1. Background

An element of the Library Review has been to gather the thoughts, ideas and opinions of as many people as possible to shape proposals which can then be subject to further consultation and testing before a decision is taken on how Southend’s future library service will be delivered.

To meet this objective it was agreed that the review would encompass three distinct stages;

1. Fact finding,
2. Formulation of proposals, and
3. Implementation.

A key part of stage 1 has been gathering information on how the service is used by the entire community. This information was gathered, in part, through the use of a questionnaire, “Your future Library Service” which as available online and also in hard copy format. An easy read version of the questionnaire was created in partnership with a group of service users who have a learning disability. The consultation lasted a total of just over 13 weeks; commencing 3rd October 2012 and finishing 6th January 2013. During this period there were additional meetings and discussion with stakeholders, community groups and other organisations to enable them to provide a collective response in line with the themes of the questionnaire. The information contained within the body of this report deals solely with the outcome of the questionnaire.

2. Findings (Main questionnaire)

A total of 4,000 hard copy questionnaires were produced and distributed via the entire Southend-on-Sea Branch Library Network. Additional to this 500 copies of the Easy Read version were distributed via the library network, relevant community groups and service providers. The findings from the Easy Read version of the questionnaire will be dealt with separately to this report.

We received in excess of 2,059 responses to the questionnaire; 70% (1439) of which were made using the hard copy / paper version whilst 30% (620) using the council’s online consultation portal. The high volume of returns via hard copy demonstrates the success of the Branch Library Network in being a key information point / distributor for the local communities they serve.
Of the responses received, 51% were completed in full and 49% were partially completed. All responses, complete or partial, will be used to inform the findings of the review.

For this first phase of consultation the questionnaire was very broad in its scope; the purpose of this was to gather information from the outset that will help identify areas to explore further; enabling the Council to meet the challenge of providing affordable, up to date Library Services to meet the needs of the local population which offers a comprehensive and efficient service which is sustainable into the future.

The questions in the survey were focussed on 6 separate themes:-

- Current use of the service
- Ideas on future service
- Developing partnerships with other organisations
- Using volunteers to enhance the service
- Making the service more efficient
- Renting space out to commercial organisations

3. Responses

3.1 Current usage of the Southend-on-Sea Library Service

The questions in this section were designed to provide us with information on how our service users currently use the library service and what would encourage them to use it more.

Qu 1: How often have you visited a Southend-on-Sea Library in the past year?

This question was answered by all respondents; the majority of which use our library services on a fortnightly basis (24%). A significant proportion of respondents were very frequent visitors, using the service more than once a week. In all 86% of respondents visit our libraries once a month or more.

The questionnaire was also answered by people who had not used the service within the past year; this enabled us to get further responses from this group (3% of total respondents) to try and understand why they had not used the service and any ideas they had that would help / encourage them use the service.
Qu 2: Nearest library?

We wanted to find out where the respondents’ nearest library to them was and subsequently which of our libraries they used most often enabling us to get a spread of views from across the library network and identify any local issues relevant to a given area.

This question was answered by 1992 respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southend Central (Victoria Avenue)</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>24.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westcliff (London Road)</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>16.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kent Elms</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh (Broadway West)</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>14.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friars (Constable Way)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorpedene (Delaware Road)</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>9.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southchurch (Southchurch Road / Lifstan Way)</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Library</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Library Service</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qu3: Which Library do you use most often?

We wanted to find out which library people used the most often; for a variety of reasons this is not always the closest one to them. 1976 responses were received to this question. The outcome of this illustrates that Southend Central Library is the most frequently used and that many of its visitors travel a distance to use it.
Qu4. How do you usually travel to the library?

The results to this question are being shown as the responses provided on the basis of the library that the respondents use the most. This helps to give us an indication of some of the differing circumstances for each location. By far, the most popular method of travel is walking, followed by car.
Qu5: Why do you use Southend-on-Sea Libraries?

For this question we wanted to try and understand the reasons that people use our library service. Of the 1968 people who responded most use the library for pleasure and to follow up interests and also a significant proportion (25%) using the library to support their studies or learning.

337 comments were received on the other reasons for using the service; the main areas of which are summarised below:
Qu6. What Services do you use?

This question was asked to help us understand what people do when they use the service - we are showing the results on a location by location basis, which illustrates some nuance; for example Café facilities are very well used at Southend Central followed by studying and library events, whilst at Kent Elms the children’s library is most popular, at Westcliff it is computers and the internet, for Leigh it is getting information about local services and events, for Friars reading groups are very popular for Thorpedene borrowing books and reading groups are equally the most popular and finally, at Southchurch the children’s library.

![Comparison of Library most often used and Services Used (Multiple Response)](image)

180 comments were provided on the other services people used which include attending meetings, lectures, library sales, visiting art exhibitions (including the Focal Point Gallery located within the Central Library Building), and other events such as the Saturday Singalongs and Storyrhymes sessions, using the Police Beat Surgeries and collecting pink recycling bags.
Qu7: Which of the following online services do you use?

A range of library services are available to use online; we wanted to see how many people were using this service. One respondent indicated that they had not been aware of the online services but that as a result of completing the questionnaire they would start to use them.

In total, 1952 responses to this question were received.

126 comments were received regarding the other online services / facilities used; these range from downloading software for home computers, browsing the internet, booking holidays, checking e-mails to using the ELAN catalogue and family history resources.
Qu8: How often do you access library services online outside of the library e.g. at home / work / college?

The purpose of this question was to establish if people used the library’s online service when they were at home or in settings other than the library. 1978 people responded to this indicating that over half never use the library’s online services anywhere other than in a library setting.
Qu9: If you don’t visit or use public library services in Southend-on-Sea, what stops you from doing so?

396 people gave us an indication of the reasons that prevented them for using the library or using it as much as they would like to. The main reason being lack of time and other reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>39.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I buy my own books</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>18.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overdue charges</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find everything I need online or from other sources</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconvenient opening hours</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor choice of books</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>28.79%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to those stated above, the main reasons for not using the library were:

- Parking & parking charges
- Opening Hours
- Lack of e-books to borrow or a preference for using e-books bought on-line
- Lack of knowledge about the range of services offered
- Noise levels
- Layout and decor being uninviting
- Mobility & access issues
- Self service machines
- Choice of books
- Unreliable IT systems

Qu10: If you don’t visit or use library services, what would encourage you to do so?

Here we received 212 comments and ideas on improvements that could be made to encourage greater use. There were some similarities to the comments provided above. The main areas were:

- Opening hours (to include evenings & Sundays)
- More online services
- Better advertising of the service
- An e-book lending service
- Book reviews by local authors
Quiet rooms / actions to address noise levels
Specialist staff (especially for Childrens books)
Coffee shops at each location
Better IT
Better choice of book & stock rotation
Text reminders to prevent fines
lip reading classes
Community and other events

Qu11: What is most important to you in library services?

We received 2007 responses to this question; the most important aspects of the service have been identified as the quality and choice of books, followed by the library being a welcoming place to visit.

3.2 Views about the future of the library service

The way people use our libraries has been changing. Libraries offer more than books. New technology means that more and more people want to use computers, have access to the internet, music, films and e-books.

Many people visit the library for a variety of health, education and social activities and events. Libraries remain a place where people choose to go for information on a variety of topics. In this section we wanted to explore possibilities for the future.
Qu12: Would you use your library more if it offered the following?

Overall, there seems to be some level of support to look at options around exploring Wi-fi access and downloadable e-books and to a certain extent more computers with internet access; however, if more branches were Wi-Fi enabled there may not need to be additional PC provision.

Qu13: Do you have any other comments or ideas that would encourage / improved your use of the library service?

This question elicited the most amount of the free text comments in the questionnaire; a grand total of 702. Throughout the questionnaire many respondents have made clear their love of the library service; many do not want anything to change at all, others may not want the service to change but still put forward ideas to improve the service.

A summary of these include:

- Meeting rooms to hire
- Mobile library – with an advance ordering facility
- Bill paypoint machines in branches
- Links with schools
- Sunday & late night opening
- E-mail information re special events
- Coffee shops
- E-books
- Study groups (not just for students)
- Conversations with staff
Qu.14. Thinking about library services in the next 3 - 5 years time, which of the following scenarios most appeal to you?

The overall responses to these questions are shown in the graph below, indicating that the most popular scenarios include:
This is further broken down to look at the responses on an individual branch level to

433 additional comments were received in this section, there were several comments around bigger not always being better and some felt that an option of better but smaller, local libraries should have been offered. Overall, there is support for libraries to be used as settings for community groups and activities and also to explore sharing the library buildings with other public services.

Looking at the responses on a location basis, users of the Central Library seemed in favour of bigger, better libraries which in the main, supports the move to The Forum. Many respondents commented that they were looking forward to the Forum opening and some felt that this would take them go to the library more often.
3.3 Developing Partnerships with other organisations

Southend-on-Sea library service currently works in partnership with Essex County Council when ordering books. Other library services in the country have explored the possibility of working more closely with local community organisations on behalf of the council. These options may open up more access to external funding, have greater involvement from local people and encourage more activities / services.

Qu.15: Do you think partnerships with other organisations should be explored for the delivery of the Southend-on-Sea Library Service?

In general the majority of respondents were in favour of exploring the possibility of partnerships with other organisations.
benefit of the library users and that this must be the prime focus. Some respondents felt that there could be a risk with partnerships, particularly with commercial organisations, that the library could get ‘lost’ and that if it was not seen as commercially viable by the partner would lead to a diminished service. Some of the suggested partnerships to explore are:

- Childrens services
- Welfare Services
- Payment of rent
- Health prevention
- Citizens Advice
- Social Services
- SAVS (Southend Association of Voluntary Services)

3.4 Using volunteers to enhance our service

We already have the support of volunteers for a variety of activities; we rely on them to help us deliver the home library service to some of our most vulnerable residents. Volunteering opportunities could be developed further to enhance the library service. It must be stressed that the role of volunteers is to enhance the service and not to replace paid members of staff.

Qu.17: Would you be willing to support your local library by volunteering to help in any of the following types of activity?

1758 people responded to this questionnaire, 64% of which did not want to volunteer for the library service. An encouraging 36% indicated that they might be willing to consider undertaking voluntary activities within the service. The following two graphs indicate preferences for activities and also those preferences on a branch by branch basis.
473 comments received on volunteering; many people were not in favour of the general principle of using volunteers within the library service as felt this was something that should be provided for by trained staff. Respondents valued the skill of employed librarians and were concerned that the librarians’ knowledge built up over many years would be lost.
Of those who were supportive of the idea of using volunteers, many qualified this on the basis that ‘they would volunteer only if they did not take the place of paid staff’ and saw the role of volunteers as providing services that do not already exist or additional support to what is already there: enhancement rather than replacement.

3.5 Making our library service more efficient

We want to achieve up to date library services which are affordable both now and into the future. We need to look at the library service to see how it can work in new and different ways. This could mean developing, changing or relocating some services and reducing or closing others.

Qu.20: Which aspect of the current library service do you value the most?

Respondents were asked to rank the following options in order of importance (with 1 being what is valued most and 5 the least).

![Bar chart showing the value of different aspects of library services]

The range of services and materials, staff and the council continuing to run the service emerged as those areas valued most by respondents.

Qu.21: Do you have any other ideas on how the library service could make savings?

For this question we received 393 comments on areas for the council to consider. Ideas generated here were primarily around income generation opportunities, such as cafes, book sales, ticketed events, energy efficiency, co-locating the library in existing buildings such as schools and colleges and donations. People did not want to see staff reductions or branch closures.

Suggestions were also made around making small charges for some of the existing services which are currently provided for free. Other ideas were around reducing the number of computers provided as more and more people have internet access in a range of devices.
Other suggested changes were around using the libraries as places for local and national companies to advertise (for a fee).

Some suggestions were also received around re-configuring the service in terms of the number of branches, enhancing the mobile library and increasing the use of online services. If more e-books were available, less physical copies would be required thus saving space which could be rented out to other organisations.

3.6 Renting space out to commercial organisations

Some libraries have space which could be rented out to commercial organisations such as coffee bars and booksellers. This could increase income and would help us to sustain library services.

**Qu22:** Which of the following services would you find useful to have located within your library?

![Comparison of Library most often used and Commercial services in libraries (Multiple Response)](image)

In general, respondents were in favour of renting out spaces within the libraries to other organisations. The most popular were related around books and associations with reading such as coffee shops / cafe and bookseller / newsagent.
Similar to comments received in the previous question, respondents noted a preference for working with local businesses rather than large national / international organisations. Again people were keen to ensure that in any commercial arrangement the essence and core of the library was retained.

Qu.23: Final comments:

We gave people one last chance to tell us anything else they wanted to about the library service and the review. 437 respondents provided us with their final thoughts, ideas and hopes for the service.

Many wanted to reiterate the value they place on the service, staff and their local library branch. Some people liked the idea of libraries being community hubs. Others felt that the library service should develop its reach into the community and provide the best customer service it can at all times.

Quotes from respondents include:

“The range and breadth of existing services should be promoted frequently and adapted to user demand. The library service should be proactive in playing an active role in the changes that are taking place in life-long learning. The library service must strive to become the hub of the community to guarantee its slice of expenditure.”

“More welcoming, more space to read, spend time (& possibly purchase more services)”

“I believe it is essential that the library embraces new ideas and move with the times, however in doing so I hope we don't lose sight of the simple fact that libraries are first and foremost a place to borrow books. And also that they do not become so few and far between that some members of society cannot access them.”
4 Who Responded?

Prior to any decisions being taken about potential changes to the Library Service the Council needs to take account of the demographic factors of the local area and understand how any changes could impact; either positively or negatively, on certain groups of people and local communities. Once the potential groups and impacts are identified the Council will be incorporate this into their decision making processes.

To assist with this, we asked respondents to provide us with certain information about themselves; these questions were optional and did not have to be answered; we also provided an option of ‘Prefer not to Say’ to enable people to clearly note their abstention.

From the responses where this information was provided we have been able to break down the data as follows: