

# **GATESHEAD LIBRARY**

## **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

**2021/22**

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## **Gateshead Library Service**

Gateshead Council faces an anticipated budget shortfall of £55 million by April 2025. This is due to cuts in the funding that the council receives to deliver services, the impact of Covid-19 and inflationary pressures. This means that the Council is reviewing how it provides its statutory library service.

The Library Service has identified possible ways to reduce service costs by changing the way some of its buildings are run and by changing the way it delivers library services across the borough. This is a part of a 3-year transformation plan which aims to save £1.2 million across Public Health and Wellbeing services in Gateshead.

As the Council moves toward the development of a locality focussed working model, there is a need for some council buildings to become “community spaces”. A community space is a place that is a focal point for local activities, services, and facilities, accessible to the local community. They are multi-purpose and reflect local needs in terms of what they provide. Community spaces have an important social function bringing people together from a cross section of the community, addressing isolation, and being a safe space where anyone is welcome.

Libraries are well placed to play a role in community spaces because of their existing position of trust within local communities, the contribution they make across a range of agendas, and their ethos of partnership working.

The arrangement of libraries and other services will vary considerably from place to place and will be driven by local circumstances – success rests on reflecting and responding to local need so every community hub will be different. We asked local residents to give us their views.

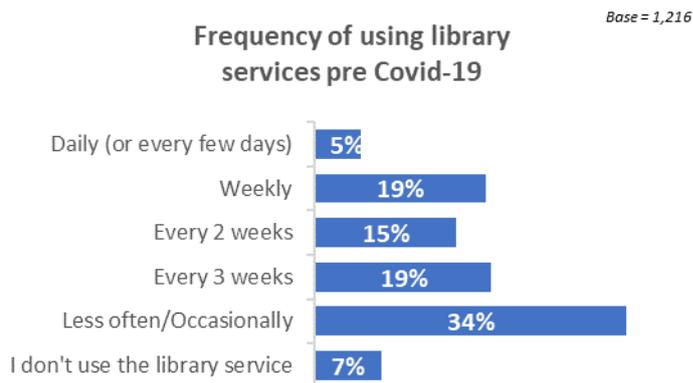
The Library consultation ran from Monday 15th November to Friday 4th February and information was collected across a range of sources.

- The Council digital consultation platform received 1226 submissions
- Consultation meetings were held with ward councillors
- 20 focus group sessions were held with 152 local people
- A series of open drop-in sessions were held in libraries to take customer feedback
- Library staff across all statutory libraries were consulted
- Volunteers and organisations involved in the Gateshead volunteer libraries were invited to contribute.

## ONLINE SURVEY ANALYSIS

A total of 1226 individuals completed the online survey on the Council Consultation platform, of those 89% indicated that they were existing library members. Most of those persons, 90% had accessed the libraries in the last 5 years.

When asked about their frequency of use, 58% indicated that they use a library at least every 3 weeks before the pandemic.

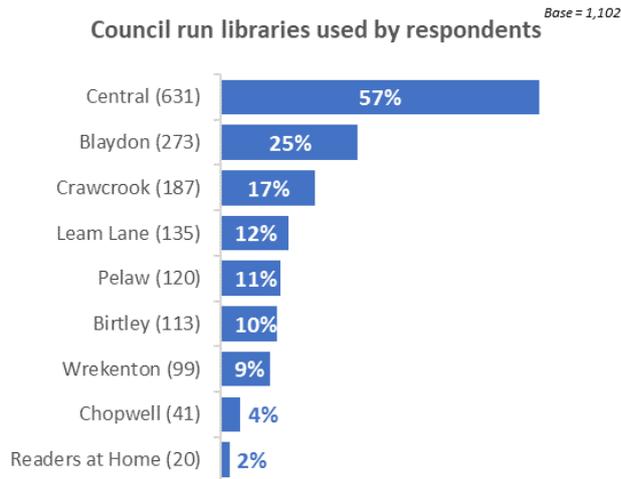


We asked respondents if they use library buildings for other purposes such as to meet a friend, job coach, watch a performance, visit the gallery or shop etc, and 62% indicated a wider use of the building than just as a library.

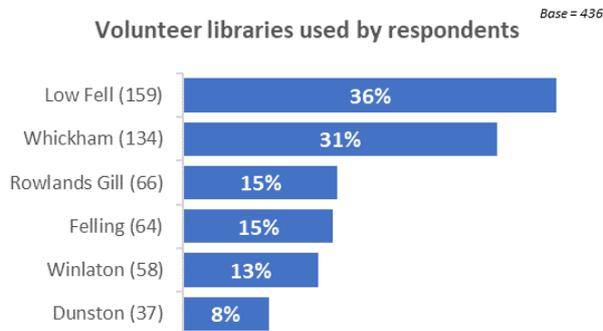
Two thirds (68%) of respondents were women and well over half (58%) were aged 55+. 4% of respondents were from ethnic groups other than White British. More than a quarter of respondents (27%) were limited because of a physical or mental health condition either a little (19%) or a lot (8%). You can view the demographic profile information in Appendix 1.

In total 1,179 respondents told us which libraries they used. Of those, 1,102 said they use a Council run library and 436 a volunteer library. However, respondents often use multiple libraries. So, for example, of those who use Council run libraries, 395 use at least one other Council run library, and of those, 147 also use at least one other volunteer library

Over half of respondents (631) recorded that they use central library, which reflects the fact that it is the largest site in the borough with multiple services on offer.



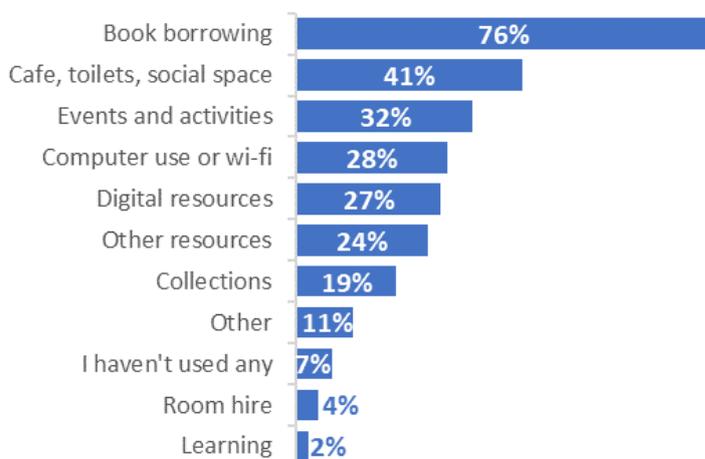
We also received responses from 436 people who use volunteer libraries. 395 of those respondents stated that they also use at least one Council library.



To understand how people use the libraries we asked about which aspects of the library service respondents used in the year before the Covid-19 pandemic. As expected, the majority stated that they were borrowing books, followed by using libraries as social space and for events. Some additional responses included use of photocopiers and printers, the shop, the local history group or family history research and meetings such as with elected representatives.

### Library services used in the year before Covid-19

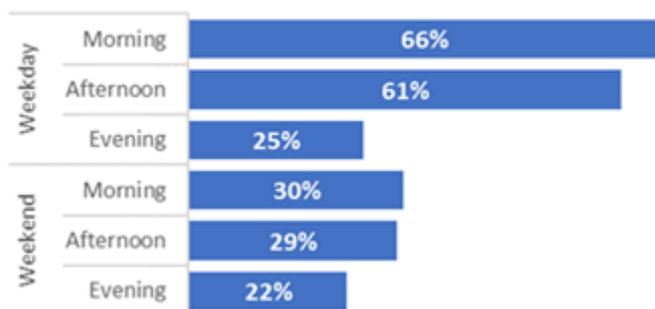
Base = 1,215



We asked respondents about their preferred time and day to visit the library. Many people ticked all the boxes, indicating that they may wish to visit at any time. As shown below the majority stated that weekday visits to libraries were their preferred option. Fewer respondents indicated a preference for access in an evening or at a weekend.

### Preferred day and time to visit a library

Base = 752

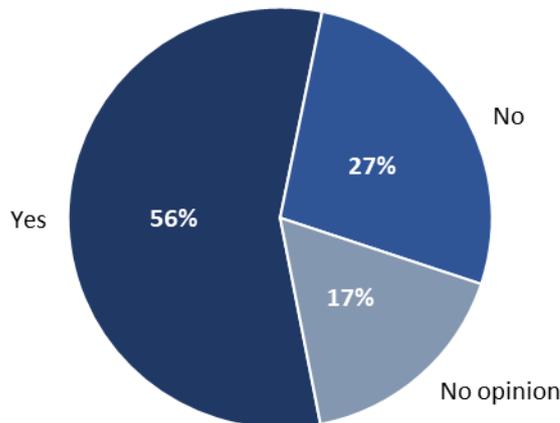


These choices may also reflect individuals' perceptions about current opening hours at individual sites.

### Future Vision for Gateshead

We asked respondents if they support the proposal of partner organisations managing some of our library buildings in the future and the majority 56% said yes.

Support for voluntary sector organisations  
managing some library buildings in the future Base = 1,122



To understand reaction to proposed changes we asked for any alternative suggestions about how the library buildings under consideration at Chopwell, Crawcrook, Pelaw, Leam Lane or Wrekenton might be changed to encourage greater use.

#### Alternative suggestions about building use and activities

There were 405 comments with suggestions about how to encourage greater use of the libraries at Chopwell, Crawcrook, Pelaw, Leam Lane and Wrekenton. Key themes are summarised below.

Observation from a member of the public:

Anything that encourages local people to actually enter the buildings and not to see the buildings as “not for people like me”.

- **Open libraries up for greater use by the community** such as space for events, meeting places for community groups, community hubs and cafes etc.  
Some noted that their local library already seems to have a ‘community offer’ and some raised concerns about the ability of their library being able to cope with greater usage due to size limitations.
- **Meeting place for groups and clubs**, a variety of different groups or clubs being able to use libraries as a space to meet.
- **Activities for children and families** - Storytelling, art and craft, dance, family reading, activities for groups like children, elderly, or those with special needs etc. (49 responses)

- **Academic and skill based educational/learning purposes** as well as fitness. (37 responses)
- **Coffee mornings** or introducing a café or beverage machines. (37 responses)
- **Meeting spaces**, informal and formal spaces with some suggesting there could be bookable space both paid and free. Many mentioned a need for more comfortable furniture. (33 responses)
- **Improve community health**, some suggested health services could either be located in library buildings or periodically send in outreach services. Others suggested specific talks or classes for mental health and other health issues.
- **Advice and Information**, many felt that libraries could be used as a place to go for advice, with a number suggesting citizen’s advice could offer a service in the library.
- **Link to schools**. many suggested greater links with schools and an emphasis on supporting children, families and young people.

When asked what services and activities they would want provided in the future, many respondents reiterated the activities and uses already suggested in the question above. There was an overarching message that the library functions must continue with book lending and access to professional library staff being highlighted by many.

Some of the additional or more specific suggestions included:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sign language and other language classes</li> <li>• meet the author events</li> <li>• IT classes</li> <li>• drop-off lockers for deliveries</li> <li>• food banks</li> <li>• credit unions</li> <li>• first aid classes</li> <li>• Digital/Device learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• child/family play</li> <li>• Baby and toddler classes</li> <li>• school holiday/after school classes</li> <li>• Youth groups</li> <li>• hobby groups such as knitting and sewing</li> <li>• toy library</li> <li>• local community craft sales</li> <li>• hubs for scouts/cubs/beavers</li> <li>• performance/choir space</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment/immigration /housing advice</li> <li>• nutrition/diet advice</li> <li>• meditation/mindfulness classes</li> <li>• accessible space for disability groups</li> <li>• DVD/CD borrowing</li> <li>• exhibition space</li> <li>• Exercise classes</li> <li>• Toilets</li> <li>• Men’s groups</li> </ul>
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## Feelings about the impact of changes to libraries

When asked to describe the potential impact that changing the way library services are delivered could have on them 326 respondents (27% of the survey total) provided a response.

Response to question 'Do you support the proposed changes?'	Number of persons
Yes	170
No	118
No opinion	34
Not known	4
Total	326

Almost half of those (48%) felt change would have a negative impact, a third (33%) felt it could be a positive thing, 17% said it would make no difference, and 6% said it was not applicable to them.

There were also several comments that suggested it was difficult to assess the impact as they were unclear of the proposed changes.

The responses indicated that many who felt it would impact negatively on them were concerned about loss of paid staff being replaced by volunteer staff, with suggestions they may be less knowledgeable and concerns about security of personal information. There were also many concerns about library opening times being reduced or even being closed altogether even though that is not a part of the consultation process.

A selection of the comments has been provided below to give a feel for the points being raised.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on existing users if new activities are noisy</li> <li>• Space for books might be reduced</li> <li>• Any closures or reduction in hours could cause more isolation for people</li> <li>• Reduced access to skilled library staff</li> <li>• Library borrowing may reduce</li> <li>• Dissuade my children and me from using the service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change will destroy the library community which staff have built up</li> <li>• It would be difficult to find people who have the capacity and skills to deliver another community service</li> <li>• More reliance on volunteers, absolves local authorities responsibilities</li> <li>• I would consider giving up using the library if it changes as it would not be a library as I would want it</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I won't be able to have my usual meet up with my friends if it is used by a volunteer club</li> <li>• Reducing library space to allow other agencies a permanent presence would change the feel of the library space, potentially disrupting the good relationship between staff and the community</li> <li>• Deterioration if ran by voluntary organisations</li> <li>• Less inclined to visit if there were other activities taking place</li> <li>• Potential for negative effects due to lack of discipline and respect for library culture</li> <li>• Complete demise of the library service</li> <li>• Terrible impact on regular users</li> <li>• Libraries are always the first to suffer cuts</li> <li>• Library services should be accessible to all</li> <li>• Concerns regarding eventual closure, leaving the area without a library</li> <li>• Watering down of library expertise and knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reducing opening times or activities would have a detrimental effect on the community</li> <li>• People go for peace and quiet</li> <li>• If the library is voluntary run, the relationship I have with the staff would stop and a visit to the library wouldn't be as good</li> <li>• Library is often quiet and the reason some people use it, if it was to become crowded with additional services, this quality may suffer</li> <li>• I'd feel lost if it becomes more difficult to get books from the library</li> <li>• More users would mean more parking spaces needed</li> <li>• Lots of people struggling with mental health and finances use the libraries to save on fuel and have social interactions</li> <li>• Readers at home will become isolated</li> <li>• Why would we want another 'community hub'?</li> <li>• Concerns regarding reliability of volunteers</li> </ul>
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Many of those who responded that the potential changes would be positive felt that opening libraries up for greater community use/integration was important. There were positive comments about broadening the library service offer, some see changing library use as the only way to keep libraries open.

A selection of the comments has been provided below to give a feel for the points being raised.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better use of buildings and more facilities</li> <li>• Areas where people can gather improve the overall wellbeing of the community</li> <li>• Imperative that libraries are available for all children</li> <li>• The library is closed for 2-3 days a week now, it could be used for other things</li> <li>• Useful for the local U3A</li> <li>• Library borrowing and computer usage may also increase</li> <li>• Free space to meet with others</li> <li>• Healthier social engagement in the elderly and generally</li> <li>• This sort of change can only enhance the local community</li> <li>• A stronger online presence would be beneficial to let people know what is going on in the different libraries</li> <li>• If there were baby groups being held, I would go along</li> <li>• Important for the youths to have somewhere like this to go rather than hanging around shops</li> <li>• Great opportunity to offer greater flexibility and value for money</li> <li>• If libraries were used as spaces to educate and support women and minorities, it could have a huge effect on the well-being of the area</li> <li>• Opportunity to recycle books, clothes and toys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As long as the building is still used as a library, anything else will be okay</li> <li>• Community building / local go to hub for information</li> <li>• Benefit for a lot of older residents to have classes</li> <li>• Change would be welcome as the library service as it stands isn't fit for purpose</li> <li>• Keen for the community groups to use the services the library provides but not at the expense of the current provisions</li> <li>• Hopefully it would build communities and reduce vandalism</li> <li>• Anything to bring the community together</li> <li>• Broader range of generations will get together and this will hopefully be promoted by events.</li> <li>• Any involvement with the younger generation would be welcome</li> <li>• Makes sense for libraries to use their rooms for other services</li> <li>• Any proposal to broaden the use of these buildings to benefit the wider community is approved</li> <li>• Other activities may attract more users</li> <li>• More community minded providing services that would improve well-being</li> <li>• Opens up more opportunities to attend (e.g., classes)</li> </ul>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Libraries need to encourage young adults to use the facilities by whatever means possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialisation is important for those suffering with loneliness or mental health issues</li> <li>• The building and IT can be used to benefit the local community</li> </ul>
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## LOCAL DROP IN SESSIONS

Libraries ran drop-in sessions across all sites in November 2021 – January 2022. These sessions enabled the public to meet library staff to ask questions and talk about their concerns. The number of participants in these sessions was very low but that enabled some detailed discussions which mirrored the comments coming in through the digital survey.

A selection of the feedback comments, concerns and questions which were recorded by staff has been included below to give a feel for the conversations.

- Will people come in to use the library or just use the new service? Will it improve library use?
- Who will be in the library providing the service when library staff are doing outreach?
- Worry about ending up with just a central library, eventually these libraries will be transfer to the community.
- I don't use the libraries for books. Access to computers is lifesaving.
- I would like to see lots more library computers, could you put them in the club for example?
- Major concern – more and more being forced online, but so many people don't have smart phones/internet, council should be an analogue champion.
- Need to make sure that the library works with existing organisations, make sure they aren't doing the same things/same times.
- Worry about the quality of service.
- Concern for the staff. Don't want them to be demoted in any way from being library assistants, Don't want them to be treated as a standard 'council worker'. Would hate to lose the experience, knowledge of book stock, the customers.
- Want to improve use by elderly and by schools. Can we work more closely with care providers? To continue to work with jobseekers.
- Want to see more work with asylum seekers – libraries can be a safe, welcoming space. Once they get in on computers they would have access to other things.

- Concern about how busy it will be, will it be the calm welcoming place it is now, if it's jam packed with other users?
- Will the local history society still be able to meet? We don't want to alienate the people who already use the library!
- Happy to encourage use of the library by many more people but not if it means they are doing yoga or other non-library activities.
- Better marketing is needed. The library already does so much, residents need to be made aware.
- More keen for building to be used more when closed by different groups than one organisations.
- More cultural activities and heritage activities needed. Central areas get more cultural services in libraries and council buildings this should be able of the library service.
- Important it's still a Council run library - volunteer libraries don't offer as much
- Concern around current and possible future room hire rates / will groups be able to continue using building if another organisation comes in?
- Health advice sessions run currently and are really useful.
- Could we have a coffee machine, a Knit and Natter group, a men's group of some kind, a jigsaw group to combat isolation.
- Need an after-school club
- The library offers security, keeps people safe and warm. People don't just come in to borrow books. It is well used by the community.
- Happy for the library to work with a partner if we can offer confidential space. There are a lot of organisations based locally and must not impinge on their offer:
- Need Housing here once a week to access services
- Library needs to appeal to children and families as well as older people. Could we run more digital sessions?
- If stock is reduced please don't charge a reservation fee to bring things from elsewhere.
- Can we call these consultations 'Ideas for Change'. Consultation as a term leads everyone to assume closure.
- It sounds good to have voluntary sector organisations involved but they would like to see details and how it would work in practice.

## **CONNECTED VOICE FOCUS GROUPS**

Gateshead Council commissioned Connected Voice to consult residents in the borough on their proposal of working in partnership with local community and voluntary organisations to transform library buildings into 'community spaces'. Connected Voice used links with local community organisations to bring together focus groups of people who would be less likely to respond to the online consultation, and who in many cases were not currently users of the library service. This approach was taken to provide a sense check, to the wider survey which was overwhelmingly completed by existing Library users. Connected Voice ran 20 focus groups engaging a total of 152 Gateshead residents from a diverse demographic and range of protected characteristics.

In general, residents were supportive of the Council's proposal, suggesting this was a good time for library buildings to develop as community spaces. Those expressing concern over the proposal often did so as a caveat to their overall support, and complete opposition was held by very few residents. A significant number of residents were unsure of their response, with some struggling to fully comprehend the proposal.

Many of those who were unsure about the proposal cited development of volunteer libraries in 2013, which many suggested had been a downgrade in the level of service. While at face value, residents welcomed the proposal and provided many excitable discussions about new provision and activities, there was some suspicion around any further reductions in service from the Council.

Groups were mostly realistic about what the libraries can provide - many suggestions made were already part of the libraries provision but were not provided in the wider communities of Gateshead, where the libraries involved in the consultation are situated. There are also some common threads in new services that the libraries can provide.

Many respondents felt the libraries could do a better job of outreach and advertising in Gateshead.

Around 70% of those residents consulted did not currently make regular use of the library service (i.e. no use within the last three months). Of the 30% using the libraries, their most frequent uses of the library were for children's activities, or collecting books with their children

on the weekend, as well as some students and adults using libraries across Gateshead as a workspace.

Other usages by adults for resources such as local history and reading the newspapers were part of people's pre pandemic patterns of use. The majority of these residents felt that the frequency of their visits had decreased significantly since 2020 due to public health concerns and personal hesitancy around being in enclosed public spaces.

### **Is the proposal supported?**

#### **Support**

Residents who supported the proposal referenced the increase in local community groups set up over the last year and the need for those groups to have a physical meeting or event space which the libraries could provide.

Several residents suggested that isolation and lack of early prevention services (which Sure Start centres used to provide) is a worry and developing libraries as a more general community space could help to address.

Residents understood that digital technologies (audiobooks, internet, etc.) were making the traditional library service less widely used, and that changes may be needed to increase footfall.

Many residents begrudged the decrease in budget for culture and leisure services which are 'always the first to be hit' when cuts are made. However, in the same groups it was understood that this was a necessary action and could help local communities if done effectively.

A considerable amount of people within the focus groups were unsure of their response to the proposal. The idea of 'partnership arrangements with local community and voluntary organisations' was too abstract for many to engage with meaningfully.

Other residents wanted assurance that partner organisation(s) motivation for running library buildings was altruism not profit and would like kept up to date on who the Council is looking to work with. They were supportive of the proposal but cautious about how it should proceed.

#### **Objections**

Of the objections raised, the most persistent was the suggestion that this proposal would lead to a fracturing of the current service, making communication and partnership between the libraries

more difficult. “If all the libraries do not share values and policies then there is no consistency or connection within the service.”

Much of the negative sentiment was based around the transition of several libraries to being volunteer led in 2013. Most residents who cited this felt it was a move in the wrong direction, citing their own poor experiences with the volunteer libraries, or the lack of availability due to reduced and irregular opening hours. Residents appreciated the effort which volunteers make to keep the library service going, but felt they could not expect a consistent level of service from these volunteers – “It puts too much pressure on those who are willing to give their time.”

These residents were keen to insist that this should not happen again with the 2021/22 proposal. For many, mentioning ‘voluntary organisation’ equated to use of volunteers to run libraries again. A few voices across consultations expressed their strong desire to keep trained librarians in place and lose no further paid staff in this transition. One resident emphasised that librarians are an “invaluable resource, which no number of trained volunteers can replace”, and that they provide a ‘corporate memory’ which a good library service relies on.

Residents of Chopwell in particular expressed their wish to work with the Council on these changes, as they did not want any new provisions to clash with those of the Chopwell Community Association, which are well attended.

### **How else can the libraries be changed?**

#### **Accessibility**

*“Not just a quiet corner, but a noisy corner too”*

Some residents with learning disabilities suggested that the general perception of the library as a quiet space was off-putting. Libraries could provide a more welcoming reassurance to those with learning difficulties and others, who do not feel comfortable in a quiet space.

This could also be achieved by segmentation, an idea picked up on by residents consulted. By rearranging the spaces – providing quiet and social sections of the library – or segmenting the opening hours, “like at the swimming pools”, or a “quiet hour” such as offered by supermarkets to customers with autism. Residents across many demographics and protected characteristics expressed similar sentiments – that the arrival of new activities were welcome, but it will be important to preserve times when the library is a quiet and restful space.

Accessibility was a prime concern for elderly residents who suggested that no matter what activities were provided, they could not attend unless there were adequate transport links.

Young parents, and those concerned for them, were pleased with the library service and activities such as Rhymetime but did not always feel that it was an appropriate place to bring babies, particular at “that tricky age” where they become more noisy and disruptive.

### **Resources**

The older respondents made it clear that the most important aspect of the library was the friendliness of staff, and the atmosphere which this familiarity created. This is what brought them back to use the service repeatedly and they hope that the Council’s proposal would not impact negatively on this.

For some residents, with the continuation of remote working, and for university students, the library represented a valuable space to work freely, which could be replicated in the five libraries. The access to public computers and free Wi-Fi was a valued resource to residents across the borough.

A frequent point raised was that of opening hours. Many residents hoped the introduction of a partner organisation might help to maintain and even increase the current opening hours, to help reach those who held full time jobs or had caring responsibilities.

“There is a huge benefit to be had from a good kitchen.” Several residents advocated for the development of a kitchen in these five libraries, where possible, and expanded on how the kitchen could be used to open up the space to more varied activities, listed in the section below.

Another common recommendation was to establish stronger connections with local schools. Particularly in Chopwell, where the two institutions share a building, it was suggested that there is not enough interlinking between schools and the library. Many residents felt the more children could be led to the library on short ‘school trips,’ the better familiarised they will become with the space, making them more likely to return of their own volition later.

### **What services matter most to local communities?**

In almost all the consultations, the following activities were suggested:

- Coffee mornings – Valued because they provide an informal place for residents to meet and socialise. A significant number of residents expressed their desire for social spaces which were free or cheap to access.
- Wellbeing groups – Short and informal introductory mindfulness and meditation classes, such as those held at Gateshead Clubhouse currently.
- ‘Knit and natter’ – A popular suggestion. There is a sense that needlecrafts are increasingly popular and that a supervised, equipment provided, casual drop in session would be popular across many age groups.
- Toddler’s storytelling and Rhymetime were referenced by many residents as important to continue. Storytelling and writing groups were also suggested for adults seeking a creative outlet.
- There was also enthusiasm in many groups about bringing in speakers to the libraries for author talks, and local history talks. Some residents emphasised the need for more intergenerational events – “There is so much to learn about your local place” and without intergenerational conversation ‘stories get lost’.
- Exhibitions – another popular suggestion, with many suggesting that they would visit their local library, no matter how small the space, to see works by a local school or art group exhibited. Some suggested that visual and interactive exhibits were engaging for neurodivergent residents.
- Walking groups – some suggested that the libraries could be used as setting off points for walking groups, led by ornithologists, local historians etc.

Many of the libraries already run groups such as these, plus other services listed below. However, the level of response around this shows that there is still an appetite for these activities in libraries.

It was clear that many of the residents consulted did not know which services were already available at the libraries, pointing to the need for effective advertising/ reach.

### **Signposting service**

One of the repeated suggestions made by residents was in support of a signposting service. Many variations on this theme were suggested. The consensus was that residents should feel confident about being able to walk into a library and talk to a librarian, or other professional, who will signpost them to relevant local services on matters such as debt advice, housing support, domestic abuse, and more.

It was suggested that this could be a weekly, or monthly drop in service at the smaller libraries, so that those in the local communities have close access to in person help. This was highlighted as particularly important to elderly residents in the community who may struggle to travel large distances and use technology to access support.

### **Adult Learning**

Another common suggestion was making available adult learning classes in the five libraries. The suggestions within this included English classes for asylum seekers (something which the Comfrey Project are keen to help facilitate), as well as classes for those who struggled with literacy late in life due to lack of education or dyslexia.

This was highlighted as an important and sensitive issue “it is still an issue which many feel secretive about” and an empowering class would improve the lives and confidence of many residents if addressed.

Also suggested were classes for older people to improve their technological competency, as well as more advanced classes around coding. This could be applied for all ages but currently exists in the form of the ‘Coder Dojo’, a children’s educational group who met pre-pandemic at the Gateshead Central Library.

### **Family History**

Another recurring suggestion, particularly among older people, was genealogy classes. To have the assistance of an expert, helping residents across Gateshead to discover their family history would be a great service which, as with the others suggested here, could be ‘toured’ across the smaller libraries, or otherwise held at Central and co-ordinated transport be provided for those across the borough. One resident suggested the Tuesday sessions at St Mary’s Heritage Centre could be replicated in the library spaces across Gateshead.

### **Kitchen Activities**

Residents suggested the establishment of a kitchen for things like cookery demonstrations and lunch clubs. The Comfrey Project had found a great value in having a kitchen as it allowed people to visit knowing they would be fed, which proved a great incentive to visit.

A library kitchen could have the same success, allowing groups to form locally around food and cooking, providing low-cost meals to residents. This is an unusual idea for a library – the fact it came up a number of times suggests the prevalence of food poverty in the groups we consulted.

Central to all the above suggestions was the feeling that they should be provided, as best the Council and partner organisation can manage, to those outside of Central Gateshead and nearby to the five libraries set for transition, at as low a cost as is possible.

One resident involved in the running of a voluntary and community group expressed how individual groups in Gateshead can be protective and competitive about their services, suggesting that the libraries can, and should, counteract this by being ambassadors and a place for bringing together local services.

### **How can the Council reach its constituency?**

Concerns were raised in several meetings about the effectiveness of the current libraries' communication with local residents. As previously mentioned, the current activities listed on libraries websites were well received, but many did not know they were available at all, and others were concerned that the libraries would not reach enough residents to make their new services and activities viable.

Suggestions were made by those present, for how the libraries may increase their reach to Gateshead residents.

- Using the Council newsletter
- Circulating information about groups to existing newsletters
- Community pages on Facebook and Our Gateshead
- Non digital advertising is especially important – shop windows, town noticeboards, leaflets
- The same in schools, healthcare buildings, day centres
- Involving advertisements of library service in the Council's essential communications with residents – e.g. in the envelope with Council tax

It was raised that many groups such as asylum seekers, particularly those unfamiliar with the English language, do not feel 'welcomed' into the library space and might require more direct outreach via 'open days', as well as WhatsApp campaigns, and foreign language flyers.

The Comfrey Project themselves suggested that they would like to help the Council to facilitate increased engagement with these groups, citing that 'Language is the greatest barrier'. By using the five libraries as 'hubs' they could provide a friendly and local point of contact to many isolated residents, especially since transport can be especially difficult for those who do not have a grasp on the language and locality. The Kittiwake Trust, who have a large library of foreign

language books, were suggested as a group who could take their resources to the outer reaches of the borough in the five libraries set for transition.

The Gateshead Jewish Community Council expressed their wish to work with the Council on providing Labriut certified activities for the local community, to ensure that they are designed with Jewish cultural practices in mind (avoidance of violence in children's book readings, for example.) Culturally mixed activities can prove difficult due to antisemitism, which is felt at a constant low-lying level, especially considering the visible Jewish dress code.

### **Focus group conclusions**

We targeted residents who were not necessarily regular users of the library service currently. For this reason, their understanding of what was already provided in terms of library services across the borough was sometimes limited.

The perception that the current volunteer-run libraries have reduced provision was evident across the focus groups. This meant that there was a natural defensiveness to further proposed changes. However, once discussions started about the 'art of the possible', many of the groups came up with great suggestions for how to make these libraries more relevant for local people.

Provided that the Council can reassure the public that this is not a 'stop-gap solution' and a slide towards the complete loss of publicly owned libraries, the people we spoke to were mostly not opposed to a new model of delivering library services.

Residents were enthusiastic about the use of libraries as a community space and had many positive suggestions for how they could be developed and serve the local community.

### **Acknowledgment**

We wish to thank Connected Voice for their expertise in running focus groups with those who are less likely to engage with mainstream public consultation and for their clear observations on how the Council needs to improve the clarity of its consultation methodology in future.

## **Discussion**

The wide-ranging response to the public consultation has demonstrated the depth of feeling from Library users about how important Libraries are to them. Much of the service delivered in local libraries is valued and the residents who responded to the consultation would like it to continue.

There is a recognition from most respondents that there is a need to change the way that some library buildings are run in order to increase use of the building and in doing so try to ensure that the building remains a useful and viable asset in its community. The question 'what will libraries look like in 10 years' time?' is important and it is essential that this consultation is a part of the process to secure the form of a long-term library offer.

Those who did not positively endorse change indicated that they would like to understand more about what is proposed for individual sites and how that will impact on them.

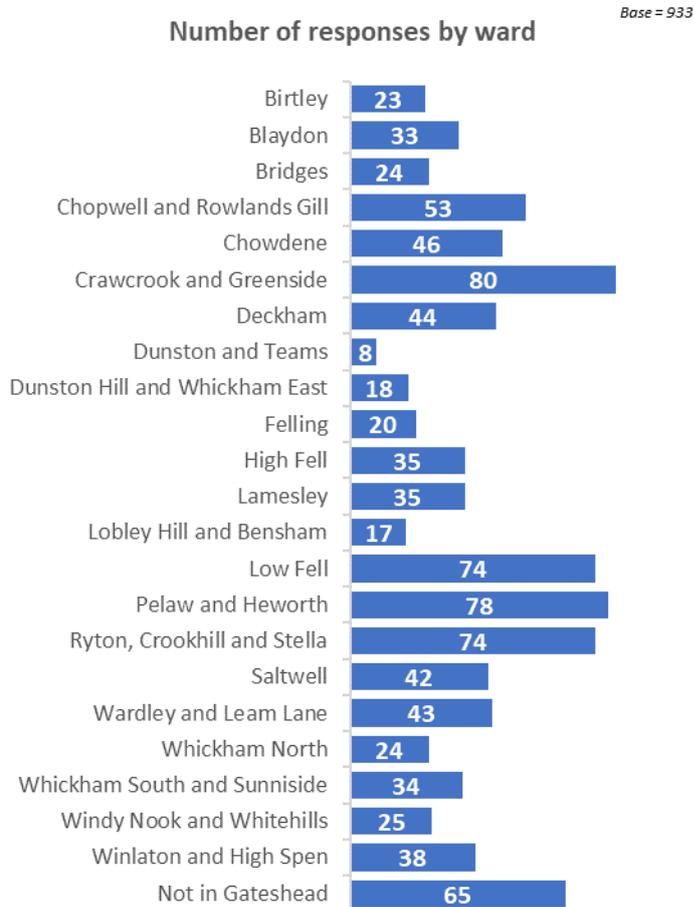
## **Next steps**

A report will be taken to Gateshead Council cabinet to feedback the findings of the public consultation

The library service will continue to reflect on the public feedback it has already received and where possible try to accommodate suggestions for change.

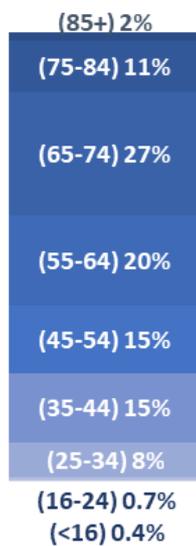
## Appendix 1.

### Profile of consultation respondents

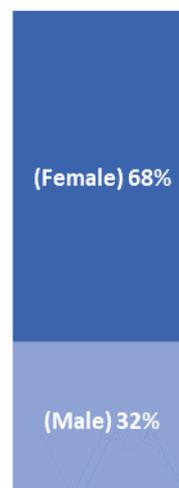


### Demographic profile

**Age of respondents** Base = 995

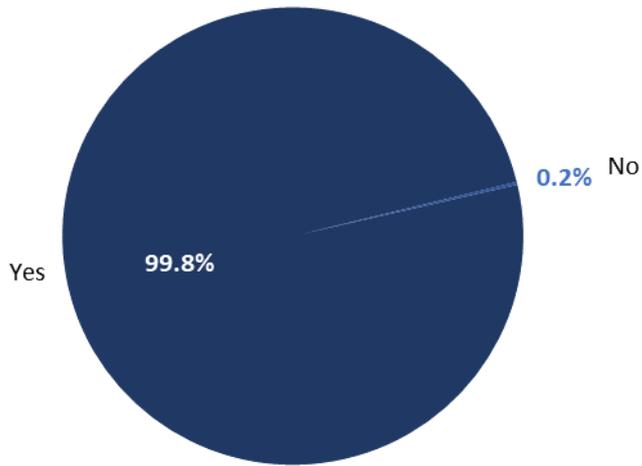


**Sex of respondents** Base = 969



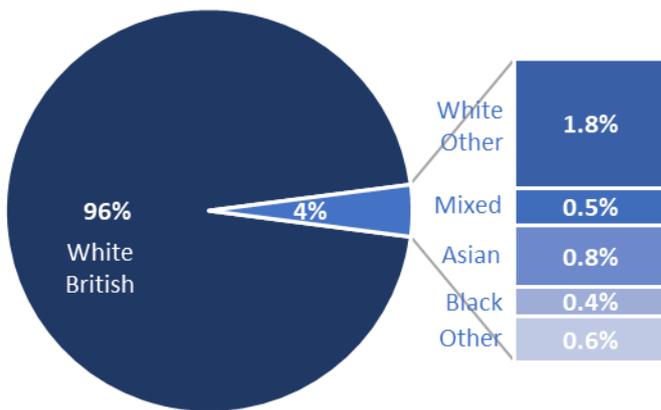
**Gender identity is the same as sex**

Base = 950



**Ethnic group of respondents**

Base = 970



**Respondents limited because of a physical or mental health condition**

Base = 953



**Respondent receives a means tested benefit**

Base = 935



## **Participating Organisations in the Connected Voice focus groups**

From 16th November 2021 to 20th January 2022, Connected Voice ran 20 focus groups totalling 152 Gateshead residents from a diverse demographic and a range of protected characteristics. The residents Connected Voice consulted are service users of one of the following 14 voluntary and community organisations:

1. Leam Lane Community Centre (Youth and community)
2. Your Voice Counts (x2 groups) (Learning disability)
3. Gateshead Jewish Community Council (Orthodox Jewish community advocacy)
4. Labriut (Orthodox Jewish community healthy living)
5. ReCoCo x2 groups (Mental health support)
6. Age UK Gateshead (Older people)
7. St Chads Community Project (Children and families)
8. The Comfrey Project (Refugees and people seeking asylum)
9. Chopwell Community Association x4 groups (Youth and community)
10. Gateshead Clubhouse (Mental health support)
11. Birtley Community Partnership (Community Support)
12. The Hop Garden (Community support)
13. Gem Arts (Ethnically minoritized communities arts development)
14. Lawnmowers Independent Theatre Company (Learning disability)

## Appendix 2. Consultation Questionnaire



# Gateshead Library Service Consultation 2021

In February 2021 Gateshead Council set its annual budget for 2021/22. To help balance the budget, councillors agreed to make savings of £1.2m from the Public Health and Wellbeing budget. A review of leisure, library and culture services is taking place to help make the savings.

Over the last year we have looked at these services and how they can help us deliver our Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It has given us the opportunity to see how we can target services towards communities who are most in need.

The Council wants to make sure that its buildings are used in the best way to support the local community. To help us to achieve this there is a need for some council buildings to become 'community spaces'. The Council is not proposing to close any library buildings as part of this consultation, we are proposing to change the way some buildings are used.

A 'community space' brings together council services, community organisations and neighbourhood groups. They offer a range of activities, programmes and services which reflect the needs of their local communities. They have an important social function as they bring together people from across the community. They help people feel less isolated and act as a safe space where anyone is welcome.

Library buildings are well placed geographically to become community spaces and the idea of them being community spaces is not new. People have a sense of trust with libraries.

Gateshead Council is considering entering into partnership arrangements with local voluntary organisations. The aim will be to change some existing library buildings into community spaces. Library functions will still be available but there will also be a wider use of the building by other organisations.

Each community space will be different. Services will vary from place to place and the needs of the local community will drive them.

We are looking for views on these proposals. We want views from residents, partners, stakeholders and non library users. The proposals will affect the following libraries:

- Chopwell
- Crawcrook
- Leam Lane
- Pelaw
- Wrekenton

## Section 1: Library Use

We would like to know how you currently use the Gateshead Library Service. Please consider everything the library service has to offer. This includes books, online resources, digital resources, collections, events and the café. If you are answering on behalf of an organisation, group or business, please answer for them rather than yourself.

**Q1. Do you have a membership card for Gateshead Libraries?** Please select one option only.

Yes  No  Don't know

**Q2. When did you last use a library building in Gateshead?**

Please select one option only.

In the last 5 years  More than 5 years ago  Never

**Q3. In the year before the Covid-19 pandemic, how often did you use any of the library services in Gateshead? At least...**

Please select one option only.

Daily (or every few days)   
Weekly   
Every 2 weeks   
Every 3 weeks   
Less often/occasionally   
I don't use the library service

**Q4. Have you used a library building for another purpose?**

*(e.g. to meet a friend, job coach, watch a performance, visit the gallery or shop etc.)*

Please select one option only.

Yes  No

**Q5. Which of the following aspects of the library service did you use in the year before the Covid-19 pandemic?**

Please tick all that apply.

Book borrowing e.g. fiction, non-fiction etc.   
Digital resources e.g. online collections, borrow box, online catalogue   
Other resources e.g. newspapers, magazines, CDs, DVDs etc.   
Collections e.g. local history   
Public access computer use or wi-fi   
Learning e.g. learn to use your tablet   
Room hire   
Events and activities e.g. rhyme time, art courses, reading clubs etc.   
Cafe, toilets, social space   
Other

Please tell us what you have used.

(Please continue on a separate sheet if required)

**Q6. Which of the following Gateshead libraries do you use? Please tick all that apply.**

**Council run libraries**

- Central
- Blaydon
- Crawcrook
- Birtley
- Leam Lane
- Pelaw
- Wrekenton
- Chopwell
- Readers at Home Library Service

**Volunteer libraries**

- Whickham
- Low Fell
- Rowlands Gill
- Dunston
- Winlaton
- Felling

**Q7. What would be your preferred time to visit a library? Please tick all that apply.**

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening

## Section 2: Future Vision

Gateshead, like everywhere, is changing. The number of library users and visitors continues to fall. Data tell us that young people and older retired people use libraries the most. Digital lending, which you can access anywhere, is also growing.

Our vision is that by transforming our library service, we will be able to sustain services in the long term. We want more people, who currently don't use libraries to access them. A different delivery model for libraries will help us to do this.

We hope that in the future our partners in the voluntary sector will manage some of the Gateshead library buildings as 'community spaces'.

In future, library staff will work from both council-run and voluntary sector managed libraries. We will also deliver library services in the community from non-traditional library facilities.

Voluntary sector partners will bring their expertise and specialisms to the 'community spaces'. This means that the type of service being offered from buildings will increase and we will meet more needs of local people.

The Council is not proposing to close any libraries as part of this consultation, we are proposing to change the way some buildings are used. You will still be able to access a library service from the building but there will be other things on offer as well.

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**Q8. Do you support the proposal for partner organisations to manage some of our library buildings in the future?**

Please select one option only.

Yes  No  No opinion

**Q9. Please use the box below to detail any alternative suggestions you may have about how the buildings at Chopwell, Crawcrook, Pelaw, Leam Lane or Wrekenton might be changed to encourage greater use.**

*(Please do not provide any personal details in your response)*

*(Please continue on a separate sheet if required)*

**Q10. Please use the box below to tell us what services or activities you would want to be provided in the library buildings at Chopwell, Crawcrook, Pelaw, Leam Lane or Wrekenton in the future.**

*(Please do not provide any personal details in your response)*

(Please continue on a separate sheet if required)

## **Section 3: Potential Impacts and Alternatives**

**Q11. Please use the box below to describe the potential impacts that changing the way that library services are delivered could have on you (or your constituency, organisation, group or business).**

*(Please do not provide any personal details in your response)*

(Please continue on a separate sheet if required)

**Q12. If you have any further comments relating to this consultation, please summarise these in the box below.**

*(Please do not provide any personal details in your response)*

(Please continue on a separate sheet if required)

## Section 4: About you - organisation, groups or businesses

**Q13. Do you currently work or volunteer for the Gateshead Library Service or Gateshead Council?**

Please select one option only.

Yes  No

**Q14. Are you responding to this consultation...?**

Please select one option only.

- As an individual (please skip to Section 5)
- As an elected representative (please skip to Section 6)
- On behalf of an organisation, group or business (please skip to Section 7)

## Section 5: About you - Individual respondents

Gateshead Council is committed to improving its services, eliminating unlawful discrimination, and promoting equality of opportunity for all people. The following questions are optional, but we would be grateful if you could answer to help us understand the views of, and potential impacts on, different areas and groups of people within Gateshead.

**Q15. What is your postcode?**

**Q16. Do you access the internet using...? Please tick all that apply.**

- A fixed connection (e.g. home broadband connection/wi-fi)
- Mobile data (e.g. data allowance on a smartphone/device)
- None of these

**Q17. What is your age? Please select one option only.**

- Under 16  16 to 24  25 to 34  35 to 44  45 to 54
- 55 to 64  65 to 74  74 to 84  85 and over
- Prefer not to say

**Q18. What is your sex? Please select one option only.**

Male  Female  Prefer not to say

**Q19. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?**

Please select one option only.

Yes  No  Please tell us your gender identity

Prefer not to say

**Q20. What is your ethnic group?**

**Please select one option only.**

- White British     White other     Mixed     Asian     Black   
Other     Prefer not to say

**Q21. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last at least 12 months?**

**Please select one option only.**

- Yes, a lot     Yes, a little     Not at all     Prefer not to say

**Q22. Are there any children or young people aged under 16 living in your household (including yourself)?**

**Please select one option only.**

- Yes, aged 0 to 4     Yes, aged 5 to 8     Yes, aged 9 to 11   
Yes, aged 12 to 15     No     Prefer not to say

**Q23. To help us understand more about the people who use our libraries and their needs, please can you tell us if you receive a means tested benefit?'**

- Yes     No     Prefer not to say

## **Section 6: About you - Democratically Elected Representatives**

If you are responding as a Democratically Elected Representative, the name and details of the constituency or ward you represent may appear in the final report, and the information you provide may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure regimes such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

**Q24 Which constituency or ward do you represent?**

**Constituency**

- Blaydon   
Gateshead   
Jarrow

**Ward**

- Birtley   
Blaydon   
Bridges   
Chopwell and Rowlands Gill

- Chowdene
- Crawcrook and Greenside
- Deckham
- Dunston and Teams
- Dunston Hill and Whickham East
- Felling
- High Fell
- Lamesley
- Lobley Hill and Bensham
- Low Fell
- Pelaw and Heworth
- Ryton, Crookhill and Stella
- Saltwell
- Wardley and Leam Lane
- Whickham North
- Whickham South and Sunnyside
- Windy Nook and Whitehills
- Winlaton and High Spen

## Section 7: About you - On behalf of an organisation, group or business

If you are responding officially, the name and details of the organisation, group or business you represent may appear in the final report, and the information you provide may be subject to publication or release to other parties or to disclosure regimes such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

### Q25 Please provide details about the organisation, group or business that you represent:

The name of the organisation, group or business:

The postcode of the organisation, group or business:

Your name:

Your position in the organisation, group or business:

**Q26 Which of these describes the function of your organisation, group or business?**

**(Please choose one option)**

- Nursery or pre-school, school, college or place of education
- Local authority (e.g. county, district, parish, town or borough council)
- Other public sector organisation (e.g. Police, Fire, Health Authority)
- Local business or business representative (e.g. BID)
- Not-for-profit charity, voluntary or local community group
- Organisation working with vulnerable adults
- Organisation working with vulnerable children
- Other *(Please write in the box below)*

**Completed forms should be posted to:**

**Gateshead Central Library  
Prince Consort Road,  
Gateshead,  
NE8 4LN**

Alternatively, there are sealed return boxes located in all libraries for your convenience.

Thank you for completing this form. Your views will help us shape library services in future.

**Your completed form must be returned by Friday 16 January 2022.**