonliness and isolation can not be helped by isolating older people from services by making them inaccessible.

All of the above options clearly will lead to less staff and a poorer service

Have more people working to help people. Only human can help human.

Contact with welcoming staff is essential to making libraries into places people want to go to.

1. Wider opening hours. N.b. Current peak usage hours do not reflect the demand of those who desperately want to visit libraries but cannot get there during current opening hours. 2. Retain plenty of books and quiet environment in libraries.

Self access and being constantly pushed to use self service is very off putting for me as a customer. I go to Libraries and Community Centres because I want help and assistance from staff, not to be pushed into tapping things on a screen.

All of these appear to be potential excuses for making redundancies. I do NOT support such an approach.

What's come out of the staff workshops

- 7.28 In the workshops, staff have told us **about their priorities for change, based on their ideas about what 'good' would look like.**
- 7.29 Staff shared their observations on the following topic. Their detailed feedback will be discussed separately as part of ongoing internal team meetings focused on future service development.
- Workforce review, service obligations and the service's name.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Pride, being ambitious to address perceptions (but continuing the good things)

7.30 It was excellent to hear that **the majority of staff 'are proud of what we do... (we take) pride in our jobs'**. However, staff felt embarrassed that they were 'occasionally let down by what we can do and have available in terms of resources'. We also heard about the future aspirations of staff, being told that the service should '**dream big... let's do/aspire for more**'. One person mentioned anecdotal **perceptions** amongst their peers of '**sexy museums, dull libraries**', giving examples of fun exhibitions taking place in libraries in other cities, querying whether 'will others come to Leics in a similar way – **(we) need good attractions and investment** to draw in people'.

7.31 Staff told us they wanted libraries and community **centres to continue being 'secure, safe place to take families – whilst cost of everything rising'**.

Promotion of reading

7.32 Staff told us they want to see themselves play a 'future role in **good reading promotion for adults and CYP**'.

Signposting, face to face assistance, self-help and outreach

7.33 Staff mentioned **signposting, face to face support**, 'encouraging **people to help themselves** in our buildings' and '**outreach**' were important future priorities considered to 'deliver real value'.

Targeted investment in the physical fabric

7.34 We heard comments from staff, and examples shared, where **physical fabric investment is needed** – 'Central Library is meant be our flagship – however, ageing building, furniture is exhausted ... we do our best, but it's not in a good state' and 'shabby buildings, grotty windows – but juxtaposed with the Smart Libraries roll out. Can we bid for investment somehow?'

7.35 Staff recognised that 'yes we're used to it, but it's an issue', especially in relation to **site-specific 'heating issues** – can be very cold'

Invest in equipment, especially IT – long-standing issues need to be resolved

7.36 A recurring theme during our conversations was the need to invest in equipment – '**we need the right kit to do our jobs**', with examples given of a lack of laptops with working cameras for online team meetings (that could save travel time and costs longer-term) and 'slow PC startup time for basics'

Please sort the toilets

7.37 Staff shared various examples of problems with **toilet facilities** requiring resolution and was **becoming damaging for morale as ongoing issues**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Working more closely with other Council/public services

7.38 Staff mentioned they would like to see their service work closely and grow (or improve) a two-way relationship with a number of other Council, and other public, services, including:

- **Youth service:** '(grow) our relationship'.
- **Customer services:** 'a specific site that can pick these up ... to ease pressure'.
- **Housing,** and acting as a 'reception' for housing appointments: '(we need) officers at certain sites to pick up specific issues... instead of generic front door... perhaps moves around – Mon at site x, Tue at site y etc'.
- **Health:** 'service use us – e.g. for health devices'.
- **Waste management:** 'we give out (orange bags) for Waste Management; people come to us to get bags'.
- **Adult education:** a closer relationship and collaboration would be welcomed.

Additional staff workshop – led by Leicester City Council

7.39 In addition to the two staff workshops led by Activist, Leicester City Council led their own follow-up staff workshop in late September 2023.

7.40 The summary headlines from this workshop are included at Appendix iv.

What's come out of the focus groups

7.41 In the focus groups, members of the public told us **about their priorities for change, based on their ideas about what 'good' would look like:**

City centre offer; Childrens Promise; Health and wellbeing

7.42 Comments relating to these headings have been outlined in earlier document sections.

Culture and creativity

7.43 We heard from one group that the future purpose of the service's culture and creativity offer should be **'to challenge and explore,** that type of creating'.

7.44 A handful of people told us how libraries, with community centres, should be about offering comfort to people and then **'opening eyes'** to the good things on offer around them – this concept of **'starting the journey'** towards whatever they wanted to achieve was mentioned by one group. 'Draw people in... Expose people to ideas, thoughts and conversations'.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 7.45 Several groups suggested a top priority would be **better promotion of the culture and creative activities programme** – comments included “Never heard of it”; ‘You stumble across (it)’; ‘Don’t think they promote very well. New promotion channels to try (or develop further) included: ‘word of mouth; local radio; back of buses’; ‘Leicestershire Live’; ‘mingling them... mix and match’.
- 7.46 A few individuals suggested there should be **one master leaflet promoting everything on offer in libraries and community centres**. One individual summarised this by commenting that “Not sure adults know where to look... libraries have a lot of leaflets and brochures... Because there’s so many, (*we’re*) not sure where to look’.
- 7.47 One group observed how, when deployed thoughtfully, service delivery locations can complement each other well. One existing site model was outlined where **the proximity** of a community centre, library, community garden, playing field and a playground all helped provide ‘a **focal point**’ for activities locally and a strong sense of community.
- 7.48 When booking activities and events, we observed **the importance of checking other existing regular local events, and patterns of use, before scheduling new, or one-off, activities** to take place at certain sites. One group gave an example of madrassa pick-up and drop-off times, and how that influenced attendance at a one-off evening consultation event.. One individual suggested it would be a great idea to have individual **community development officers for each library and community centre**, tasked with ‘engaging with the local community’ and ‘making requests happen’.
- 7.49 The principle of **charging for activities** was generally viewed by our groups as a **potential barrier to access** – ‘money is important’; ‘if I see a big admission figure, I tend not to go’. However, there were **some minority views that charging a small fee was ‘reasonable’**, especially ‘in this day and age’ and ‘to protect essential services’, and that people were willing to ‘weigh it up’ before deciding to attend.
- 7.50 One activity leader told us of the ‘**importance of funding activity facilitators**’, and not just relying on volunteers to run sessions for libraries and community centres. They commented that ‘these days, people need to work and earn an income - they need the income’. One other group cautioned that ‘**volunteers** are really important, but you need to **pay them respect (as well as) their DBS fees and for their training**’.

Information and digital

- 7.51 Our groups recognised **the societal shift towards more digital service offers**. One individual comments that it is ‘important (to have) access to digital in order to do everyday life now’.
- 7.52 **Formats for information materials** came up several times, with one individual suggesting that ‘**leaflets** are handy - but **digital screens (could become) popular**, if (they were) updated regularly’.
- 7.53 Relating to this, it was suggested by several individuals that **the traditional ‘job of librarians has changed** a lot’.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Reading

- 7.54 Many focus group participants outlined **the wide range of different approaches to library use**, in particular what children and young people were perceived to need.
- 7.55 There were also a handful of **provocative, but thoughtful**, questions posed in relation to public libraries and the future provision of reading materials, including:
- ‘Do we need libraries, or repositories of books, anymore?’ – only one or two individuals agreed.
 - ‘Do we need physical book stock?’ - again, only one or two individuals agreed.

Youth (young people’s focus group comments

- 7.56 The **young people** we spoke with shared their **suggestions about what a ‘good’ future service model might look like**.
- In order to attract more young people, it was suggested by the majority of the group that **libraries should try focusing more on being ‘a social space’ for young people who had nowhere else to go** – ‘then do things to promote it – offer social clubs, book clubs... a games café’. One individual told us that ‘if there was something social, (*then*) young people would go’, which most of the group liked.
 - In terms of programming, the young people were very mindful that they had **different entertainment requirements compared to older people** – one individual summarised the point by suggesting ‘if older people don’t want noise, like leisure centres, you could have **timetables** - e.g. for (older) women, or young people (to help) get them in’.
 - One young person also suggested **incentives for young people to visit and read** may also help attract new young users, saying this could mean you ‘read 5 books, (*and*) get a discount or something’, which most of the group agreed might work.

Other headlines

- 7.57 The majority of our focus group conversations closed with a group request for a copy of the final report and we recommend that participants are sent a copy when it is published.

Summary of findings

Key findings

7.58 In the table below, we have summarised our key findings from this section:

Table 7.2: 'What models and good practice exist' - our key findings

- Library and community centre **staff** have made clear their **strong views and observations** about **how the service should change for the better in future**.
- There are a number of **site specific issues that need resolving**, including tired **physical fabric, heating issues, toilet issues** and **the reliability of IT infrastructure**. Staff are **embarrassed about apologizing** to the public about these long-standing unresolved issues.
- We have heard how the future Leicester library and community centre staff workforce **will need to develop a range of new skills** to respond to changing resident needs, including **enhanced ESOL support, service offer awareness** and **customer service skills**. The traditional librarian's **'day job' has changed** significantly since many people were originally recruited. There is a need to **reset expectations** about what the Council require of its staff, including its **approach to recruitment** and the **skills that team members now need to possess**.
- Whilst each individual site should continue to provide a **'core universal' service offer**, there is also a future need for a **locally tailored and life-enhancing offer** to be delivered, reflecting the local communities based in the immediate surrounding areas.
- In terms of broader sector changes, there is an opportunity to explore **the future role of AI**, and **the use of IT**, in library and community centre service delivery, with Leicester University currently progressing a related-research programme.
- Looking to the future, today's children will emerge into an employment market requiring **even more advanced IT and technological skills** than the ones required today. There is **an opportunity for libraries and community centres** to play a role in helping children and young people to develop these advanced IT skills, as well as any reskilling of older people that may be required.
- Public service, and partner, **co-location** is a direction many services have moved in recent years, **responding to the complex needs of residents** where multi-agency partnership working is required. As public sector budgets face more pressure, service delivery does not necessarily need to mean just 'from a physical building' and opportunities exist to **explore the potential for greater outreach and co-delivery working alongside community partners**. However, there is a risk to manage around libraries and community centres **losing their 'librariness' whilst co-locating services**, and becoming generic unspecialised service hubs.
- The co-location of services also offers the potential to streamline the Council's physical building footprint and to reduce overheads. However, **any exploration of community asset transfer in Leicester should be with caution** based on previous poor experiences and local appetite that we have been warned about.
- Conflicting views were exhibited on the subject of self-service access, reflecting the typical range of positive and negative perspectives seen elsewhere. While some people willingly embrace technological solutions, others do not like systems which move away from a 'traditional' service. Between these poles sit an uncommitted group which might be open to change if it supports their needs.

8. What we've found out about libraries and community centres in Leicester

Introduction

- 8.1 In this section, we explore what's driving the required changes to libraries and community centres in Leicester, the needs that are and aren't being met by the current service offer, and present our observations on the sites currently run by the Council.

Our approach to identifying the needs being met and not met

- 8.2 In this section, we reflect on our understanding of the key findings and needs of the people of Leicester, as summarised in this report's previous sections.
- 8.3 We assess how the service is currently meeting these needs set against the current service offer and Libraries Connected's Universal Offers, and what needs exist that are not currently being met and that the service should look to address.

Libraries Connected's Universal Offers

- 8.4 In the Secondary Research report, the role of Libraries Connected, and the Universal Library Offers are summarised. The Universal Offers 'aim to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity' and can be used to describe what libraries or community centres can offer people.

The needs that currently are, and aren't, being met

Reading

- 8.5 People have told the Council that one of the most important library services offered to them is access to reading and literacy materials.
- 8.6 Leicester residents have core reading and literacy support needs. Libraries can, and should, play a role in supporting these needs across all age groups and demographics.
- 8.7 There is a growing need for more stock in non-English languages to better reflect the diverse communities living in Leicester, and as these communities continue to grow and diversify.

Health and wellbeing

- 8.8 People have told the Council that libraries and community centres offer respite and relief from life's challenges, supporting their wellbeing and helping to address isolation.
- 8.9 Leicester residents continue to have core health and wellbeing support needs. Libraries and community centres can, and should, play a role in supporting these needs across all age groups and demographics.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 8.10 Leicester's library and community centre staff offer compassionate in-person support that is highly valued, especially as other public services have seen their in-person presence reduced. Residents do not want to lose access to this support, and would like to see it increased in the future. Residents, and partners, trust Leicester's library and community centre staff.
- 8.11 There is a significant growing need for more mental health support in Leicester, as well as support with improving people's physical health post-Covid.
- 8.12 Libraries and community centres offer highly valued free, or low cost, communal and socialization spaces for Leicester residents.

Information and digital

- 8.13 People have told the Council that libraries and community centres help people with access to free IT, Wi-Fi, information, face to face advice and support signposting needs.
- 8.14 Leicester residents continue to have core information, advice and IT access support needs. Libraries and community centres can, and should, play a role in supporting these needs across all age groups and demographics.
- 8.15 There is a growing need for more translation, non-English language and ESOL support, especially to support new communities and people in Leicester, including the provision of information and advice in different languages.
- 8.16 Staff recognise that the Council's library and community centre buildings require targeted investment and refurbishment work, including in improving the reliability of its existing IT infrastructure.

Culture and creativity

- 8.17 People have told the Council that libraries and community centres offer free (or highly affordable) creative and cultural activities and events that they enjoy participating in and offer relief from the challenges in their lives. They would like to see more of these activities and events being offered, tailored to each unique locality and reflecting the blend of communities and cultures that live in the immediate surrounding areas.
- 8.18 There is a need to improve the promotion and marketing of the library and community centre cultural offer in order to improve city-wide awareness and participation by more people, especially new communities to Leicester.
- 8.19 The city centre is busy and lively but, given the pressures on retail and the hospitality sectors, there is an opportunity to align any refreshed library and community centre offer with a broader refresh of the cultural offer and marketing of Leicester as a city destination, particularly through programming in the Central Library.
- 8.20 Leicester residents want access to free (or highly affordable) spaces for various community group activities to take place.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- 8.21 Staff recognise that the Council's library and community centre buildings require targeted investment and refurbishment work, including in improving the physical fabric and appearance of spaces to make them welcoming places for creative activities to happen.

Employment and learning

- 8.22 People have told the Council that one of the most important services offered by libraries and community centres is space to safely and quietly study and learn.
- 8.23 There is a significant need for safe out of classroom hours study space for children, young people and adult learners. Residents would like the existing offer to be expanded further, and existing facilities and availability of workspaces improved.
- 8.24 The city faces challenges in retaining its talented people. There is an opportunity for (libraries and community centres) to do more to help the Council and its partners address this issue.

Children's promise

- 8.25 A significant proportion of Leicester children are understood to grow up in poverty, with related impacts on school readiness and future life outcomes. Libraries and community centres can play a role in helping children, young people and their families with these early year challenges, in part through the provision of pre-school literacy and reading support.
- 8.26 As covered in Employment and learning, there is a significant need for safe out of classroom hours study space for children and young people.

Additional needs

Community centres

- 8.27 People have told the Council that one of the most important things offered by community centres is their proximity to people's homes, plus the socialisation space and community cohesion function that they perform.
- 8.28 As covered in Culture and creativity, Leicester residents want access to free (or highly affordable) spaces for various community group activities to take place. Leicester's community centres can, and should, play a role in providing this access, complementing the offer of other VCS providers in the city.
- 8.29 Staff recognise that the Council's community centre buildings require targeted investment and refurbishment work, especially in the physical fabric and internal infrastructure.

The diverse and vibrant communities of Leicester

- 8.30 People have told the Council that they are proud of Leicester's diversity and the many different communities and cultures that make up the city.
- 8.31 As the city continues to grow and change, people want to see this diversity continue to be reflected in the Council service offers, activities and events that happen and are celebrated in Leicester.
- 8.32 There are new communities in Leicester - some that are 'known', some that are 'known unknowns'. More work is first required to engage with them before the Council is able to understand their unique support needs.

9. Conclusions

Introduction

9.1 In this section, we summarise our findings, compiling the headlines in this report.

Summary of findings

Table 2.2: Introducing libraries and community centres in Leicester - our key findings

- The impact of **socio-economic events have exacerbated the existing challenges facing Leicester residents**, and of library and community centre users in Leicester. These challenges present new support needs, and opportunities for these valuable services to reach more new communities and service users. The existing library and community centre support offer could be tailored to be more immediately relevant to the current needs of more Leicester residents.
- Leicester's library and community centre offer **needs to convey the vibrancy and energy of the city's diverse communities**, whilst also **helping to address the pockets of inequality** that sit within the city. They are a trusted public service.
- Public services, especially **library and community-based services, have suffered from chronic central government underfunding for the past decade**. It is timely to explore the best use of Neighbourhood Services' available resources to meet local needs, including its ways of working with local residents and partner organisations, whilst also **being ambitious but realistic about what will, and won't, be possible** to do in the future.

Table 4.4: 'Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision' - our key findings

- Leicester is a **vibrant and diverse city made of many different communities and cultures**. The Neighbourhood Services offer needs to keep under review how it responds to these ongoing changes, including the need for **more ESOL support** and how it can work with other services to draw on their translation support and provision of advice in non-English languages.
- There are pockets of **significant inequality** across Leicester, where residents need **increasing amounts of help** to respond to their complex needs.
- The post-Covid impact on **people's physical and, also especially, mental health** is becoming increasingly apparent. People in Leicester are **now struggling more** and need more support.
- There is a role for libraries and community centres to play in supporting resident **health and wellbeing, community inclusion, and literacy and skills development**. The service, and its staff, appears to be **well positioned** with, and **well trusted by**, their partners. However, it is felt that the service could do more, and help even more residents, by building on existing multi-agency partnerships to better coordinate city-wide interventions together.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- There is an opportunity for the libraries and community centre offer in Leicester to be **more directly aligned with the city's overall cultural offer**, particularly around the provision of a diverse community activity programme across the city in coordination with the Council's partners.
- A **significant proportion of Leicester children** are understood to **grow up in poverty**, with related impacts on **school readiness** and **future life outcomes**. Libraries and community centres, alongside other public services, can play a role in helping children, young people and their families with these early year challenges.
- It is perceived that there **is a strong and well-trusted VCS sector in Leicester**, offering provision in various locations and venues across the city. The Council's own libraries and community centre network could, and should, complement this offer and could be coordinated in partnership with local VCS organisations. There is also understood to be **a strategic appetite for a change in the Council's community presence locally**, whether that means changes in the physical network or alternative approaches to service delivery, such as increased outreach or delivery from different buildings.

Table 5.18: 'How people are currently using library and community services across the city' - our key findings

- Leicester's libraries and community centres play a **highly valued role**, meeting the **'traditional' support needs of residents**. This is mainly focused on the provision of: **reading materials; creative activities and events; socialization spaces; supporting community cohesion; study and learning spaces**, and **compassionate in-person support and advice**.
- As other public services' in-person presence has been eroded due to over a decade of austerity and the move to 'digital by default' there is **an increased pressure on services that do provide face-to-face support for residents**. The role of libraries and community centres as **one of the last remaining outposts to provide this support** is highly valued and **more support would be welcomed** by existing service users.
- Leicester residents who use the services especially love **the communal role of the libraries and community centre buildings** as physical places to meet and socialise with others. They especially value access to services, and buildings, **located in near proximity to their homes** – they like having nearby familiar facilities. These services, and activities, offer **relief from inequality and poverty** and **must remain free (or very low cost) in order to be accessible by as many people as possible**.
- New communities to Leicester will often have **language and information support needs**. **ESOL and translation support**, plus **advice provided in non-English languages**, are highly valued and **in increasing demand**. However, much of this is not the direct responsibility of neighbourhood services but the services need to continue taking this into account in their planning and partnership working. The unique needs of **some of the newer communities to Leicester still require discovery**, and may be accessed through more detailed engagement with trusted VCS leaders, such as local community groups and/or faith leaders.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- People are **proud of Leicester's diversity**. They enjoy participating in **cultural events** and **want to see their own communities 'reflected back' at them** in the Neighbourhood Services' offer being delivered in libraries and community centres.
- Despite its vibrancy and young student population, the city is perceived to face **challenges with retaining its talented young people (i.e. those who might be skilled across a whole range of disciplines, not just the academically gifted)**, and offering appealing career and life-enriching opportunities, especially in the city centre. **Libraries and community centres can help to address these perceptions and challenges and can factor this into their planning.**
- As well as the city centre, **the physical fabric** of the existing library and community centre network has been well-used for many years and is now **extremely tired**. **Targeted investment** should be considered **to improve the look and feel** of the Council's library and community centre buildings so that they are fit for future generations of Leicester residents to continue enjoy using.
- There is multiple evidence that the Central Library is not providing significant value within the overall library offer for the City. There is little enthusiasm for what it offers beyond what is valued within the services available in local libraries. Many library users and non-users appear to be put off using the Central Library by a number of factors including poor awareness of the services on offer and broader disincentives to visiting the city centre including safety and cost of transport.
- Recognising that survey respondents were predominantly enthusiastic library users, there was considerable apathy, scepticism and negativity about using community centres.

Table 6.10: 'What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future'- our key findings

- Leicester residents see libraries and community centres **as something broader than a place to just access books**. They value the core Universal Offers being provided by the services, but also the **life improvement and enrichment** opportunities also on offer to them.
- Opportunities to speak with public services in person, when help is needed to solve a problem or seek advice, have been slashed over the past decade. People who need help and in-person advice value highly their **free access to libraries and community centres and their staff** and want to see **more in-person support opportunities** woven into the service offer.
- As even more new and diverse communities move into Leicester, an already diverse city, there is a **growing need for support and advice to be provided in non-English languages**, for **more ESOL support**, and for **more translation services**.
- People are struggling financially across the UK, and especially in the known pockets of inequality within Leicester. **Free and cheap access to activities** and services provide relief to people and are highly valued. **A fun, interesting, enriching and culturally-relevant activity programme** could be better tailored to each locality in Leicester in discussion with local communities and service users, and then **marketed more widely and 'loudly' across the whole city** as part of **a revised cultural offer**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- Leicester's libraries and community centres have been well-used for many years. **IT hardware, and other essential equipment, are now struggling with reliability**, and there are **site-specific issues** that need to be comprehensively mapped and resolved.
- It is clear that children, young people and those studying require **quiet study spaces, particular outside of classroom hours**. Libraries and community centres provide the **safety, warmth and quiet spaces** sought by many people, and some residents would like the existing study space offer **to be expanded and improved**.
- Residents **often see 'public services' as a single entity** – they don't see the silo lines that exist in reality. For that reason, they welcome opportunities to engage with services all in one place, so **the co-location of select Council and/or other public sector partner services** in the same building appears to make sense. Libraries and community centres already perform a 'front-door' and initial query/response signposting role for residents. **Deeper two-way connectivity, and mutual support, with other Council and partner services** to build on these existing natural relationships will be essential in the future.
- With that point in mind, it is recognised that there is **some 'toe-treading'** in terms of service offer provision across the city **with the VCS sector**. There are opportunities to **explore and align** how Council and the VCS sector support offer can **complement each other and maximise the use of available resources**, rather than compete or conflict in any way.
- People would like to see **more investment being targeted at the buildings in their local streets and communities**.
- Upon exploration with residents, **investment in a new Central Library is not considered a top priority** against the other higher priority needs that have been identified. However, if it is to be explored as a capital project, it is timely to discuss it now with Council partners, such as Leicester University and De Montfort University, whilst they are also exploring their own future central library location options.

Table 7.2: 'What models and good practice exist' - our key findings

- Library and community centre **staff** have made clear their **strong views and observations** about **how the service should change for the better in future**.
- There are a number of **site specific issues that need resolving**, including tired **physical fabric, heating issues, toilet issues** and **the reliability of IT infrastructure**. Staff are **embarrassed about apologizing** to the public about these long-standing unresolved issues.
- We have heard how the future Leicester library and community centre staff workforce **will need to develop a range of new skills** to respond to changing resident needs, including **enhanced ESOL support, service offer awareness** and **customer service skills**. The traditional librarian's **'day job' has changed** significantly since many people were originally recruited. There is a need to **reset expectations** about what the Council require of its staff, including its **approach to recruitment** and the **skills that team members now need to possess**.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- Whilst each individual site should continue to provide a **'core universal' service offer**, there is also a future need for a **locally tailored and life-enhancing offer** to be delivered, reflecting the local communities based in the immediate surrounding areas.
- In terms of broader sector changes, there is an opportunity to explore **the future role of AI**, and **the use of IT**, in library and community centre service delivery, with Leicester University currently progressing a related-research programme.
- Looking to the future, today's children will emerge into an employment market requiring **even more advanced IT and technological skills** than the ones required today. There is **an opportunity for libraries and community centres** to play a role in helping children and young people to develop these advanced IT skills, as well as any reskilling of older people that may be required.
- Public service, and partner, **co-location** is a direction many services have moved in recent years, **responding to the complex needs of residents** where multi-agency partnership working is required. As public sector budgets face more pressure, service delivery does not necessarily need to mean just 'from a physical building' and opportunities exist to **explore the potential for greater outreach and co-delivery working alongside community partners**. However, there is a risk to manage around libraries and community centres **losing their 'librariness' whilst co-locating services**, and becoming generic unspecialised service hubs.
- The co-location of services also offers the potential to streamline the Council's physical building footprint and to reduce overheads. However, **any exploration of community asset transfer in Leicester should be with caution** based on previous poor experiences and local appetite that we have been warned about.
- Conflicting views were exhibited on the subject of self-service access, reflecting the typical range of positive and negative perspectives seen elsewhere. While some people willingly embrace technological solutions, others do not like systems which move away from a 'traditional' service. Between these poles sit an uncommitted group which might be open to change if it supports their needs.

Appendices

Appendix i - Research brief

Leicester Library and Community Needs Assessment – Research Brief

Table 1: overview

Commissioned by	Project Team
Author of brief	Andrew Holden
Project	Leicester Library and Community Needs Assessment
Research type	Primary and Secondary research
Version	v0.4
Date	Sep 2023

Table 2: summary of research brief

Subject area	To understand current patterns of use for library and community services, what people will need for the future, <i>and</i> how these future needs can be delivered affordably.
Principal themes of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where needs for Neighbourhood Services are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision • How people are currently using library and community services across the city • What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future. • What models and good practice exist elsewhere. • What options are available for transformation of Neighbourhood Services to ensure services can continue to be delivered within a reduced budget.
Principal user/s of research output/s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Team/Board
Principal contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCC leading secondary research • Activist leading primary research
Expected output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 Secondary Research - mini report • Phase 1 engagement findings - evidence base (online survey, paper survey, focus groups, interviews, staff workshops).

Table 3: key hypotheses we want to test in phase 1

Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision

1. Inequalities within the city have been exacerbated by the pandemic and cost of living and this is reflected in *changing* demand for support within libraries and community services.
2. Many people with the greatest needs across the Universal Offers are not accessing Neighbourhood Services.
3. Changing demographics are influencing areas of greatest need for Leicester's Neighbourhood Services.
4. There is a greater reliance on libraries and community centres to deliver health and wellbeing benefits for local people
5. There is a growing need reliance on libraries and community centres to provide opportunities for volunteering and community group activities.
6. There is a growing demand for neighbourhood services to support the needs of children and young families.

CYP:

- The pandemic has resulted in a learning gap and poorer mental health among some children and young people.
- Some parents are reliant on their children for help with English language and accessing information and services (relating to home languages).
- There is a lower than average reading age among children and young people in Leicester.

How people are currently using library and community services across the city

7. The pandemic and cost-of-living crisis have changed patterns of usage of library and community services.
8. While reported customer satisfaction is high, the service offer is not meeting the needs of key groups within the community .
9. There is a mis-match in some areas of the city between current service provision and levels of usage (there is over provision in some parts of the city).
10. More and more people are using library services online rather than physical borrowing.
11. Many people in the community are still dependent on access to physical and analogue services.
12. Libraries and community centres are seen as safe and welcoming community spaces which are accessible to residents from all communities.
13. Usage of the central library facility is low due to poor location.
14. Many people are using multiple library and community centre sites for different purposes.

CYP:

- Girls predominate among CYP library users and this disparity increases with age.
- Libraries are seen as having less to offer by older children.
- Libraries are seen as valuable partners by other front-line services but are not always integral to key strategic plans.

What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future.

15. People recognise that the Council cannot afford to do everything or transform services overnight.
16. Current users are very attached to their local library or community centre and the service it provides, but many people are open to change.
17. People have lots of creative ideas about how people can be better helped through library and community services.
18. People recognise that services are moving online but many rely on libraries to provide resources and support for accessing them.

CYP:

- Children and young people need more access to safe spaces to learn, meet each other and take part in activities
- Children and young people need more routes to access reliable information, advice and other support
- Partnership working and co-location need to be extended to create incentives for greater use.
- Use of technology in libraries is not keeping pace with how CYP engage with the online world.

What models and good practice exist elsewhere

19. Some library services in England have increased use of new technologies such as self-access systems to reduce staffed opening hours.
20. Models of 'central library' provision are diverse and changing, driven by technology and the changing high street landscape with some provision located in the heart of popular retail centres.
21. Other sectors beyond public libraries have lessons which could be adopted to meet the needs of local people.
22. Public Library services are not current equipped to address people's information needs in a rapidly changing technological landscape.
23. Further co-location of services in accessible multi-service centres may offer solutions in Leicester.
24. Community Asset Transfer of community centres has been demonstrated to significantly expand community provision in some local areas.

CYP:

- Children and Young people's needs for support across universal offers are being met imaginatively in many library and non-library settings elsewhere.
- Co-location with other services will drive greater family use of libraries and community centres.

Table 4: key research themes (in bold) and key lines of enquiry

Key for primary research methods:

P = Project Team and board

I = stakeholder interviews (individual and group).

F = Focus groups

S = survey

Key for the main focus of engagement methods

■ = direct focus in primary research (to elicit knowledge, ie what is your direct, first-hand experience of this?).

□ = indirect focus in primary research (to elicit opinions, ie what do you know or think about this from other people or evidence?).

Key lines of enquiry	P	I	F	S	Notes
A Where needs are greatest across the city and how these map against current service provision					Use Universal Offers to structure
1. What are people's needs for health and wellbeing and where are services available?	□	□	■	■	
2. What are people's needs for accessing information and services online and where are these services available?	□	□	■	■	
3. What are the reading and literacy needs of people across the city and where are these services available?	□	□	■	■	
4. What sort of cultural and creative activities would people like and where can they access them?	□	□	■	■	
5. How do does the offer for Children and Young People map against the changing needs of CYP in the city?	□	□	■	■	
6. What are people's needs for community spaces?	□	□	■	■	

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Key lines of enquiry	P	I	F	S	Notes
CYP					
1. Within the remit of the Universal Offers and the Children's Promise, what are the priority services for children and young people?	■	■	■	■	
2. What is the impact of the pandemic and cost of living crisis on children's learning and wellbeing?	■	■	□	□	
3. Digital – what resources do children need to access information and entertainment, and what support do they need to access this (eg coding, internet, own devices)?	■	■	■	■	
4. What resources and activities best support children and young people to promote their health and wellbeing within Neighbourhood Services (eg speaking and listening skills, informal learning and group activities, linking in with children's health initiatives)?	■	■	□	□	
B. How people are currently using library and community services across the city					
1. How are patterns of use changing among different groups and in different places?	□	□	■	■	
2. What do people think about the services on offer to each locality and for different groups of people?	□	□	■	■	
3. What barriers do people experience accessing the support they need or participating in activities?	□	□	■	■	

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Key lines of enquiry	P	I	F	S	Notes
4. What might encourage people to use libraries and community centres more?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
CYP Focus					
1. What are the positive and negative experiences CYP have had in libraries?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. What are the barriers to children and young people accessing Leicester Libraries and Community Centres and how could these be addressed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3. How do we best reach children and young people including through their parents/carers and schools to engage them in using library and community services?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
4. Reading - Are children reading, where are they sourcing reading material, what are they reading and what formats and genres are they using?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
5. What cultural activities are children attending in our centres?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
C. What people think they will need from their libraries and community centres in the future.					

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Key lines of enquiry	P	I	F	S	Notes
1. What services would people prioritise most if available resources are declining?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. What would be their priorities for investing in community services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3. What would people like to see within a new central library offer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
CYP					
1. How can libraries support children to address their challenges within our remit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. What activities would they prioritise for the future? (eg live performance, arts and crafts, holiday activities etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
D. What models and good practice exist elsewhere					
1. How have successful central library projects been delivered recently?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
2. What is the evidence of the impact of investing in new technology, including self-access?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
3. What is the evidence of the impact of community asset transfer on provision of community centres?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
4. What evidence exists about the benefits of further co-location/integration of services?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
5. Where is the best evidence about library impacts on key impact measures?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
6. What are the workforce needs to deliver a future library service?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
7. How should 'universality' and 'targeting need' within the library model be balanced?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Key lines of enquiry	P	I	F	S	Notes
CYP					
1. How could potential changes to the service impact on children and young people (for better or worse)?	■	■	□	□	
2. What capacities and competences need to improve to better address needs of CYP within remit of neighbourhood services?	■	■	□	□	

Section 5a: research activities summary (to be completed when tables 3 and 4 agreed)

No	Research Activity	Methodology	Issues to resolve	Lead	Deadline	Status
1.0	Secondary Research	Existing datasets - Ward profiles Benchmarking data including CIPFA	LCC developing profiles. Agree datasets and other research sources.	LCC		Ongoing
2.0	Interviews and workshops	16 1-2-1 interviews and 2 group workshops	LCC to suggest shortlist	Activist		Sep
3.0	Focus Groups	12 focus groups	LCC suggest area-based approach of 2 per public health area. Consider mixed approach including priority groups to reach, eg. CYP, parents etc.	LCC/Activist		w/c 11 Sep
4.0	User/non-user Survey	Via Citizen Space Include CYP version (see below)	Paper version data processing (volume)	Activist		Published 3 July

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Section 5b: CYP-specific research activities summary

No	Research Activity	Methodology	Issues to resolve	Lead	Deadline	Status
1.0	CYP Survey	Via Citizen Space	Simplified version for youngest age group Marketing/facilitation routes			
2.0	Secondary research	Existing data sets: LCC Public Health Survey CIPFA 2018 CYP Survey National HWB CYP surveys				
3.0	Other primary research activities	TBC				

Appendix ii - Main survey – question list

Question
What are the greatest concerns in your life at the moment?
What are you hoping to change about your life in the future?
What is your main occupation?
How often do you visit a public library in Leicester?
Which libraries do you visit?
Thinking about the public library you visit most often (apart from the Central Library) what are the most important things on offer there for you?
What are the main reasons you don't visit a local library (apart from the Central Library)? Please tick up to three options.
How often have you visited the Central Library in the past five years?
What are the most important things on offer for you at the Central Library? Please tick up to three options.
How well does the Central Library support your needs in the following areas:
What are the main reasons you don't visit the Central Library? Please tick up to three options.
How often do you visit a community centre run by Leicester City Council?
Which community centres do you visit?
Thinking about the community centre you visit most often, what are the most important things on offer there for you? Please tick up to three options.
How well do the community centres you visit support your needs in the following areas?
What are the main reasons you don't visit a community centre run by Leicester City Council? Please tick up to three options.
When you visit a library or community centre how do you usually get there?
How often do you access the computers and internet in our library and community centres?
What would encourage you to use your local library more often? Please tick up to three options.
What would encourage you to visit the Central Library more often? Please tick up to three options.
What would encourage you to visit a community centre more often? Please tick up to three options.
To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, what local library services would you prioritise? Please tick up to three options.
To help us support the changing needs of the people of Leicester, which Central Library services would you prioritise? Please tick up to three options.
To help us support the changing needs of people in Leicester, which community centre services would you prioritise? Please tick up to three options.
Many councils are changing how they operate community centres and library services in order to better meet the needs of residents. Please tick up to three ideas that you think we could look at.
Do you have any other ideas or suggestions about how Leicester's libraries and community centres can better meet the needs of people within the resources available to the council? - Tell us more here.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

Over the summer we will be holding focus groups across the city to give people a further opportunity to contribute ideas about the future of our neighbourhood services. If you would like to take part, please leave your contact details below (this information will be separated from your answers to the survey in line with our privacy policy).

What is your postcode? Please note: we collect postcode data to gain a better understanding of which parts of the city / county respond to our consultations. We cannot identify individual properties or addresses from this information.

What is your age?

What is your sex?

Is your gender identity the same as your sex registered at birth?

If No, what term do you use to identify your gender? (leave blank if prefer not to say) - Preferred term:

How would you describe your ethnic background?

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

If Yes, please specify: - If you wish to specify, please tell us more here.

Appendix iii - CYP survey – question list

Questions
Are you a boy or a girl? It's fine if you'd rather not say.
How old are you?
Please tell us your postcode, if you know it.
Please tick all the languages you speak at home.
How do you spend your free time? Tick all the ones that are important to you.
How do you feel about where you live? Tick all the ones you agree with.
When did you last visit a local library (not with your school)?
Which of these libraries have you visited? Tick all the ones you've been to.
What do you think about your local library? Tick all the ones you agree with.
What things have you done at the library? Tick all the ones you've done.
Why don't you go to the library? Tick all the reasons why you don't.
What do you think would get you to go to the library more often? Tick all the ones you agree with.
What would be in your dream library?

Appendix iv - Staff workshop notes from September 2023, led by Leicester City Council

Headlines from September 2023 staff workshop – led by Leicester City Council

Service Name

- Could this be changed - something meaningful to people internally and externally.

Core purpose

- We need to define our mission in a changed world
- Addressing needs of the communities – learning, reading, social, leisure
- Re-engage with communities – map out areas, services, stakeholders and partners – more outreach and engagement
- Outreach to engage children
- Locations in the heart of communities – prioritise key locations where need is greatest
- Leicester is a diverse city with vast differences in communities – not a one size fits all

Signposting & face to face

- Information & signposting – be clear about this remit to manage expectations
- More important as other services move online

Reading & Books

- Reading is the priority. Improves life chances
- We need to do more to promote internally as well as externally. Need to absorb reading into all our offers.

Children & Young People

- Improve capacity for outreach with children's offer
- A perceived increased need due to impact of lockdown
- Universal library card – for all children at birth

Structure

- Need to look at service structure
- Is it possible to create a role in between SDM and front line post.

Phase 1 primary research findings report - appendix

- Need to increase capacity for outreach (SDM time).
- Can we improve career route with midpoint post?
- This could be more operational, leaving service delivery managers to do outreach and service development
- Need more intuitive job titles, would help with recruitment and to focus new staff

Promotion of service

- We need to (re)define our strategic principles
- Use library card like a leisure card to provide other leisure benefits. Card gives discounts.

Effective partnership working

- We need to step back to ask what is our mission in a changed world?
- We can best add value by working with partners and third party providers – how do we signpost more effectively?
- Understanding the change in use – how people use our spaces – hosting partners to deliver at community level
- We need to define core library & community centre offers, and to offer these to other services to ensure we are clear to partners

Opening Hours

- Can we target opening hours more effectively – would need to research, but after school key

Volunteers

- Volunteering offer key to community offer and links to careers and employment offer.