

Brighton & Hove Libraries

Needs and Use Analysis

Part 2: Consultation feedback

Informed by Public Consultation – Summer - Autumn 2025. Link paper to the Part 1 data analysis produced in July 2025.

December 2025

Analysis contents

1. Purpose of document
2. Executive summary
3. Summary of proposals
4. Process we've followed
5. Understanding of needs and use of the library service
 - a. Understanding of Library Use
 - b. Understanding of Community Profiles and assessment of need
6. Reflection on the four key factors – need, use, geography and cost
7. Assessment on impact of proposals
8. How this links to wider strategy and sustainability work
9. Opportunities and alternative models
10. Conclusions, next steps and recommended actions
11. Linked documents

1. Purpose of this needs and use analysis

A needs and use analysis is required whenever a council proposes changes to its statutory library provision. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 obliges councils to provide a “comprehensive and efficient” library service for all who live, work, or study in the area. The analysis helps demonstrate that any proposed changes will still meet this duty. The full analysis comprises the part 1 document produced in July 2025 and this part 2 document, which has been prepared following a public consultation and additional research. There are other linked documents which set context and rationale, details of which can be found in Linked Documents at the end of section 11.

A needs and use analysis is one of the key tools for councils to make lawful, fair, and effective changes to library services. It ensures that decisions are evidence-based, inclusive, and transparent, and that the council continues to meet its statutory duties while responding to local needs and financial realities.

This needs and use analysis:

- Assesses who uses library services, how and why.
- Identifies which groups are most affected by changes.
- Evaluates whether alternative provision can meet essential needs.
- Demonstrates that proposals are evidence-based and proportionate, especially regarding equality duties

2. Executive summary

This needs and use analysis (parts 1 and 2) covers the statutory, evidence-based review of Brighton & Hove’s public library services, combining quantitative data and extensive public consultation to assess current and future needs across the city. The analysis identifies who uses library services, how and why, and which groups would be most affected by proposed changes. It considers the impact of proposals to reduce opening hours and close specific libraries, with particular attention to vulnerable groups such as children, older people, disabled residents, low-income families, and marginalised or disadvantaged communities. The findings highlight the value of libraries as inclusive, accessible community assets and inform recommendations to ensure that any changes maintain a comprehensive and efficient service, in line with legal obligations and the city’s long-term sustainability goals.

3. Summary of proposals for change

Brighton & Hove City Council has proposed changes in public library provision in the city to not only improve sustainability but also to deliver on the savings plan for 2025-27. Concentrating resources on fewer physical library locations and a reduction in opening hours, whilst maintaining a geographic spread across the city, will support longer-term sustainability of the wider city service, as well as safeguarding the quality of library provision.

In February 2025 as part of the council budget decisions councillors agreed to reduce the Library Service revenue

budget by £210,000, likely to be achieved through a reduction in public services, to include library closures and a decrease in opening hours.

In the spring and early summer of 2025, council officers worked closely with the administration to develop proposals for changes to the public library offer to meet the savings whilst maintaining a comprehensive and efficient service

Officers conducted the first part of a Needs & Use Analysis, looking at the usage statistics of each library, the levels of deprivation and needs in each area, the cost of delivering services and the geographic spread of sites across the city. Proposals were identified through analysis of four key factors – need, use, geography and cost.

It was proposed and agreed by Cabinet in July 2025 to commence a public consultation on the proposals, specifically covering the following suggestions:

- Consult on a proposed closure of Hollingbury Library
- Consult on a proposed closure of Rottingdean Library
- Consult on a proposed closure of Westdene Library
- Consult on proposed changes in opening hours at Hove Library
- Consult on proposed changes in opening hours at Jubilee Library

An Equalities Impact Assessment was prepared with regard to the consultation process.

The opening hour changes and libraries closure proposals were put to a public consultation which ran for 12 weeks from 18 July to 10 October 2025.

The consultation was extensive and provided much feedback and reflection, not only on the proposals but also on the wider needs and use of the city's library service. This provides a valuable insight ahead of drafting a new city library strategy in 2026 – covering many elements of providing a comprehensive and efficient service.

Following the public consultation, the review of Part 1 of the needs and use analysis, collation of this Part 2 and with reference to the other linked documents, the following proposals are being made to Cabinet in December 2025.

That having considered the information provided in this report and its appendices, Cabinet agrees to make the following changes to existing library provision, being satisfied that its remaining provision complies with its statutory obligation to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service

Cabinet agrees to reduce opening hours at Jubilee Library by 5 hours/week on Monday evenings and Sunday afternoons from 1st April 2026;

Cabinet agrees to reduce opening hours at Hove Library by 5 hours/week on Wednesday evenings and Saturday afternoons from 1st April 2026;

Cabinet agrees to close Hollingbury Library on 31st March 2026 and notes that officers will work with partners in exploring alternative options for future community based provision;

Cabinet agrees to continue the existing library provision in Rottingdean with a further report to be brought back to Cabinet in 12 months to review the outcome of work with community partners;

Cabinet agrees to close Westdene Library on 31st March 2026 and notes that officers will work with partners in exploring alternative options for future community based provision;

That Cabinet delegates authority to the Corporate Director for Families, Children and Wellbeing, working in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sport & Leisure, to take all steps necessary or incidental to the delivery of the recommendations in the paragraphs above.

4. Process we've followed

A detailed data-based needs and use analysis was published in July 2025 to inform the Cabinet report proposing the public consultation. It is a stipulation from the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), that changes to library provision in a local area should be informed by a local needs and use analysis approach. This should include:

Consideration of the needs of those who live, work and study in the area

- An assessment of accessibility
- Consideration of the views of existing users
- An assessment of whether any specific communities or groups would suffer adverse impacts
- Consideration of information from partner organisations and other departments

The following phases form the local needs assessment, designed with the above criteria at the fore:

Phase 1: Needs and Use Part 1 - Data Analysis - Spring 2025

Phase 2: Needs and Use Part 2 - Public & Stakeholder Informed by Consultation – Winter 2025

Should library service changes be decided upon then a further 2 phases will be delivered:

Phase 3: Staff Consultation – Winter/Spring 2026

Phase 4: Implementation of changes - Spring 2026

Part one of this needs and use phase consisted predominantly of desk-based research and data analysis. Data reviewed included footfall, borrowing data (about what resources are borrowed, when and where) from library management systems, 2021 Census data, ONS and DWP data available via the Local Insight platform¹, and additional data provided by colleagues from across BHCC including numeric Schools Census, travel and Adult Social Care data.

Part two of the needs and use analysis (this document) details an analysis of needs and use of library service users informed by the formal Public Consultation that was held in Summer/Autumn of 2025, as well as additional data necessary for evidencing and contextualising what we heard. This additional data has come from a further look at what is available on the city's Local Insight website (where we gained further insight into English as an Additional Language rates and further information about Black and racially minoritised residents) and from the latest release of the English indices of deprivation 2025.

The consultation ran for 12 weeks, with 2711 survey responses, over 150 emails, posters and letters from school children and

engagement from nearly 400 residents in online and in-person consultation meetings. A full report on the consultation outcome is available within the linked documents. That report, alongside the accompanying equalities impact assessment, fully details what those consultation responses tell us about the needs and use of residents, customers and the library services in the city.

It is clear from the responses received to the public consultation that the library service is a valued and important community asset, especially for children, families, older people, disabled residents, and those experiencing digital or financial exclusion.

Respondents offered a variety of alternative models and funding suggestions, often emphasising the long-term social value of libraries over short-term financial savings.

5. Understanding of the needs and use of existing or potential library service users

Context of Brighton & Hove

Brighton and Hove had a population of approximately 277,100 as of the 2021 Census, reflecting a modest 1.4% increase since 2011. The median age was 38 years, an increase from 35 years in 2011, yet still younger than the South East average of 41 and England's 40. Notably, the number of residents aged 50 to 64

¹ www.brighton-hove.localinsight.org

increased by 30% between 2011 and 2021, while those aged 35 to 49 decreased by 7.9% during the same period.

Brighton & Hove has become increasingly ethnically diverse. 26% of residents (approximately 72,272 people) identified as Black and Racially Minoritised in 2021, up from 19.5% in 2011. This proportion is higher than the South East average of 21% and aligns with the national average for England.

Administratively, the city is divided into 21 electoral wards, across which the needs of residents vary greatly.

A library service responsive to change

The city's public library service currently comprises 13 libraries (see Fig.1.), including the flagship Jubilee Library in central Brighton, Hove Library, and 11 community libraries located in Coldean, Hangleton, Hollingbury, Moulsecoomb, Patcham, Portslade, Rottingdean, Saltdean, Westdene, Whitehawk and Woodingdean. Jubilee Library, opened in 2005, stands out as one of the most visited libraries in the UK, recording over 830,000 visits in the 2023/24 period and accounting for about 50% of the city's library transactions.

Over the past decade or so, Brighton & Hove Libraries has undergone significant transformation to adapt to changing community need and financial constraints, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2013, the mobile library service was withdrawn and replaced by a more cost-effective Home Delivery Service that has maintained access for residents unable to visit library branches. Against a backdrop of national library cuts, the city

retained all of its branches for the next decade, until Mile Oak library was closed in July 2023 due to low visitor numbers and high buildings costs. In the same year, staffed days at community libraries were reduced and in 2024 the Libraries Management Team was also reduced, to meet savings targets.

In the three years preceding this, the service responded quickly and effectively to the Covid-19 pandemic. Pivoting to a click and collect format of delivery and sharing online Storytimes and activities for children at home, whilst ensuring the safety of staff and customers as a priority.

Despite these challenges, Brighton & Hove Libraries has embraced innovation and inclusivity. The introduction of the 'Libraries Extra' initiative (at a time when libraries nationally were closing) has extended opening hours and improved access through a combination of staffed and unstaffed periods. In 2020, Jubilee Children's Library was refurbished and still receives public acclaim today.

Furthermore, in 2024, all 13 libraries in the city were collectively awarded the 'Library Service of Sanctuary' status, recognising their commitment to providing welcoming spaces for refugees, asylum seekers, and other marginalised groups. In the same year, the newly refurbished Saltdean Library, based within Saltdean Lido, was opened. Part of a broader development of the listed site, the majority funder of this project was the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Fig.1. Library locations and ward boundaries



In May 2025, council customer services were integrated with libraries. Two new Council Help Desks opened at Jubilee and Hove, operating Monday – Friday 10am-5pm, which, along with the council’s telephone switchboard are now staffed by library officers. With the addition of free self-help telephones and PCs across all branches, libraries are enabling more face-to-face support to access council services for those who need it most.

This context underscores the evolving landscape of public library provision in Brighton & Hove, reflecting efforts to balance resource limitations with the goal of serving a diverse and growing urban population.

Future populations of Brighton & Hove

As per the Context of Brighton & Hove section above, by looking at trend data and the 2021 census data, some more information about current and potential future populations of the city can be extrapolated.

Brighton & Hove’s population changes are not evenly distributed across all age groups

Difference between 2021 Census and 2020 Mid-Year Estimates.

In the 2021 Census there are...



- Fewer children aged 0 to 10 years old, a decrease of 9% (2,805 people)
- Fewer adults aged 21 to 32 years old, a decrease of 22% (15,253 people)



- More adults aged 49 to 52 years old, an increase of 9% (1,353 people)

Difference between 2021 Census and 2011 Census.

In the 2021 Census there are...



- Fewer children aged 0 to 7 years old, a decrease of 16% (3,826 people)
- Fewer adults aged 23 to 46 years old, a decrease of 10% (10,284 people)



- More adults aged 48 to 62 years old, an increase of 32% (13,826 people)
- More adults aged 65 to 77 years old, an increase of 20% (4,341 people)

Brighton & Hove has a different population profile compared to the South East and England



Brighton & Hove has a much higher proportion of people aged 18 to 34 years old (28%, 78,759 people) compared to only 20% in the South East and 22% in England.



Brighton & Hove has a lower proportion of children aged 0 to 15 years old (15%, 41,735 people) compared to 19% in both the South East and England.



Brighton & Hove has a lower proportion of people age of 57 to 87 years old. In Brighton & Hove just over one in five of the total population (22%, 59,583 people) is aged 57 to 87 years old compared to 28% in the South East and 27% in England.

The higher population of people 18-34 may well be explained by being a double university city. We know many areas of the country are experiencing the decline in child population

numbers, but it is starker here in Brighton & Hove than many places.

In the last year the City Council has begun consultation on its longer-term City Plan, setting out the framework for development—including housing—up to 2041. The plan, due to launch in 2027, will:

- Set out policies to guide future development, including the scale and location of new housing.
- Identify how much new housing is needed to meet the needs of residents.
- Encourage high-quality, well-designed, and sustainable places.
- Ensure new development is supported by necessary infrastructure.
- Address affordability, accessibility, and the needs of diverse communities.

The city faces severe land constraints, so meeting these targets will require creative solutions, including higher-density development, redevelopment of brownfield sites, and collaboration with neighbouring authorities.

5a Understanding of library use

Part 1 of this Needs and Use Analysis, published in July 2025, provided a comprehensive data review of the current use of library services in the city.

During the public consultation we asked for further information from respondents, to provide further insight and understanding to the raw data collected by the service.

An overall summary of the responses gained during the public consultation included the following reflections and contributions:

- Libraries are used by a diverse range of users, including children, families, older people, disabled people, carers, and by people who are part of communities that are less represented in the wider population or who may face additional barriers to inclusion and access.
- Respondents reported using a wide range of library services, including community collections, home delivery, online resources, and physical visits
- Usage patterns and dependencies on other libraries vary by branch:
- Most library visits are made on foot or by public transport, with accessibility and proximity being crucial for many users, especially those with mobility challenges.
- Libraries are valued by many as safe, free, and inclusive community spaces, providing warmth, shelter, and opportunities for social interaction.

- Children and young people were reported to use libraries for literacy, homework, and after-school activities, with comments made about links to local schools enhancing their value.
- Older people and those experiencing social isolation depend on library services for social contact and access to information, particularly those who are digitally excluded.
- Disabled users appreciate libraries for their accessible facilities, such as public toilets and quiet spaces.
- Low-income families and digitally excluded residents were reported to rely on libraries for free access to books, computers, and the internet, supporting job-seeking, benefits, and education.
- Groups at risk of marginalisation/disadvantage, including LGBTQ+ people and those with neurodiversity often see libraries as welcoming and neutral spaces, important for community cohesion and access to relevant resources for those communities.
- Responders reported a reliance on libraries for regular visits, social activities, and essential services such as baby changing, computer support, and shelter from bad weather.

Comparison with data collected in Part 1

The public consultation responses provide a wider understanding of the impact of the proposals.

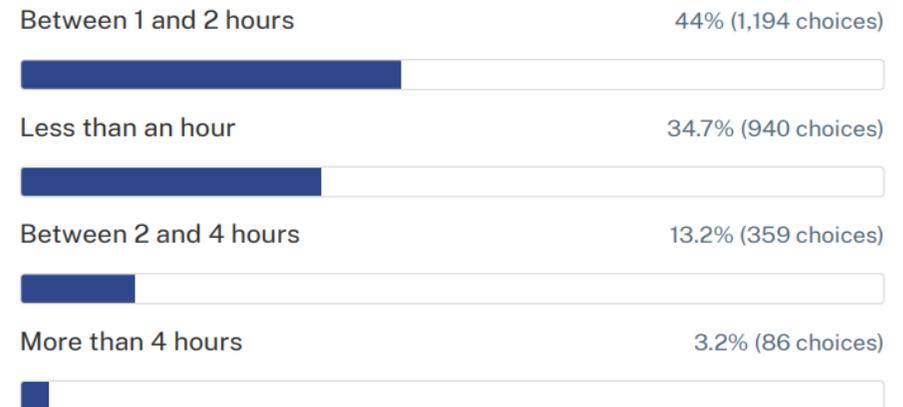
Footfall vs length of time spent in libraries

Part 1 detailed data collected across all libraries on footfall – this is measured by a heat sensor at each library front door. This provides useful data on the numbers of people entering and leaving the buildings. However, what it doesn't provide is an overview of how long individuals are staying in the libraries.

This was asked within the consultation and the following information was gained from the survey responses.

We asked how long people spent in the libraries, on an average visit:

2640/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional





Part 1 of the analysis provided an hourly average breakdown in the footfall numbers at Hove and Jubilee Libraries. This informed an understanding of the quieter times in the library spaces, to inform proposals to reduce opening hours.

For reference here are the current full opening hours:

Jubilee

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday – 10am to 7pm

Wednesday, Friday and Saturday – 10am to 5pm

Sunday – 11am to 5pm

Hove

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday – 10am to 5pm

Wednesday – 10am to 7pm

Here is the footfall data for the relevant times – expressed below as a percentage of each library’s average weekly total visits (2024-25).

Jubilee

Mondays 5-7pm 1%

Sundays 2-5pm 4%

Hove

Wednesdays 5-7pm 2%

Saturdays 2-5pm 6%

The new information about how long people spend within the libraries provides valuable insight into how many people may be impacted by arriving at a library an hour or two ahead of a proposed closure time; some people would still be hoping to use the library for an extended time and therefore will be impacted by an earlier closure. Head counts taken during the consultation at times affected by the proposals do suggest this may be the case at Jubilee on Monday evenings, where despite less new customers entering, many are staying up until closing at 7pm. However, weekend head counts at Jubilee and Hove, and Wednesday evenings at Hove fell below the footfall figures, suggesting that visitors on these days and times aren’t visiting for long.

Data on issues/PC use vs what people actually do with the library service offer

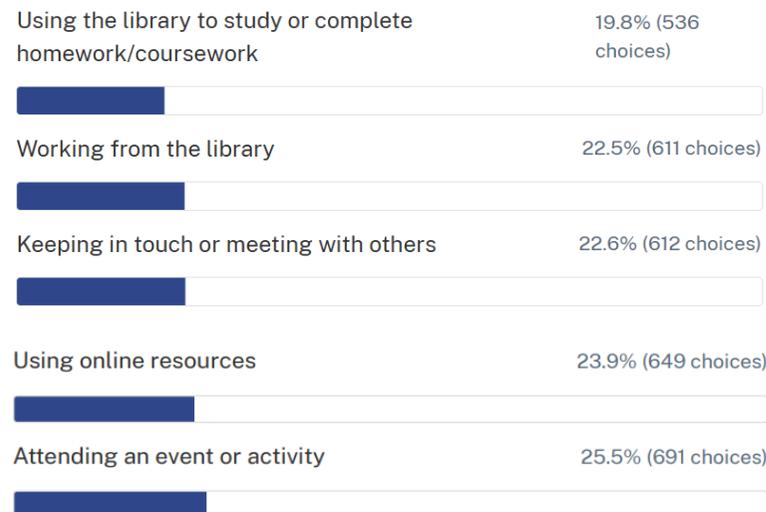
Part 1 of this analysis provided data on items issued (typically referred to as borrowing), comparing it with the data already

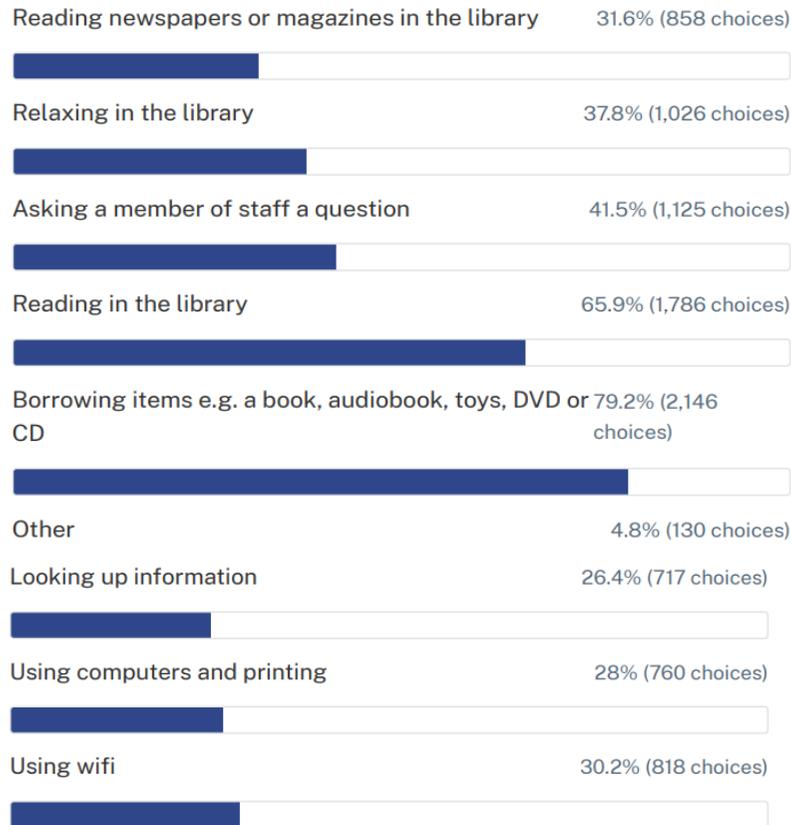
known about footfall within the libraries. That shows us that more people were using the libraries than there was borrowing activity.

During the public consultation we asked people about what services they use whilst visiting or using (as some are online) library services:

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.

2659/2711 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional





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

This additional information gathered within the public consultation provides us with valuable insight into the wide and varied range of uses of the library services, which adds to and expands upon what was already known about borrowing.

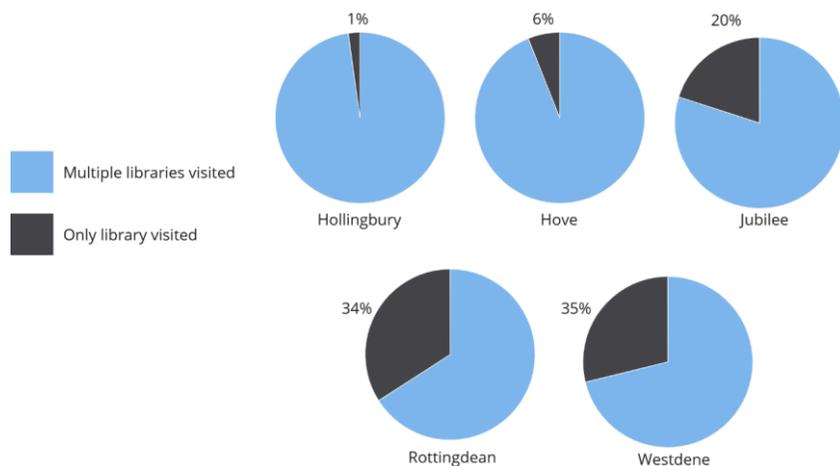
Another area of helpful insight was understanding better whether people used one sole library or visited multiple sites. This helps us start to understand what alternative library use could look like, when considering reductions to library services.

The survey within the public consultation asked responders about single library site use vs multiple library site use in areas affected by the proposals.

From this we learnt that among respondents who reported visiting the libraries affected by the proposals, the proportion who reported that they 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 who exclusively used that branch.

While 35% of Westdene users only use this branch, the remaining 65% are likely to also use Jubilee or Patcham. 34% of Rottingdean users use Rottingdean alone and the remaining 66% are likely to use Saltdean or Jubilee. Hollingbury users are

likely to also use Patcham and Jubilee, with only 1% reporting using just this branch.



This tells us that whilst there are a significant percentage of library service users who do use more than one library site, there are some that currently do not and this needs to be considered where there are proposals to reduce library service provision, but especially where closures are proposed.

In order to understand this better we asked survey respondents whether they can access alternative libraries, and for the three proposed closure libraries, the nearest alternatives were named as examples of ones nearby.

We heard that 30% of those that responded to this question answered that they couldn't access alternatives, and 29%

answered that they could. 27% responded that they were not sure and 14% answered with 'no response'.

We asked a follow up free text question to understand more about those that cannot access alternatives.

A frequently cited concern is the difficulty of physically accessing alternative libraries, especially for:

- Disabled residents who face mobility barriers and cannot easily use public transport or carry books.
- Families with young children, for whom walking longer distances or navigating hilly or difficult terrain is impractical.
- Elderly users, who rely on proximity and familiarity and often cannot drive or afford transport.

Public transport was described as inadequate, expensive, and inconvenient, with some routes requiring multiple buses or crossing busy roads.

Many respondents expressed that transport costs—whether bus fares or fuel costs if driving—make regular visits to alternative libraries unaffordable. This concern was more acute for:

- Low-income families who use libraries as a free resource for books, internet, and community engagement.
- Those who would need to drive instead of walk, raising both cost and environmental concerns.

Some also stressed 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.

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).

The public consultation was also an opportunity to find out more about people's use/thoughts about Libraries Extra. The Part 1 analysis provided data on visitor numbers during Libraries Extra opening hours but in order to fully understand how proposed library reductions can be best managed or mitigated it was important to ask for more detail.

We asked in the survey whether respondents used Libraries Extra at any libraries (an offer that is currently only available at community libraries). 46% answered no and 45% answered yes. We already recognise that not everyone would / could use the Libraries Extra offer. For example, young people under the age of 16 are not allowed to use it for Health, Safety and Wellbeing reasons, but some may have replied to this question in the survey.

In order to understand the responses further, we asked a supplementary question on why people don't use Libraries Extra.

Most people replied that they 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 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.

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 expressed concern for the impact on staff employment and the loss of the social/community aspect of libraries.

Those respondents who do use Libraries Extra expressed that they find it useful but even among respondents who are users, there can still be a preference for staffed hours.

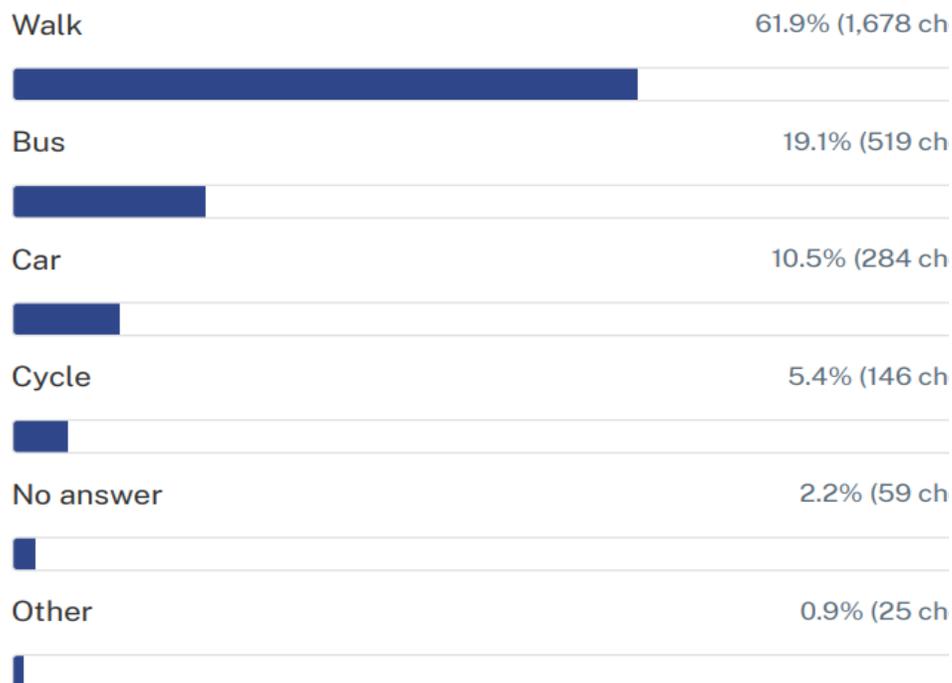
This valuable insight helps us better plan, promote and manage the Libraries Extra part of the library service provision,

especially where it is given as potential mitigations to the impact of library service reductions.

Part 1 of the analysis had little data on how people travel to libraries in the city, so the public consultation was a useful opportunity to understand that better.

We asked survey respondents to tell us how they normally travel to the library they use the most.

2654/2711 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional



The majority of those who chose 'other' travel by train. A few respondents travel by wheelchair, mobility scooter or taxi.

This tells us that walking to a library appears to be an intrinsic part of using a library service in person for many, under the current arrangements. It doesn't tell us why people use that form of transport, however with the answers provided about why people cannot travel to an alternative library we get a good picture of why many people walk. This is an important insight for thinking about the proposals, their potential impacts and any necessary mitigating actions.

During the consultation period we extracted some further data on PC usage at the three libraries we consulted on for closure.

PC usage for the financial year 24/25:

Library	Children's PCs – total hours used	Main library PCs total hours used	Combined total	Total % of entire library opening hours (including Libraries Extra)
Hollingbury	26:15	134:49	161:04	2.28%
Rottingdean	179:43	577:05	756:48	9.45%
Westdene	54:06	217:51	271:57	2.53%

This shows a variance in use, just across 3 community libraries and helps give further insight into community needs and uses.

5b Understanding of community profiles and assessment of need

Geographical communities

Part 1 of the needs and use analysis provided in July 2025 details known published data on the geographical communities around the city libraries.

Library use varies significantly by branch location. As found above, the consultation responses indicate that some branches, such as Westdene, have a higher proportion of users who rely solely on their local library, while others, like Hollingbury, have more users who also use other branches.

Proximity appears to be a key factor in library usage. Many respondents reported visiting libraries that are closest to their homes, with walking and public transport being the main modes of travel. This came up in the public meetings held around Rottingdean and Westdene Libraries too.

Accessibility concerns can be linked with geography. Users with mobility challenges, disabilities, or caring responsibilities emphasised the importance of having a local branch within easy reach, as travelling further can be difficult or impossible for some. Some areas of the city have a challenging environment for some e.g. with steep hills and busy roads in between one library and the nearest alternative.

School links influence geographical patterns. Libraries located near schools were particularly valued for the potential for after-school visits and educational activities, making their location central to some family routines.

Some community libraries serve as informal community hubs for specific neighbourhoods. Local libraries can be seen as safe, inclusive spaces for social interaction, especially in areas that may be lacking other community facilities.

Communities of interest and identity

Age

- **Children and Young People:** Many parents and carers who responded to the survey, contacted the council directly or attended public meetings described libraries as essential for children's literacy and development, offering access to books they could not otherwise afford and providing educational activities. School links were highlighted as important, and libraries located in close proximity to schools are especially valued. There was particular concern that closures could disrupt after-school routines and reduce opportunities for learning and socialisation. It was reported that many felt that libraries are crucial for children's literacy, education, and social development. School partnerships and proximity to schools are highly valued, with Westdene Primary School's classes visiting the library regularly. Concerns were raised that the closure of some community libraries could disrupt family routines and reduce access to books

and educational activities. Concerns were also raised about the risk to children of excessive time spent on smart phones and other digital devices. It was reported by some that access to a community library or evening / weekend access to a central library could help minimise smart device use.

- Older People: Many older respondents highlighted their vulnerability to digital exclusion and social isolation. Libraries were described by some as crucial for maintaining social connections and accessing information, especially for those living alone or with limited mobility. Older respondents highlighted difficulties with public transport and the importance of accessible, local facilities. Many older people were heard during the consultation process, both through paper and digital survey responses and through public meetings.

Disability

- Some respondents living with disabilities expressed concerns about accessing alternative libraries, citing challenges with public transport and the physical difficulty of carrying books. Libraries were valued for their accessible public toilets and as quiet, local spaces. There was concern that closures or reduced hours would increase barriers and potential distress for disabled and neurodivergent users. It was stated that alternative provision would need to be accessible and inclusive.

Sex, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

- Libraries were described as safe havens for some LGBTQ+ people and women—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 and the importance of this to those groups.

Race and Ethnicity

- Several Black and Racially Minoritised respondents emphasised that libraries feel like important, safe, and inclusive spaces, especially for those who may be facing digital exclusion, low income, or social isolation. They highlighted the importance of libraries for children's literacy, community connection, and access to resources that may not be available at home. Concerns were raised about the impact of closures or reduced hours on vulnerable groups, including those with intersectional needs around disabilities and caring responsibilities. Some respondents stressed that libraries support good mental health, can provide opportunities for learning, and help bridge inequalities.

Religion and Belief

- Libraries were described as inclusive spaces for people of all faiths and beliefs, including those with no particular religion. The equalities monitoring section of the survey

captured a range of religious backgrounds among respondents, highlighting the diversity of library users.

Caring Responsibilities

- Many respondents highlighted the importance of libraries for carers and those with caring responsibilities, noting that libraries provide respite, support, and access to resources for both carers and those they care for. A loss of local library provision could reduce access to these essential services, especially for those who are carers.

Low Income and Digital Exclusion

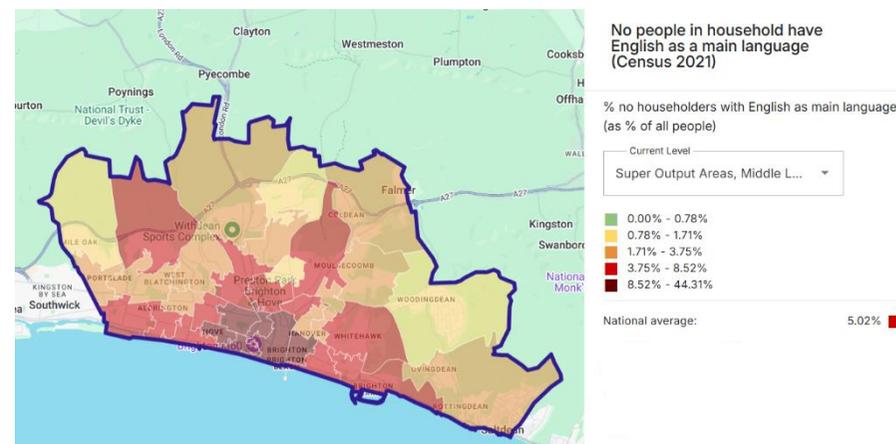
- Libraries were described as essential for low-income families and those experiencing digital exclusion, providing free access to books, computers, and the internet. There was concern that closures would exacerbate inequality and reduce opportunities for job-seeking, benefits access, homework, and administrative tasks. Concerns were raised about how closure or reduced hours could exacerbate inequality; alternative provision should maintain free access and digital support.

Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

- Libraries were also described as important for refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, offering a welcoming environment and access to information and support.

Those with English as a main language

- In order to further understand the ranges of needs across Brighton & Hove and across different communities we've also looked at where there are no people in a household with English as a main language. Information gathered from the 2021 Census is shown below. This shows us that the central city area has a higher mix of households where there are no people with English as a main language. Areas where library closures are proposed have lower rates of households where no people have English as a main language.



Communities less heard

The survey included optional equalities monitoring questions, with 59% of respondents providing information. The data showed a range of ages, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and caring responsibilities among respondents, partially reflecting the diversity of library users in Brighton & Hove.

Efforts were made during the consultation to make it more accessible to a wider range of city residents and actual or potential library users. This included writing directly to dozens of community organisations asking them to share details about the proposals and how to engage with the consultation to their networks.

Within the library service some areas of demographic data are not collected or held about service users, for example those who are Black or Racially Minoritised. The survey therefore was a good opportunity to collect this data.

During the consultation, efforts were made to ensure Black and Racially Minoritised communities were able to engage, recognising that these groups were initially underrepresented in responses. Additional marketing and outreach were undertaken to improve representation. At the conclusion, 12% of respondents (an increase from 6% at consultation midpoint) identified as being from a Black or Racially Minoritised background, compared to 26% of the city's population (Census 2021).

Assessment of need around proposals for specific libraries

Hollingbury

Many respondents highlighted their strong opposition to the proposed closure – 54% respondents 'strongly disagree' while a further 13% 'tend to disagree' - emphasising their view of Hollingbury Library's role as part of a community hub, especially for children and low-income families. Many stated 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 challenging terrain for walking with children.

Concerns were raised about the impact on those living with disabilities and families who rely on the library as part of their daily routine, particularly after school. Respondents noted that public transport costs and limited parking at alternative libraries could create barriers for people using them.

Westdene

58% of respondents strongly disagree with the closure of Westdene Library while a further 11% 'tend to disagree with it', emphasising 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 stated that Patcham Library is not a viable alternative due to distance and poor transport links.

Respondents highlighted that the library's proximity to Westdene Primary School makes it especially valuable for families and children, and that its closure would disproportionately affect those who rely on walking or public transport. The lack of alternative accessible community spaces in the area was also a recurring concern.

Rottingdean

62% of respondents 'strongly disagree' with the proposed closure while 12% 'tend to disagree', emphasising the library's importance for education, literacy, social connection, and as a

safe, free public space. Many highlighted that they felt that closure would disproportionately impact those unable to travel to alternatives, such as the elderly, disabled, and families with young children.

Several respondents noted that Saltdean Library, while mentioned as an alternative, is not easily accessible for many Rottingdean residents.

The library was described as a vital community hub, supporting not just reading and learning but also social inclusion and wellbeing.

Jubilee Library

Many respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal to reduce Jubilee Library's opening hours. 48% of respondents strongly disagree with plans to reduce opening hours on Monday evenings. 51% 'strongly disagree' with planned reduction on Sunday afternoons. They felt the library is always busy during these times and serves as a free, safe public space and community hub for all ages, including children, students, disabled people, and those facing social isolation or financial hardship.

There was emphasis on the importance of Sunday afternoons for families and weekday evenings for students and those seeking a warm and free space. Respondents noted that these are peak times for working people, students, and families.

Respondents highlighted the role of the library in supporting mental health, combating loneliness, and providing essential

internet and computer access for those experiencing digital exclusion.

Hove Library

There was 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 a prime time for families to visit the library. 45% respondents 'strongly disagree' with plans to reduce opening hours on a Wednesday evening and 46% 'strongly disagree' with plans to reduce hours on a Saturday afternoon.

A minority of respondents accepted reduced hours as preferable to full closure – 9% agreeing with reduction in evening hours at Hove - but many suggested that if hours must be reduced, it would be better to cut hours on less busy weekdays rather than evenings or weekends.

Overarching understanding of need

Through both Needs and Use Analysis, the wider public consultation, plus the other documents referred to in Linked Documents, a range of needs in relation to the library service is well set out through both quantitative and qualitative data.

The city's libraries serve a diverse population, including children, families, older people, disabled residents, carers, and marginalised groups. Libraries are valued as safe, inclusive community spaces that provide access to books, digital resources, social interaction, and essential services.

The analysis demonstrates that proximity and accessibility to existing or alternative libraries is important, especially for those with mobility challenges, and that many users currently use their nearest local library, although for some that is just one of the libraries used. The consultation revealed that closures or reductions in service could present an impact on vulnerable groups, such as low-income families, disabled people, and those experiencing digital exclusion.

A case was also made for the importance of libraries for children's literacy, older people's social connections, and as welcoming spaces for LGBTQ+ communities, women, refugees, and migrants.

6. Reflection on the four key factors – need, use, geography and cost

Following the production of Part 1 of the needs and use analysis and having the immediate driver of the budget savings to achieve, the original proposals were identified through analysis four key factors – need, use, geography and cost.

Need Consideration of the needs of those who live, work, study and visit in the area.

Key demographic information was collated to create a picture of existing and potential needs from library and information services. The analysis considered variation in needs relating to social outcomes from area to area.

It is recognised that communities are not consistent or homogenous and within community areas there will be differences in need. However, the needs of residents and accessibility of services were key factors driving decisions for proposals for change.

Use Consideration of current, previous and projected use of existing library provision.

Usage data was collated and analysed to find trends in use and compare usage across sites.

While use does not necessarily correlate with need, it was recognised that changes at the most used sites would impact on a greater number of people. This was taken into account when considering proposals for change.

Geography Consideration of variation in geographical spread of libraries.

The spread and grouping of libraries across the city was considered. Public transport links, parking facilities and measures of car ownership were included, as well as a measure of miles between libraries. Transport links to central

libraries from communities were considered, as well as those between smaller, local libraries, as data showed that customers at Jubilee Library were travelling in from other locations.

This included analysis of the postcodes of active borrowers and how many of them used multiple libraries.

The availability of alternative library sites nearby was considered as part of the rationale for proposals for change.

Cost Consideration of the cost of delivering services and savings required

The cost of delivering services was measured and included but was not limited to staff salaries, cleaning and security costs. Some costs were not included; the book fund was not considered for reduction as the intention would be to reallocate stock to other libraries to support changes in use i.e. if a library were to close, the stock could be moved to the nearby alternative libraries to allow users access to the same volume and variety of stock, albeit from a different site.

The balance of different factors was considered when making and agreeing proposals for change. It is understood that reducing hours at the central libraries necessarily affects the greatest number of people. However, the number of staff needed for those sites is far higher, so any reduction in hours would achieve a greater saving. Community libraries have

much lower running costs than central libraries, and closure of these sites impacts on less individuals.

The analysis of need, use, geography and cost identified which libraries were of highest priority for the city to maintain and promote, based on the needs of the areas they serve, giving appropriate weight and consideration to each of the elements considered. Certain libraries were identified as priorities in order to support those areas at most risk of disadvantage.

The proposals for change that were consulted on in July – October 2025 were developed with consideration of balancing these factors..

The fuller details of what we heard during the public consultation is in the summary report, referred to in the Linked Documents section.

Following the public consultation and the compiling of this Part 2 analysis each proposal was reconsidered and the factors of needs, use, geography and cost reassessed in light of insights received. This is detailed further in the report to Cabinet listed in the Linked Documents section.

It is the council's view that on balance, the revised and final proposals continue to support the rationale of protecting services in areas of greatest need. The data gathered through the extended Needs & Use Analysis, and the additional data from the public consultation, continues to support the original proposals for the closure of Westdene and Hollingbury Libraries and the reduction in hours at Hove and Jubilee Libraries.

However, is it proposed that the library in Rottingdean is retained while options for alternative community-based

provision are explored with partners. The savings which could be achieved through closure of the library are relatively moderate and, on balance, the retention of the service while alternative options for community involvement are explored can be maintained whilst still achieving the majority of the overall saving for the Library Service.

According to the Libraries Basic Dataset 2023 from Arts Council England, Brighton & Hove City Council currently offers more library provision per resident than average across the country. Consideration was given to the travel times and convenience of library location; currently there are clusters, particularly in the east and north of the city, with multiple libraries within 3 miles of each other.

Were the proposal to reduce the city's libraries from thirteen to eleven to be taken forward, the city would still have more libraries per resident than the national average with a reasonable geographic spread.

Whilst it is recognised that any proposals to reduce services will affect some residents, most people will be able to access a comprehensive library service at the 11 remaining libraries, online and through the Home Delivery Service. Customers may need to alter their current usage habits and some will need to travel further, but the range of provision is still reasonably accessible.

7. Assessment on impact of proposals plus mitigations

The Linked Documents refer to a full Equalities Impact Assessment written after the production of Part 1 of the analysis and after the public consultation. This provides detail and insight into the potential impacts of the proposals.

Summary of the impacts that have been identified

Impact on vulnerable groups: The assessment finds that proposed library closures and reduced opening hours could impact certain groups, including:

- Children and young people (especially from low-income families, those with special educational needs, and those without access to books or digital resources at home)
- Older adults (risk of increased social isolation and reduced access to community hubs)
- Disabled people (barriers to travel, digital exclusion, and loss of accessible, inclusive spaces)
- Black and Racially Minoritised communities, migrants, refugees, and those for whom English is not a first language (loss of inclusive, culturally relevant spaces and resources)
- Carers, people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and those at risk of homelessness (loss of free, warm, safe spaces and digital access)

- LGBTQ+ individuals and those with diverse gender identities (loss of safe, inclusive environments)

The EIA highlights that individuals with multiple protected characteristics (e.g., age + disability + low income) may experience compounded negative effects.

Main mitigating actions proposed within the assessment

Accessible Communication: Ensure all information about changes (closures, reduced hours) is provided in accessible formats (plain English, multiple languages, Easy Read, Braille, etc.) and channels, so all affected groups are informed and supported.

Targeted Engagement and Support: Continue proactive outreach to vulnerable and underrepresented groups (older people, disabled residents, carers, minority ethnic communities, migrants, those experiencing poverty) to help them adapt to changes and signpost alternative resources.

Alternative Access and Services: Promote and expand services such as:

- Home Delivery Service for those unable to visit libraries
- Digital library resources (eBooks, audiobooks, online support)
- Libraries Extra (extended access to alternative libraries)

- Publicise alternative “warm spaces” and community venues

Monitoring and Review: Systematically monitor the impact of changes on protected and vulnerable groups, using ongoing feedback and data to adjust mitigations as needed. Findings will be reported to decision-makers for accountability.

Staff Training and Inclusive Practice: Ensure staff are trained to support diverse needs, maintain safe and inclusive spaces, and signpost to relevant local services.

8. How this links to wider strategy and sustainability work

The current Libraries Strategy expires at the end of 2025 and a new strategy will be launched in 2026, developing the longer-term plan for libraries including post Jubilee Library PFI contract arrangements in 2029. The extensive work and inputs gathered throughout the change management process this year all provide valuable contributions to the development of the new strategy.

Here are some of the ways this process will inform the new strategy – which will have a continued focus on the longer-term sustainability of the library service in the city.

- **Importance of evidence-based, inclusive decision-making.** Part 1 and Part 2 of the Needs and Use Analysis plus the Summary of Consultation Responses document demonstrate the importance of using both

quantitative data (usage statistics, demographic analysis) and qualitative feedback (public consultation, community engagement) to ensure that any changes to library services are well informed and considered. It also ensures changes are lawful, fair, and effective. This approach should be embedded in the longer-term strategy to ensure decisions are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to local needs.

- **Understanding diverse community needs.** The analysis highlights the varied needs of different user groups—children, families, older people, disabled residents, low-income households, and marginalised communities. A successful and comprehensive future strategy must recognise these differences, ensuring that library services remain accessible and relevant to all, especially those most at risk of exclusion.
- **Balancing different factors such as accessibility, geography, and cost.** Insights into how people use libraries (e.g., reliance on local branches, travel barriers, importance of proximity) can guide decisions about the location, opening hours, and types of services offered, while also considering financial sustainability.
- **Mitigating negative impacts.** The Equalities Impact Assessment and consultation responses identify potential adverse effects of service reductions or

closures. The strategy should include robust mitigation measures to any future service changes—such as enhanced communication, targeted outreach, alternative access (e.g., Home Delivery, digital resources), and ongoing monitoring—to support those most affected.

- **Exploring and considering alternative models.** Feedback from the consultation suggests there is interest in alternative delivery models, such as volunteer-led services, community partnerships and expanded digital and volunteering offers. The strategy can explore the viability of some of these models to increase resilience, flexibility, and potentially of community partnership in delivery of library services.
- **Continuous engagement.** The process described in this document—phased analysis, consultation, and ongoing review—shows the value of continuous engagement with residents and stakeholders. The longer-term strategy should commit to regular consultation, data collection, and willingness to adapt approaches based on feedback and changing needs.
- **Linking to wider city strategies.** This analysis notes the importance of aligning library strategy with broader council goals, such as social inclusion, digital transformation, sustainability, and community wellbeing. Libraries can play a key role in delivering these wider

objectives, and the strategy should make these connections explicit and sustainable.

The insights from these needs and use analyses provide a robust foundation for a longer-term library strategy that is evidence-based, community-focused, and adaptable. Libraries need to remain vital, sustainable, and responsive to the evolving needs of all residents and service users.

9. Alternative models

Throughout the consultation much was heard about potential alternative models – as a way of avoiding or mitigating potential closure or reductions in opening hours. Suggestions are fully explored elsewhere within the Linked Documents referred to below, but they include:

- Expanding the use of volunteers
- Expanding use of non-staffed Libraries Extra days
- Considering transfer to a community run provision
- Reinstating mobile library services
- Finding another provider to run the libraries
- Partnering with local community spaces to host community book collection points
- Seeking alternative funding sources such as sponsorships or grants
- Considering reduction of hours at other libraries
- Removing the savings targets and reallocating to a different council budget

- Increasing council tax or parking charges

Some models are more practicable to deliver on than others. Some require a greater commitment from those outside of the city council, often including members of the local communities around the libraries. Some models are not viable to take forward and some require greater exploration.

In reaching the final proposals presented to Cabinet in December 2025 there is a commitment to exploring alternative models further, in the short, medium and longer term.

Any significant changes to library provision in the future would be subject to a public consultation process and the council would still need to meet its statutory duty in providing a comprehensive and efficient library service.

10. Conclusions and next steps

The Needs and Use Analysis (Part 1 and 2), informed by both quantitative data and extensive public consultation, demonstrates that Brighton & Hove's libraries are highly valued by a diverse cross-section of the communities that live, work and visit in the city. Libraries are seen as key for enhancing literacy, digital inclusion and for social connection particularly for children, older people, disabled residents, low-income families, and marginalised groups.

The analysis confirms that while changes to provision are necessary and appropriate to ensure long-term sustainability,

these must be carefully balanced to maintain accessibility, inclusivity, and statutory obligations.

The consultation has also highlighted the importance of proximity, flexible service models, and the need for robust mitigation measures to support those most affected by any changes. The process has reinforced the value of continuous engagement, evidence-based decision-making, and alignment with wider city strategies.

Next Steps

- Finalise and communicate decisions:
Present the final proposals to Cabinet in December 2025 ensuring that all decisions are clearly communicated to the public and stakeholders in accessible formats.
- Implement approved changes:
Officers to decommission sites for closure and complete staff consultation on changes to rotas and reductions in staffing.
- Monitor and review impact:
Establish a system for ongoing monitoring of the impact of changes, particularly on vulnerable and protected groups, and report findings to decision-makers for accountability.

- Engage with and support affected groups:
Continue proactive outreach to those most affected, including targeted support and signposting to alternative resources.
- Promote and expand alternative services:
Enhance awareness and uptake of Home Delivery, digital resources, and Libraries Extra. Publicise alternative “warm spaces” and community venues.
- Staff training and inclusive practice:
Ensure staff training continues to support diverse needs and maintain safe, inclusive spaces
- Prepare for future strategy development:
Use the insights and evidence gathered to inform the development of a new library strategy in 2026, ensuring ongoing consultation and adaptability to changing needs.

11. Linked documents and key contacts

July 2025 Cabinet papers : [Brighton & Hove City Council - Agenda item - Library Sustainability Plan](#)

- particularly Needs and Use Analysis Part 1

December 2025 Cabinet papers: [Brighton & Hove City Council - Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 11th December, 2025, 2.00pm](#)

- Summary of consultation responses
- Equalities Impact Assessment
- Cover report for Cabinet

