

Cheshire West & Chester Council

# Museums and Libraries

Consultation Report

November 2024



**WEST CHESHIRE  
MUSEUMS**



**Libraries**



Cheshire West  
and Chester

## Findings of the Museums and Libraries Consultation

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## **Background to the consultation**

Cheshire West and Chester Council carried out a consultation in Spring 2024 to help guide how museum and library services are delivered in the future. The consultation sought people's views so that changes are made in the best way possible and the Council continues to deliver responsive services that provide value for money.

The Council delivers museum and library services across the whole of Cheshire West and Chester. These services are open to all and are well used by communities every day.

Cheshire West and Chester Council's ambition is to offer modern, accessible, and sustainable museum and library services whose development is informed by the views of residents across the borough.

To achieve this, the Council developed some principles to guide how museums and library services are delivered in the future. This included some proposed changes to the opening hours of museums and libraries to ensure consistency across the borough, and that each local area has access to library services throughout the week.

The purpose of this consultation was to understand the views of service users, residents and wider stakeholders about these proposals.

Feedback from this consultation will help to inform senior managers' decisions when they consider how museum and library services are delivered in the future.

## **How the consultation was carried out**

The consultation was open for 8 weeks, starting on 5 February 2024 and closing on 2 April 2024. There were multiple ways in which people could respond to the consultation and ensure their views were heard. These methods included an online survey and scheduled drop-in events which were also advertised on the Council website. These took place on various dates throughout the consultation period at venues including:

- Weaver Hall Museum and Northwich Library
  - Ellesmere Port Library
  - Grosvenor Museum, Chester
  - Neston Library
  - Lion Salt Works, Northwich
  - Upton Library
  - Winsford Library
  - Tarvin Library
- 

Paper copies of the survey were available in museums and libraries across the borough and on request from the Council's contact centre. People were also able to respond to the consultation by email, telephone or by sending their views to a dedicated postal address.

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Communication methods to ensure that key stakeholders were made aware of the consultation and given the opportunity to have their say included media releases, emails to key stakeholder groups including town and parish councils, briefings for Members, social media and the presence of the consultation on the Council website.

The consultation received a response from 1,595 people. The responses were made up of 1,492 completed surveys, 128 people attending drop-in sessions with 67 people making comments at the sessions, as well as 36 email/letter responses.

## Key messages

The overarching key messages that have emerged from the consultation are as follows:

Key messages relating to museums:

- The majority of people agreed with the principles for museums with more than three quarters of respondents (87%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing.
- For each museum more people agreed than disagreed with the proposed changes to opening hours.
  - However, those who had visited Lion Salt Works, Weaver Hall Museum, and Stretton Watermill in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to the proposed opening hours.
  - Contrastingly, those who had visited Grosvenor Museum in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'strongly agree' or 'agree' to the proposed opening hours.
- Many people thought that keeping local history alive and having informative and engaging exhibitions and events are the most important things about museums.

Key messages relating to libraries:

- The majority of respondents agreed with the library service principles, with more than three quarters of respondents (88%) either strongly agreeing or agreeing.
- More respondents agreed with the proposed changes to library opening hours than disagreed, with 46% of respondents answering 'strongly agree' or 'agree'.
  - The level of agreement with the proposed opening hours for libraries was broadly similar for those respondents who had used a library in the last 12 months and those respondents who had not used a library in the last 12 months.
- Many respondents felt that having a good range of books available was important for library services. People also commented on the importance of libraries being a safe and welcoming place to visit with friendly and knowledgeable staff, and that libraries are an important part of the community.
- Many people felt that it was an important aspect of library services that opening hours are long and cover a range of times and days to suit different groups of people including working people, parents, carers and students. Times mentioned were evenings, lunch times, weekends as well as weekdays. People also commented that locations need to be easy to reach and convenient.

## Summary of consultation findings

When completing the survey, respondents could choose whether they responded to questions about museums or libraries or about both services. In total, 34 people chose to answer the questions about museums, 907 people chose to answer questions about libraries, and 548 people chose to answer questions about both museums and libraries. 3 people didn't answer this question.

## Detailed museum findings

### Current museums usage

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were asked how often they had visited the four West Cheshire Museums in the last 12 months. They were asked to respond for Lion Salt Works, Weaver Hall Museum, Grosvenor Museum and Stretton Watermill.

**Table 1: How often respondents visit West Cheshire Museums**

During the last 12 months, how often have you visited the following West Cheshire Museums?										
Answer Choices	Almost every day	At least once a week	At least once a fortnight	About once a month	About once every three months	About once every six months	About once a year	Less than once a year	Rarely	Never
Lion Salt Works	<1%	1%	3%	3%	5%	7%	18%	11%	11%	41%
Weaver Hall Museum	1%	3%	2%	4%	5%	6%	14%	10%	9%	46%
Grosvenor Museum	<1%	1%	3%	6%	10%	10%	19%	10%	10%	30%
Stretton Watermill	0%	0%	<1%	1%	2%	2%	12%	9%	12%	62%

Base for table: 494 - 541 respondents. Please note that due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

During the last 12 months, how often have you visited the following West Cheshire Museums?

## During the last 12 months, how often have you visited the following West Cheshire Museums?

Lion Salt Works, almost every day <1%, at least once a week 1%, at least once a fortnight 3%, about once a month 3%, about once every three months 5%, about once every six months 7%, about once a year 18%, less than once a year 11%, rarely 11%, never 41%.

Weaver Hall Museum, almost every day 1%, at least once a week 3%, at least once a fortnight 2%, about once a month 4%, about once every three months 5%, about once every six months 6%, about once a year 14%, less than once a year 10%, rarely 9%, never 46%.

Grosvenor Museum, almost every day <1%, at least once a week 1%, at least once a fortnight 3%, about once a month 6%, about once every three months 10%, about once every six months 10%, about once a year 19%, less than once a year 10%, rarely 10%, never 30%.

Stretton Watermill, almost every day 0%, at least once a week 0%, at least once a fortnight <1%, about once a month 1%, about once every three months 2%, about once every six months 2%, about once a year 12%, less than once a year 9%, rarely 12%, never 62%.

The above table shows that for Lion Salt Works 19% of people had visited once every six months or more, 40% of people had visited from rarely to about once a year, 41% of people had never visited.

For Weaver Hall Museum 21% of people had visited once every six months or more, 33% of people had visited from rarely to about once a year, 46% of people had never visited.

For Grosvenor Museum 30% of people had visited once every six months or more, 39% of people had visited from rarely to about once a year, 30% of people had never visited.

For Stretton Watermill 5% of people had visited once every six months or more, 33% of people had visited from rarely to about once a year, 62% of people had never visited.

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were asked if they had visited a West Cheshire Museum in which capacity that was. They were asked to select multiple options from:

Visitor, volunteer, student, friend of the museum or supporting partner, corporate sponsor, member of a group or organisation associated with the museum or other.

**Table 2: In what capacity people visit West Cheshire Museums**

<b>If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, in what capacity have you visited?</b>				
<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Lion Salt Works</b>	<b>Weaver Hall Museum</b>	<b>Grosvenor Museum</b>	<b>Stretton Watermill</b>
Visitor	26%	24%	35%	15%
Volunteer	30%	17%	35%	17%
Student	18%	26%	44%	12%
Friend of the museum or supporting partner	18%	29%	46%	7%
Corporate sponsor	0%	50%	50%	0%
Member of a group or organisation associated with the museum	25%	25%	45%	5%
Other (please specify using the box below):	29%	28%	36%	7%

Base for table – 503 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option for each museum so percentages will not sum to 100%.

If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, in what capacity have you visited?

For Lion Salt Works, visitor 26%, volunteer 30%, student 18%, friend of the museum or supporting partner 18%, corporate sponsor 0%, member of a group or organisation associated with the museum 25%, other, 29%.

For Weaver Hall Museum, visitor 24%, volunteer 17%, student 26%, friend of the museum or supporting partner 29%, corporate sponsor 50%, member of a group or organisation associated with the museum 25%, other, 28%.

For Grosvenor Museum, visitor 35%, volunteer 35%, student 44%, friend of the museum or supporting partner 46%, corporate sponsor 50%, member of a group or organisation associated with the museum 45%, other, 36%.

## If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, in what capacity have you visited?

For Stretton Watermill, visitor 15%, volunteer 17%, student 12%, friend of the museum or supporting partner 7%, corporate sponsor 0%, member of a group or organisation associated with the museum 5%, other, 7%.

The above table shows that people visited the museums in a variety of capacities.

For Lion Salt Works 30% of people visited as a volunteer, 29% said they visited in another capacity, 26% came as a visitor, 25% as a member of a group or organisation associated with the museum, 18% as a student and 18% as a friend of the museum or supporting partner.

For Weaver Hall Museum 50% of people visited as a corporate sponsor, 29% as a friend of the museum or supporting partner, 28% of people said they visited in another capacity, 26% as a student, 25% as a member of a group or organisation associated with the museum, 24% came as a visitor, and 17% of people visited as a volunteer.

For Grosvenor Museum 50% of people visited as a corporate sponsor, 46% as a friend of the museum or supporting partner, 45% as a member of a group or organisation associated with the museum, 44% as a student, 36% of people said they visited in another capacity, 35% of people visited as a volunteer and 35% came as a visitor.

For Stretton Watermill 17% of people visited as a volunteer, 15% came as a visitor, 12% as a student, 7% as a friend of the museum or supporting partner, 7% of people said they visited in another capacity and 5% as a member of a group or organisation associated with the museum.

Respondents who chose 'other' gave a variety of reasons for visiting including:

- Visited with a school class or adult education group
- Visited for a particular event or programme
- Visited Weaver Hall Museum to use the library
- Visited for private research



Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were asked if they had visited a West Cheshire Museum which services they had accessed.

**Table 3: Which services people access at West Cheshire Museums**

<b>If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, which services have you accessed?</b>				
<b>Answer Choices</b>	<b>Lion Salt Works</b>	<b>Weaver Hall Museum</b>	<b>Grosvenor Museum</b>	<b>Stretton Watermill</b>
Visited an exhibition	27%	24%	39%	11%
Attended a family-friendly event	30%	28%	29%	13%
Attended an event for adults	28%	24%	42%	6%
Educational visit with a school or student group	26%	27%	39%	8%
Attended a conference, public lecture or meeting	27%	13%	56%	3%
Attended a regular group, e.g. Meet and Make, Cafe Crafts, Young Producers	29%	35%	29%	8%
Attended for Local or Family History information	23%	27%	39%	11%
Visited the museum café	44%	25%	22%	9%
Visited the museum shop	30%	24%	36%	10%
Other (please specify using the box below):	20%	37%	29%	14%

Base for table – 488 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option for each museum so percentages will not sum to 100%.

If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, which services have you accessed? You can select more than one answer for each museum.

Lion Salt Works, visited an exhibition 27%, attended a family-friendly event 30%, attended an event for adults 28%, educational visit with a school or student group 26%, attended a conference, public lecture or meeting 27%, attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers 29%, attended for local or family history information 23%, visited the museum café 44%, visited the museum shop 30%, other 20%.

## If you have visited a West Cheshire Museum, which services have you accessed?

Weaver Hall Museum, visited an exhibition 24%, attended a family-friendly event 28%, attended an event for adults 24%, educational visit with a school or student group 27%, attended a conference, public lecture or meeting 13%, attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers 35%, attended for local or family history information 27%, visited the museum café 25%, visited the museum shop 24%, other 37%.

Grosvenor Museum, visited an exhibition 39%, attended a family-friendly event 29%, attended an event for adults 42%, educational visit with a school or student group 39%, attended a conference, public lecture or meeting 56%, attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers 29%, attended for local or family history information 39%, visited the museum café 22%, visited the museum shop 36%, other 29%.

Stretton Watermill, visited an exhibition 11%, attended a family-friendly event 13%, attended an event for adults 6%, educational visit with a school or student group 8%, attended a conference, public lecture or meeting 3%, attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers 8%, attended for local or family history information 11%, visited the museum café 9%, visited the museum shop 10%, other 14%.

The above table shows that people visit West Cheshire Museums to access a variety of services.

For Lion Salt Works, 44% of people visited the museum café, 30% attended a family-friendly event, 30% visited the museum shop, 29% attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers, 28% attended an event for adults, 27% attended a conference, public lecture or meeting, 27% of people visited an exhibition, 26% came for an educational visit with a school or student group, 23% attended for local or family history information and 20% came for another reason.

For Weaver Hall Museum, 37% of people visited for another reason, 35% attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers, 28% attended a family-friendly event, 27% came for an educational visit with a school or student group, 27% attended for local or family history information, 25% visited the museum café, 24% of people visited an exhibition, 24% attended an event for adults, 24% visited the museum shop and 13% attended a conference, public lecture or meeting.

For Grosvenor Museum, 56% of people attended a conference, public lecture or meeting, 42% attended an event for adults, 39% of people visited an exhibition, 39% attended for local or family history information, 39% came for an educational visit with a school or student group, 36% visited the museum shop, 29% attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers, 29% attended a family-friendly event, 29% came for another reason and 22% visited the museum café.

For Stretton Watermill, 14% of people visited for another reason, 13% attended a family-friendly event, 11% attended for local or family history information, 11% visited an exhibition, 10% visited the museum shop, 9% visited the museum café, 8% came for an educational visit with a school or student group, 8% attended a regular group, e.g. meet and make, cafe crafts, young producers, 6% attended an event for adults, 3% attended a conference, public lecture or meeting,

Respondents who chose 'other' listed a variety of services they had accessed:

- Library services at Weaver Hall Museum
- Attended a theatre/music production
- Attended a clothes swap event at Grosvenor Museum
- Use of a meeting room
- General look around
- A research project
- A specific event
- For the play area

### **Views on current museums**

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were asked if they had visited a Council Museum, what was most important to them about the museum service. In total 370 comments were received, below is a summary of the key messages from these comments:

- Many people thought that keeping local history alive is the most important thing about museums.
- Many people said that informative and engaging exhibitions and events are the most important.
- Some people said that museums are a valuable educational resource.
- Some people mentioned the importance of accessibility, commenting on the need for a good location, ease of access via public transport and physically accessible buildings.
- Some people felt that exhibitions should be well-maintained, interactive, and relevant.
- Some people felt it is important for museums to be family-friendly and relevant for children.
- Some people said that friendly and knowledgeable staff are important to them; staff who can share information and have good customer service skills.
- A few people commented that affordable prices are important.
- A few people mentioned the importance of good facilities, such as cafes and gift shops.

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were asked if they had **never** visited a Council Museum why that was. In total 111 comments were received, below is a summary of the key messages from these comments:

- Many people said they have never visited a Council Museum because they were unaware of them and what they had to offer.
- Some people said they intend to visit but have other priorities.
- Some people commented that they have visited the museums in previous years but felt that without updated exhibitions they didn't have a reason to visit again.
- Some people said that the subjects of the museums did not align with their interests.
- A few people commented that not all museums are easy to access using public transport.
- A few people said that the cost of visiting museums, including entry and parking/travel costs could be quite high.

## Museums principles

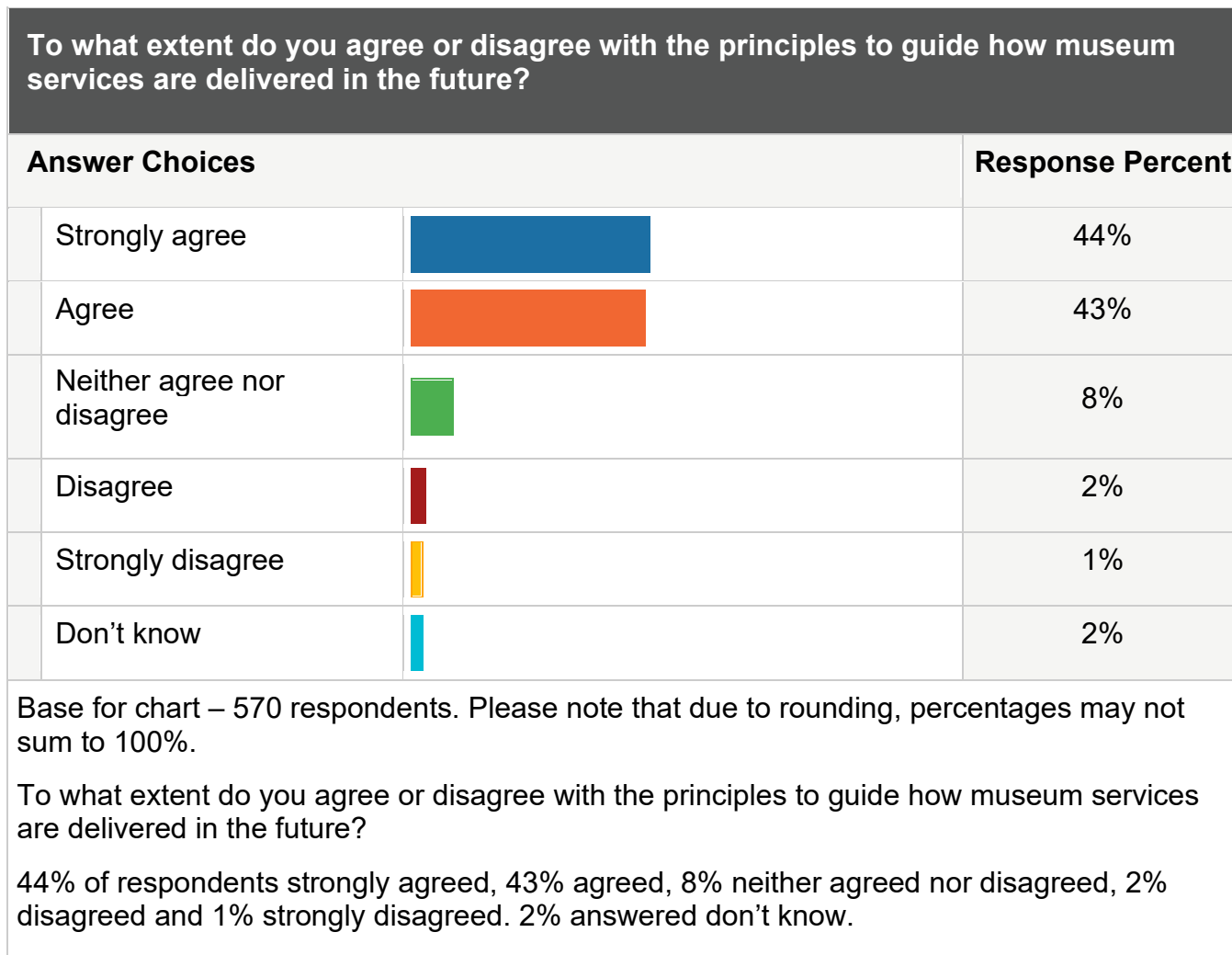
Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were presented with a series of proposed principles for the future of West Cheshire Museums.

To ensure museums continue to have a positive impact on resident's lives in the borough, we have created some principles for West Cheshire Museums. We will use these principles to manage and develop the service in future and want to hear residents' views on them. These principles outline how our museums will collect, preserve, document and interpret the Council's Museum collections and make them accessible to members of the public by:

- Developing inclusive and accessible exhibitions for residents to take part in, learn from and enjoy.
- Increasing access and the understanding of collections via digitisation, research and study, community engagement and partnerships.
- Offering a wide range of regular collections-based activities which provide access to cultural and creative opportunities.
- Making sure museum buildings are fit for purpose for museum collections and public access.
- Working with partner services and organisations to ensure value for money and increase access and reach a wider audience.
- Ensuring skilled teams can support visitors and collections and provide opportunities for volunteering across the service.
- Adopting sustainable practices wherever possible and exploring ways to generate more income to support service delivery.

Respondents were then asked about their agreement with these principles.

**Chart 1: Agreement with the proposed principles for museums**



The above chart shows that more than three quarters of respondents (87%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the principles for museums.

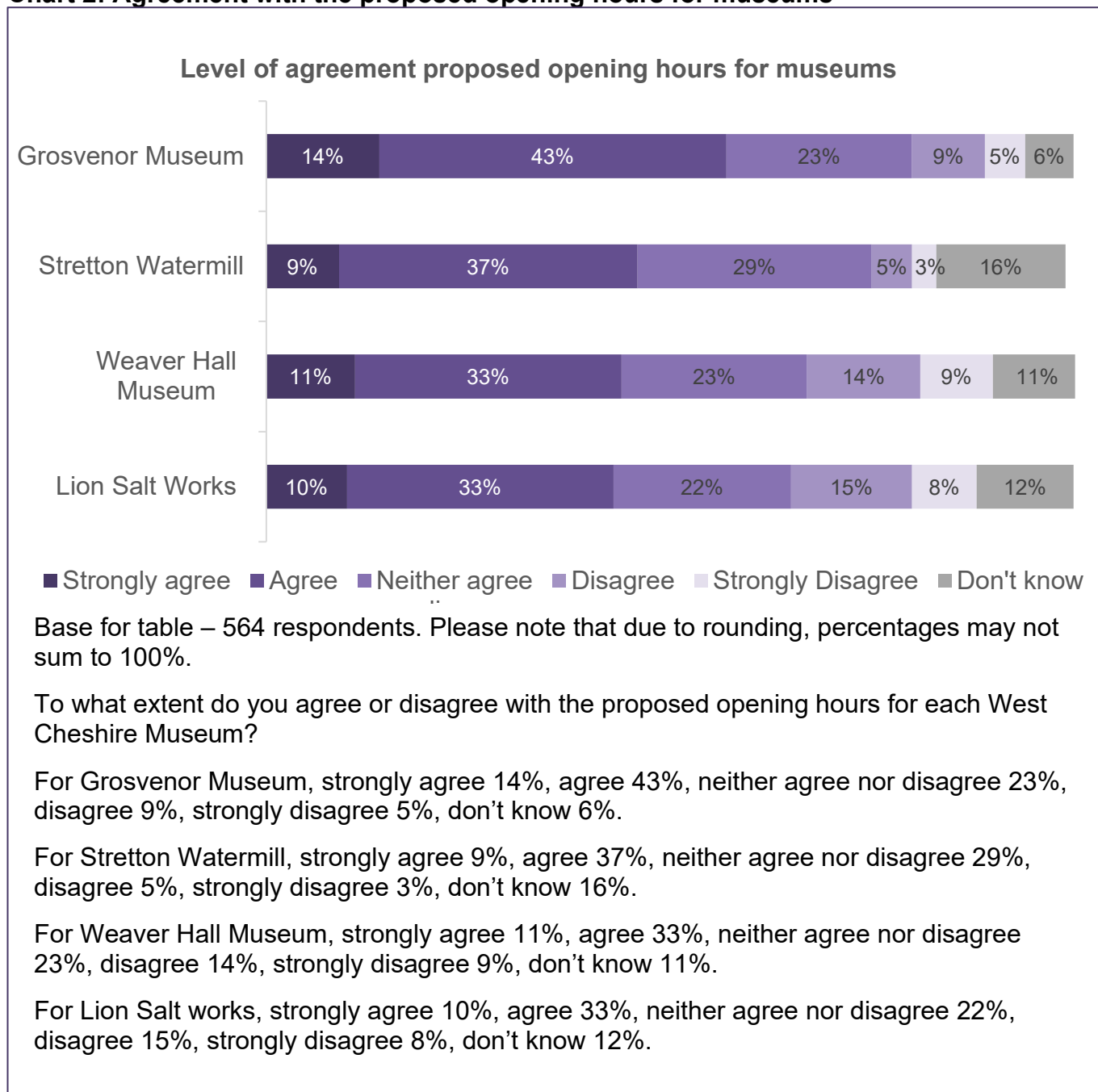
## Museums opening hours

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about museums were presented with a series of proposals about changes to opening hours at each museum. The proposals were summarised as follows (please note, there was a more detailed opening hours document which respondents could also read):

Museums	Proposed change	Proposed change
Grosvenor Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monday to Friday – no change to opening times</li><li>Saturday open at 11am rather than 10.30am and close at 4pm rather than 5pm.</li><li>Sunday open at 11am rather than 1pm.</li></ul>	+0.5 hours
Lion Salt Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monday to Friday – no change to opening times</li><li>Saturday and Sunday open at 11am rather than 10.30am and close at 4pm rather than 5pm.</li></ul>	-3 hours
Weaver Hall Museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monday no change to opening times</li><li>Tuesdays to Fridays open at 11am rather than 10am and close at 4pm rather than 5pm.</li><li>Weekends open at 12pm rather than 2pm and close at 4pm rather than 5pm.</li></ul>	-6 hours
Stretton Watermill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>No change to the days this site is open</li><li>April and September weekends open from 12pm till 4pm rather than 1pm to 5pm.</li><li>May to August open Thursday to Sunday from 12pm till 4pm rather than from 1pm to 5pm.</li></ul>	0 hours

Respondents were then asked about their agreement with these proposals

**Chart 2: Agreement with the proposed opening hours for museums**



The above chart shows for Grosvenor Museum 57% of people agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals with 14% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 23% neither agreed nor disagreed and 6% said they didn't know.

For Stretton Watermill 46% of people agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals with 8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 29% neither agreed nor disagreed and 16% said they didn't know.

For Weaver Hall Museum 44% of people agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals with 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 23% neither agreed nor disagreed and 11% said they didn't know.

For Lion Salt works 43% of people agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed changes with 23% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 22% of people neither agreed nor disagreed and 12% said they didn't know.

We conducted further analysis to compare levels of agreement between respondents who had visited each museum in the last 12 months and those that hadn't visited each museum in the last 12 months.

### Agreement with proposed opening hours for Grosvenor Museum

The table below compares the answers for respondents who had visited Grosvenor Museum in the last 12 months to those who had not visited Grosvenor Museum in the last 12 months.

The table shows that more people agreed than disagreed with the proposed opening hours for both types of respondents. However, those respondents who had visited Grosvenor Museum in the last 12 months were more likely to answer, 'strongly agree or agree', whereas those respondents who had not visited Grosvenor Museum in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'don't know'.

<b>Table 4: Agreement with proposed opening hours for Grosvenor Museum</b>					
	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Used museum in last 12 months	65%	20%	15%	1%	270 respondents
Not used museum in last 12 months	51%	27%	11%	12%	271 respondents

### Agreement with the proposed opening hours for Stretton Watermill

The table below compares the answers for respondents who had visited Stretton Watermill in the last 12 months to those who had not visited Stretton Watermill in the last 12 months.

The table shows that more people agreed than disagreed with the proposed opening hours for both types of respondents. However, those respondents who had visited Stretton Watermill in the last 12 months were more likely to answer, 'disagree or strongly disagree', whereas those respondents who had not visited Stretton Watermill in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'don't know'.

<b>Table 5: Agreement with proposed opening hours for Stretton Watermill</b>					
	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Used museum in last 12 months	53%	31%	14%	1%	81 respondents
Not used museum in last 12 months	46%	28%	6%	20%	413 respondents



### Agreement with proposed opening hours for Weaver Hall Museum

The table below compares the answers for respondents who had visited Weaver Hall Museum in the last 12 months to those who had not visited Weaver Hall Museum in the last 12 months.

The table shows that more people agreed than disagreed with the proposed opening hours for both types of respondents. However, those respondents who had visited Weaver Hall Museum in the last 12 months were more likely to answer, 'disagree or strongly disagree', whereas those respondents who had not visited Weaver Hall Museum in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'don't know'.

<b>Table 6: Agreement with proposed opening hours for Weaver Hall Museum</b>					
	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Used museum in last 12 months	41%	20%	38%	1%	179 respondents
Not used museum in last 12 months	46%	23%	13%	19%	326 respondents

### Agreement with proposed opening hours for Lion Salt Works

The table below compares the answers for respondents who had visited Lion Salt Works in the last 12 months to those who had not visited Lion Salt Works in the last 12 months.

The table shows that more people agreed than disagreed with the proposed opening hours for both types of respondents. However, those respondents who had visited Lion Salt Works in the last 12 months were more likely to answer, 'disagree or strongly disagree', whereas those respondents who had not visited Lion Salt Works in the last 12 months were more likely to answer 'don't know'.

<b>Table 7: Agreement with proposed opening hours for Lion Salt Works</b>					
	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Used museum in last 12 months	42%	21%	35%	3%	189 respondents
Not used museum in last 12 months	46%	23%	13%	19%	326 respondents

## **Further comments about museums principles and opening hours**

Respondents were also invited to give further comments about the principles and/or proposed opening hours for museums. 215 comments were received from the survey.

The key messages in support of the proposals were:

- Many people agreed with the proposed changes and thought they seemed a fair way to reduce costs.

The key messages against the proposals were:

- Many respondents did not agree with the proposed changes to opening hours.
- Some respondents thought that services should be promoted in a better way rather than being reduced.
- Some people were concerned about changes negatively impacting staff and visitors.

Other key messages included:

- Many respondents thought that longer opening hours at weekends would be beneficial, especially for families.
- Many people thought that either earlier or later opening would be a benefit.
- Some people thought that some museums would benefit from longer opening hours during school holidays.
- A few people thought that longer weekday hours would be beneficial for groups, after school visits and working people.

## Detailed library findings

### Current library usage

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were asked how often they had visited Council libraries during the last 12 months.



#### Council libraries are:

- Chester libraries: Blacon Library, Chester Library at Storyhouse, Great Boughton Library, Hoole Library, Lache Library, Upton Library
- Ellesmere Port libraries: Ellesmere Port Library, Little Sutton Library, Hope Farm Library
- Northwich libraries: Barnton Library, Northwich Library, Sandiway Library, Weaverham Library
- Winsford libraries: Winsford Library, Wharton Library
- Frodsham and Helsby libraries: Frodsham Library, Helsby Library
- Neston libraries: Neston Library
- Rural libraries: Malpas Library, Mobile Library, Tarporley Library, Tattenhall Library, Tarvin Library

### Chart 3: How often respondents visit Council libraries

During the last 12 months how often have you visited any Council library in Cheshire West and Chester?		
Answer Choices		Response Percent
Almost every day		7%
At least once a week		32%
At least once a fortnight		27%
About once a month		22%
About once every three months		6%
About once every six months		3%
About once a year		1%
Less than once a year		<1%

**During the last 12 months how often have you visited any Council library in Cheshire West and Chester?**

Rarely		1%
Never		2%

Base for chart – 1,447 respondents. Please note that due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

During the last 12 months how often have you visited any Council library in Cheshire West and Chester? Please select one option only.









Almost every day 7%, at least once a week 32%, at least once a fortnight 27%, about once a month 22%, about once every three months 6%, about once every six months 3%, about once a year 1%, less than once a year <1%, rarely 1%, never, 2%.

The above chart shows that the majority of respondents (88%), have visited a council library at least once a month or more often in the last 12 months, 11% of respondents said they visited from once every 3 months to rarely, with 2% of respondents never visiting a council library in the last 12 months.
















Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were asked if they used Council libraries to indicate which ones they used.

**Chart 4: Which libraries respondents have visited**

**If you use a Council library, please tell us which of the following libraries you use.**

Answer Choices		Response Percent
Blacon Library		3%
Chester Library at Storyhouse		33%
Great Boughton Library		7%
Hoole Library		2%
Lache Library		4%
Upton Library		12%
Ellesmere Port Library		14%
Little Sutton Library		7%

**If you use a Council library, please tell us which of the following libraries you use.**

Hope Farm Library		6%
Barnton Library		10%
Northwich Library		22%
Sandiway Library		10%
Weaverham Library		11%
Winsford Library		11%
Wharton Library		5%
Frodsham Library		11%
Helsby Library		11%
Neston Library		8%
Malpas Library		2%
Mobile Library		2%
Tarporley Library		5%
Tattenhall Library		4%
Tarvin Library		3%

Base for chart – 1,422 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option for each library so percentages will not sum to 100%.















If you use a Council library, please tell us which of the following libraries you use. Please select all that apply.

Blacon Library 3%, Chester Library at Storyhouse 33%, Great Boughton Library 7%, Hoole Library 2%, Lache Library 4%, Upton Library 12%, Ellesmere Port Library 14%, Little Sutton Library 7%, Hope Farm Library 6%, Barnton Library 10%, Northwich Library 22%, Sandiway Library 10%, Weaverham Library 11%, Winsford Library 11%, Wharton Library 5%, Frodsham Library 11%, Helsby Library 11%, Neston Library 8%, Malpas Library 2%, Mobile Library 2%, Tarporley Library 5%, Tattenhall Library 4%, Tarvin Library 3%.

The above chart shows that Chester Library at Storyhouse is the most commonly used amongst respondents followed by Northwich Library then Ellesmere Port Library. The libraries least used by respondents were Hoole Library, the Mobile Library and Malpas Library.

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were asked if they used Council library services which services did they access.

**Chart 5: Which library services respondents have accessed**

If you use Council library services, which services do you access?		
Answer Choices		Response Percent
Borrow books		91%
Use a computer		22%
Use the Wi-Fi		17%
Attend a family-friendly event		28%
Attend an event for adults		24%
Use work or study space		19%
Read or relax in the library		42%
Access a welcoming space		28%
Visit a Café		20%
BorrowBox for eBooks or eAudiobooks		24%
Libby for eMagazines		10%
Use online reference resources		11%
Access other council or partner services, please specify below		4%
Other, please specify below:		12%

## If you use Council library services, which services do you access?

If you answered, 'Access other council or partner services', please specify which services you accessed below: (39)

Base for chart – 1,418 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option for each library so percentages will not sum to 100%.

If you use Council library services, which services do you access? Please select all that apply.

Borrow books 91%, use a computer 22%, use the Wi-Fi 17%, attend a family-friendly event 28%, attend an event for adults 24%, use work or study space 19%, read or relax in the library 42%, access a welcoming space 28%, visit a café 20%, BorrowBox for eBooks or eAudiobooks 24%, Libby for eMagazines 10%, use online reference resources 11%, access other council or partner services 4%, other 12%.

The above chart shows that the most common service accessed in libraries is 'borrowing books' at 91% of respondents. Followed by visiting to 'read or relax in the library' at 42% then 'attend a family friendly event' and 'access a welcoming space' both at 28%. 'Use a computer', 'attend an event for adults' and 'BorrowBox for eBooks or eAudiobooks' were also popular services all chosen by more than 20% of respondents.

4% of respondents said they used libraries to access other council or partner services and specified that these included visiting:

- To access the Council web page and Council services including:
  - Recycling information
  - Report a road fault
  - Cheshire West and Chester funding and benefits information
  - Application and payment for Green Bin
  - Obtain waste collection rotas
  - Senior Rail Card discount information and renewal of Bus Pass
- To access the gov.uk website
- To liaise with the Department for Work and Pensions about Universal Credit and other benefits using the services at the library
- Passion for Learning partnership with the library
- Information about services for the hard of hearing and other local support groups
- To meet Police Officers and Cheshire West and Chester Councillors
- To attend a Driving Assessment Course

- To access citizens advice
- To attend the cinema and theatre
- To view consultation documents and policies
- To ask for local information and advice
- To visit the Registrar

12% of respondents chose the 'other' option and specified a variety of other reasons including:

- Using the self-service library at Brio Memorial Court
- Use the printing, scanning and copying services or get IT assistance
- Access information or do research, use reference books, periodicals and newspapers
- To volunteer for home library service or other services
- Attend a meeting
- To tutor GCSE students
- To meet friends or colleagues/business contacts
- To go to the theatre and cinema
- To use the toilet

### **Views on current libraries**

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were asked if they had visited a Council Library or used their online services what was most important to them about the library service. In total 1,076 comments were received, below is a summary of the key messages from these comments:

- Many respondents felt that the range of books available was the most important thing about library services.
- Many people commented on the importance of libraries being a safe and welcoming place to visit and a good place to meet other people.
- Many respondents said that having friendly and knowledgeable staff available to help visitors was important for library services.
- Many people felt that it was an important aspect of library services that opening hours are long and cover a range of times and days to suit different groups of people including working people, parents, carers and students. Times mentioned were evenings, lunch times, weekends as well as weekdays. People also commented that locations need to be easy to reach and convenient.
- Many people talked about the services they valued in libraries including; the events, groups and activities, the additional resources such as access to local information, family



history resources and newspapers, the ability to order books from other libraries at a low cost and access to ICT and internet in libraries

- Many people said that library services being free to use was very important to them.
- Some respondents explained that they felt that library services are an important part of the community or hub in the community, a valuable local asset open to all.
- Some respondents commented that libraries can help to introduce children to reading.
- Some respondents found the access to online service such as Borrowbox (our eBook and e Audiobook app) important to them.
- A few people explained that they found using a library as a place to work or study important.

Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were asked if they had **never** visited a Council Library why that was. In total 121 comments were received, below is a summary of the key messages from these comments:

- A few respondents explained that they haven't used library services as they prefer to buy their own books or eBooks, or they access information online and therefore have no need to borrow books.
- A few people said that they were not aware of the services available or the hours that libraries were open.
- A few respondents said that they hadn't had any reason to use library services.
- A few people commented that the opening hours were not compatible with their routines.
- A few people said that the library wasn't easy to get to or local to them.

## Libraries principles

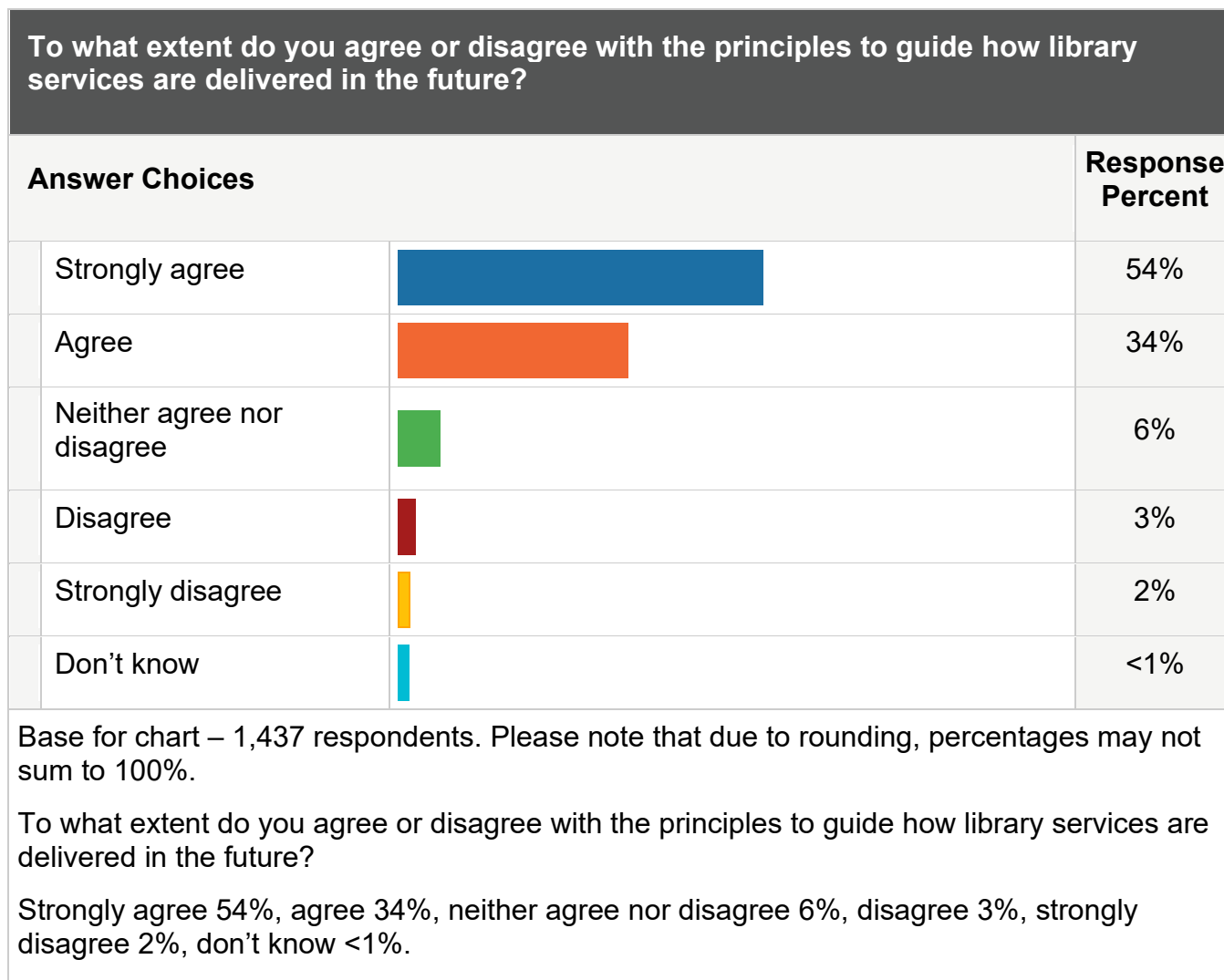
Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were presented with a series of proposed principles for the future of Library Services.

In order to ensure libraries continue to have a positive impact on residents' lives in Cheshire West and Chester, we have created some principles for Library Services. We will use these principles to manage and develop the service in future and want to hear residents' views on them. These principles form the 'Libraries First' approach and ensure that our libraries will:

- Be used as the first port of call to deliver Council and partner programmes, services, and information. Provide access points to information in residents' communities.
- Be well located in communities, in accessible, fit for purpose and well-maintained modern buildings. Where possible buildings will be shared with other services/organisations to ensure value for money, increase access and to reach a wider audience.
- Provide access to services outside of buildings via the Mobile Library, the Home Library Service and outreach work.
- Be staffed by skilled library teams who can support and empower residents to access the wide range of services available and signpost to other services.
- Support volunteering opportunities to provide skills and development opportunities in communities.
- Offer a wide range of up-to-date book stock in printed form and via a free online eBook, eAudiobook, eNewspaper and eMagazine offer. They also provide free access to trusted online resources.
- Provide digital access to users via up-to-date computers with printing and scanning services and access to free Wi-Fi. Skilled staff will support residents to improve their digital skills.
- Work with partners to offer a wide range of activities and events for all ages, daily, weekly and across the year. These events will support literacy and reading, improve digital and information skills, contribute to improved health and wellbeing and provide access to cultural and creative opportunities to enrich residents' lives.

Respondents were then asked about their agreement with these principles.

**Chart 6: Agreement with the proposed principles for library services**



The chart above shows that 88% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the library service principles. 6% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed. Less than 1% answered didn't know.

## Libraries opening hours

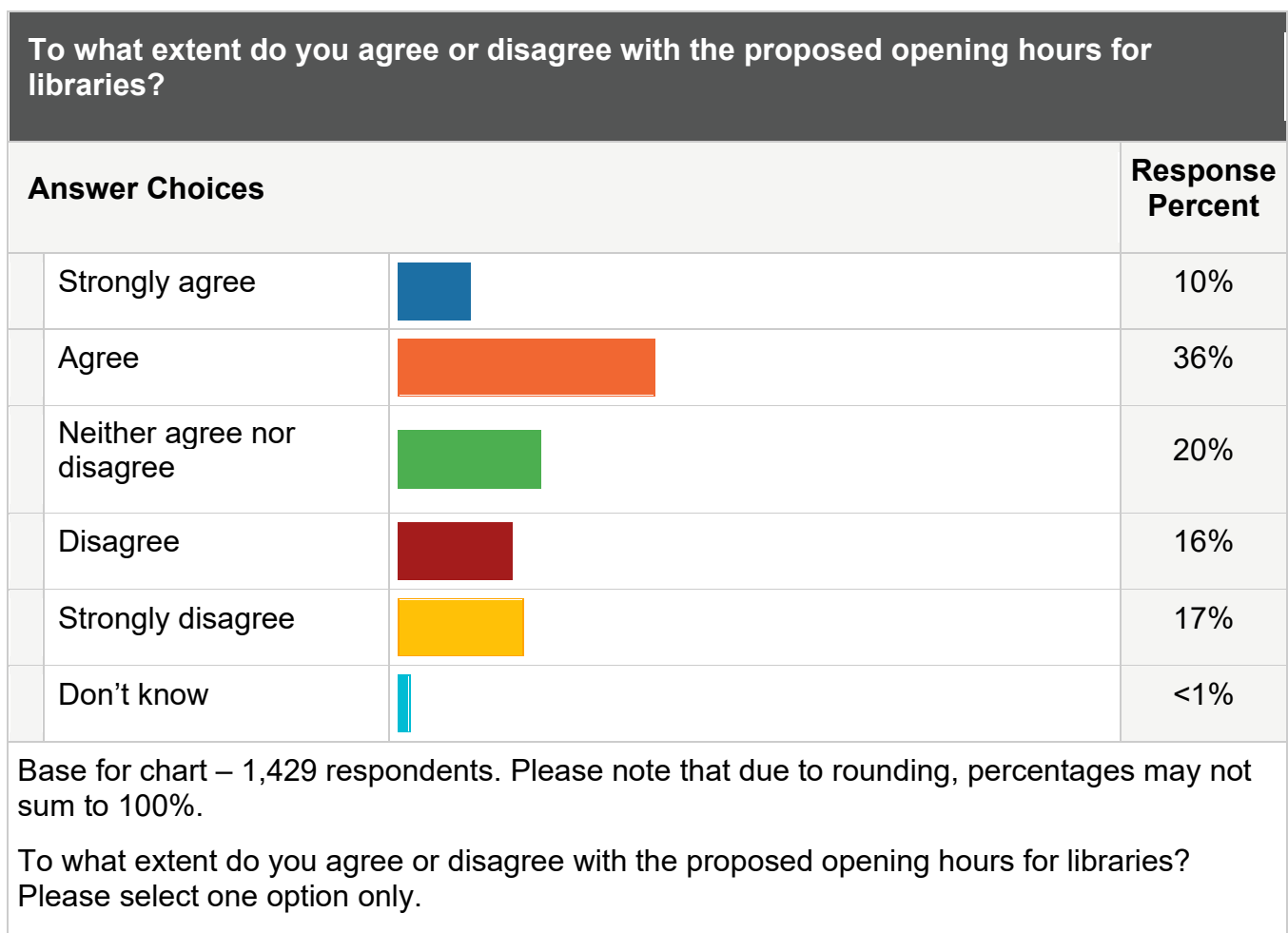
Those who completed a survey and chose to answer questions about libraries were presented with a series of proposals about changes to opening hours at each library. The proposals were summarised as follows (please note, there was a more detailed opening hours document which respondents could also read):

<b>Chester Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Blacon Library	Open at 9:30am each day instead of 9am. Open until 6pm Wednesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2.5 hours
Chester Library at Storyhouse	No change	0 hours
Great Boughton Library	Open until 7pm Monday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
Hoole Library	No change	0 hours
Lache Library	Open until 7pm Thursday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
Upton Library	Open until 7pm Tuesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
<b>Ellesmere Port Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Ellesmere Port Library	Open until 7pm Monday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-4 hours
Little Sutton Library	Open at 9:30am instead of 10am on Monday and Wednesday morning and open at 2pm instead of 1pm on Tuesday and Friday afternoon. Open until 7pm on Tuesday but close at 5pm other weekdays. Close Thursday instead of Wednesday	-3 hours
Hope Farm Library	Open at 9:30am instead of 10am. Open until 7pm on Thursday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-1 hour
<b>Northwich Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Barnton Library	Open at 9:30am instead of 10am. Open until 7pm Wednesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-1 hour
Northwich Library	Open until 7pm Thursday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
Sandiway Library	Open until 7pm Tuesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
Weaverham Library	Open until 7pm Friday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
<b>Winsford Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Winsford Library	Open at 9am instead of 9:30am each weekday. Open until 7pm on Monday but close at 5pm other weekdays	+0.5 hours
Wharton Library	Open at 9:30am instead of 9am in the morning. Wednesday open 2pm to 5pm rather than closed. Friday open 2pm to 5pm rather than 12pm to 5pm	-1 hour
<b>Frodsham and Helsby Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>

Frodsham Library	Open until 7pm Wednesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-3 hours
Helsby Library	Open until 7pm Tuesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
<b>Neston Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Neston Library	Open until 7pm Tuesday but close at 5pm other weekdays	-2 hours
<b>Rural Area</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>
Malpas Library	Open 3pm to 7pm, rather than 1.30pm to 7pm, Tuesday and Thursday	-3 hours
Mobile Library	No change	-0 hours
Tarporley Library	Open 3pm to 7pm, rather than 1.30pm to 7pm, Monday and Wednesday. Open Wednesday instead of Thursday	-3 hours
Tattenhall Library	Close Thursday	-3 hours
Tarvin Library	Open 2pm to 7pm Tuesday rather than 12pm to 7pm. Open 2pm to 5pm Thursday rather than 1.30pm to 5pm	-2.5 hours

Respondents were then asked about their agreement with these proposals

**Chart 7: Agreement with the proposed opening hours for library services**



**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed opening hours for libraries?**

Strongly agree 10%, agree 36%, neither agree nor disagree 20%, disagree 16%, strongly disagree 17%, don't know <1%.

The above chart shows that 46% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the proposed changes to library opening hours. 20% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and 33% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposals. Less than 1% answered they didn't know.

We conducted further analysis to compare levels of agreement between respondents who had used a library in the last 12 months and those that hadn't used a library in the last 12 months.

**Agreement with the proposed opening hours for libraries**

The table below compares the answers for respondents who had used a library in the last 12 months to those who had not used a library in the last 12 months.

Level of agreement with the proposed opening hours for libraries was broadly similar for those respondents who had used a library in the last 12 months and those respondents who had not used a library in the last 12 months.

<b>Table 8: Agreement with proposed opening hours for Libraries</b>					
	Strongly agree or Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree or Strongly disagree	Don't know	
Used library in last 12 months	46%	20%	33%	1%	1388 respondents
Not used library in last 12 months	45%	22%	27%	5%	59 respondents

**Further comments about libraries principles and opening hours**

Respondents were also invited to give further comments about the principles and/or proposed opening hours for libraries. 807 comments were received from the survey.

The key messages from comments in support of the proposals were:

- Many people were broadly happy with the proposals but expressed concern about any further reductions to services.
- A few people expressed support for the proposed changes to opening hours as a preferred alternative to closures.

The key messages from comments against the proposals were:

- Many people expressed that they did not support the proposed changes to opening hours.

- Many people were concerned about the impact of opening hour changes on groups and activities in the libraries, and people who use the space to study, meet, work or use them as a warm and safe space.
- Some people commented that the proposed opening hour changes represent a higher reduction at some libraries than others, particularly in reference to rural areas, and this was an inconsistent approach.
- Some people were concerned about the impact of the proposed changes on staff.

Other key messages included:

- A lot of people commented that longer opening hours would benefit a variety of groups including workers, carers, students, parents and families.
- A few respondents said that libraries need to be located in convenient places in communities. People mentioned the need for free parking and made comments about libraries in schools being difficult to gain access to during school times.
- A few respondents agreed with the principles, particularly that libraries could offer even more services to the public and the community, ensuring better usage.
- A few people suggested that library opening hours and facilities should be better advertised.
- A few people supported later opening in the mornings.

### **Further comments about the proposals for museums and libraries**

Respondents had the option to provide further comments about the proposals for museums and libraries. Feedback was collected through the survey, drop-in sessions, emails, letters and Councillor briefing sessions. In total, 617 comments were received, below is a summary of the key messages from these comments.

Key messages from comments about museums:

- Some people commented that museums are good for community wellbeing and see them as a valuable resource.
- A few people said that museums would benefit from further investment and more modern facilities.

Key messages from comments about libraries:

- Many people said that libraries are important for the community and are a valuable resource.
- Many people made other suggestions for service development, some examples included removing reservation charges, improving facilities and improving the range of stock at some libraries.
- Some people commented that they didn't agree with the proposed changes to library opening hours and were concerned they would disadvantage certain groups of

people. Some of these people said that library opening hours should be extended further.

- Some people thought that libraries should increase engagement and host more groups, events and activities.
- Some people made suggestions about how the library opening hours could be changed in a different way. For example, keeping libraries open late on a different night, changing the closed day, opening later in the morning, opening over lunch times, opening longer at weekends.
- Some people said that they value the library staff.
- Some people expressed that they did not want libraries to close.
- A few people made comments about the temporary library at Weaver Hall Museum in Northwich and expressed a desire for it to re-open in its original building on Witton Street.
- A few people said that libraries would benefit from further investment and more modern facilities.

Cross-cutting key messages about museums and libraries:

- Some people said that the proposals for museums and libraries seemed reasonable.
- Some people said that they thought museums and libraries need more publicity.
- Some people commented that museums and libraries could explore alternative ways to save money and/or increase income.
- A few people made negative comments about the consultation process and approach.

## **Next steps**

The consultation findings have been shared with senior managers and Councillors to help shape the final proposals for museums and libraries.

Feedback around principles for libraries will contribute to supporting the creation of a Libraries Development Plan.

Feedback around principles for museums will contribute to a refresh of the Museums Development Plan.

Feedback around the opening hours will be reviewed by each service and senior managers and following consultation with staff, if agreed, new opening hours for museums and libraries will come into effect in 2025.

We will share this summary of the consultation findings on the consultation website. The consultation website and service websites will be updated prior to implementation of any changes.



## Appendix 1 – Profile of respondents




### Survey respondents

Those who completed a survey were asked in what respect they were taking part.

**Chart 8: Who took part**

In what respect are you completing this survey?		
Answer Choices		Response Percent
I am a library member		88%
I volunteer at a Cheshire West library		2%
I volunteer at a West Cheshire Museum		<1%
I am an employee of Cheshire West and Chester Council and work for the libraries and/or museums team		2%
I am an employee of Cheshire West and Chester Council and work for another team		3%
I am a resident of Cheshire West and Chester		64%
I am an elected Member of Cheshire West and Chester Council		<1%
I am a local Town or Parish Councillor		1%
I am a representative of an organisation that works in partnership with libraries and/or museums		1%

## In what respect are you completing this survey?

I am a representative of a local voluntary or community organisation		5%
I am a representative of a local business		1%
Other (please specify):		4%

Base for chart – 1479 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option so percentages will not sum to 100%.

### In what respect are you completing this survey?

88% of respondents were library members, 64% were residents of Cheshire West and Chester, 5% were representatives of a local voluntary or community organisation 3% were employees of Cheshire West and Chester Council, 2% were employees of Cheshire West and Chester Council and worked for the libraries and/or museums team, 2% were volunteers at Cheshire West Libraries, 1% were a local Town or Parish Councillor, 1% were representatives of an organisation that works in partnership with libraries and/or museums, 1% were representatives of a local business and 4% answered 'Other'.

### The following organisations completed a survey

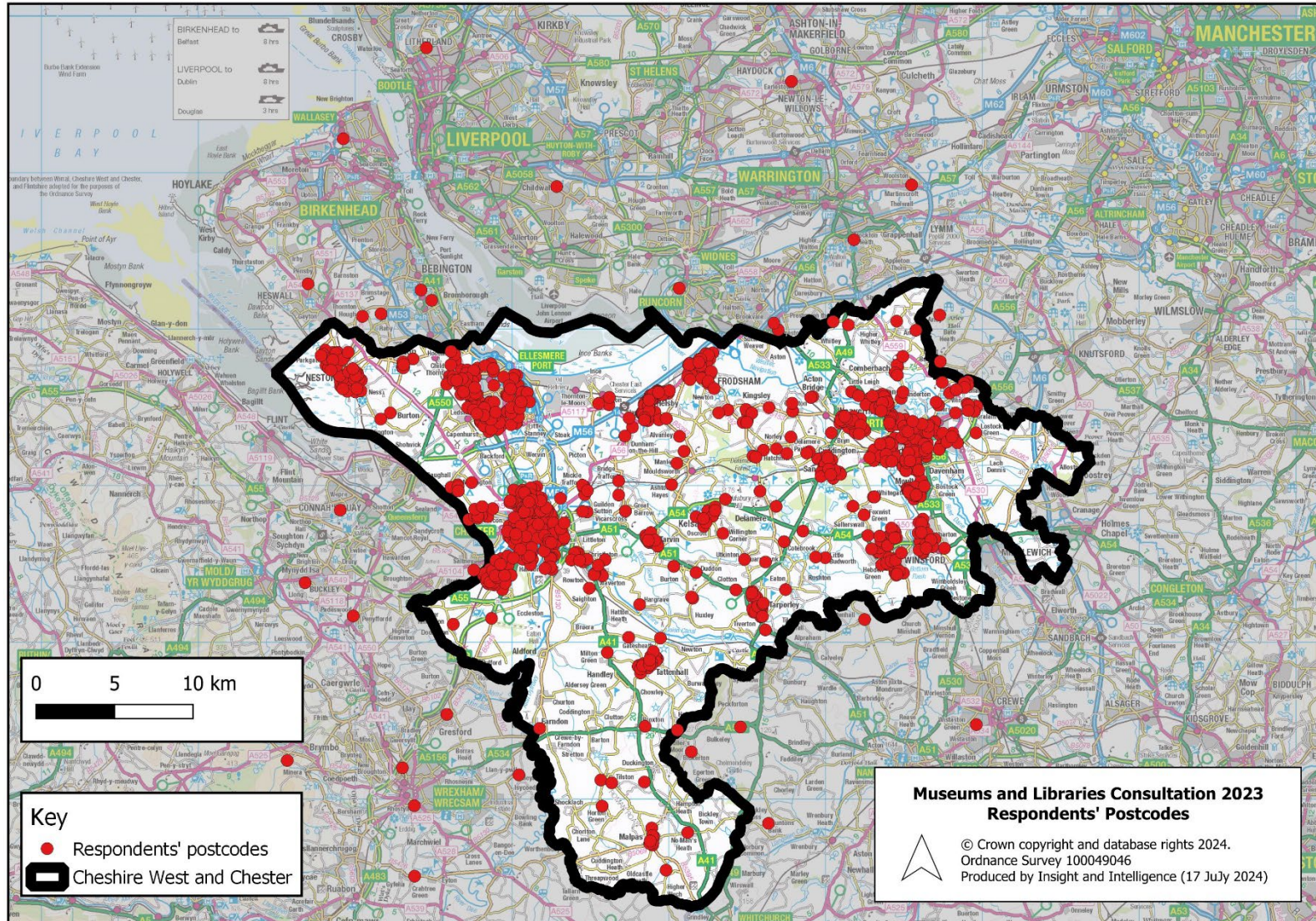
- Artists Tattenhall
- Barnton Library Knitting Group
- Chester Archaeological Society
- Christleton Book Club
- Church Recording Society
- Counselling & Psychotherapy in Chester
- Cuddington Sandiway Scouts
- Dial West Cheshire
- Friends of Anderton and Marbury
- Frodsham Library Reading Group
- Helsby Drop In, Helsby Methodist Church
- Historia Normanis, Unknown Vikings
- Hope Farm Trefoil Guild

- Little Sutton Sapphires Womans Institute
- Monument Square Limited T/A Orme Associates
- Moulton Womans Institute
- PALS - Positive Action for Little Sutton
- Passion for Learning
- Peoples Choice Group, Northwich
- Racy Readers
- Sustainable Northwich
- Transition Tattenhall
- Vale Royal Talking Newspaper
- Vale Royal Writers Group

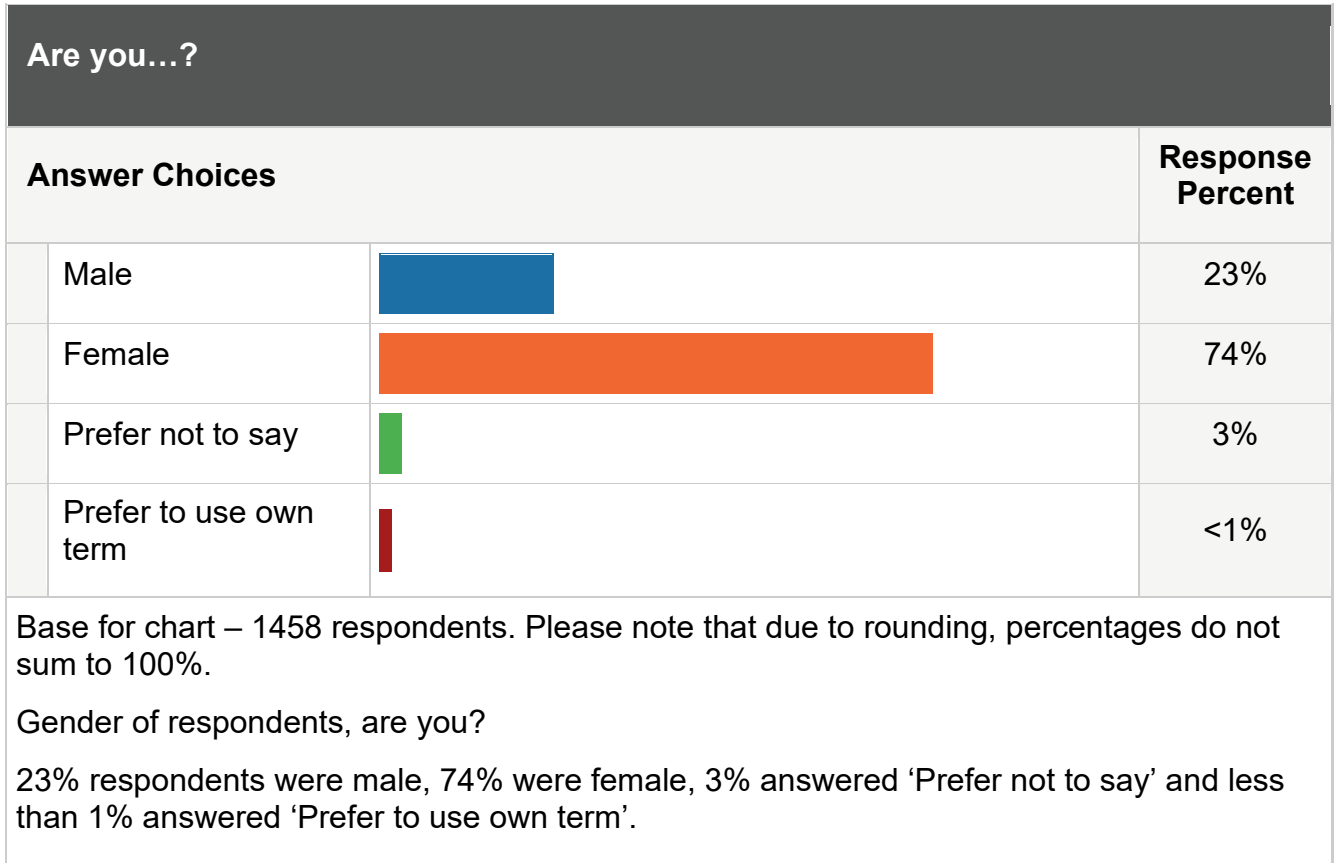


## Postcode of respondents

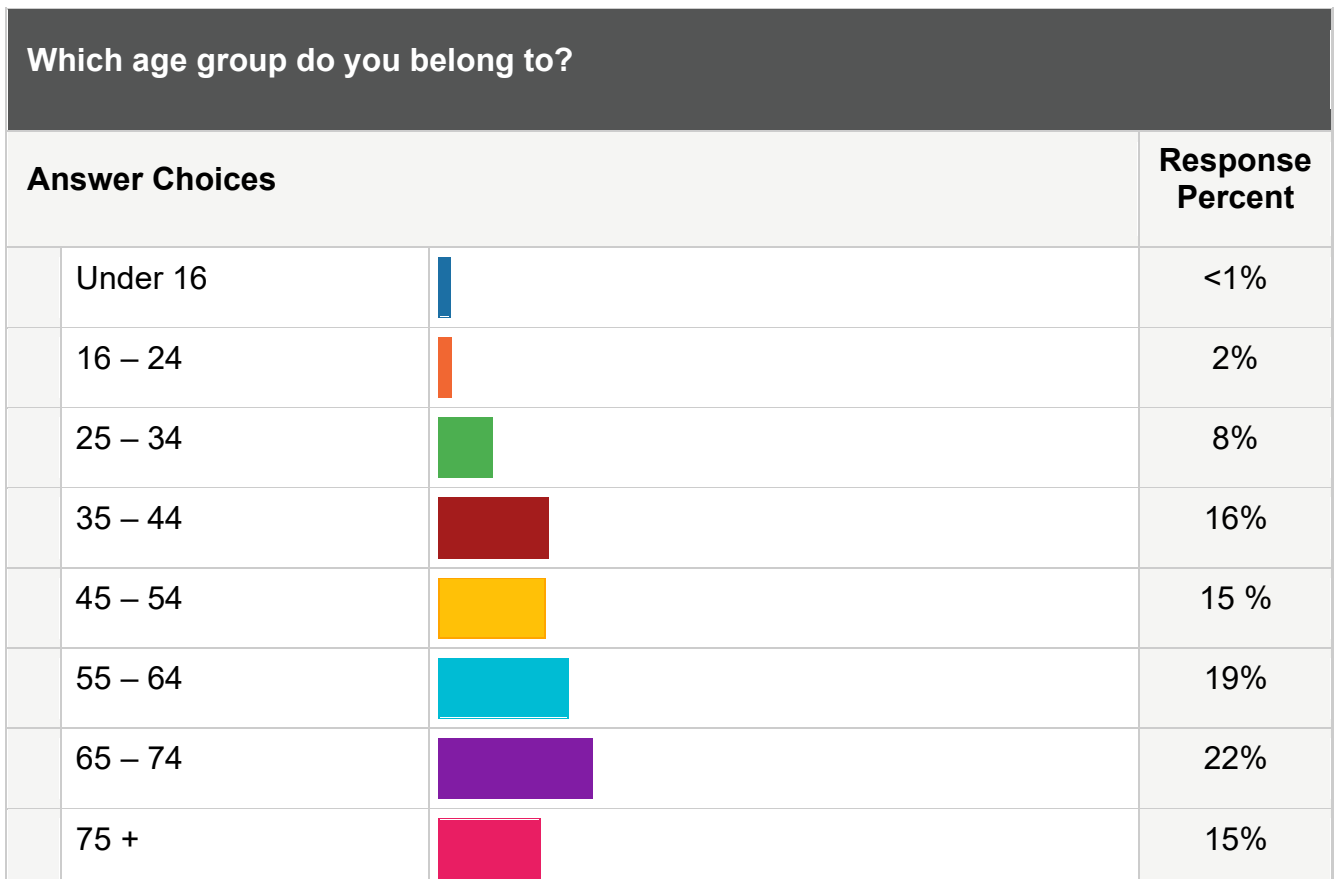
The map below shows all the postcodes given by respondents that could be mapped (1,121 postcodes). 1,090 respondents lie within the Cheshire West and Chester boundary and 31 lie outside.



### Chart 9: Gender



### Chart 10: Age group



## Which age group do you belong to?

Prefer not to say



3%

Base for chart – 1465 respondents. Please note that due to rounding, percentages do not sum to 100%.

Which age group do you belong to? Please select one option.

2% of respondents were aged 16-24, 8% of respondents were aged 25-34, 16% were 35-44, 15% were 45-54, 19% were 55-64, 22% were 65-74, 15% were 75+ and 3% answered 'Prefer not to say'.

## Long-term illness, health issue or disability

16% of respondents said they had a long-term illness, health issue or disability that limits their daily activities or the work they can do.

### Chart 11: Disability profile of respondents

If you answered 'yes' to the question above, please indicate which of the following applies to you...

Answer Choices		Response Percent
Physical impairment that causes mobility issues, e.g. wheelchair user		26%
Visual impairment		7%
Hearing impairment		15%
Learning disability or difficulty		6%
Mental health issue		16%
Long standing illness or health condition		46%
Prefer not to say		13%
Other		11%



**If you answered 'yes' to the question above, please indicate which of the following applies to you...**

Base for chart – 265 respondents. Please note that people could choose more than one answer option so percentages will not sum to 100%.

If you answered 'yes' to the question above, please indicate which of the following applies to you... Please select all that apply.

26% of respondents said they had a physical impairment that causes mobility issues e.g. a wheelchair user, 46% said they had a long-standing illness or health condition, 16% said they had a mental health issue, 15% said they had a hearing impairment, 7% said they had a visual impairment, 6% said they had a learning disability or difficulty. 8% answered 'Other' and 13% answered 'Prefer not to say'.

### **Ethnicity**

88% of respondents identified as 'White British'.

### **Religious Belief/Faith**

52% of respondents said they were 'Christian', 33% said they followed no religion, 11% preferred not to say, and 3% answered 'Other'.

### **Sexual Orientation**

The majority of respondents identified as 'heterosexual/straight' (80%), 14% preferred not to say, 2% identified as bisexual, gay/lesbian or answered that they would prefer to use their own term.

## **Appendix 2 – Organisations that sent an official response**

**Three organisations sent official responses to the consultation and have given permission for their responses to be published here:**

- Historic England
- Upton-by-Chester & District Parish Council
- CILIP - The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals





Historic England

West Cheshire Museums and Libraries Consultation

Ellesmere Port Library

Civic Way

Ellesmere Port

CH65 0BG

29 February 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

**West Cheshire Museums and Libraries Consultation 2024**

Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on all matters relating to the historic environment in England. We are a non-departmental public body established under the National Heritage Act 1983 and sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). We champion and protect England's historic places, providing expert advice to local planning authorities, developers, owners and communities to help ensure our historic environment is properly understood, enjoyed and cared for.

Thank you for consulting us on the above proposal. Please note that Historic England provided grant funding to Cheshire West and Chester Council in 2014 to support repairs to Stove House 2 at Lion Salt Works in Northwich. The grant included post-repair conditions that remain in place until 22 December 2029, including a public access requirement – specifically, that the site be open to the public for 28 days per year for at least four, preferably six, hours per day.

It appears that the revised opening hours for Lion Salt Works would fulfil this condition, therefore we do not wish to offer any further comments regarding the proposals.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any queries or would like to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

#####

Business Officer

SUITES 3.3 AND 3.4 CANADA HOUSE 3 CHEPSTOW STREET MANCHESTER M1 5FW  
*Telephone 0161 242 1416 [HistoricEngland.org.uk](http://HistoricEngland.org.uk)*

On behalf of Upton by Chester & District Parish Council, this is our input to the current consultation, based on the views of our residents expressed in the consultations for developing our Neighbourhood Plan in 2015-2022, and more recent views expressed to our Councillors.

The Upton Library is highly valued by all age groups, both as a library to borrow books and digital media, and as a community centre providing an information point and a range of other services. These other services include activities such as the sing and rhyme sessions for toddlers, hosting the crochet/knitting groups and the IT learning/access for those with insufficient skills or home IT provision.

Upton residents have shown a strong desire to retain and where possible improve our local public buildings such as the Library. There is a strong positive identification with the library, which is well situated next to the GP surgery/pharmacy and the Parish Pavilion and facilities such as the playground, playing fields, tennis court and bowling green. They form a central neighbourhood hub which encourages people to access all of them when they visit. It is accessible on foot or by cycling from any part of Upton.

The staff are unfailingly helpful and knowledgeable.

We would not wish to see any reduction in opening times and believe that the coverage offered by the different sessions ensure that the library meets the needs of young families, working people and those who are not employed. It is particularly valued by those new to Upton in order to find out about local activities and events.

Regards

#####

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Chair, Upton-by-Chester & District Parish Council

Parish Councillor, Upton Park ward



The library  
and information  
association

Libraries

Consultation Team

Cheshire West and Chester Council

By email

25<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Consultation team,

### **SUBMISSION TO LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS CONSULTATION**

I am pleased to make the following submission to your Libraries and Museums Consultation on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). I would be most grateful if you could share this response with the team leading the consultation and do please let me know if there is any further information we can provide.

#### **About CILIP**

CILIP is the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals. We are the leading industry voice that champions and represents library and information professionals across the United Kingdom, guided by our Royal Charter to develop and improve library and information services, and as a Charity to act in the public interest.

We support library services across the UK to continue to adapt and innovate to meet the changing needs of residents and with Councils such as yours to ensure that libraries continue to fulfil their essential social and educational purpose for local people.

#### **General comment**

We would like to note and applaud the Council's ongoing commitment to delivering quality library services for local residents despite the complex financial challenges being faced by Local Authorities across the UK.

Residents in Cheshire West and Chester are fortunate to be supported by a highly innovative and creative library service with a strong track-record of meeting local needs. We were particularly pleased to note the impact of their work on Health and Wellbeing Week in January<sup>1</sup>, which saw your libraries host a wonderful range of activities focused on helping residents live healthier, happier lives (and in the process alleviating some of the severe pressure on local health and care services).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.chesterstandard.co.uk/news/24042630.cheshire-west-libraries-host-health-wellbeing-week/>

It is particularly positive to see the recognition in your consultation document that local libraries continue to serve a combination of 'traditional' library services as well as a range of digital, creative and other activities – reflecting the changing needs of library users.

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You may have seen the following commentary from Councillor Liz Green, Chair of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, writing for Arts Professional<sup>2</sup> about the importance of maintaining investment in libraries and local arts and culture despite the significant pressures:

*“But is it all doom and gloom? No. We remain the largest public investor in culture and there is money in the system - we just need to make that money go as far as it possibly can. That means using or existing assets - libraries, theatres, parks and museums - as cultural hubs for activities, extending their reach so that those with least access to culture, particularly during this cost-of-living squeeze, are still able to experience low cost or free activities.”*

We strongly endorse Councillor Green's comments as a call-to-arms to Councils to see ongoing support for libraries as an investment in the cultural life of their communities.

We hope that despite the financial pressures you face, the tremendous social, cultural and personal benefits of a strong library service for current and future residents will continue to inform your decision-making.

## **Principles for libraries**

We further welcome the 'Libraries First' approach that the Council has used to shape these principles for the development of library services within the Authority, as well as the use of data and evidence to inform decision-making.

We would also like to submit the following comments:

- It would be helpful perhaps to include in the 'Principles' a note acknowledging that libraries are a Statutory Service under the 1954 Public Libraries and Museums Act. While we appreciate that statutory status ought to be a minimum expectation, there is sometimes confusion among Elected Members as to the statutory nature of libraries and it would be beneficial to ensure that this is acknowledged in the documentation. It may be helpful on this point to include a link to the DCMS guidance document Libraries as a statutory service<sup>3</sup>, provided by the Libraries Team at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- We would also draw your attention to the LGA document Delivering local solutions for public libraries<sup>3</sup>, to which CILIP were pleased to contribute. This includes a diagram describing the core elements of a future-proof library service (see overhead) which in our view align well to your principles.

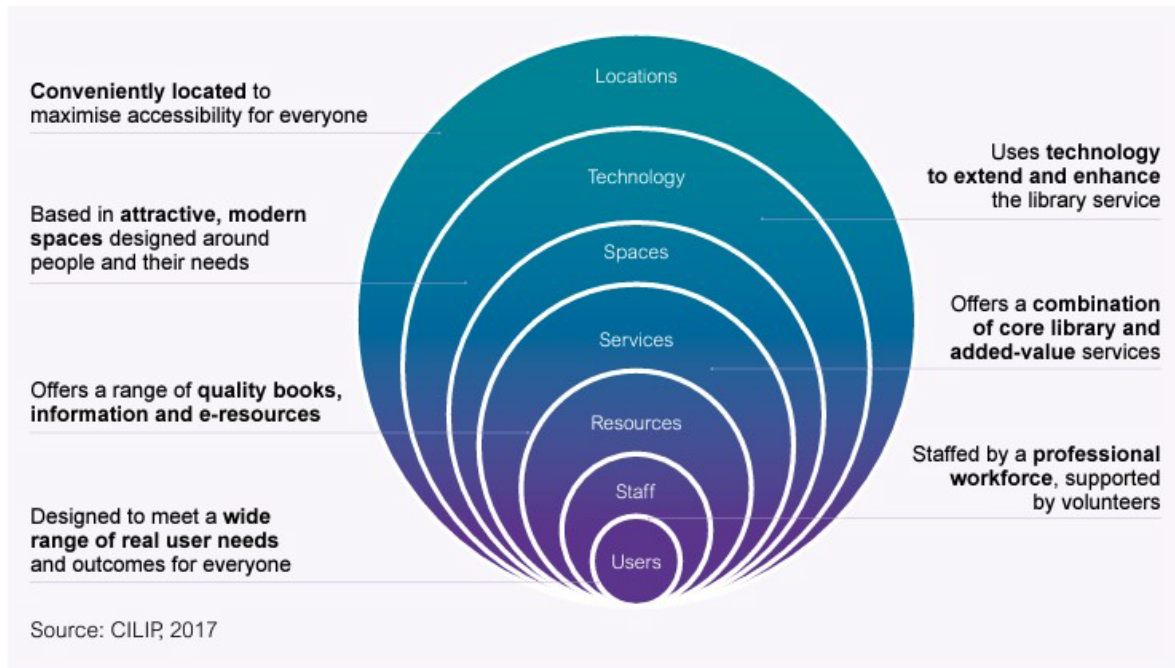
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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.artsprofessional.co.uk/magazine/article/local-authorities-need-cultural-sectors-support> <sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-libraries-as-a-statutory-service/libraries-as-a-statutory-service>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/delivering-local-solutions-public-library-services>

The only element we can see that might be absent from the principles is a sense of outcomes that your local library services might support. In our experience, it is often helpful to define the impact of libraries on local indicators such as health and wellbeing, economic productivity and sense-of-place – the better to make a continued case for investment.

**Diagram 1: Visualising the library of the future**



We have defined the outcomes of local services as follows, in case this is useful in the development of an impact framework for your own services.

### 1. Equal Access to Knowledge

Public libraries serve as invaluable community hubs, providing free and universal access to a vast array of educational resources including books, periodicals, digital materials and educational programmes. They play a critical role in promoting literacy, lifelong learning, and equitable access to information for all members of the community, regardless of age, background, or socio-economic status.

### 2. Support for Education and Learning

Libraries are vital partners in education, offering essential resources and support to students of all ages. They provide homework assistance, adult learning support and access to computers and internet services, bridging the digital divide and helping individuals to succeed in life.

### 3. Cultural Enrichment and Community Engagement

Local libraries have amongst the most diverse audience of any local cultural institution. They promote creativity, imagination and cultural enrichment across all demographics, offering a wide range of activities such as author readings, book clubs, workshops, and art exhibitions, fostering a sense of community belonging and civic engagement.

### 4. Digital Inclusion and Technology Access

In an increasingly digital world, libraries play a crucial role in promoting digital literacy and providing access to technology for those who may not have it at home. From computer classes

to Wi-Fi hotspots, libraries ensure that everyone has the opportunity to develop essential digital skills and participate fully in the digital economy.

## **5. Economic Impact and Social Cohesion**

Local libraries contribute to the economic vitality of communities by supporting small businesses, entrepreneurs, and job seekers through resources like business development programmes, CV clinics and resources for jobseekers.

## **6. Driving health and wellbeing**

Since the pandemic, local library services have emerged as an essential 'frontline partner' to public health services, providing access to health information, promoting health and digital literacy and helping to connect people to wellbeing activities and social care.

## **7. Tackling social isolation**

Libraries serve as a safe, trusted and inclusive space for every member of the community. They have a proven role in helping Local Authorities to tackle the complex effects of social isolation, for example by providing Warm Spaces and social activities for many of the hardest-to-reach communities. In the process, libraries deliver significant savings for other social services.

### **Changes to opening hours**

We note the proposal to change opening hours in most of your 22 libraries and outreach services, and that these changes amount to a net 6% reduction in opening hours.

While we understand the logic driving these changes, we have some concerns that they may impact negatively on local communities, and particularly residents with specific needs or who have protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010.

We would be grateful if you could take the following into consideration:

- The proposal is to move to 7pm closing on one day a week but to close at 5pm on the remaining weekdays. In our view, this risks impacting negatively on families, carers and younger learners who may depend on the library space for out-of-hours support and homework space. We would recommend that the Council either explores alternatives to early closing, or considers the use of zoning to create spaces in the library that are accessible between 5pm and 7pm without requiring the provision of full library services.
- The proposal in some rural areas is to move from 5.5 hours of staffed access (1.30 to 7pm) to 4 hours (3pm to 7pm) – while we are aware that this will be driven by current data on usage, we have some concern that this represents a disproportionate loss of access for people in harder-to-reach rural areas who may also be disadvantaged by, for example, changes in bus times. We would ask the Council to consider either protecting service hours in rural areas or to increase provision of mobile and outreach services to address these issues.
- In general, we note that people with protected characteristics, or who have specific needs, frequently prefer to use the library during quieter but still staffed hours. There is a concern that the overall net reduction in hours and the shortening of hours in 'high density' areas will compress usage into less time, resulting in fewer quiet periods. In our

experience, the negative impact of this falls disproportionately on people who may already be facing marginalisation or deprivation in their daily lives.

We are very aware that the Council would most likely not be exploring these reductions were it not for the acute financial challenges arising from under-investment and a lack of financial certainty around Local Government.

As noted above, we appreciate the nuanced and evidence-based approach that the Council has taken to address these challenges. We very much hope that this will constitute a constructive contribution to your thinking.

Investing in libraries is an investment in the future of communities across Cheshire West and Chester, ensuring that they remain vibrant, inclusive, and thriving places for generations to come. My team and I are at your disposal if you would like to schedule a conversation to discuss any of the points raised here.

Sincerely,

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Interim CEO

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP)

#### Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in Audio, Braille, Large Print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email us at [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

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Pokud byste požadovali informace v jiném jazyce nebo formátu, kontaktujte nás

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, prosimy dać nam znać.

ਜੇ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੀਦੀ, ਤਾਂ ਇਹ ਸਾਥੇ ਮੰਗ ਲਓ।

如欲索取以另一語言印製或另一格式製作的資料，請與我們聯絡。

Türkçe bilgi almak istiyorsanız, bize başvurabilirsiniz.

اگر آپ کو معلومات کسی دیگر زبان یا دیگر شکل میں درکار ہوں تو براۓ مہربانی ہم سے پوچھیے۔

**Tel:** 0300 123 8 123 **Textphone:** 18001 01606 867 670

**email:** [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)

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