Reading Libraries

New Central Library and Themes for Service - results

- **Project**: Reading Libraries - New Central Library and Themes for Service
- Duration: 27 June 2025-26 July 2025
- **Project manager**: Simon Smith, Reading Libraies and Museum Manager

Report summary

This exercise was to show get feedback on the final designs for the Central library, in preparation for the move in 2026. We were also seeking feedback on our draft themes for the library service to inform our future development.

Do you have any comments about the welcome space? (79/137 commented)

Overall, the main trends were concerns about staff visibility and support, comfort and accessibility of seating, clarity of signage and navigation, and a desire for a warmer and more community-focused atmosphere.

A significant number of respondents raised concerns about the lack of a visible staff presence or reception/help desk in the welcome area, emphasising the importance of staff for assistance and a clear point of contact. Related to this, several people mentioned the need for clear signposting, maps, or wayfinding to help users navigate the library.

Comfort and accessibility of seating were frequently mentioned. Many felt the seating looked uncomfortable, too modern or clinical, or not suitable for longer stays. There were also requests for more individual soft seats and accessible furniture for disabled and older users.

Some respondents felt the space was underutilised or too empty and suggested it could be better used for community activities, public notices, or more bookshelves.

The colour scheme and overall aesthetic received mixed feedback. While some liked the bright and modern look others found it too clinical, childish or likely to date quickly. There were several requests for more plants and local artwork to make the space warmer and more inviting.

A few respondents suggested adding a coffee shop or refreshment area to encourage people to stay longer.

Many respondents commented that the image provided was too small or unclear to properly assess the welcome space.

English

Do you have any comments about the computer and study spaces? (73/137 commented)

Several respondents commented on the need for more efficient use of space in the computer and study areas, with suggestions to add more work points or study spots.

Feedback indicated a need for increased capacity for individual study and computer use, indicating that the current arrangements are not meeting demand.

Do you have any comments on this courtyard space? (73/137 commented)

Feedback on the courtyard space indicated a a preference for a warmer, more inviting atmosphere; specifically, the current colour scheme was described as cold, and the addition of plants was suggested to improve the space.

Several respondents expressed reservations about the inclusion of live events and screens in all libraries, with one noting this was not something they wanted or needed.

Do you have any comments on these children's and teen libraries? (70/137 commented)

Respondents generally reacted positively to the proposed children's and teen library spaces, with several noting that the new designs look much nicer and more engaging than the current Central Library.

There was appreciation for the inspiring and accessible ground floor location. Suggestions included adding plants, local artwork, and a quiet area for creative activities such as Lego building.

Do you have any comments on the local history library? (66/137 commented)

Overall there was satisfaction with the current offering, alongside a desire for more visual representation of local history.

Respondents generally expressed positive feedback about the local history library, praising the work of the local studies specialist.

There was a suggestion to enhance the space with local artwork, such as prints from local presses and historic photographs of buildings and schools.

No negative comments or major concerns were raised.

What are you most looking forward to about the new library? (95/137 commented)

English

Respondents most frequently mentioned looking forward to a more inviting and comfortable space in the new library, with specific references to enjoying books in a nicer environment and the possibility of relaxing features.

The central location was also highlighted as a positive change, making the library more accessible.

Respondents expressed interest in having access to new and up-to-date book stock.

There was also enthusiasm for using the library as a space for study, family visits, and participating in activities such as reading groups and workshops.

Do you have any concerns about the move to the new library in 2026? (95/137 commented)

Many respondents are worried that the new library will be smaller, more cramped, and noisier, with less privacy and comfort for users.

The most common concerns raised by respondents are about a reduction in the number of books available on shelves, with several expressing that browsing physical collections is essential and that fewer books would be a significant loss.

There is concern that the design prioritises children and teens at the expense of adult users.

A reduction in visible, friendly, and informed staff is another key worry, with some respondents highlighting the importance of human connection and expressing unease about a shift towards automation, as well as the 'clinical' feeling of the images.

Supporting children and young people with language and literacy development (132/137 responses)

English

How important do you feel this theme should be for the library service?

132/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Very important   66.4% (91 choices)

Important   20.4% (28 choices)

Neither important or unimportant   4.4% (6 choices)

No answer   3.6% (5 choices)

Not at all important   2.9% (4 choices)

Don't know   1.5% (2 choices)

Not very important   0.7% (1 choice)

English
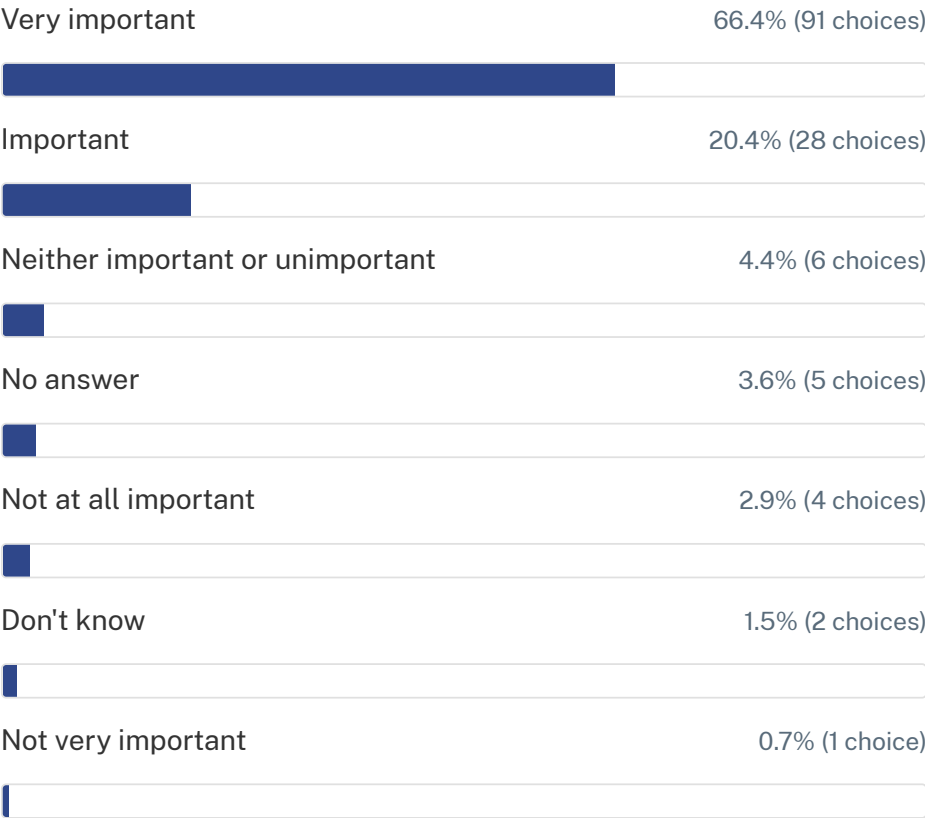
And how important do you think the following are?

92/137 - Matrix - optional

	1 - Not at all important	2 - Not very important	3 - Neither unimportant or important	4 - Important	5 - Very important
Offering national schemes like Bookstart and reading challenges	1.12%	0%	10.11%	40.45%	46.07%
Free rhymetimes	3.33%	5.56%	14.44%	32.22%	34.44%
Helping with early speech and language	2.27%	2.27%	9.09%	30.68%	48.86%
A wide range of free books to borrow	0%	0%	0%	24.18%	72.53%
Story readings/storytimes	2.2%	1.1%	6.59%	40.66%	43.96%

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Improving digital provision, access and content to support learning and skills (131/137 responses)

🇬🇧 English

How important do you feel this theme should be for the library service?

131/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Important   42.3% (58 choices)

Very important   41.6% (57 choices)

Not very important   6.6% (9 choices)

Neither important or unimportant   4.4% (6 choices)

No answer   4.4% (6 choices)

Not at all important   0.7% (1 choice)

Don't know   0% (0 choices)

English

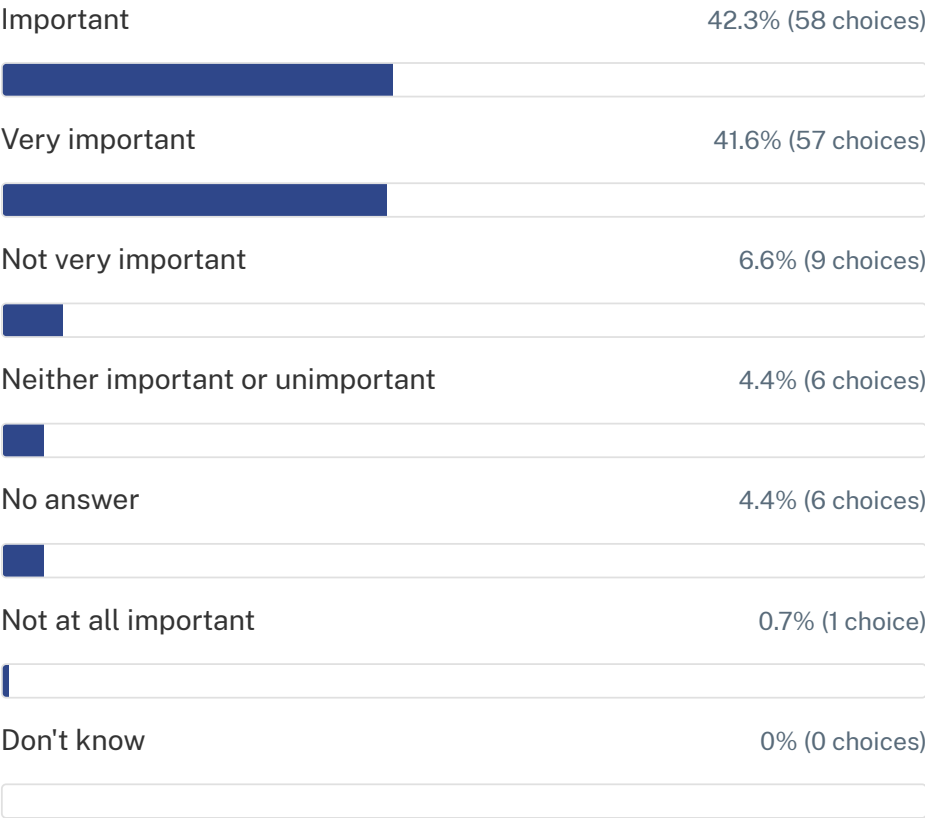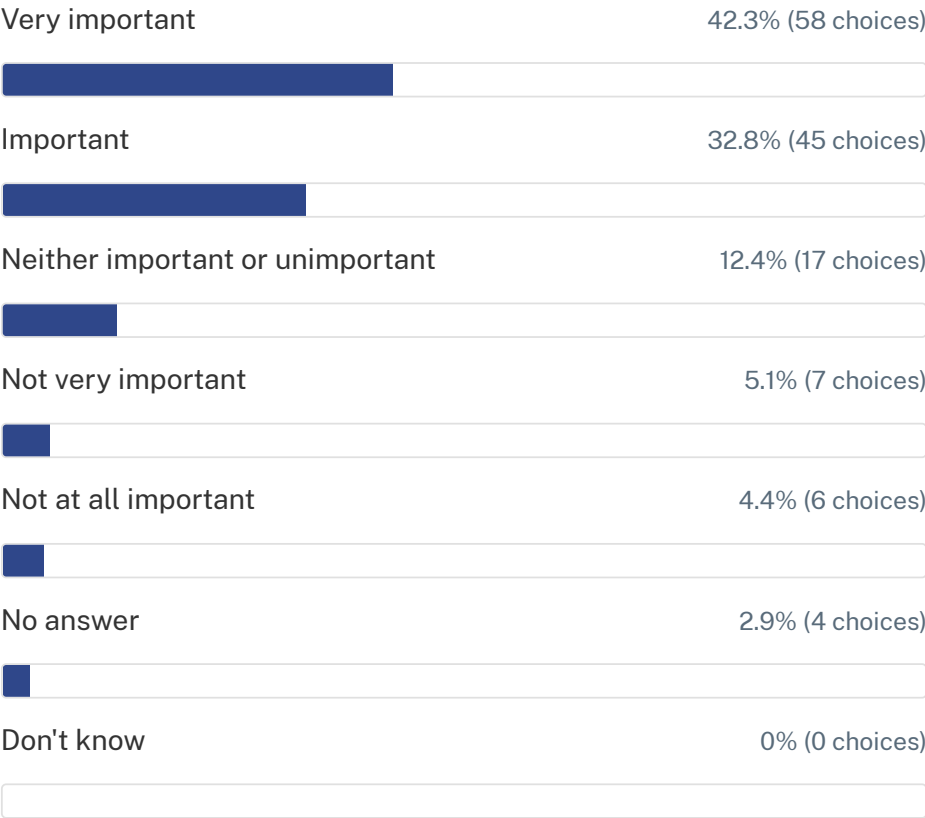## And how important do you think the following are?

91/137 - Matrix - optional

	1 - Not at all important	2 - Not very important	3 - Neither unimportant or important	4 - Important	5 - Very important	6 - Don't know
Providing tablets for use at the library	12.22%	11.11%	20%	34.44%	15.56%	6.67%
Providing a range of ebooks, emagazines and eaudio	4.44%	2.22%	13.33%	44.44%	31.11%	4.44%
Providing IT equipment to borrow	7.87%	10.11%	19.1%	32.58%	24.72%	5.62%
Providing training and support	5.62%	1.12%	11.24%	34.83%	44.94%	2.25%
Lending tablets for home use	15.91%	12.5%	25%	23.86%	13.64%	9.09%
Providing document printing services	0%	0%	7.78%	34.44%	53.33%	4.44%

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Bringing arts, culture, heritage and creativity into library spaces (133/137 responses)

🇬🇧 English

How important do you feel this theme should be for the library service?

133/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Very important   42.3% (58 choices)

Important   32.8% (45 choices)

Neither important or unimportant   12.4% (17 choices)

Not very important   5.1% (7 choices)

Not at all important   4.4% (6 choices)

No answer   2.9% (4 choices)

Don't know   0% (0 choices)

English

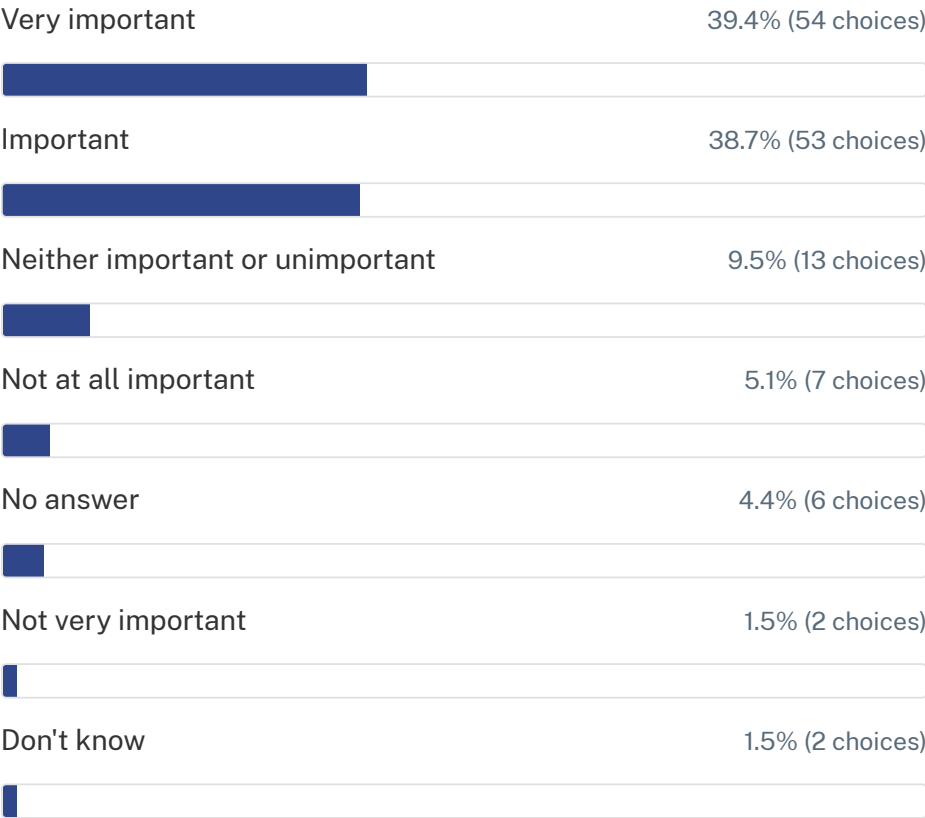## And how important do you think the following are?

87/137 - Matrix - optional

	1 - Not at all important	2 - Not very important	3 - Neither unimportant or important	4 - Important	5 - Very important	6 - Do know
Provision of local history information and resources	0%	4.65%	6.98%	40.7%	47.67%	0%
Hosting Reading Museum events and activities	3.45%	4.6%	17.24%	40.23%	32.18%	2.3%
Live performances in every library	12.64%	14.94%	22.99%	26.44%	21.84%	1.15%
Working with local cultural organisations to deliver events and activities	5.75%	12.64%	12.64%	29.89%	39.08%	0%
Providing space for craft sessions	6.9%	11.49%	24.14%	29.89%	24.14%	3.45

Supporting improvements for Reading's health, wellbeing, literacy and cohesion (131/137 responses)

English

How important do you feel this theme should be for the library service?

131/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Very important   39.4% (54 choices)

Important   38.7% (53 choices)

Neither important or unimportant   9.5% (13 choices)

Not at all important   5.1% (7 choices)

No answer   4.4% (6 choices)

Not very important   1.5% (2 choices)

Don't know   1.5% (2 choices)

English

And how important do you think the following are?

87/137 - Matrix - optional

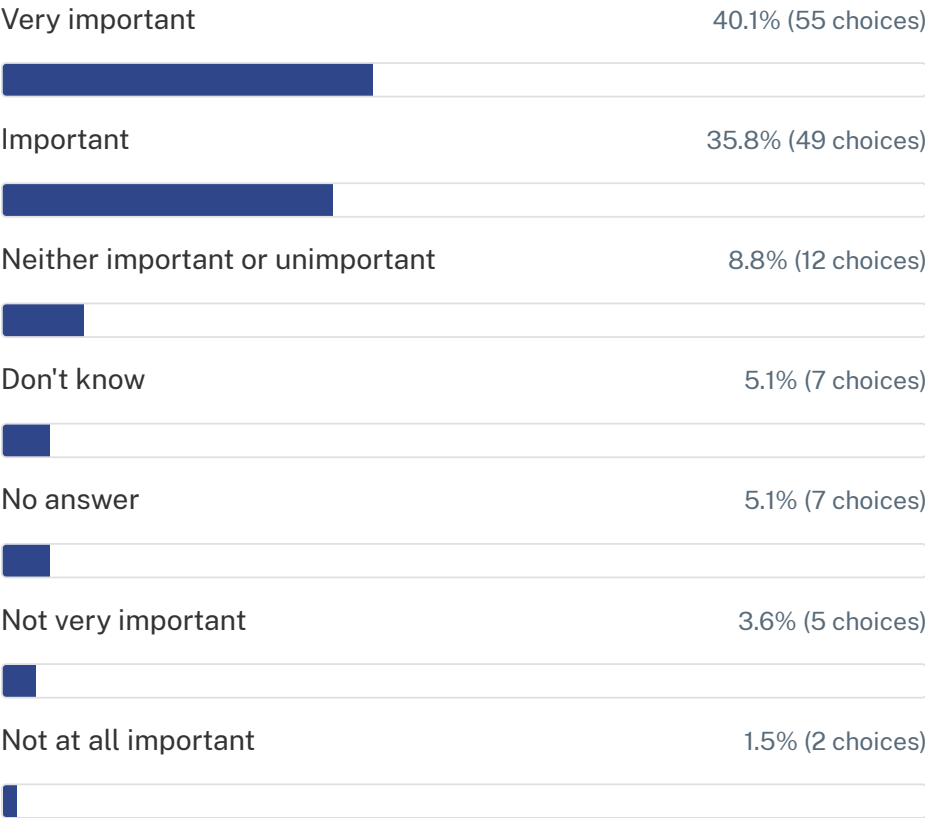|	1 - Not at all important	2 - Not very important	3 - Neither unimportant or important	4 - Important	5 - Very important	6 - Dont know
Hosting coffee morning sessions at libraries	5.81%	9.3%	24.42%	38.37%	19.77%	2.33%
Providing space for groups to run own sessions	4.6%	5.75%	22.99%	36.78%	27.59%	2.3%
Hosting health activities and sessions	4.65%	10.47%	18.6%	40.7%	24.42%	1.16%

Ensuring all libraries in the network respond to the needs of communities and building these into funding bids (130/137 responses)

English

How important do you feel this theme should be for the library service?

130/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Very important   40.1% (55 choices)

Important   35.8% (49 choices)

Neither important or unimportant   8.8% (12 choices)

Don't know   5.1% (7 choices)

No answer   5.1% (7 choices)

Not very important   3.6% (5 choices)

Not at all important   1.5% (2 choices)

English

And how important do you think the following are?

86/137 - Matrix - optional

	1 - Not at all important	2 - Not very important	3 - Neither unimportant or important	4 - Important	5 - Very important	6 - Don't know
Having library books to borrow from new and different places - like community centres	4.71%	7.06%	22.35%	40%	21.18%	4.71%
Using customer groups for feedback	0%	4.65%	17.44%	48.84%	26.74%	2.33%
Promoting library space as somewhere that can host activities	4.71%	11.76%	16.47%	36.47%	25.88%	4.71%

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Do you have any other comments on our themes? (62/137 commented)

Many respondents expressed support for the proposed themes.

Several highlighted the importance of the library serving as a community hub, offering activities such as creative, craft, building, and reading clubs.

There was a strong emphasis on the library being more than just a place to borrow books, and instead becoming central to community life.

Overall, feedback was generally positive, with appreciation for the work being done.

🇬🇧 English

Are there any other themes you would like us to focus on? (55/137 commented)

Respondents most frequently emphasised the importance of promoting reading for all ages, ensuring access to new and popular books, and providing a welcoming space where people — especially children — can escape screens and digital distractions.

There was also a strong desire for the library to be a free, inclusive environment that supports people during the cost of living crisis and does not require spending money.

Several respondents highlighted the value of activities and events, particularly those delivered by external providers, and suggested a wider promotion of literacy across the town.

Additionally, there was a suggestion to focus on healthy eating, specifically promoting options beyond junk or ultra-processed food as part of library themes.

Have you or any members of your family used any of Reading's library facilities, either in person, via the home delivery service, mobile service or online? (Please tick one box)

134/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

Yes, in the last 6 months   64.2% (88 choices)

No, not for at least 2 years   19% (26 choices)

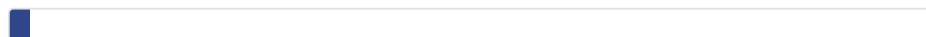Yes, in the last year   10.2% (14 choices)

Yes, in the last 2 years   3.6% (5 choices)

No answer   2.2% (3 choices)

Don't know   0.7% (1 choice)

🇬🇧 English

Which of the following library buildings or facilities have you used in the last two years?

108/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Reading Central Library   65% (89 choices)

Caversham Library   31.4% (43 choices)

No answer   21.2% (29 choices)

Reading Libraries app   20.4% (28 choices)

Online library (ebooks, emagazines, eaudio)   13.9% (19 choices)

Battle Library   13.1% (18 choices)

Palmer Park Library   10.9% (15 choices)

Tilehurst Library   9.5% (13 choices)

Southcote Library   5.1% (7 choices)

Whitley Library   5.1% (7 choices)

Home Library Service   2.2% (3 choices)

English

Which of the following services provided by the library service do you generally use?

68/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Onsite tablets for web browsing   0% (0 choices)

Bookgroup sets   0.7% (1 choice)

Audio books (CD)   0.7% (1 choice)

Collaborative working space   0.7% (1 choice)

Meeting rooms   0.7% (1 choice)

Take home laptops   0.7% (1 choice)

Online events   1.5% (2 choices)

Summer Reading Challenge / Reading loves reading   2.9% (4 choices)

Books in languages other than English   2.9% (4 choices)

Large Print books   2.9% (4 choices)

Community space   2.9% (4 choices)

Storytime   3.6% (5 choices)

eMagazines / Libby   3.6% (5 choices)

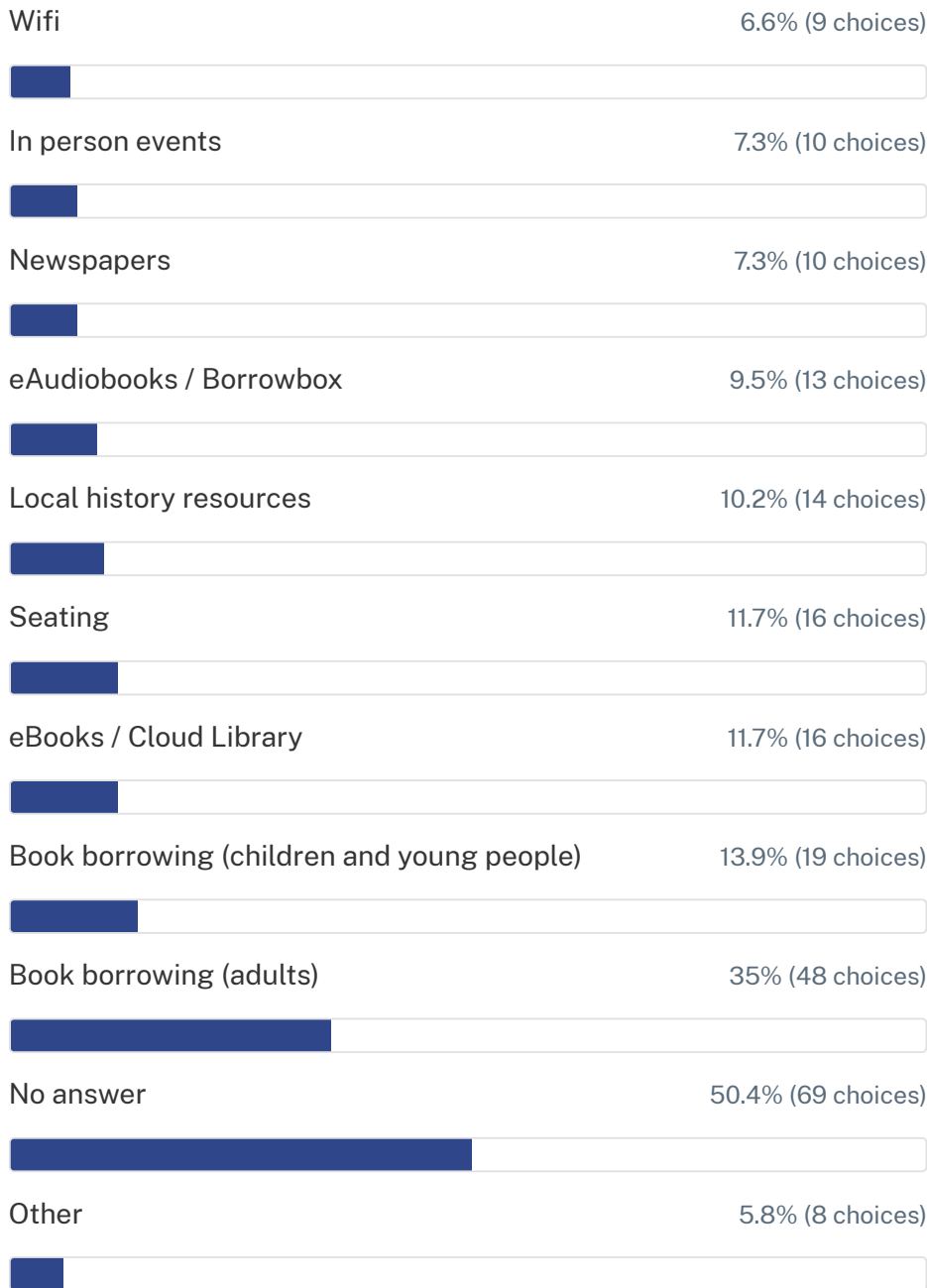Online resources   5.1% (7 choices)

Study space   5.8% (8 choices)

Rhymetime   5.8% (8 choices)

English

Wifi

6.6% (9 choices)

In person events

7.3% (10 choices)

Newspapers

7.3% (10 choices)

eAudiobooks / Borrowbox

9.5% (13 choices)

Local history resources

10.2% (14 choices)

Seating

11.7% (16 choices)

eBooks / Cloud Library

11.7% (16 choices)

Book borrowing (children and young people)

13.9% (19 choices)

Book borrowing (adults)

35% (48 choices)

No answer

50.4% (69 choices)

Other

5.8% (8 choices)

English

Some people have told us they have these reasons for not using the library, do any of these apply to you?

61/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

No answer   55.5% (76 choices)

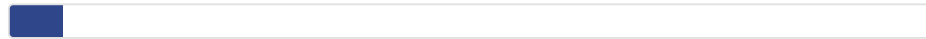I get all my information online   14.6% (20 choices)

I don't have enough time   13.1% (18 choices)

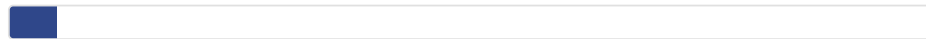I buy my own books   11.7% (16 choices)

I can't easily get to a library building   5.8% (8 choices)

I don't think the service is relevant to me   5.1% (7 choices)

Nothing I am interested in   2.9% (4 choices)

I'm worried about getting overdue fines (we don't charge   2.2% (3
fines)   choices)

I don't have internet access for library services   0.7% (1 choice)

Other please specify)   19% (26 choices)

Have you used the library app?

130/137 - Multiple choice - choose one - optional

No, I don't use   53.3% (73 choices)

Yes I do use   30.7% (42 choices)
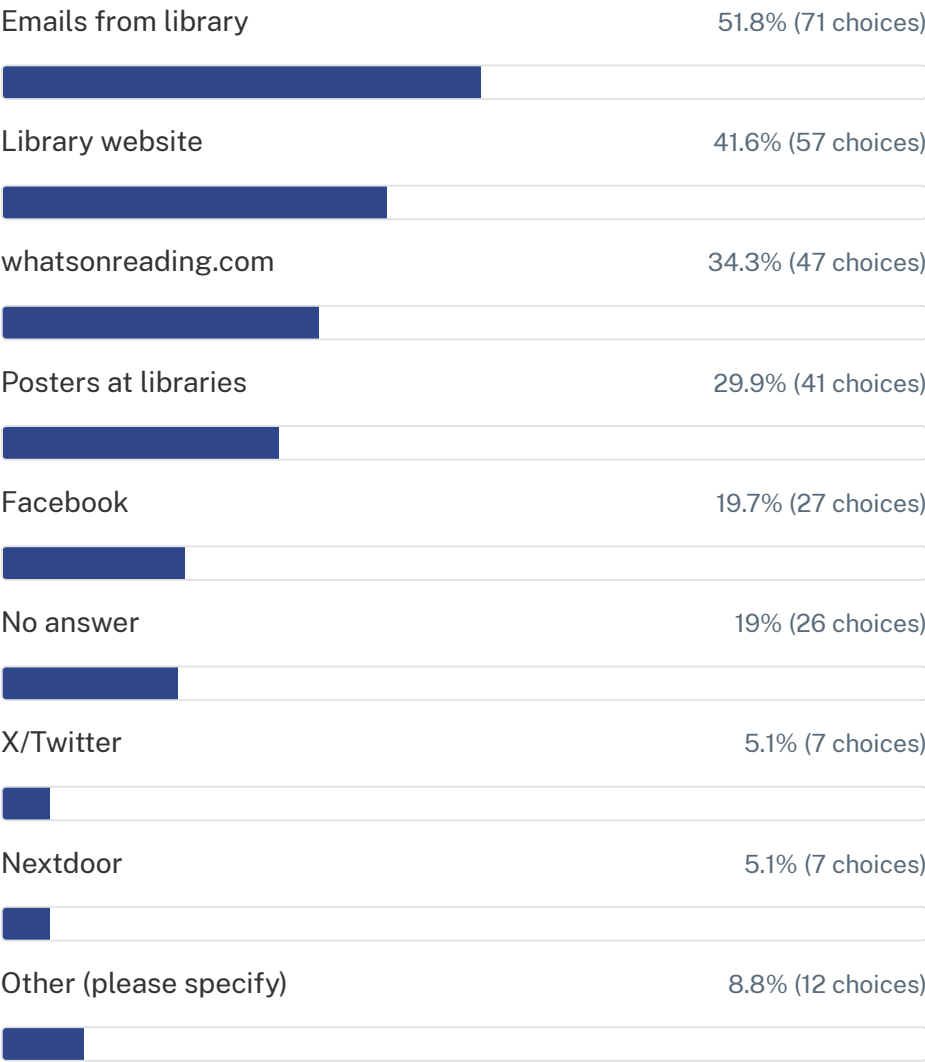
I have done but I don't now   10.9% (15 choices)

No answer   5.1% (7 choices)

English

Where would you prefer to find out about library events and activities?

111/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

Emails from library   51.8% (71 choices)

Library website   41.6% (57 choices)

whatsonreading.com   34.3% (47 choices)

Posters at libraries   29.9% (41 choices)

Facebook   19.7% (27 choices)

No answer   19% (26 choices)

X/Twitter   5.1% (7 choices)

Nextdoor   5.1% (7 choices)

Other (please specify)   8.8% (12 choices)

Have you got any suggestions for new activities you'd like to see in your local library?

Overall, there is a clear desire for a wider variety of interactive, community-focused activities for both adults and children.

Respondents most frequently suggested more events and activities centred around reading and writing, such as author visits, creative writing workshops, and poetry groups;. There was also a notable interest in expanding group activities, including more adult reading groups. For children, respondents recommended beginning language classes, themed book clubs (e.g. for popular series like Harry Potter or Percy Jackson), local history sessions, and Lego clubs.

English

We will have a gallery space at the New Central library - what would you like to see there?

124/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

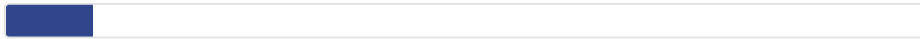Art exhibitions by local artists   79.6% (109 choices)

Exhibitions brought in from outside Reading   56.9% (78 choices)

No answer   9.5% (13 choices)

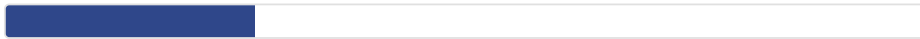Other   14.6% (20 choices)

Would you be interested in hiring any library service spaces? If so then as long as your contact detail is given elsewhere on the form we may contact you solely for this purpose

100/137 - Multiple choice - choose many - optional

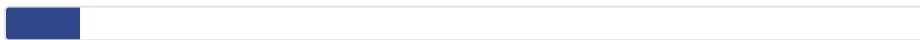No   62% (85 choices)

No answer   27% (37 choices)

Yes, room hire   8% (11 choices)

Yes, gallery space at Central Library   4.4% (6 choices)

English