Brighton & Hove City Council Sustainability Plan for Libraries

Summary of public consultation responses 2025

Why we held a public consultation

In July 2025, City councillors agreed to hold a public consultation on the proposed closure of 3 community libraries and changes to the opening hours of Jubilee and Hove libraries.

These proposals were part of a wider strategic plan for Brighton & Hove libraries, which included the introduction of customer service points earlier this year and some reductions in vacant staff posts.

The consultation invited views on whether the library spaces proposed for closure could continue to be provided through a different operating model, for example transfer to a community or voluntary sector organisation.

The wider plan aims to ensure Brighton & Hove City Council maintains a sustainable and affordable library service across the city, particularly focused on serving those in greatest need. If agreed, these proposals would maintain 10 libraries across Brighton & Hove.

The proposed changes to library services in Brighton & Hove covered in this public consultation were:

- Closing Hollingbury, Rottingdean and Westdene libraries

- Reducing the opening hours of Jubilee Library by 2 hours on Monday evenings and by 3 hours on Sunday afternoons

- Reducing the hours of Hove Library by 2 hours on Wednesday evenings and by 3 hours on Saturday afternoons

Officers considered a number of factors when looking at the libraries proposed for closure, based on their use and the needs of the communities in the areas they serve.

This included an analysis based on economic activity and receipt of benefits and free school meals to prioritise areas in most need, as well as each library's usage, the proximity of alternative community libraries and operational costs.

The proposed changes at Jubilee and Hove libraries reflect the times when the fewest people access them.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport requires a public consultation for any proposals that reduce or significantly change statutory library services.

How the consultation ran

The consultation ran for a period of 12 weeks from 18 July - 10 October 2025.

The consultation included:

- A survey open to anyone, hosted on the council's YourVoice website, open from 18 July until 10 October 2025. The survey was available online and in paper format from libraries.
- 2 publicly advertised online consultation meetings held in July and October.
- 3 drop-in sessions at Hollingbury, Rottingdean Westdene Libraries
- 4 in-person consultation meetings spread throughout the time period - 2 planned for Jubilee Library and Hove Town Hall, 2 added in response to high levels of interest at Westdene Primary School (on the same site as Westdene Library) and St Margaret's C of E Primary School (near to Rottingdean Library).

There was a general email address available for questions and representations – libraries.consultation@brighton-hove.gov.uk plus residents submitted Member enquiries and enquiries to the Customer Feedback Team. During the consultation, a number of FOI requests were also made.

A Young People's Guide and an Easy Read Guide to the consultation were created and made available on the Your Voice platform alongside the survey and proposal documents. The availability of the information in accessible formats was also promoted.

Consultation marketing and engagement

The consultation and associated survey were publicised (via flyers, posters, stickers, digital screens and word of mouth) in Libraries, at Council Help Desks, the Homelessness Help Desk and Family Hubs. Publicity was also supported by local organisations and businesses, particularly those in close proximity to the affected library branches.

Council and Libraries' social media accounts were also used to share the information.

Tannoy announcements were made at Jubilee during the proposed affected hours to increase visibility of the consultation and staff engaged in person with customers, raising awareness of the proposals and promoting the survey.

Library user stakeholder engagement

Targeted communication and engagement was made with regular library users who book rooms and/or meet in libraries. This included the citywide library network of book groups and community groups that meet regularly in libraries. This enabled groups who may be directly impacted to have the opportunity to consider and respond to the proposals.

Wider stakeholder engagement

Over 100 local stakeholder / community organisations were contacted with information about the proposals and survey and were invited to share a response as an organisation or group directly via the consultation email address or to complete the survey. Stakeholders were also asked to share details of the proposals and the survey/meetings and email address with their networks - a wide range of residents from across the city, including young people, those living with disabilities, those at risk of digital exclusion, Black and Racially Minoritised diasporas, older people, care leavers, the LGBTQ+ community, those with neurodivergence, low-income families and those experiencing mental health issues, reaching communities all across the city. A follow-up reminder email was sent to all stakeholders halfway through the consultation period.

City schools were informed via the city's schools bulletin and an accompanying article. Schools closest to libraries affected by the proposals were contacted directly by the Libraries' Senior Management Team with the offer of additional support to enable pupils' and teachers and school staffs' engagement with the consultation.

Councillors and officers met with a range of stakeholder groups on request, including Rottingdean Parish Council, the Save Our Library (Rottingdean) campaign, Old Boat Corner Community Centre and Westdene Primary School.

A range of visits were also made by library staff to community groups, including the Network of International Women, StoryTree and the Social Prescribers Forum to give additional support to engage with the consultation.

Responsive marketing throughout consultation period

Monitoring data received via the survey and the level of email responses were both evaluated throughout the period. As of 9th September, only 6% of respondents that shared monitoring info were from Black and Racially Minoritised backgrounds – this was not representative of the fact that 26% of the city's residents are from Black and Racially Minoritised backgrounds (Census 2021).

Partner organisations and colleagues were proactively approached for support to ensure the range of voices heard were as diverse as possible.

Additional online marketing that features more diverse imagery (of real library customers) was created to support engagement with Black and Global Majority residents on the proposals.

At the consultation conclusion, 12% of respondents identified as being from a Black or Racially Minoritised background.

How people responded to the consultation

2711 completed responses were made to the YourVoice survey – it was possible for individuals to submit multiple entries

164 emails were sent to the consultation email address which have been accepted as responses to the consultation

1 formal member enquiry was received during the consultation

374 people engaged with 9 public consultation meetings, online and in person

Summary of the consultation

Explanatory note:

This report provides a summary overview of responses received to the public consultation. It includes a summary analysis of the Your Voice survey, of the emails received directly to

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the council, of group/organisational responses, and a summary of the comments/questions raised at the meetings facilitated by the council.

The full raw data from the survey, the emails and letters cannot be shared publicly because they could contain personal and sensitive information which might identify the consultee and which the council is therefore not able to put into the public domain.

Please note that AI has been used to support the summary analysis of the free text responses to the YourVoice survey. Officers have read all individual responses, and AI has been used to support the collation of themes and summaries.

Survey Responses

A total of 2711 people responded to the online survey. All responses were anonymous, and we encouraged views from both users and non-users of Brighton & Hove libraries services.
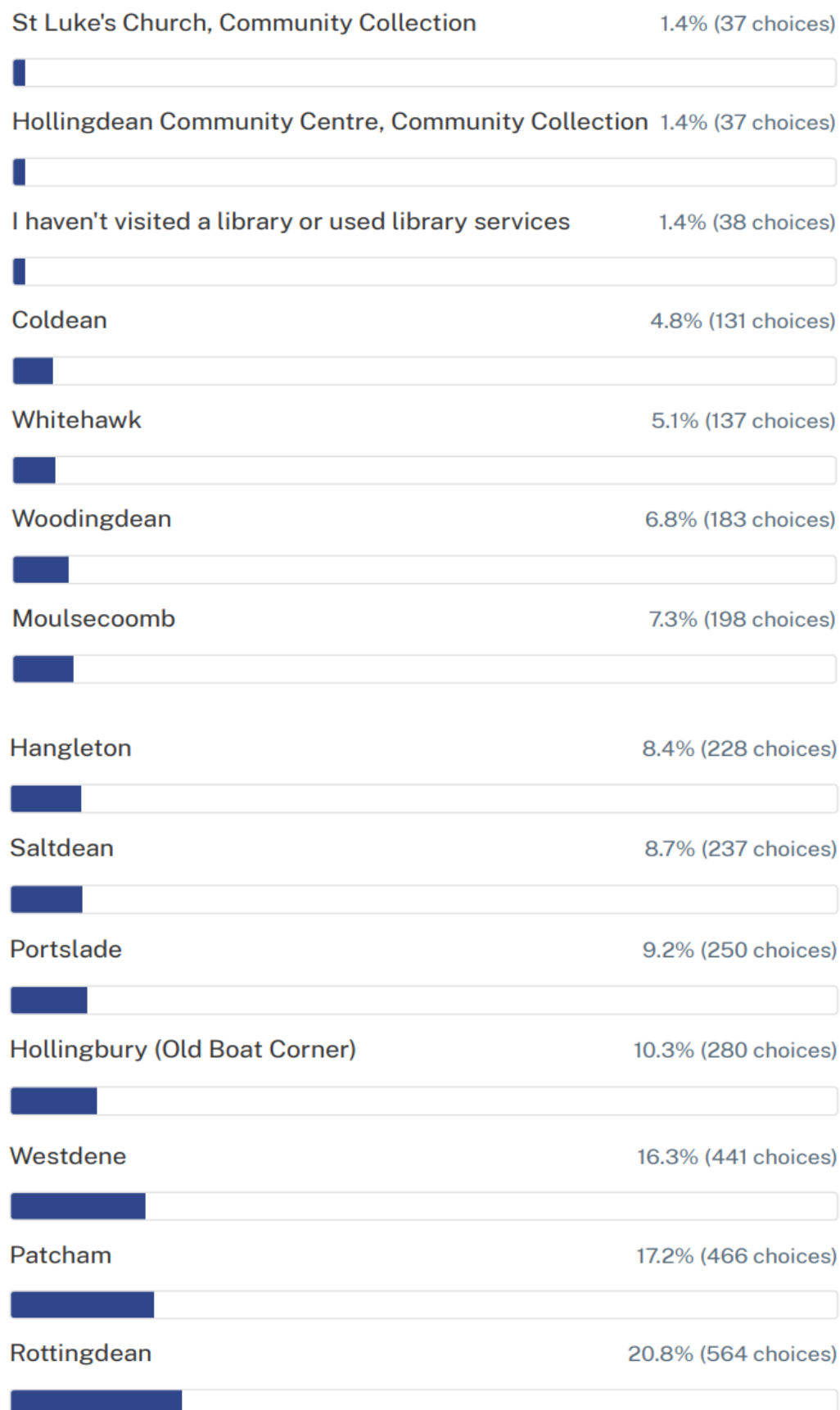
This section addresses each individual survey question, providing a summary of responses and descriptive statistics where appropriate.
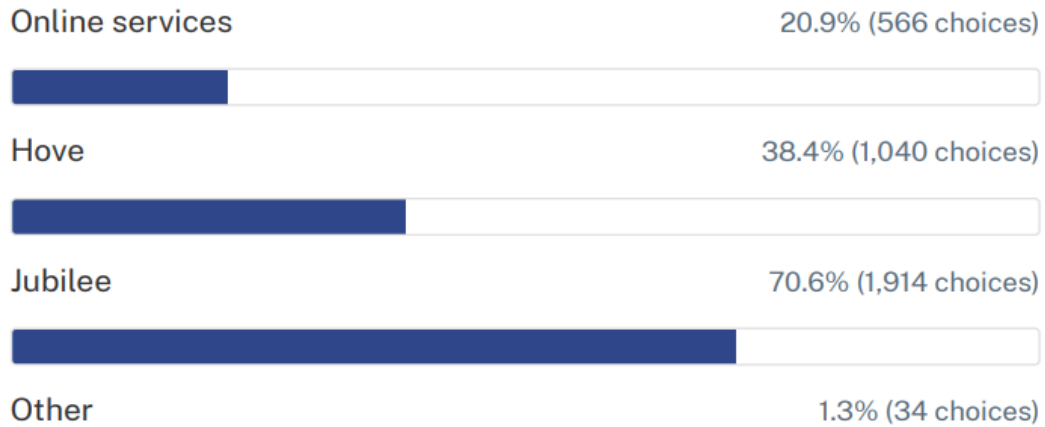
Q1. Which libraries and services have you used in the past 12 months?

A range of checkboxes were offered and there was no limit to the number of boxes responders could tick. Options included Community Collections at St Luke's Church and Hollingdean Community Centre, as well as Equal Access, Home Delivery and online services. There was also the option to declare that the respondent does not use library services.

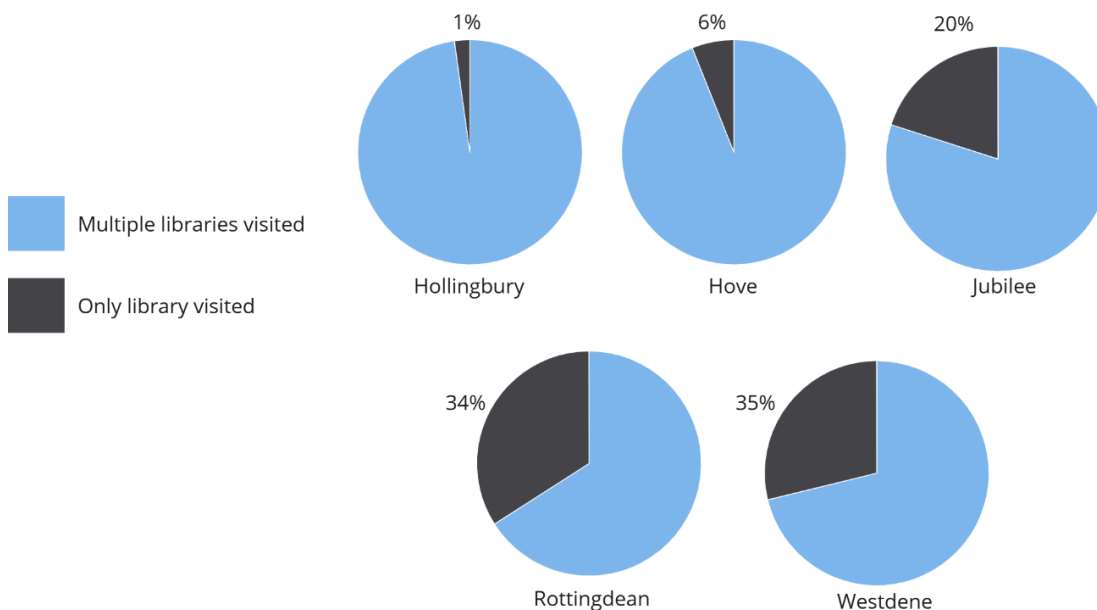2711/2711 - Multiple choice - choose many - required

Equal Access Service to residential homes   0.5% (13 choices)

Home delivery service   1% (27 choices)

St Luke's Church, Community Collection — 1.4% (37 choices)

Hollingdean Community Centre, Community Collection — 1.4% (37 choices)

I haven't visited a library or used library services — 1.4% (38 choices)

Coldean — 4.8% (131 choices)

Whitehawk — 5.1% (137 choices)

Woodingdean — 6.8% (183 choices)

Moulsecoomb — 7.3% (198 choices)

Hangleton — 8.4% (228 choices)

Saltdean — 8.7% (237 choices)

Portslade — 9.2% (250 choices)

Hollingbury (Old Boat Corner) — 10.3% (280 choices)

Westdene — 16.3% (441 choices)

Patcham — 17.2% (466 choices)

Rottingdean — 20.8% (564 choices)

Online services	20.9% (566 choices)

Hove	38.4% (1,040 choices)

Jubilee	70.6% (1,914 choices)

Other	1.3% (34 choices)

'Other' locations and services can be categorised as follows:

- Repeats of libraries already listed and chosen
- Other locations such as 'Rottingdean Gallery' and 'The Grange'
- Libraries outside of the authority (elsewhere in South East and UK)
- 'Reserving books'
- Council Help Desks
- School libraries
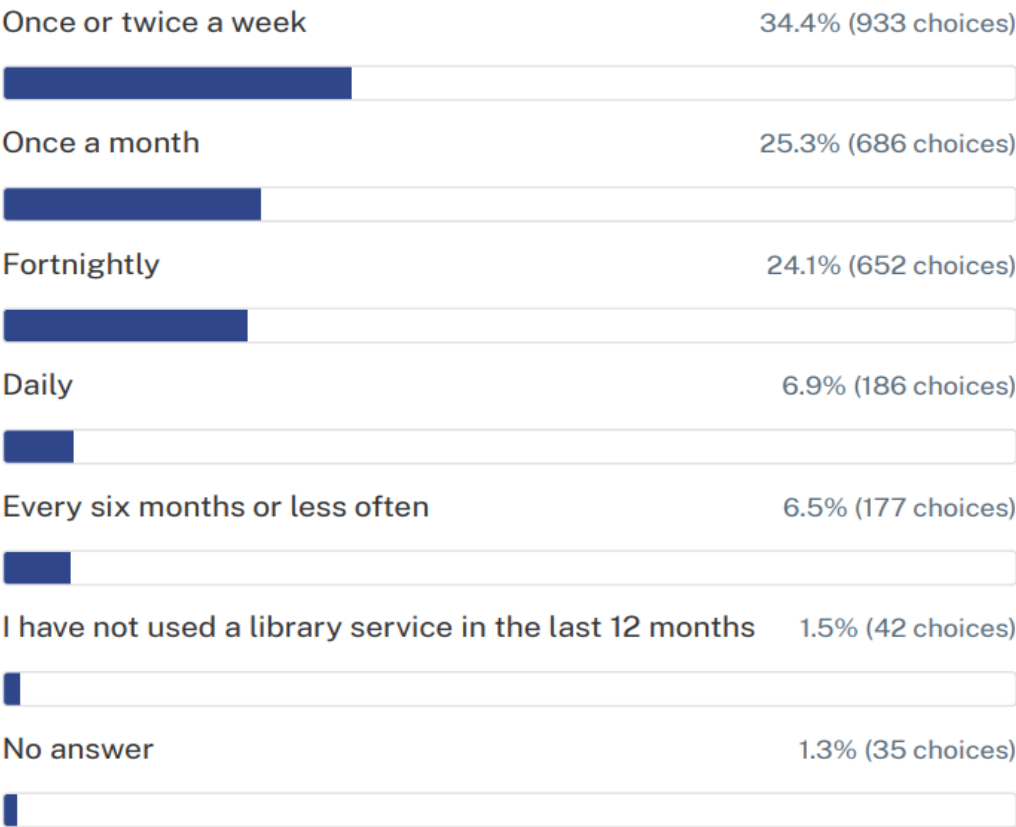- Libraries Extra
- Specific online services such as 'Borrowbox'

Single site use vs multiple site use in areas affected by the proposals

Among respondents who reported visiting the areas affected by the proposals, the proportion who had used only one specific library in the past year varied significantly between branches — from just 1% of Hollingbury users to 35% of Westdene users exclusively using that branch.

Multiple libraries visited

Only library visited

Hollingbury 1%

Hove 6%

Jubilee 20%

Rottingdean 34%

Westdene 35%

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Q2. On average, how often do you use Brighton & Hove libraries? (optional)

2676/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Once or twice a week   34.4% (933 choices)

Once a month   25.3% (686 choices)

Fortnightly   24.1% (652 choices)

Daily   6.9% (186 choices)

Every six months or less often   6.5% (177 choices)

I have not used a library service in the last 12 months   1.5% (42 choices)

No answer   1.3% (35 choices)

Q3. How long do you spend in Brighton & Hove libraries on an average visit? (optional)

2640/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Between 1 and 2 hours   44% (1,194 choices)

Less than an hour   34.7% (940 choices)

Between 2 and 4 hours   13.2% (359 choices)

More than 4 hours   3.2% (86 choices)

No answer   2.6% (71 choices)

The whole day   1.8% (48 choices)

Other   0.5% (13 choices)
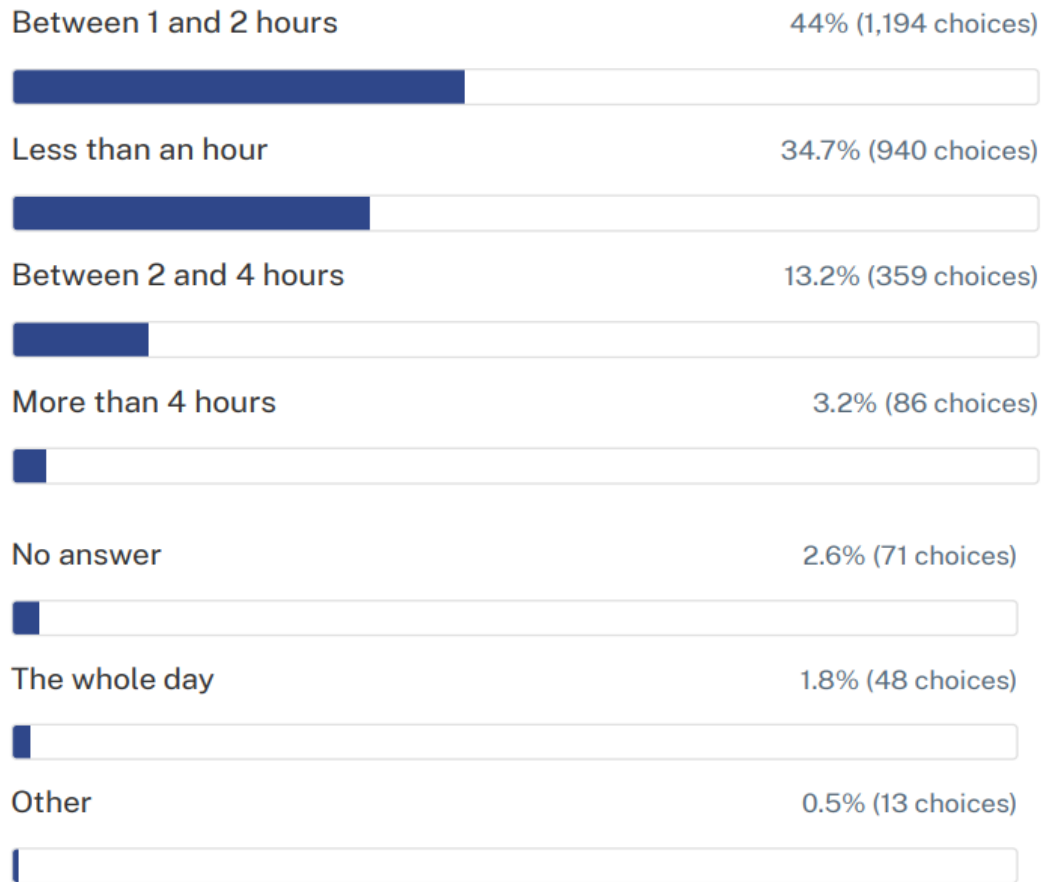
Q4. How do you usually travel to the library you visit most in Brighton & Hove? (optional)

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2654/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Walk — 61.9% (1,678 choices)

Bus — 19.1% (519 choices)

Car — 10.5% (284 choices)

Cycle — 5.4% (146 choices)

No answer — 2.2% (59 choices)

Other — 0.9% (25 choices)
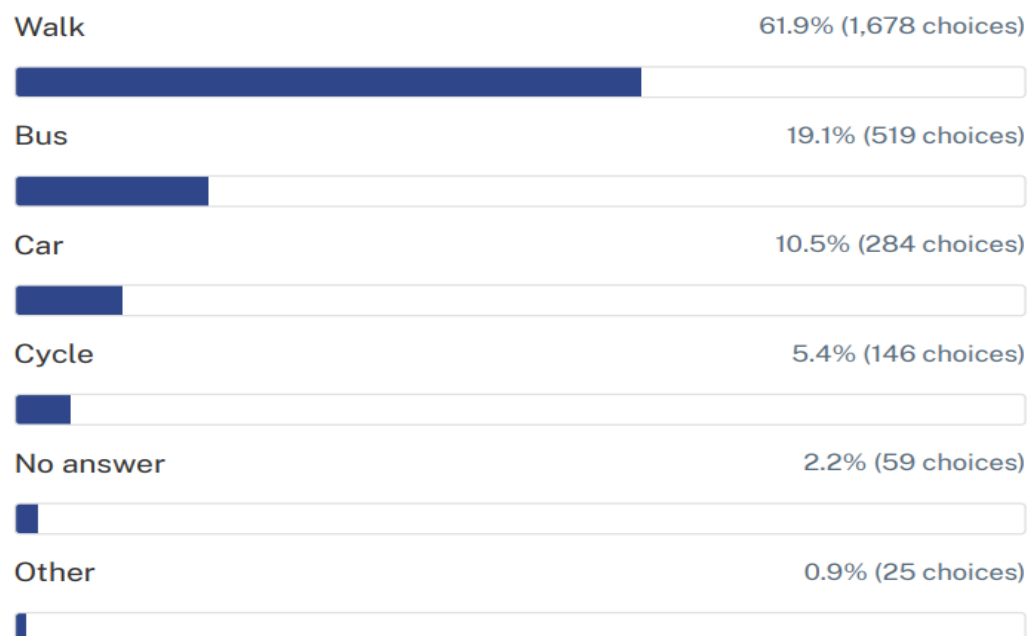
The majority of those who chose 'other' travel by train. A few respondents travel by wheelchair, mobility scooter or taxi. One respondent travels by broomstick.

Q5. Which of the following library services have you used in the last 12 months? (optional)

Respondents were given the option to tick as many services as they liked, as well as the chance to specify other service aspects not listed.

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No answer — 1.9% (52 choices)

Business and careers information including the Business and IP Centre (BIPC) — 3.8% (103 choices)

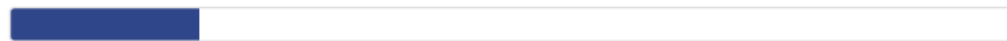Using the meeting or conference rooms — 4.8% (129 choices)

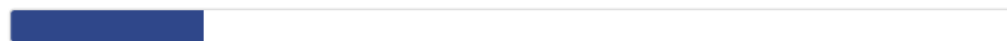Visiting the Council Help Desk — 4.9% (133 choices)
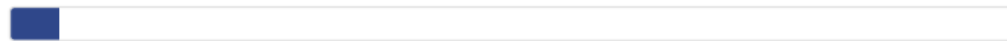
Playing board games and puzzles — 10.8% (292 choices)

Keeping warm and safe — 18.8% (510 choices)

Borrowing electronic items e.g. eBook, eAudiobook, eComic or eMagazine — 19.2% (521 choices)

Using online resources — 23.9% (649 choices)

Attending an event or activity — 25.5% (691 choices)
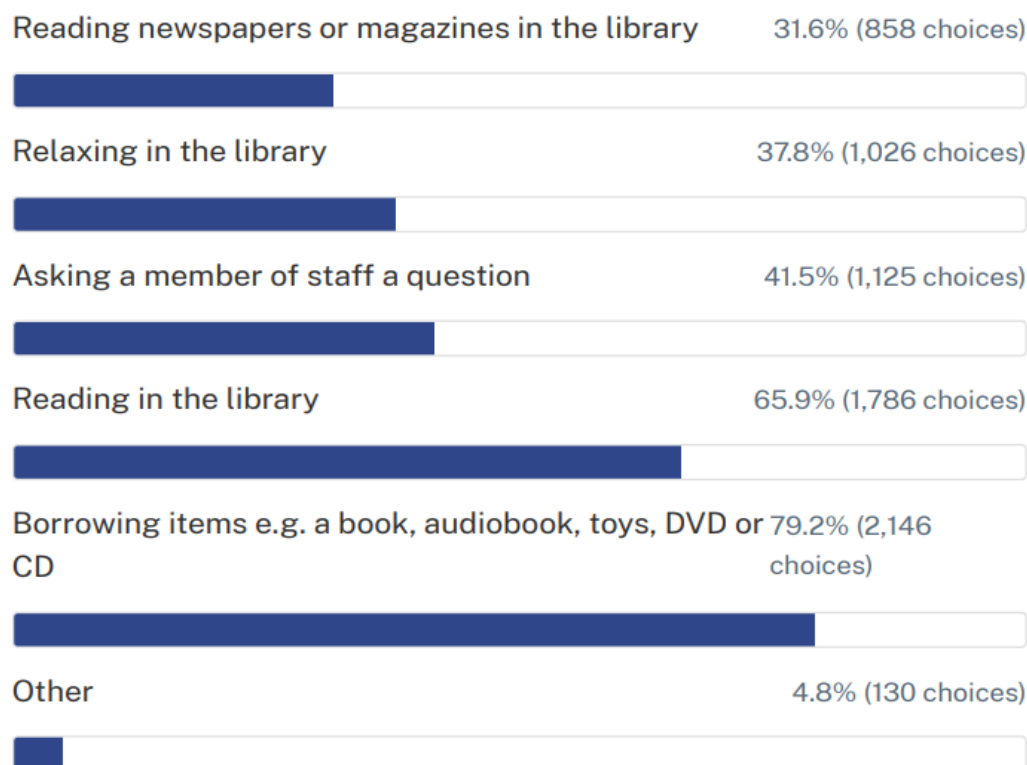
Looking up information — 26.4% (717 choices)

Using computers and printing — 28% (760 choices)

Using wifi — 30.2% (818 choices)

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Reading newspapers or magazines in the library — 31.6% (858 choices)

Relaxing in the library — 37.8% (1,026 choices)

Asking a member of staff a question — 41.5% (1,125 choices)

Reading in the library — 65.9% (1,786 choices)

Borrowing items e.g. a book, audiobook, toys, DVD or CD — 79.2% (2,146 choices)

Other — 4.8% (130 choices)

The answers of respondents who chose 'other' can be categorised as follows (in order from most to least cited):

- Baby changing
- Playing with and reading to children
- Using the toilet
- Using the cafe (Jubilee)
- Meeting with a Library Connect volunteer (computer support)
- Revising
- Breastfeeding
- Sheltering from bad weather
- Attending social groups and events
- Paid employment in a library

Q6. Why do you not use library services? (optional)

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If respondents said that they did not use library services in the last year, we wanted to know more about why. Respondents could tick all that applied or specify another reason.

1911/2711 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Not applicable - I do use library services   66% (1,790 choices)

No answer   29.5% (800 choices)

I don't need to use the services libraries provide   1.3% (35 choices)

The opening hours do not suit me   0.7% (19 choices)

I don't know what services there are   0.7% (18 choices)

I use a different library authority   0.6% (15 choices)

I cannot travel to any library   0.4% (12 choices)
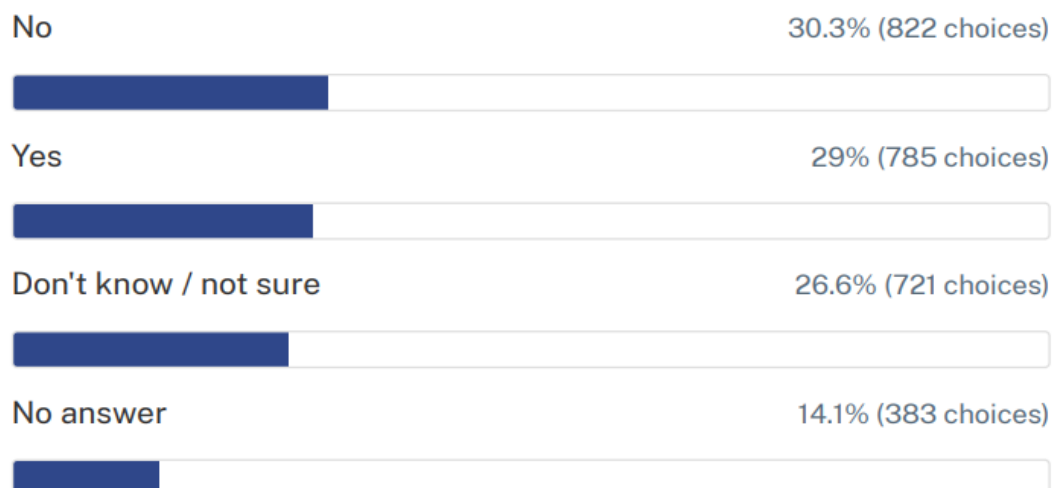
Other   1.2% (32 choices)

32 respondents shared detailed qualitative information about their reasons for not visiting libraries, categorised as follows (in order from most to least cited):

- Being too busy / no time to read
- Haven't used since children were younger
- Transport/travel issues
- Technical issues with cards (Libraries Extra)
- Insufficient lighting in buildings
- Ideological disagreement with some of the stock on offer
- Not permitted to bring pet into libraries
- Out of the 'habit'
- Live outside of the area

Q7. Can you access those or other alternative libraries? (optional)

Respondents were given a list of nearest alternative libraries to those proposed for closure before answering this question.

2353/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

No   30.3% (822 choices)

Yes   29% (785 choices)

Don't know / not sure   26.6% (721 choices)

No answer   14.1% (383 choices)

Q8. If you can't access alternative libraries or if you have concerns about accessing alternative libraries, please tell us why. (optional)

This free text question was answered by 38% of respondents.

The most cited concerns relating to access were for those living with disabilities and for families for whom the library is on their route home from school.
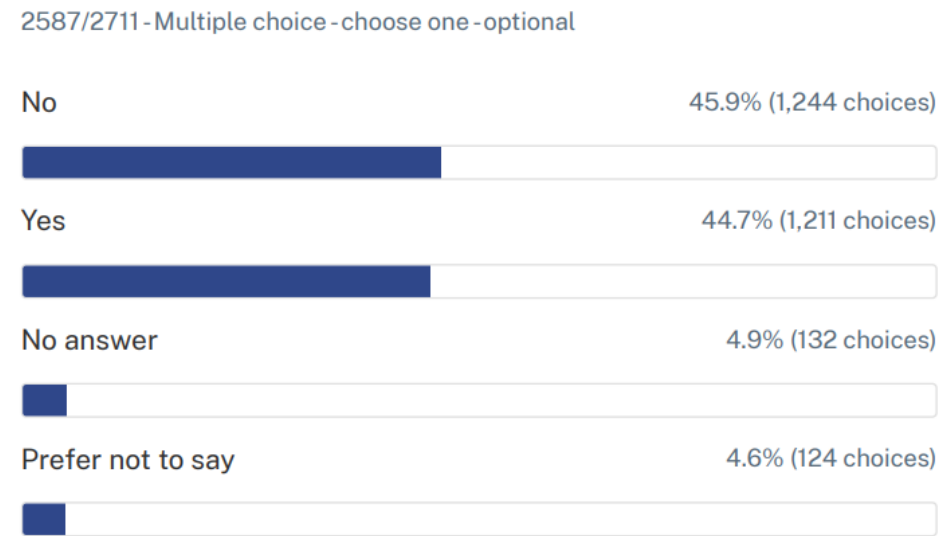
Concerns were also expressed about financial constraints and public transport costs, as well as the inconvenience of traveling longer distances to reach another library.

Respondents living with a disability said they would find accessing alternative libraries via public transport very challenging. Some of those who state they could make the journey by public transport fed back that their disability would mean they were unable to carry books home on the bus. Some highlighted the fact that their library offers the only accessible public toilet in their area. While some would consider driving to the next available library, parking is cited as a barrier to this (the example of limited spaces in the on-site car park at Patcham being given by multiple respondents).

Parents with young children highlight the difficulty of traveling to alternative libraries, especially when they rely on walking or public transport. They mention that using a car daily is not feasible due to climate change concerns and financial constraints. The comments also stress the importance of libraries being within walking distance, as they are often used for after-school visits and are integral to the daily routines of families.

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Many comments moved beyond the scope of the question on access, to reflect a deep and broad concern about the potential closure of local libraries, emphasizing their importance as vital community resources.

Q9. Do you use Libraries Extra at any libraries? (optional)

2587/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

No	45.9% (1,244 choices)

Yes	44.7% (1,211 choices)

No answer	4.9% (132 choices)

Prefer not to say	4.6% (124 choices)

Q10. If you don't use Libraries Extra, please tell us why. (optional)

This free text question was answered by 25% of respondents.

The trend in responses is that most people do not use Libraries Extra because they are unaware of it. Many also said they had heard of it but were not sure what it was or how to sign up for it.

A significant number of respondents stated they do not need to use Libraries Extra because their needs are met during regular staffed hours or at libraries (Jubilee or Hove were both cited here) that have good opening times. Some haven't needed to use it yet or haven't got around to registering. A small number cited technical issues as a barrier to using Libraries Extra. Another common theme is that Libraries Extra is not available at the libraries respondents use most often (namely, Jubilee and Hove).
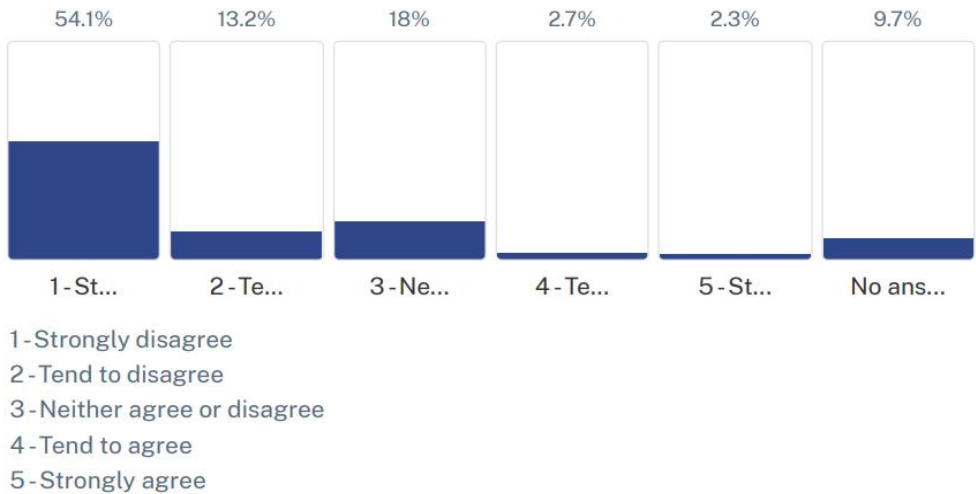
Safety and comfort concerns about being in an unstaffed library were raised by several respondents and were more likely to be raised amongst older respondents or those living with a disability.

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Older respondents were more likely to report that they prefer to visit the library on staffed days. As well as citing safety as a reason for this, they also cite concern for the impact on staff employment and the loss of the social/community aspect of libraries.

Those respondents who do use Libraries Extra express that they find it useful but even among respondents who are users, there is still a preference for staffed hours. Technical issues are cited by some as being off-putting.

Q11. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close Hollingbury Library? (optional)

2447/2711 - Linear scale - optional

54.1%	13.2%	18%	2.7%	2.3%	9.7%
1 - St...	2 - Te...	3 - Ne...	4 - Te...	5 - St...	No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q12. If Hollingbury Library was to close, do you have any comments or suggestions for alternative ways to deliver local library services? We welcome comments from community groups interested in working with us to deliver local library services. (optional)

This free text question was answered by 17% of respondents.

Most respondents highlight their strong opposition to the proposed closure of Hollingbury Library, emphasising its vital role as a community hub, especially for children and low-income families. Some respondents cite that they and their families would have no other way to access books if the library closed, due to the expense of bus travel to alternatives and the terrain between them making walking with children challenging.

Summary of suggestions for alternatives to closure shared during the consultation:

- Reinstating a mobile library service to serve those unable to travel to other branches

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- Using volunteers or community groups to staff or help run the library, sometimes alongside paid staff

- Expanding Libraries Extra or open access hours but ensuring self-service facilities work

- Partnering with local businesses, schools, cafes, or other community venues to host book collections within them

- Offering the Home Delivery Service for those unable to travel

- Better promotion and marketing of the library

- Seeking alternative funding sources such as sponsorships or grants

- Reducing opening hours at larger libraries or cutting other council services instead

- Working with bus company to improve transport links between Hollingbury and Patcham

Q13. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close Rottingdean Library? (optional)

2480/2711 - Linear scale - optional
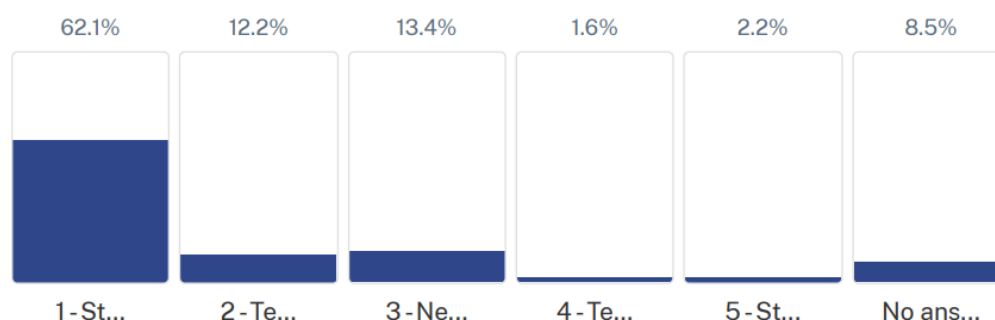
62.1%	12.2%	13.4%	1.6%	2.2%	8.5%
1 - St...	2 - Te...	3 - Ne...	4 - Te...	5 - St...	No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q14. If Rottingdean Library was to close, do you have any comments or suggestions for alternative ways to deliver local library services? We welcome comments from community groups interested in working with us to deliver local library services. (optional)
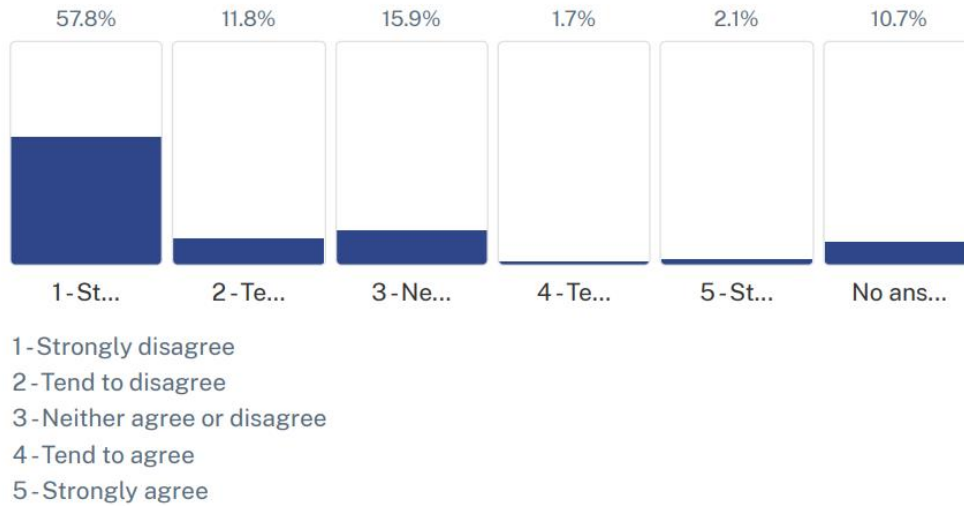
This free text question was answered by 19% of respondents.

The overwhelming majority of respondents strongly oppose the closure of Rottingdean Library. Many highlighted the library's importance for education, literacy, social connection, and as a safe, free public space. There is widespread concern that closure would disproportionately impact those unable to travel to alternatives, such as the elderly, disabled, and families with young children. A few respondents mention using Saltdean Library as a viable alternative, but many state it is not easily accessible for Rottingdean residents.

Suggestions for alternatives to closure:

- Use volunteers or seek support from groups such as Rottingdean Heritage to run the library (though some respondents recognise this is not a substitute for professional library staff)
- Reducing staffed hours and increasing Libraries Extra hours at Rottingdean Library
- Reducing staffed hours across other/all community libraries to avoid closure of Rottingdean Library
- Offering mobile library services or home delivery for those unable to travel
- Reconsider spending priorities and look for savings elsewhere rather than closing libraries
- Charge for entrance to libraries in the way museums do

Q15. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to close Westdene Library? (optional)

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57.8%	11.8%	15.9%	1.7%	2.1%	10.7%

1 - St...   2 - Te...   3 - Ne...   4 - Te...   5 - St...   No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q16. If Westdene Library was to close, do you have any comments or suggestions for alternative ways to deliver local library services? We welcome comments from community groups interested in working with us to deliver local library services. (optional)

This free text question was answered by 17% of respondents.

Most respondents to this question strongly oppose the closure of Westdene Library, emphasizing its role as a community hub, particularly for children at the neighbouring school, the elderly, disabled people, and those without easy access to transport. Many respondents stated that Patcham Library is not a viable alternative due to distance and poor transport links. A minority felt the library was underused and suggested focusing resources elsewhere, but these views were far outweighed by those stressing the library's value.
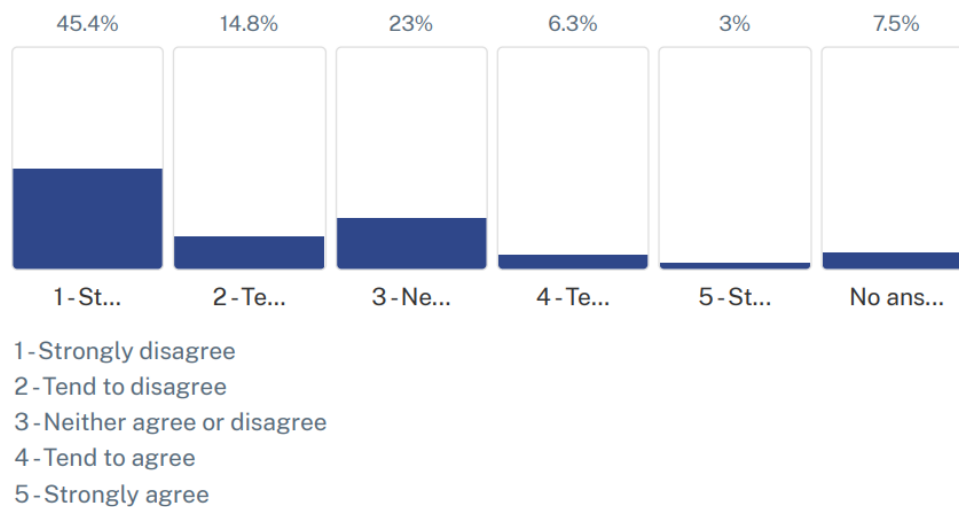
Suggestions for alternatives to closure:

- Reducing hours at larger libraries (such as Jubilee) or cutting other council spending instead

- Using volunteers or community groups to staff or run the library

- Increase Libraries Extra hours

- Partnering with the school or local organisations (local churches, school and leisure centre all mentioned) to share responsibility for the space and service

- Reintroducing mobile library services for those unable to travel

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- Fundraising

- Increasing council tax or parking charges to support libraries

- Reduce spending on books to keep the building open

Q17. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the opening hours at Hove Library on a Wednesday evening? (optional)
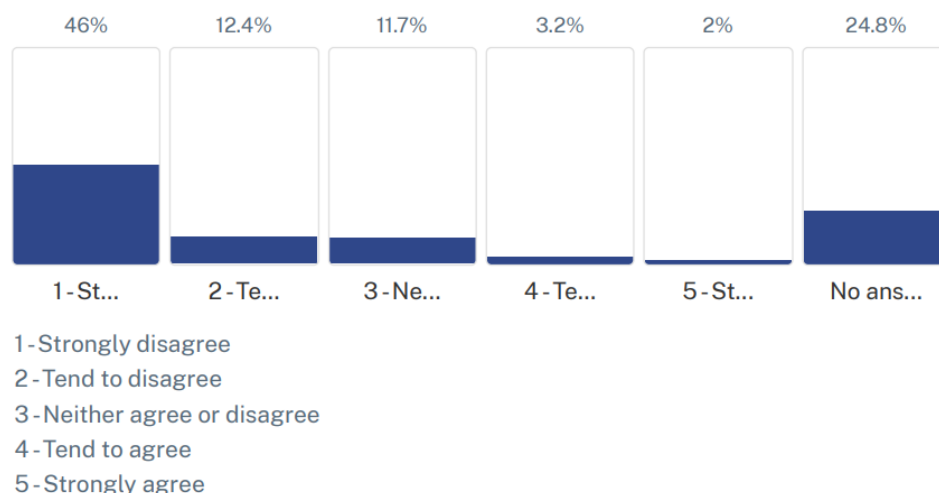
Respondents were reminded of the precise proposed changes to hours before answering this question.

2509/2711 - Linear scale - optional

45.4%	14.8%	23%	6.3%	3%	7.5%
1 - St...	2 - Te...	3 - Ne...	4 - Te...	5 - St...	No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q18. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the opening hours at Hove Library on a Saturday afternoon? (optional)

Respondents were reminded of the precise proposed changes to hours before answering this question.

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46%   12.4%   11.7%   3.2%   2%   24.8%

1 - St...   2 - Te...   3 - Ne...   4 - Te...   5 - St...   No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q19. If the opening hours at Hove Library were to change, do you have any comments or suggestions for alternative ways to deliver library services? (optional)

This free text question was answered by 21% of respondents.

There is strong opposition to reducing Hove Library's opening hours, with many respondents stressing that current late openings and weekend hours are essential for people who work full-time, parents, students, and families. Many said that closing at 5pm or earlier would make the library inaccessible to anyone working standard hours, and that Saturday afternoons are prime time for families. Several noted that school-age children and students would also be disadvantaged if weekend or late hours were cut. A minority of respondents accepted reduced hours as preferable to full closure.
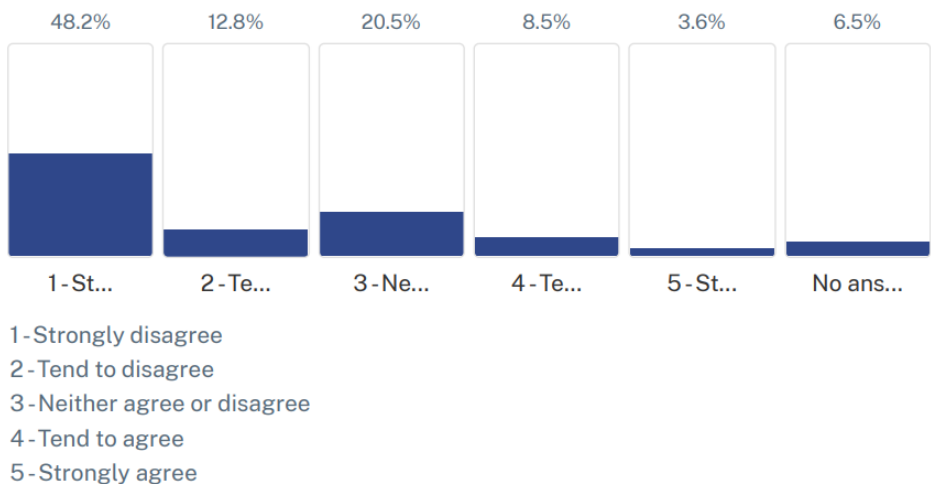
Suggestions for alternatives to a reduction in opening hours:

- Introduce Libraries Extra to Hove Library to reduce staffed hours
- Using volunteers to keep the library open
- Reduce hours on less busy weekdays rather than evenings or weekends
- Later opening in the morning to allow for later closing
- Alternative funding sources and fundraising efforts
- Increased use of volunteers and community partnerships to deliver library services
- Expand online library offer and resources
- Reintroducing a mobile library

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Q20. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the opening hours at Jubilee Library on a Monday evening? (optional)
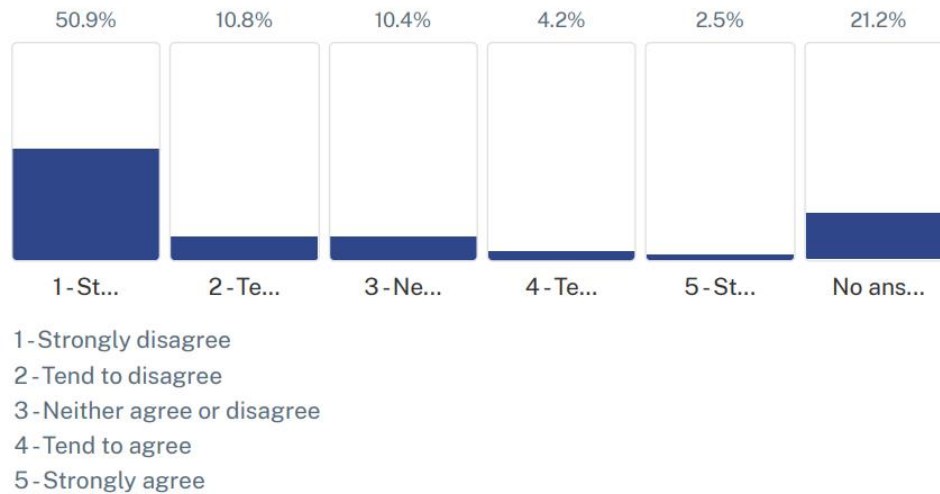
Respondents were reminded of the precise proposed changes to hours before answering this question.

2535/2711 - Linear scale - optional

48.2%	12.8%	20.5%	8.5%	3.6%	6.5%
1 - St...	2 - Te...	3 - Ne...	4 - Te...	5 - St...	No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q21. How much do you agree or disagree with the proposal to reduce the opening hours at Jubilee Library on a Sunday afternoon? (optional)

Respondents were reminded of the precise proposed changes to hours before answering this question.

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50.9%   10.8%   10.4%   4.2%   2.5%   21.2%

1 - St...   2 - Te...   3 - Ne...   4 - Te...   5 - St...   No ans...

1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Tend to disagree
3 - Neither agree or disagree
4 - Tend to agree
5 - Strongly agree

Q22. If the opening hours at Jubilee Library were to change, do you have any comments or suggestions for alternative ways to deliver library services? (optional)

This free text question was answered by 22% of respondents.

Many respondents strongly disagree with the proposal to reduce Jubilee Library's opening hours. Many feel that the library is always busy at these times and serves as a vital, free, safe public space and community hub for all ages, including children, students, disabled people, and those facing social isolation or financial hardship. There is particular emphasis on the importance of Sunday afternoons for families, and the importance of weekday evenings for students and those seeking a warm, safe and free space. A minority accept that some reduction in hours may be necessary for financial reasons but urge that cuts be made at less busy times or that reductions be minimal.

Suggestions for alternatives to a reduction in opening hours:

- Introduce Libraries Extra to Jubilee to reduce staff costs

- Use volunteers to help keep the library open longer

- Close some floors at Jubilee on certain days and times and minimise staffing at those times, to avoid reducing hours

- Collaborate with local businesses or community groups to run library services

- Close earlier on a weekday rather than Sundays or only reduce hours outside of exam periods

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- Prioritise funding for libraries over other services

- Alternative funding models such as crowdfunding or taxing the wealthy

Q23. How might these changes impact you? (optional)

We want to understand how our proposals may impact different people in our city, especially in relation to personal characteristics. These characteristics were listed as follows, as a precursor to this free text question:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex (including pregnancy and maternity)
- Gender identity or reassignment
- Race or ethnicity
- Religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Caring responsibilities
- Low income or digital exclusion
- Refugee, asylum seeker, or migrant status

Respondents overwhelmingly emphasised that libraries are vital community resources, especially for groups at risk of exclusion: children and families (particularly those on low incomes), older people, disabled people, those with caring responsibilities, and people experiencing digital exclusion. Many highlighted that libraries are often the only free, safe, warm indoor spaces available for social interaction, study, work, and access to information and technology.

A major concern was that reducing opening hours - especially evenings and weekends - or closing local branches would disproportionately impact those who cannot travel far or afford alternative spaces. This includes working people who rely on evening/weekend access, parents with young children who need local, accessible activities, and those with mobility issues or disabilities. Many noted that public transport is expensive or impractical for these groups.

Digital exclusion was frequently mentioned and the fact that libraries provide essential internet and computer access for those who cannot afford it at home, which is crucial for job-seeking, benefits, homework and administrative tasks. Respondents also stressed the importance of libraries in improving mental health and combating loneliness and isolation, particularly for elderly people and new parents.

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Many parents and carers described libraries as essential for children's literacy and development, offering access to books they could not otherwise afford and providingeducational activities. School links were highlighted as important, and libraries located in close proximity to schools are especially valued.

Disabled people and neurodivergent users repeatedly stressed the need for accessible, local, quiet spaces; respondents express concern that closures or reduced hours would increase barriers and distress. Some respondents noted the lack of alternative accessible toilets in the city outside of those provided by local libraries.

Libraries were also described as safe havens for LGBTQ+ people, migrants, and other minorities - places where they feel welcome and can access relevant resources. Several respondents mentioned the importance of libraries as neutral spaces for community cohesion and integration.

A number of respondents expressed concern that closures or reduced hours would further erode community spirit and increase inequality. Some suggested alternatives such as using volunteers to keep libraries open but raised concerns about consistency and inclusivity in volunteer-run services.

A minority said they would not be personally affected but recognised the negative impact on others, especially vulnerable groups. A few expressed a view that the consultation was poorly designed or that decisions had already been made.

Q24. Please share any final comments or suggestions you have about our proposals. (optional)

This free text question was answered by 45% of respondents.

Respondents overwhelmingly oppose library closures and reductions in opening hours, describing libraries as vital, irreplaceable community assets that provide much more than just access to books. The most common themes and concerns in response to this question are:

Libraries as essential community hubs

Libraries are repeatedly described as safe, warm, and inclusive spaces that support learning, social connection, mental wellbeing, and provide free access to information and technology for all ages, especially children, the elderly, low-income families, and vulnerable groups.

Negative impact on disadvantaged groups

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There is strong concern that closures, or reduced hours will disproportionately harm those who cannot easily travel further afield, such as people with disabilities, older people, families with young children, and those on low incomes.

Importance of libraries for children's education and literacy

Many stress the crucial role libraries play in encouraging children to read, supporting schoolwork, and providing educational opportunities that may not be available at home.

Rottingdean and Westdene Libraries

There is a particularly strong response to keep Rottingdean and Westdene libraries open. Respondents highlight their high usage (especially by children and older people), their role as community/cultural hubs (Rottingdean Library's position within The Grange), proximity to schools, and the minimal financial savings compared to the social cost. Many argue that closing these libraries would increase isolation and reduce access for those unable to travel.

Concerns about reduced opening hours at central libraries

There was also a particularly strong response to retain late nights and weekends at Jubilee and Hove Libraries. Many object to reducing evening and weekend hours at main libraries (Jubilee and Hove), noting these are peak times for working people, students, and families. There is particular concern about Sunday closures or early closing.

Opposition to cost-cutting

Many respondents believe the proposed savings are small compared to the long-term social and educational costs. They urge the council to find savings elsewhere.

Libraries as free public spaces

Libraries are seen as one of the last remaining places where people can spend time without having to spend money or face commercial pressures.

Respondents suggest a range of alternatives to closure or cuts, the most cited being:

- Increase use of volunteers or community-run models (though with some caution about sustainability)

- Seek alternative funding (sponsorship, donations, crowdfunding, tourist tax)

- Reduce hours at larger libraries to maintain smaller branches

- Expand library services (increased digital offer and mobile libraries most frequently mentioned)

- Improve publicity and outreach to increase usage

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Other notable points:

- Some call for greater transparency in decision-making

- A minority of respondents do suggest rationalising the service by focusing on fewer but better-resourced libraries

In summary, the vast majority of respondents see libraries as vital public spaces whose closure or reduction would have far-reaching negative impacts, and they urge the council to seek alternative savings or funding and to recognise the long-term value of libraries over short-term financial savings.

We invited survey responders to complete optional equalities monitoring questions at the end of the survey. A summary of the responses are provided at the end of this report.

Email Responses

We received a total of 164 emails to the dedicated consultation inbox. Engagement came from a range of people, summarised as follows:

Response type	Count
Public	133
Community Group	7
School	2
MP	1
Organisations	3
Councillors	2
Library Staff	2
Access Requests	14
Total	**164**

As well as this, 195 pages of letters and handmade posters from children at Westdene Primary School were written, scanned and shared by email to the consultation inbox as an attachment. In addition, 7 handmade posters were shared in-person by children from Rottingdean which were scanned by library staff and sent to the consultation inbox.

14 access requests were predominantly for PDF versions of the survey or for signposting to proposal details and appendices.

The majority of email responses from the public specifically relate to Rottingdean and Westdene Libraries, whereas group and organisational responses tended to be more general in nature.

The most common themes and concerns from email correspondence, echoing some of those from the survey responses, are:

Potential impact on families, children and young people

Respondents highlight that for many children, the library is on their way home from school or close to a swimming lesson, and concern is expressed that families may be unable to maintain this healthy library habit. The two responses from local schools in Westdene and Rottingdean both state the importance of their local public libraries' impact on improving and maintaining literacy outcomes for pupils. Westdene Primary School's response highlights the fact that all of their classes visit the library every fortnight but do not use the main entrance. Pupils that responded directly to the consultation by written letter are overwhelmingly against the proposed closure of Westdene Library and share the many ways the library supports their love of reading. They also outline the role it plays in the lives of other people in their community – particularly those experiencing fuel poverty and digital exclusion. They also reference the calming and relaxing nature of the space.

Similarly, concern is expressed by members of the public for families who utilise Jubilee and Hove libraries at weekends who would find this opportunity reduced were the proposals to be taken forward.

Potential impact on older people, specifically those digitally excluded

Multiple respondents highlight that older people are vulnerable to digital exclusion and social isolation, regardless of their financial means. As well as this, older respondents share their personal experience of living with disabilities, and their inability to use public transport.

Libraries as vital safe spaces

Many examples of the benefits of physical library spaces for vulnerable groups are shared, particularly young people, refugees and asylum seekers, and the unhoused community at Jubilee and Hove Libraries.

Dissatisfaction with consultation process

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A number of respondents expressed their concern over the lack of multiple suggestions being consulted on, as well as the size of the potential saving compared to the potential impact on communities and the financial savings that libraries contribute to elsewhere (school attainment, employment, reducing social isolation and digital exclusion are all cited in relation to this).

Event Engagement

Over 370 people were recorded as being in attendance at nine consultation events to share their views in person.

Key themes and concerns

Transparency & Evidence

Requests for detailed cost breakdowns and clarity on how decisions are made were made at multiple meetings and concerns expressed about long-term planning.

Accessibility & Equity

Strong objections were made across the board to reduced hours or closures. Concerns about impact on children, elderly, and disabled residents were cited in all locations.

Carbon Impact

Questions were put to Councillors and Officers at multiple meetings about increased travel and emissions if residents at Rottingdean, Hollingbury and Westdene must travel further to access libraries.

Social Value

Libraries were frequently described as safe, free spaces for children and families. Personal stories highlighted the role of libraries in post-COVID recovery, job seeking, and community connection or combatting of social isolation. Libraries were seen by attendees as essential to fund, and it was suggested that they mitigate excessive screen time for children and young people. Particularly in Rottingdean and Westdene, event attendees highlighted a lack of other free community spaces.

Ideas from event attendees

Alternative models

Shared funding, reduced staffing hours, fully volunteer-led models, or blended (staff and volunteer) models were all suggested as alternatives to closures or reductions.

Income generation

Encouraging more public donations, seeking sponsorships, and running income-generating community events were frequently suggested. Collaboration with businesses (including national bookshops) was also suggested as an area for exploration.

Youth engagement

There were strong calls to consult thoroughly with young people, especially students from local schools. Suggestions to involve students in running libraries services via Duke of Edinburgh volunteering were made.

Partnerships

Career coaching, adult education, and digital support were suggested areas to work in partnership with other services and save resources. Greater collaboration with school libraries was also proposed.

Smartphone Use & Education

Libraries are seen as a counterbalance to screen time; calls to align library policy with national moves to reduce smartphone use among children and the National Year of Reading in 2026.

Rottingdean & Westdene-Specific Issues

- Cultural Hub: The Grange houses the library, gallery, museum, and gardens; it is seen as a vital cultural centre.
- Community Impact: Residents from Rottingdean, Ovingdean, and Westdene expressed concern about losing key social and educational resources.
- Accessibility: Praised for disabled access and proximity to schools and play areas.
- Heritage & Covenant: Questions raised about historical agreements requiring the building to be used for library services.
- Synergy with Other Services: Highlighted the interconnectedness of services at The Grange and Westdene School.

Summary of all responses

Most frequently cited ideas and suggestions from all responses

Reduce savings targets for libraries and reallocate to other council services
Increase use of volunteers or community-run models

Seek alternative funding (sponsorships, donations, crowdfunding, charging and membership)
Reduce or alter hours at larger libraries to maintain smaller branches and protect evenings and weekends
Expand or alter library services (digital support and e-resources, mobile libraries, extend Libraries Extra hours at community libraries and consider introducing at Jubilee and Hove)
Improve publicity and outreach to increase usage

Key themes and concerns from all responses

Opposition to reduction in library budgets
Concerns over impact on children and literacy, and schools' use of libraries
Loss of study space for young people and students
Libraries as safe, warm, 'third' spaces that support community cohesion and reduce social isolation
Difficulty travelling to alternatives, particularly for families, elderly and disabled
Digital and financial exclusion

How this report will be used

This report is created to facilitate discussion at a November 2025 meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Brighton & Hove.

This report plus further analysis of the public consultation will be shared as part of the final proposal paper going to Cabinet in December 2025.

Supplementary information: Your Voice Survey Monitoring Information

A series of optional equalities monitoring questions were asked at the end of the survey. Before these questions, it was stated that:
- *All responses are anonymous.*
- *Data is used to help the council fulfil its legal equalities duties and ensure its services meet the needs of customers and service users*

- *The information you give will be used to see what impact these proposals may have on particular groups. We can also adjust our approach if we find a particular group is under-represented.*

59% of respondents shared monitoring information.

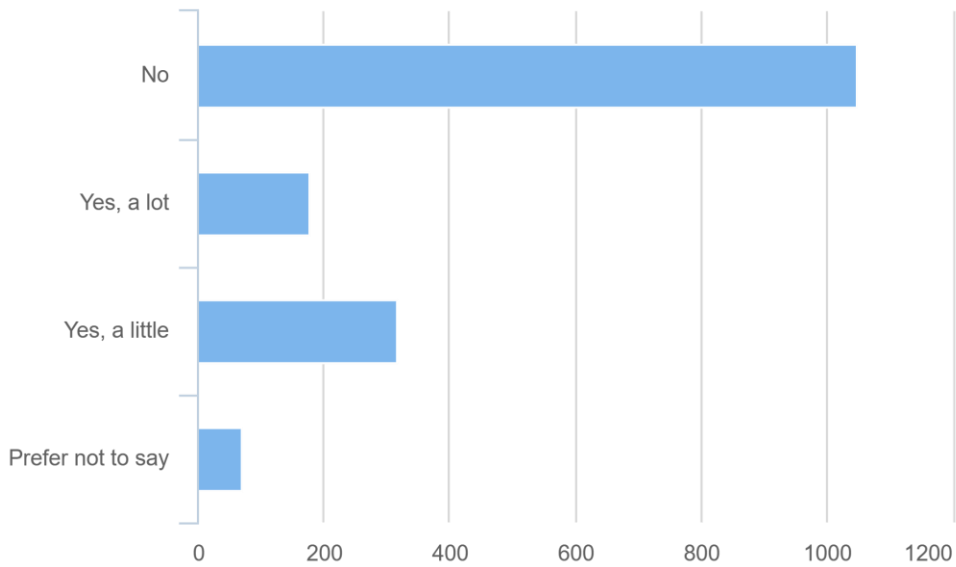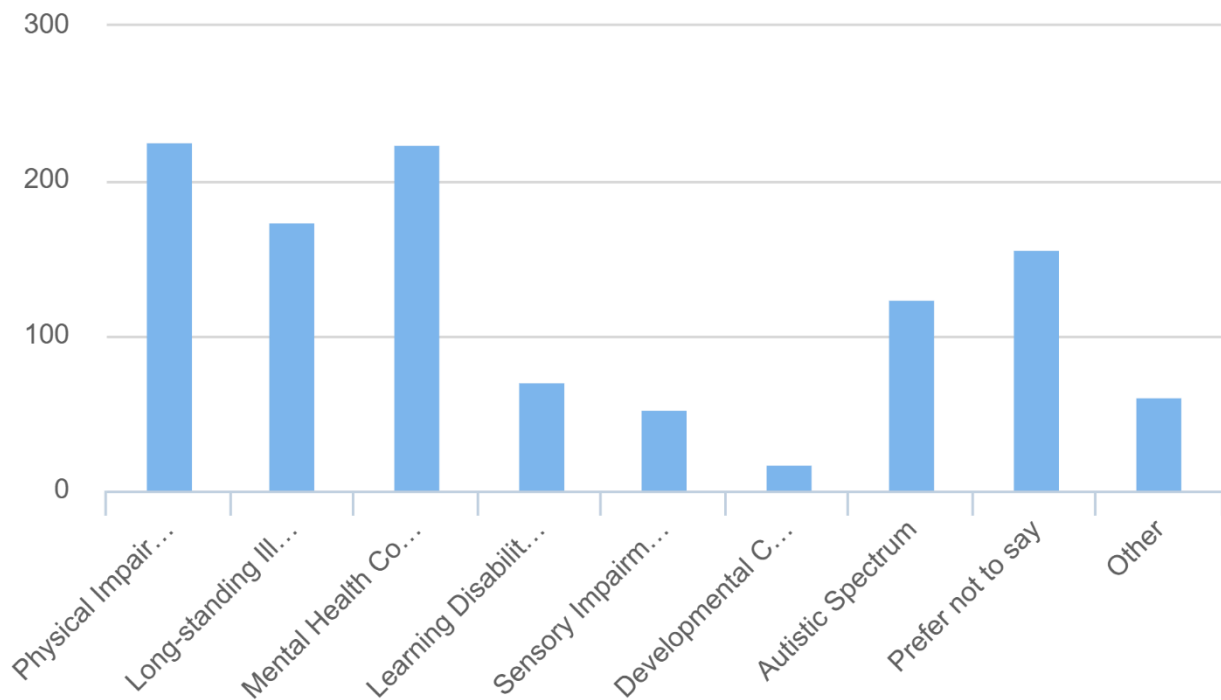Here is a summary of those responses:

Q32. What is your age? (optional)
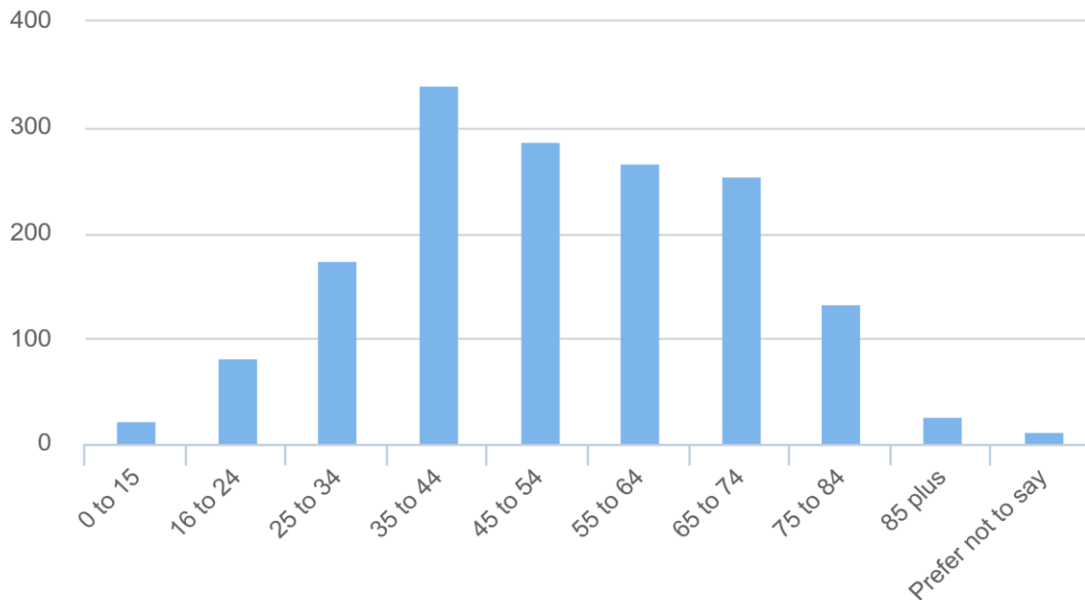
Q 33. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? (optional)
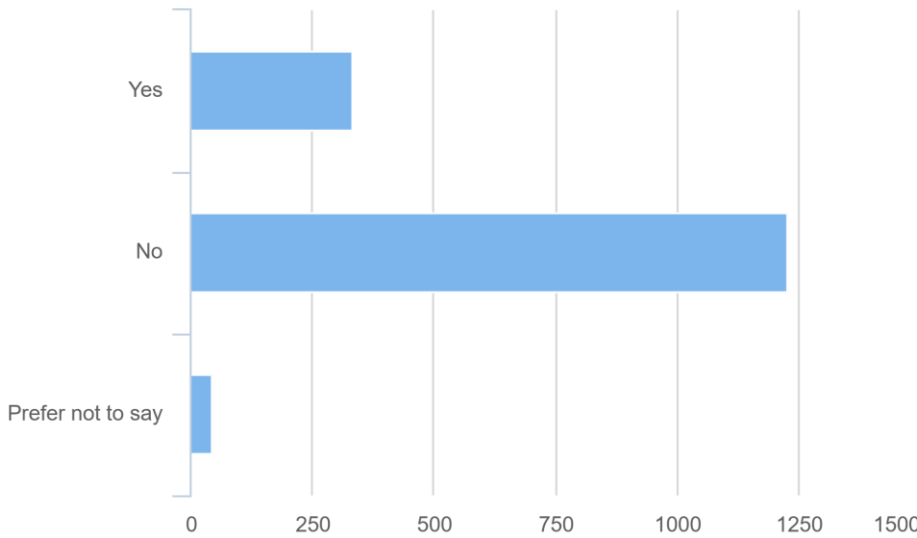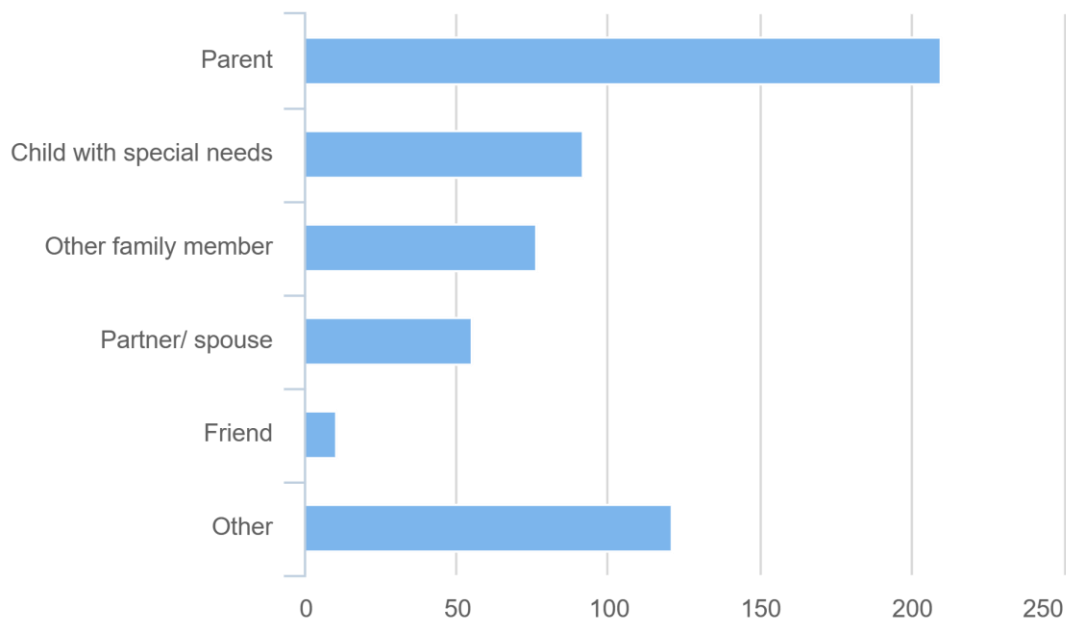
Q34. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? (optional)
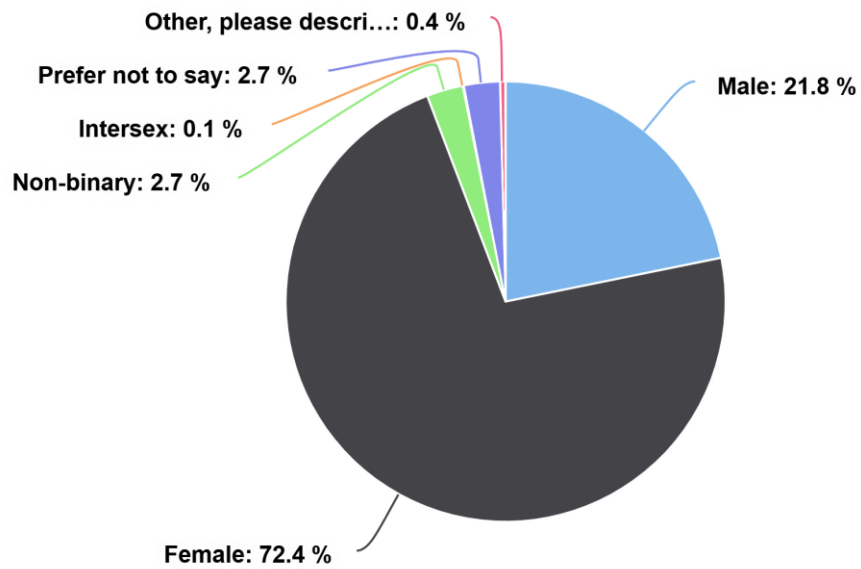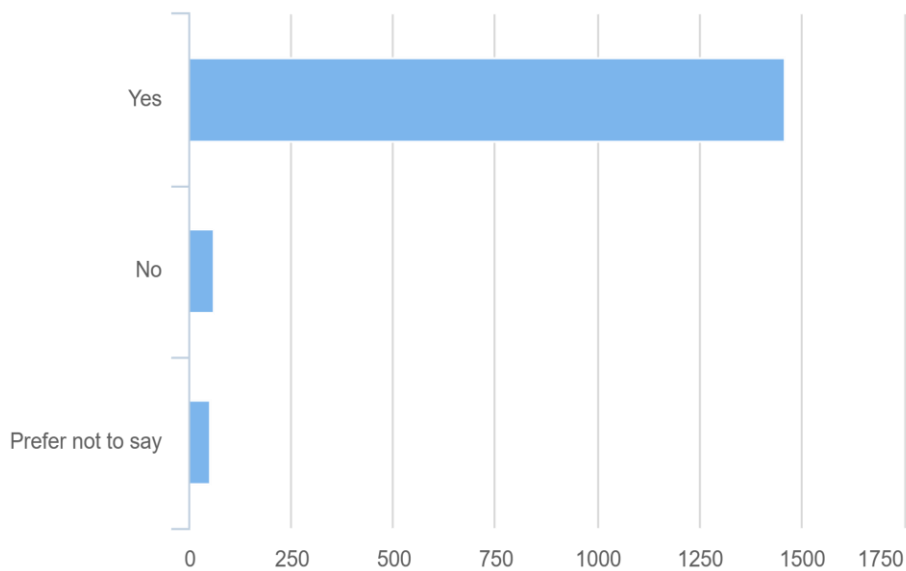

Q35. Are you a carer? (optional)

Q36. If you answered 'yes' above, please state who you care for. If you care for more than one person please tick all that apply. If none apply, please mark 'other' (optional)

Q39. What best describes your sex?

Male: 21.8 %

Other, please descri…: 0.4 %

Prefer not to say: 2.7 %
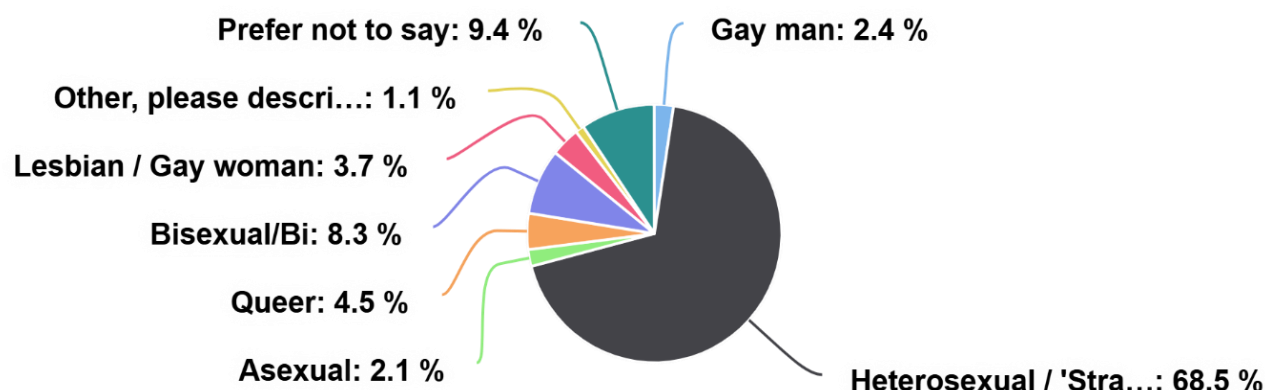
Intersex: 0.1 %

Non-binary: 2.7 %

Female: 72.4 %

Q40. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth? (optional)

Q42. How would you describe your ethnic origin? (optional)

35

Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi	4
Asian / Asian British: Chinese	8
Asian / Asian British: Indian	33
Asian / Asian British: Other (please share details below)	12
Black / Black British: African	17
Black / Black British: Caribbean	14
Black / Black British: Other (please share details below)	2
Mixed: Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background	32
Mixed: Asian and White	17
Mixed: Black African and White	8
Mixed: Black Caribbean and White	9
Other ethnic group, please describe	29
Other Ethnic Group: Arab	12
Prefer not to say	42
White: English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British	1099
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	2
White: Irish	32
White: Other	191
Asian / Asian British: Pakistani	2
(blank)	1146

Q44. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation? (optional)


Prefer not to say: 9.4 %
Gay man: 2.4 %
Other, please descri…: 1.1 %
Lesbian / Gay woman: 3.7 %
Bisexual/Bi: 8.3 %
Queer: 4.5 %
Asexual: 2.1 %
Heterosexual / 'Stra…: 68.5 %

Q46. What is your religion or belief? (optional)

Jewish	24
I have no particular religion or belief	749
Prefer not to say	86
Other philosophical belief	53
Hindu	15
Christian	367
Other religion or belief, please describe	29
Atheist	115
Pagan	15
Buddhist	25
Agnostic	47
Muslim	19
Sikh	2

Q48. What is your legal marital or registered civil partnership status? (optional)

Never married and never registered in a civil partnership	455
Married	704
Separated but still legally married	19
Divorced	127
Widowed	71
In a registered civil partnership	43
Formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	4
Separated but still legally in a civil partnership	4
A surviving member of a legally registered civil partnership	2

Q49. Are you, or have you been, looked after by a local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14? (optional)

Prefer not to say: 1.3 %

Don't know: 0.5 %

Yes: 1.1 %

No: 97.2 %
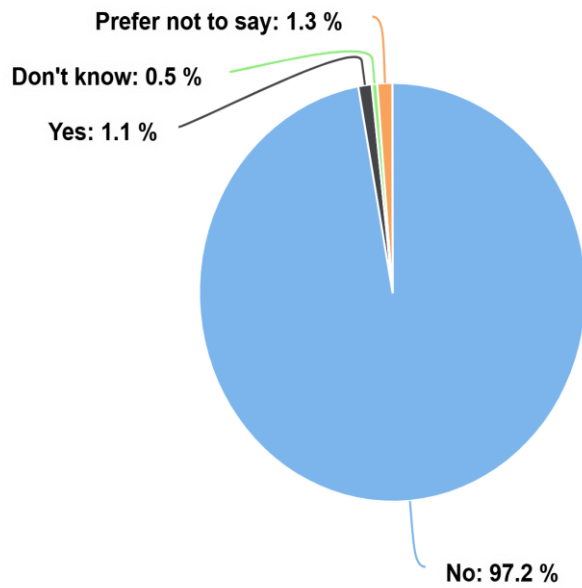
Q50. Have you previously served in the UK armed forces? (optional)

Other: 0.2 %

Yes, previously serv…: 0.3 %

Yes, previously serv…: 0.9 %

Prefer not to say: 1.0 %

No: 97.6 %